

## Guidance for Probation Offender Management following Government COVID-19 / Social Distancing Guidance

The following guidance sets out how we will operate the probation system in light of the most recent Government guidance on social distancing (from 23 March) to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Public protection remains absolutely critical and will remain our focus throughout this challenging period – this guidance sets out how we can best operate key Probation services, manage risk and protect the public, while applying social distancing guidance and reducing face-to-face contact wherever possible.

### Caseload Considerations

- The majority of offenders can be supervised by telephone/ Whatsapp/Skype (video messaging should be used wherever possible).
- Given that telephone/ Whatsapp/Skype supervision is inferior to face to face contact, it is a requirement that contact frequency for each offender doubles for those who are being supervised via this means.
- Face to face contact should be retained for the following groups, supplemented by phone/video calls as appropriate:
  - TACT offenders
  - Offenders without recourse to a phone
  - Prison leavers reporting for their initial appointment (subsequent appointments can be done via telephone/ Whatsapp/Skype where appropriate)
- For all other high and very high risk of harm and additionally medium risk of harm cases with domestic abuse or safeguarding issues, doorstep visits should be the first consideration as a risk management strategy (it is recognised that this will not be appropriate in all cases) supplemented by phone/video calls as appropriate. In order to keep staff safe this will involve a visit by car to the offender's address and a telephone call being conducted from outside the property. This will allow staff to have sight of the offender at the address whilst also facilitating a discussion. These doorstep visits should be undertaken in pairs, and if absolutely necessary a police presence should be requested. It is expected that this occurs once every four weeks for each offender in this category **as a minimum**. This frequency should be specifically discussed with SPOs and the rationale recorded appropriately. For those other offenders presenting a medium risk of serious harm or below, these should be used on a discretionary basis but on a minimum of no less than once every 3 months. Please note these are exceptional measures, that will be reviewed in 3 weeks' time, in line with the message given by the Prime Minister on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
- Every risk management plan and sentence plan will need to be reviewed quickly to reflect the new supervision regime. Those plans associated with offenders presenting the highest risk should be prioritised for completion. All plans for medium risk of serious harm and above will need to be endorsed by an SPO. Whilst this will be automated for high and very high risk of serious harm cases, a manual review and Delius entry will need to be made for medium risk of serious harm cases. Specific attention should be paid to medium risk of harm cases where there are Safeguarding or Domestic Violence concerns present including how best to monitor the safety of co-habiting partners or children.
- PDUs should arrange daily calls with Police and Local Authority Social Services Departments to review relevant call outs or intelligence from the past 24 hours. It is suggested that these calls should be with local agency MAPPA leads.
- Where cases are managed on a multi-agency basis, ongoing contact with partner agencies should be maintained.

## **Estate Considerations**

- Where possible, Probation Offices should be closed in order to support social distancing. It is likely that each office will not be able to close entirely, rather, judgements will need to be made about which day an office should open to receive those requiring face to face contact.
- Senior Probation Officers will need to review the list of offenders requiring face to face contact in conjunction with their PDU Head and make a judgement about how many days per week the office will need to be open. In order to minimise the number of offices open, PDU Heads will need to review options including whether offenders can report to alternative offices. The availability of public transport will be an important consideration in making this decision.
- When an office is closed, a sign should be placed on the door advising of the next day the office is open and providing a duty telephone number for emergency contact. The duty number can be shared between officers through use of the call forwarding function.

## **Administrative Considerations**

- The extent to which administrative functions can be completed virtually will vary between PDUs.
- Business Managers will need to conduct a review of administrative functions and identify which cannot be completed virtually e.g. the production of enforcement packs for uploading to Court Store requires a printer and scanner in some Divisions.
- Where administrative functions require office hardware that is unavailable at home, arrangements will need to be made for access to offices to perform these tasks.