

Press release: In-cell phones for more prisons in drive to cut crime

- family ties are a vital part of rehabilitation, an important link over the festive period, and ultimately help to cut the number of future victims of crime
- restricted in-cell phones will also reduce both tension on the wings and demand for the illicit mobiles which fuel violence
- roll-out is part of wider efforts to bring stability to prisons and boost inmates' prospects of rehabilitation

More prisoners will get phones in their cells to help them maintain family ties and significantly boost their chances of rehabilitation, Justice Secretary David Gauke announces today (Friday 28 December).

As families come together to celebrate Christmas and new year, the Justice Secretary unveils plans for a further £10 million roll-out of in-cell landline telephones to help prisoners preserve relationships with their own loved ones and reduce tension on prison wings.

This will ultimately improve their chances of rehabilitation and help to reduce reoffending which currently costs society £15 billion every year. The importance of family to rehabilitation is underlined by research, with studies showing that prisoners who receive family visits are 39% less likely to reoffend.

All calls on in-cell phones are recorded and can only be made to a small number of pre-approved numbers. In the event that they are suspected of being used for criminal activity, calls can be monitored, and governors have the power to remove the phones of those who have misused them.

In-cell phones allow prisoners to make calls in private at a time which fits with their families' schedules, and are currently installed in 20 prisons in England and Wales. The latest roll-out has been funded by the additional £30 million allocated to prisons in the last Budget and will allow 50 prisons to have the phones by March 2020.

As well as helping prisoners connect with their families, the phones also give them easier access to support services such as the Samaritans and MIND, therefore reducing their risk of self-harm – another major challenge for jails.

The phones help the government's wider drive to bring stability to the prison estate by reducing the tension which can arise from queuing to use communal phones and providing an alternative to illicit mobiles which fuel crime and violence.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

At this time of year more than any other we're reminded of the importance of family, and there can be few groups that this applies to more than prisoners.

In-cell telephones provide a crucial means of allowing prisoners to build and maintain family relationships, something we know is fundamental to their rehabilitation.

Introducing them to more prisons is a recognition of the contribution I believe in-cell telephones make to turning prisons into places of decency where offenders have a real chance to transform their lives.

The latest roll-out builds on the expansion of in-cell telephones announced over the summer as part of a £30 million package of measures to boost safety, security and decency across the prison estate.

A major review by Lord Farmer last year found that close ties between prisoners and key family members can significantly reduce the risk of reoffending.

Other measures taken by government to tackle mobile phones in prisons include new security measures such as body scanners and improved searching techniques – part of an additional £70 million investment in safety and decency in prisons announced this year.

The government is also supporting the Interference with Wireless Telegraphy Bill, which received Royal Assent on 20 December 2018. This legislation will enable prisons to use interference technology to disrupt mobile telephone signals and prevent illegal use of mobiles by prisoners.

Notes to editors

- Ministry of Justice (MOJ) research shows that if a prisoner receives visits by a partner or family member (one measure of family ties) the odds of reoffending are 39% lower than for prisoners who had not received such visits.
- For more information please contact the MOJ Press Office on 0203 334 3536.