

Press release: Justice Secretary launches fresh crackdown on crime in prison

- Safety, security and decency will be improved across the prison estate
- Criminal lynchpins operating behind bars will be targeted through new digital technology
- In-cell phones to incentivise good behaviour and boost rehabilitation

Criminal lynchpins who orchestrate gangs from behind bars will be identified, targeted and disrupted thanks to the use of new technology.

As part of action to enhance safety, security and decency across the estate, a new digital tool will enable prisons to build a more detailed picture of the kind of risk an offender is likely to present – including the likelihood of involvement in organised crime.

Following a successful trial, the digital tool – which assesses information from various law enforcement databases to create a central ‘risk rating’ for each prisoner – will be rolled out across the country over the next year, thanks to a £1m injection.

While the current system relies on offence type and sentence length to categorise prisoners, the new technology will help staff to assess the risks an offender is likely to pose – including violence, escape, or becoming involved in organised crime. This intelligence will allow police and prison staff to better target their activity to prevent, disrupt and disable criminal networks, including moving prisoners when necessary.

This smarter approach to categorisation is already having an impact and has led to 12 of the most prolific criminals being moved to different prisons, disrupting their control over criminal networks.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

We must make it clear to these gangs that criminality stops at the prison gate.

...We have already identified some of the worst offenders coordinating drug supply from the inside and moved them to other prisons to cut them off from their market. This includes people using drones and visitors to smuggle drugs and mobile phones into prisons, and those seeking to corrupt prison staff and coerce other prisoners – through intimidation or fear – to get involved in criminal activity.

Removing these individuals disrupts supply routes and, just like any organisation, this lack of leadership paralyses the gangs and

stops them from getting business done.

The £30m package announced today includes an overall £7m investment in safety. This will fund a range of new security measures, including airport-style scanners, improved searching techniques and phone-blocking technology.

The Justice Secretary also announced that the MOJ will be working with the prison service, police and CPS to update the 'Crime in Prisons Protocol', to enhance the response to crime behind bars. New training for prison staff, due to be rolled out by Autumn, will focus on crime scene preservation to make sure investigators and prosecutors have the evidence they need to pursue offenders wherever possible.

The remainder of the £30m will be spent on:

- £16m to improve the fabric of prisons, targeting establishments with the most pressing maintenance issues and to ensure that they are brought back up to acceptable standards. This is on top of the existing maintenance budget.
- £7m on in-cell telephones for more prisons. Currently most prisoners queue for public phones on the landings, which can be the trigger for violence or fuel demand for illicit mobile phones. Some of our modern prisons have in-cell phones with strict security measures, meaning calls to family can take place in private. Prisoners will continue to pay to make these calls.

The Justice Secretary added:

Once in prison, offenders deserve to live in decent, safe and secure environments.. In too many parts of our prison estate today cells are dirty with peeling paint and exposed wiring, shower and toilet facilities are filthy or broken, and food serving and eating areas do not meet modern food hygiene standards.

...Decency also extends to how we treat prisoners – fairly and consistently, with time out of their cells, activities, and the opportunity to maintain family relationships. As Lord Farmer made clear in his ground-breaking review last year, supportive relationships are critical to achieving rehabilitation.

As part of his drive to improve opportunities for compliant prisoners who want to reform and turn their backs on crime, the Justice Secretary outlined plans for an enhanced 'incentives and earned privileges' scheme.

Under this scheme, governors will be given the autonomy to identify what

works best in the context of their prison – for instance, if they have excellent gym facilities, prisoners could be given extra access if they engage in education and employment programmes. Likewise, these privileges can be revoked if prisoners do not behave well.

The existing scheme is run centrally and this has been identified as a flaw by governors and inspectors.

The MOJ will also explore plans for enhanced drug-free wings where prisoners can live in better conditions if they agree to undergo regular testing.

As well as helping offenders to keep on track, we also need to give them hope for the future and the tools to build a bright one. So, we need to create prison regimes that encourage offenders to engage positively with clear pathways to progress,” the Justice Secretary said.

...By using this type of incentives and sanctions model, I believe we can change the dynamic within prisons, creating environments built on mutual respect and trust – where prisoners know what is expected of them and what they can expect in return.