

# Press release: New prison anti-corruption taskforce unveiled

- new unit 'closing the net' on corrupt staff in prisons
- team of specialists installed to tackle the threat
- part of wider crackdown on crime behind bars

The new Counter Corruption Unit began work earlier this month and will proactively pursue those suspected of corrupt activity in prison and probation services across England and Wales.

Working closely with law enforcement agencies, these specialist staff will investigate and disrupt criminality, and bring more prosecutions against those causing harm behind bars.

Crucially, the new taskforce will serve to protect the vast majority of prison and probation staff who are honest and hardworking. It will take action to counter the chaos and violence caused by the few who smuggle illicit items into our jails or impede our ability to supervise offenders in the community effectively.

The unit comprises 29 specialist staff split into a national team and 5 regional teams. Within these teams are expert intelligence analysts who will examine threats to the organisation.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

Our prison staff are overwhelmingly dedicated and honest and do their best to instil safety and order in our jails.

We have seen from recent criminal prosecutions, however, that a small minority continue to engage in corrupt behaviour in our prisons – damaging both the integrity of the system and their profession.

This unit underlines our determination to stamp out criminality in prison in all its forms and will make sure we are closing the net on the individuals driving this, allowing the focus to be on safety and rehabilitation and ultimately keeping the public safer.

Corruption can range from a member of staff having a relationship with a prisoner to bringing in drugs and contraband for individual prisoners or organised crime groups. The unit complements prison security teams that can already search staff, including with metal detectors and baggage scanners.

The new Counter Corruption Unit has 4 aims to combat the threat:

- protect against corruption by building an open and resilient

organisation

- prevent people from engaging in corruption, strengthening professional integrity
- pursue and punish those involved in corruption
- prepare prisons to minimise the impact of corruption where it does occur.

The police will be working with HM Prison Service to co-ordinate this work, reflecting the fact that corruption can extend beyond the prison walls – sometimes involving criminal kingpins orchestrating activity from their cells.

The new team accompanies our £70 million investment to improve safety, security and decency in prisons. This includes funding for new security scanners, improved searching techniques, phone-blocking technology and a financial crime unit to identify and seize assets linked to crime behind bars.

This has come against a backdrop of rising prison officer numbers, with more than 4,700 additional officers now recruited since October 2016 and staffing levels at their highest since 2012.

## **Notes to editors**

- Broadcasters: A pre-recorded interview with the Justice Secretary David Gauke is available on a pooled basis. Please contact Sky News at Millbank to obtain this
- for security reasons, we are unable facilitate the recording of the Counter Corruption Unit's work