

Press release: Prison officer safety equipment rolled out

- the decision follows a successful trial by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) at 4 prisons
- PAVA can help to de-escalate potentially violent situations, keeping staff and prisoners safe from serious harm
- part of wider drive to protect officers and improve safety and security in prisons

Prison officers across the country will be equipped with incapacitant spray to help keep them safe and maintain order, Prisons Minister Rory Stewart announced today (9 October 2018).

Following a successful pilot conducted by HMPPS, who have made the decision to roll out nationally, a £2 million investment will ensure every prison officer in the adult male estate is equipped with PAVA – a synthetic pepper spray which temporarily incapacitates those it is sprayed upon.

PAVA can help to prevent serious harm to staff and prisoners alike, as well as being a tool to persuade prisoners in the act of violence to stop. It will be a crucial step to help reduce serious harm in prisons.

It will only be deployed in limited circumstances when there is serious violence or an imminent risk of it taking place, and where its deployment will reduce the risk of serious injury. All prison officers will receive specialist training before being allowed to carry the spray. It will be delivered in prisons where 'keyworker' training has already been rolled out. This will allow officers to build more positive relationships with prisoners, support their rehabilitation and manage difficult behaviour – before the need for any force is required.

This is the latest of a number of measures taken by government to protect prison officers, which include doubling the maximum sentence for those who assault them as well as rolling out body worn cameras, 'police-style' handcuffs and restraints. Meanwhile more than 3,500 additional officers have been recruited since October 2016.

It comes amid a wider drive to bring stability to prisons, with a £40 million investment announced over the summer to improve the prison estate and tackle the problems that drive much of the violence, including drugs and mobile phones.

This funding will allow the introduction of more airport-style body scanners, phone-blocking technology and drug-detecting dogs, and there will be a particular focus on the country's 10 most challenging prisons.

The PAVA roll-out will start early next year, giving time for essential training to take place first.

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said:

Prison officers' ability to keep control of prisons, and the chaotic individuals within them, is vital to ensuring everyone's safety.

Violent individuals are as much of a danger to other prisoners as they are to prison officers. Most prisoners want to keep out of trouble and see the prison authorities given the means to keep control, so that they can focus on rehabilitation.

Safer prisons means dealing effectively with a dangerous minority, while allowing more offenders into education and work and reducing the likelihood of them reoffending.

The PAVA pilot took place at HMP Hull, Preston, Risley and Wealstun over a 6 month period, and it will now be rolled out across the adult male estate.

Notes to editors

- This was decision taken by HMPPS as part of their safety programme.
- Prison officer numbers are at their highest level since 2013. The majority of the new recruits are already on the landings, joining our dedicated officers who play a vital role in making sure prisons are safe, secure and decent.
- The Assaults on Emergency Workers Bill received Royal Assent which will increase the maximum sentence for assaults against prison officers to double from 6 to 12 months in prison.
- In July we announced a £30 million investment including £16 million to improve conditions for prisoners and staff and £7 million on new security measures, including airport-security style scanners, improved searching techniques and phone-blocking technology. This also includes £1 million on a digital tool which assesses information from various law enforcement databases to create a central 'risk rating' for each prisoner.
- In August we announced another £10 million would be invested in 10 difficult prisons to curb the flow of drugs and phones, while also improving conditions as those jails and improving leadership. This will tackle drug supply by enhancing physical security at the jails; with investment in drug-detection dogs, body scanners, and improved perimeter defences.