Press release: Prison Drugs Strategy unveiled

- strategy outlines the government’s approach to tackling drugs in prisons
- millions being invested in security to stop drugs getting through the prison gates
- drugs fuel violence and prevent rehabilitation of offenders

The Prison Drugs Strategy outlines the co-ordinated response needed to deal with the scourge of drugs which are fuelling record levels of violence.

It is centred around 3 objectives – restricting supply, reducing demand and building recovery. The overall aim is to reduce drug misuse in prisons, thereby better protecting staff and prisoners and creating conditions for offenders to turn their lives around.

The publication of the strategy follows the investment of an additional £70 million over the past year in prison safety, security and decency. This includes a number of measures to tackle drug supply, such as security scanners, improved searching techniques, phone-blocking technology and a financial crime unit to target the criminal kingpins operating in prisons.

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said:

> The threat drugs pose to the safety of prisons has never been greater and it requires a wide-ranging response.
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> The Prison Drugs Strategy sets a clear direction for all those involved in reducing the impact of drugs in our jails.
>
> The potential benefits of this are huge, not only in the form of improved safety for officers and prisoners, but also in reduced re-offending and greater public safety.

The strategy has been developed by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), working with other partners across government.

The central elements of the strategy are:

- Restricting the supply of drugs by improving security, building intelligence, and targeting the criminal networks which aim to bring drugs into prison.
- Reducing the demand for drugs in prison by developing more meaningful regimes, providing more constructive ways for prisoners to spend their time and ensuring the balance of incentives encourages prisoners to make the right choices.
- Working closely with health and justice partners to build recovery for

prisoners who want to overcome their substance misuse, providing prisoners who are serious about living substance free with the environment to do so successfully.

The document will be used by prisons to help inform their own local drugs strategies, which are due to be completed across the estate by September this year.

One example of effective partnership work is the Drug Recovery Prison pilot at HMP Holme House, where the MOJ is working with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to test and evaluate innovative approaches to tackling drugs and helping prisoners improve their chances of recovery.

Press release: HMRC urges loan scheme users to come forward now

HMRC is encouraging users of disguised remuneration (DR) schemes to come forward to settle their tax debt by 5 April.

The majority of users will pay less by settling now than if they wait until the loan charge comes into force. Anybody who wants to settle their taxes should contact HMRC now and send all the information required by 5 April at the latest.

People affected by the loan charge can still benefit from the published settlement terms if they contact HMRC with a genuine intent to settle before 5 April and provide the relevant information, even if settlement cannot be reached until after that date.

By 5 April, scheme users should send through:

- their name and tax reference numbers (UTR), or National Insurance number
- the amount of loans received in each tax year
- whether you want to claim a benefit in kind offset – if so, how much and for which years
- the name of the employer who provided the loans

Anyone earning less than £50,000 and no longer involved in tax avoidance can spread their payments over 5 years minimum and won’t have to provide detailed supporting information about income and assets. For anyone earning less than £30,000, the spread of these payments can be extended to 7 years minimum.

An HRMC spokesperson said:

> HMRC wants to do all that it can to help people get out of avoidance for good. We’re appealing to those who haven’t come forward to settle their disguised remuneration debts to do so now and send us the required information by no later than 5 April.
>
> If you’re concerned about your ability to pay, it’s still better to contact us now – we have a range of flexible payment options to consider, and no option will require you to sell your main home to pay off your debt.

People affected by the loan charge don’t need to pay the full amount in one go or by 5 April 2019. HMRC can help anybody who thinks they will have difficulty paying what they owe by spreading payments over a number of years.

There is no maximum time period for payment arrangements. HMRC will not force anyone to sell their main home to pay their disguised remuneration debts.

To support loan charge users, HMRC set up a dedicated helpline, complemented by a team to provide extra support to those who need it. It has redeployed staff to support scheme users and announced simplified payment arrangements.

As part of its continued work in this area, HMRC has announced that it is expanding its Needs Extra Support service to vulnerable customers when it looks into their tax affairs.

DR schemes are contrived arrangements that pay loans through a third party, often an offshore trust, in place of ordinary remuneration with the sole purpose of avoiding Income Tax and National Insurance contributions.

The loans are provided on terms that mean they are unlikely to be repaid, so they are no different to normal income and are, and always have been, taxable. HMRC’s position on DR schemes has always been clear that DR schemes are designed to avoid tax and simply do not work.

- Customers can contact HMRC through the dedicated helpline on 03000 534 226, or email us or speak to their usual HMRC contact.
- The loan charge, which was first announced in the 2016 Budget, will apply where people have not settled their tax and have DR loans made since 6 April 1999 that remain outstanding at midnight on 5 April 2019.
- Where people do not settle their tax and have loans outstanding they will have to pay the loan charge. Individuals who have not agreed a settlement or repaid their loans before the loan charge arises should submit an information return to HMRC, setting out their loan balance by 30 September 2019. They should also file their 2018 to 2019 Self Assessment tax return and pay the loan charge by 31 January 2020.
- Where the scheme user was in an employment-based loan scheme and the employer still exists and is UK-resident, they should tell the employer what the outstanding loan balance is by 15 April 2019. The employer will need to calculate the PAYE liability on that loan charge income, and make payment to HMRC either by 19 April 2019 (by post) or 22 April 2019 (online). The employer will need to report the loan charge amount to

HMRC via Real Time Information from 20 April.

- HMRC has recently warned about new tax avoidance which claim to circumvent the loan charge. These will not work and people should not consider using them. Read Our recent Spotlight is on GOV.UK.
- The government published a report on time limits and the charge on disguised remuneration loans last week.
- You can read further information on disguised remuneration schemes and HMRC's issue briefing on disguised remuneration charge on loans

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Statement to parliament: EU Transport Council 27 March 2019

The Romanian Presidency hosted an informal meeting of transport ministers in Bucharest on Wednesday 27 March (2019). This was not a formal Council meeting and no decisions were taken. This statement provides a summary of discussions. The UK was represented by officials.

The meeting discussed multimodality, sustainability, infrastructure and road safety. On multimodality, participants underlined the importance of developing a comprehensive approach to multimodal transport. Integrated ticketing systems, promotion of car-sharing or public transport, digitalisation and interoperability were identified as means for developing multimodality.

On sustainability, participants discussed the importance of action to reduce the impact of transport on climate change, recognising the challenges raised by an increasing need for mobility and the negative impact on the climate. Policy and practical approaches to encouraging multimodal transport were discussed, with many interventions focusing on possible measures to be taken in order to decarbonise transport such as: promotion of alternative fuels, digitalisation, better planning of services, uptake of new technologies, and incentives for use of public transport or cycling.

The Commission set out its thinking on the revision of the TEN-T Regulation, following the launch of its review process in March, and its plans for consultation with stakeholders and member states in the next few months. Participants welcomed the Commission's initiative to start the revision process of the TEN-T regulation and discussed future funding options for the promotion of priority projects.

Over lunch the meeting heard some presentations on road safety. The European Commission stressed the importance of member states implementing the 'vision zero' to reduce fatalities and severe injuries on roads. The European Commission will be seeking to re-focus its efforts in this area by introducing a new policy framework on Road Safety for 2021 to 2030. In addition, they will seek to foster a partnership with the European Investment

Bank to provide the 'safer transport facility' with the aim of providing a 'one stop shop' to support member states in achieving the objective.

The UK did not intervene substantively.

Press release: UKEF launches consultation into foreign content policy

UK Export Finance (UKEF) has today launched a month-long consultation into its foreign content policy. During the consultation, the UK's export credit agency will ask the public for its views on proposed changes, which are designed to recognise the full contribution of the UK supply chain in the transactions UKEF supports.

The proposed changes will enable UKEF to provide the most appropriate support for UK exporters and suppliers, ensuring that the UK remains competitive and enabling global buyers to purchase more easily from the UK.

The consultation was announced in the Spring Statement and follows the publication of the Export Strategy in 2018. The strategy underlines the government's commitment to providing comprehensive and flexible support to help UK exporters take full advantage of international demand for the UK's world-class goods and services.

Louis Taylor, chief executive, UKEF said:

> UK Export Finance is committed to helping UK exporters succeed in overseas markets with the right support. By consulting on the support we provide, we are ensuring we can adapt in line with the world's changing economy and the changing needs of the UK's exporters, ultimately ensuring the UK meets its trading potential.

UK Export Finance is the UK's export credit agency and a government department, working alongside the Department for International Trade as an integral part of its strategy and operations.

Our mission is to ensure that no viable UK export should fail for want of finance or insurance from the private market. We provide finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and ensure they get paid for export contracts.

Sectors in which UKEF has supported exports include: aerospace, healthcare, infrastructure, telecommunications and transport.

UKEF has a national regional network of 24 export finance managers supporting export businesses.

Our range of products includes:

- Bond insurance policy
- Bond support scheme
- Buyer & supplier credit financing facility
- Direct lending facility
- Export insurance policy
- Export refinancing facility
- Export working capital scheme
- Letter of credit guarantee scheme

Our country cover positions outline our current cover policy and risk appetite for each country.

Press release: Ready, set, lift! Giant ‘superspan’ gantry installed across M6

The structure is nearly 131ft (40m) in length and weighs around 46 tonnes. It was lowered into place by a specialist crane weighing 200 tonnes.

The new gantry spans the width of the M6 and was installed at the weekend near Corley Services between junctions 3 (Coventry / Nuneaton) and 4 (Coleshill).

It will house the technology responsible for providing safety information to motorists as well as advising drivers of changes in variable speed limits to help traffic flow more smoothly.

Highways England captured timelapse footage of the painstaking work that took place overnight while the road was at its quietest.

Motorway Gantry 1 M6 2-4

Highways England Assistant Project Manager, David Croser-Drake, said:

> We planned this work meticulously to ensure that we could get the M6 open on Sunday morning as quickly and as safely as possible.
>
> This is a really exciting milestone in this major upgrade of a busy stretch of the M6 and once completed will ease congestion and provide smoother journeys for those using it.

Once finished, the new-look stretch of the M6 will feature:

- three controlled motorway lanes, retaining the hard shoulder from junctions 3a to 4 where the motorway will tie into the existing controlled motorway
- a four-lane smart motorway between junctions 2 to 3a with a hard shoulder next to the current ‘climbing lane’ travelling eastbound
- installation of new electronic information signs and signals, radar detection and CCTV cameras – these will be used to vary speed limits which allow management of traffic flow and incidents
- nine emergency areas to use in place of the hard shoulder
- an improved central reserve barrier made of concrete to improve safety
- two new noise barriers at Potter’s Green and Goodyers End and low noise surfacing on the road

The gantry was lowered into place using specialist lifting equipment

Elsewhere, Highways England has completed a £265 million project to add extra lanes and new technology to a 19-mile stretch of the motorway between Crewe and Knutsford – the most significant change since the M6 first opened in Cheshire in 1963.

A fourth lane has been introduced in each direction and a total of 258 electronic signs, 104 traffic sensors and 70 CCTV cameras will help tackle congestion and improve journey times for around 120,000 drivers every day.

The upgrade is the first of four smart motorway schemes to be finished that will increase the M6’s capacity by a third on 60 miles of the motorway between Coventry and Wigan.

And there’s also good news for motorists in North Tyneside with more than 80,000 drivers a day are experiencing safer and smoother journeys thanks to the opening of the North East’s first ever triple decker junction.

The £75 million Highways England Coast Road scheme has been opened on time and traffic is now able to use the new section of road. This means that drivers will no longer have to negotiate the roundabout and can continue straight on along the A19.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.