



17 March 2020: A statement from HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Peter Clarke

Peter Clarke, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, has announced that all scheduled inspection work involving visits to prisons or other places of State detention in England and Wales has been suspended up to the end of May 2020. This will affect around 15 full inspections, independent reviews of progress and visits as part of thematic inspection work. This decision will be kept constantly under review in the light of COVID-19-related developments.

The decision reflects the latest government guidance on social distancing in dealing with COVID-19 and recognises the very significant challenges faced by prisons and other establishments at this time. HMI Prisons believes it would be inappropriate to subject prisons and other establishments to the demands of an inspection or other type of visit at a time when they are devoting all their resources to preparing to deal with the impact of COVID-19.

However, Mr Clarke and HMI Prisons have a continuing duty to monitor, as best they can, the treatment and conditions for prisoners and other detainees. Inspectorate staff will continue with work not directly related to prison visits – including the publication of reports from earlier inspections.

Mr Clarke said:

“We acknowledge the huge pressure prisons are now under so, until the end of May as presently envisaged, we will not be arriving unannounced at establishments to inspect. However, we will seek alternative ways of fulfilling our obligation to monitor, understand and report on the treatment and conditions in prisons and places of detention. Where we can, we will share this work publicly. It is important at this difficult time to reassure the public, those in prison and their families, and ministers, that we will not lose sight of our primary duty to offer an independent assessment of conditions in detention.”

Additionally, some HMI Prisons staff have substantial and relevant prison service experience. HMI Prisons is liaising closely with the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and will consider seriously any requests for assistance.