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6 January 2021

UNIONS DEMAND ACTION ON NEW COVID RISKS

Napo, UNISON and GMB/SCOOP have written to Amy Rees, Director General for Probation, today to request urgent talks on the HMPPS response to the Government's announcement on Monday of a second severe lockdown in England and Wales with effect from today.

The new lockdown is the result of the exponential rise in Covid cases across our two nations which in turn has been caused by the spread of the highly contagious and therefore much more dangerous new variant of the virus.

We understand that at one AP in the North West, 15 residents are self-isolating of whom 13 have tested positive, alongside 5 members of staff of whom 3 have tested positive for Covid. These figures bring home the seriousness of the rise in cases and the risks now faced by our members.

We understand that EDMs are currently being reviewed, but we do not consider that this is an adequate response by itself. While some Regional Directors have been positively engaging with local TU reps to discuss the EDM reviews, some have insisted that they will only share the EDM once it has been reviewed which is not, in our view, proper engagement.

The unions have therefore asked Amy Rees as a matter of urgency that:

1. HMPPS provides us with a risk assessment of the new variant of the Covid virus to allow us to properly understand the risks it poses to our members and service users and to ensure that NPS is taking all necessary steps to protect its workforce.
2. Regional Directors convene meetings with their local trade unions to discuss the EDM reviews and to agree the necessary measures to protect staff including those staff working in other workplaces such as prisons, courts and partner agencies.
3. A meeting is convened between the unions and the Residential Division to agree appropriate measures within the AP estate.
4. All face to face meetings with service users migrate to on-line platforms with only the most pressing public protection risks dealt with in person.
5. RAG ratings are reviewed, with particular reference to the concerns the unions expressed prior to Christmas in respect of London and other

areas with very high infection rates remaining on amber and the message that is sent to staff when they are told that the RAG rating only refers to service delivery and not to their personal safety in the workplace.

6. All Regions ensure that positive Covid test data for staff/service users is communicated in real time to trade union representatives.
7. The advice and guidance for clinically extremely vulnerable and clinically vulnerable staff is reviewed with immediate effect to provide the necessary protection for these employees in respect of the new variant.
8. A review of staff cover and multi-site working arrangements takes place to ensure that asymptomatic staff are not unwittingly carrying the virus into other workplaces.
9. A referral is made up to Ministers to the effect that it is no longer possible for NPS to provide business as usual cover to courts under circumstances where staffing shortages are putting unreasonable pressure on those who remain in the workplace and sentencers are limiting the use of virtual hearings.
10. An urgent review of staff well-being and measures is put in place to support staff during this second lockdown.

ADVICE TO MEMBERS

The three unions are working hard to secure the best protection for members against the new Covid variant and the steep rise in cases in the population. If you have any concerns about your personal safety, or the way in which you or your colleagues are being asked to work, please speak as a matter of urgency to your local union rep or branch.