



## 1 June 2020: Statement from HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Peter Clarke, on our next steps

Peter Clarke, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, has announced that the suspension of full inspections will continue past the end of May 2020. Mr Clarke said:

“On 17 March 2020, I announced a suspension of full inspections until the end of May 2020. This reflected government public health guidance and recognised that it would be wrong to burden prison staff with the rigours of full inspections as they dealt with the rapidly-unfolding COVID-19 crisis. I also emphasised that I have an ongoing statutory duty to report on treatment and conditions for those detained.

“On 21 April 2020, we published information about our model of short scrutiny visits (SSVs), which would enable HM Inspectorate of Prisons to fulfil this duty.

“The suspension of full inspections will remain in place for the time being. However, the Inspectorate will continue to carry out short scrutiny visits, and is also currently working to enhance and develop the SSV methodology.

“The SSV model developed in April, focusing on short visits to groups of similar establishments, has been successfully implemented and well received – both in principle, reflecting the importance of independent scrutiny, and in practice, in locations we have visited. Governing teams have reported that they have found an independent perspective to be useful and we have seen some positive changes as a result of our visits.

“Since 21 April, we have visited 19 establishments – men’s local, training and long-term/high-security prisons, women’s prisons, young offender institutions and immigration removal centres. We have a schedule of further visits over the coming weeks.

“You can read findings from our published reports here. It is clear from our visits that swift action by the prison service appears to have prevented widespread transmission of the virus and averted the potentially disastrous consequences that some had feared. There have been fewer cases of COVID-19 than was initially predicted. However, we have also noted the extreme impact of these measures on regimes, time out of cell, and the risks created by the reduction in support services provided to prisoners, particularly the most vulnerable

“Our initial SSV model was designed for a prison system navigating its way through a crisis. However, as we know, the COVID-19 pandemic picture has changed significantly. We have also noted that the prisons we have visited have been stable, and there have been enough staff.

“In light of this, development of our methodology in this next phase will be guided by the core considerations of whether the restrictions in place are proportionate to the health risks facing places

of detention and balanced against the negative impact of those restrictions on prisoners and detainees.

“We do not in any way underestimate the continuing challenges facing those who run these establishments. As with our initial SSV model, we will work constructively with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and other agencies in refining our model.

“We will continue to follow national public health advice, and seek to ensure that our visits and reports make a positive and valuable contribution as establishments move from severe restrictions towards regimes which reflect the easing of those restrictions in the wider community.

“We will publish further detail on our enhanced SSV model in the coming weeks.”