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.
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> 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

Users of disguised remuneration schemes need to come to HMRC with information to settle their affairs before 5 April or face the loan charge.

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

Items discussed at the 27 March 2019 informal meeting of EU transport council ministers including multimodality, sustainability, infrastructure and road safety.

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.