

Press release: New incentives framework to help prisoners turn their lives around

- Governors have greater freedom to offer the incentives which work best for their particular cohort of prisoners
- Those who don't follow the rules will have privileges removed and face swifter punishment through our new adjudications process
- The move is intended to help break the cycle of reoffending and put prisoners on the right path

Prison governors will today be able to have their say on a new approach to incentives which encourages prisoners to take responsibility for their own rehabilitation.

A consultation is being launched on the new Incentives and Earned Privileges policy, which would empower governors to design their own programme of incentives tailored to the specific challenges in their prison.

Those who behave well and engage in meaningful activities such as education and employment programmes could receive privileges such as more time in the gym or additional visits.

Crucially, governors will be able to tackle poor behaviour by taking away privileges – returning people to a more basic regime and living conditions – and will have greater freedom to decide how prisoners move up or down privilege levels.

Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said:

Prisons must be places of safety, decency and purposeful activity to turn around the lives of those in custody.

This new framework will give governors the tools to set clear behavioural standards for offenders under their watch, and the consequences should these not be met.

Research on behaviour change shows positive reinforcement is much more effective at shaping behaviour than punishment and, while sometimes necessary, punishment alone does not effectively change behaviour.

Many consider that the incentives system is not currently as effective as it could be, with governors having too little flexibility to establish incentives that their particular cohort of prisoners value.

We are therefore providing governors with more freedom to design their incentive scheme to take account of the local needs of their prison

population and the facilities available in their prison. This means a prison with a good gym, or a wing with a kitchen area, could better use these in its IEP system in future.

Governors could also choose to increase the amount of time out of cell an individual prisoner receives to engage in recreational activities or exercise alongside education and work programmes.

And to better assist them in preparing for life back in the community, governors could choose to incentivise prisoners by offering additional visits from family and friends, with more flexible timings.

We will retain sensible limitations on governors' freedoms, so that, for example, no paid for TV channels or other inappropriate incentives are permitted.

And for those who don't follow the rules, a strict system of adjudications and punishments will ensure that governors are able to deal swiftly with those who refuse to engage. Punishments range from the removal of privileges to harsher measures such as prosecution and additional prison time.

Notes to editors

- The consultation will launch today (3 September) and will run for a period of 28 days.
- The new system will retain 3 privilege levels: basic, standard and enhanced, but remove 'entry level' which Governors tell us is bureaucratic and penalises prisoners who are new, setting up an adversarial relationship with staff from the outset.