

Press release: Phone detection kit introduced in prisons

- Justice Secretary announces new mobile detection technology in prisons
- Will allow prison officers to pinpoint mobile phone signal down to precise cell
- Part of wider efforts to reduce violence and drug use and restore stability to the prison estate

The technology is the latest weapon in the fight against phone smuggling which leads to drug-dealing and violence behind bars.

It works by sending real-time alerts when a mobile is detected in prison, shown on a digital heat map which identifies the strength of the signal. This allows prison officers to pinpoint the location of the phone down to the exact cell.

Staff can also track data over time to watch for patterns emerging, for example when inmates conspire to smuggle drugs into prison. This intelligence is analysed and in conjunction with law enforcement partners can lead to arrests.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

As criminals look for new ways to smuggle contraband into prisons, it is vital that we stay one step ahead, and this kind of technology will help prevent them operating from their cells.

This is vital to ensuring prisons are places of safety and rehabilitation, where offenders can turn their backs on crime for good.

Illicit use of phones in prisons to co-ordinate crime fuels high levels of violence as offenders vie for control of the internal market and enforce drug debts. Phones can also be used to terrorise victims and maintain outside criminal networks.

The technology is part of a wider multi-million-pound strategy to restore stability to prisons, with other measures including security scanners, improved searching techniques, phone-blocking technology and a financial crime unit to target the criminal kingpins operating in prisons.

Following a successful six-month trial of the latest technology in one prison, the technology is now in use in five across the country.

There is a direct link between crime on the wings and landings and crime in our towns and cities. Ensuring there is less crime in our prisons means less crime in communities.

Since January last year the Government has invested £70 million in safety, security and decency to help restore stability to the prison estate. On top of this, £14 million is being invested each year to stop criminal gangs smuggling drugs into prisons.

This has come against a backdrop of rising prison officer numbers, with more than 4,700 additional officers recruited since October 2016 and staffing levels at their highest since 2012.

- For security reasons, we cannot disclose the location or further details of the technology.
- The government supported the Interference with Wireless Telegraphy Bill, which received Royal Assent on 20 December 2018. This legislation enables prisons to use interference technology to disrupt mobile telephone signals and prevent illegal use of mobiles by prisoners.