**FAMILIES & SIGNIFICANT OTHERS**

**COVID-19 UPDATE**

At the end of 2019 a new strain of Coronavirus was discovered in China. A sister to the SARs virus, COVID-19 quickly spread, its impact has been felt globally.

HMPPS is working alongside Public Health England and our partners in the devolved administration to make sure we are able to cope with the ongoing impact of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Throughout the Prison Estate difficult decisions have had to be made about the usual prison regimes in order to protect our residents and staff and to make sure we are following the government’s rules on social distancing.

At all times, we have to think of the health and safety of the staff, people in our care and under our supervision.

We know that family contact is important, even more so in these uncertain times and maintaining family contact is one of our key priorities, placed alongside the importance of meals, medication, and safety.

The problem then arises that as new rules are enforced in the wider community how do promote family contact whilst following the government’s advice. With restrictions on nearly every aspect of normal life, that changed initially very rapidly HMP Rochester we had to adapt at pace.

**WHAT WE DID**

**19/03/2020** – To promote Governments advice around social distancing, the number of visits we booked were reduced by 50% to 18 families.

**20/03/2020** – We made the difficult decision to cancel the planned family visits for Easter.

**20/03/2020** – Whilst a reduction number of visits we would book, would stop high number in the future we looked at the weekend visits figures and offered to buy back PVO’s at an increased rate of Pin Credit, promoting the Incentives scheme and to discourage non-essential travel.

**23/03/2020** – We implemented temperature testing of all Social Visitors to HMP ROCHESTER, to allow visits to continue in the safest way possible.

**23/03/2020** – We informed all residents that where emergency credit was requested to speak to relatives with suspected Covid-19, if they had a visit booked in the next 14 days this would be postponed to protect the safety of all.

**On the Evening of the 23rd of March 2020 the Prime Minister announced that the United Kingdom would be placed on lock down, to protect the NHS and the population as a whole.**

*The announcement superseded a lot of the protective measures we had put in place with a nationwide curtailment of visits, with immediate effect. Since the announcement we have implemented the following changes to promote family ties.*

**Following the announcement**

* We have given all of our residents the opportunity to trade their Visiting Orders and Privilege Visits orders for pin credit.
* We have given every resident £5 of pin credit each week.
* We have regularly updated @hmprochester on twitter to keep families informed.
* We have given every man the opportunity to write and send a letter at the cost to the establishment.
* We have worked on reducing the cost of phone calls for all our residents.
* We have Prison Voicemail and Email-a-Prisoner as alternative ways of keeping touch.
* We will continue to address and review this and add to this list as required.