



COVID-19

INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE IN CUSTODY – 5 MAY 2020

MOBILE PHONES

As you know, the SPS has had to make difficult decisions in the last few weeks in order to prevent the spread of the virus and protect those living and working our prisons. These decisions – particularly the suspension of visits - have undoubtedly impacted on you and your families and friends.

We understand how difficult this has been and have been working hard to design and implement alternative forms of communication. On Friday 17th April, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced his intention to rollout restricted mobile phones to everyone in custody to allow you to maintain vital communication with your families and friends.

We know you will have a number of questions regarding how the system will operate in practice and as such this Question and Answer sheet is designed to help:

Q1. When will we receive the mobile phones?

We have been working with the service provider to introduce mobile handsets as quickly as possible. There are technical and legal issues that we have to overcome before mobile phones can be distributed, including challenges in some establishments in relation to connectivity to external masts. However, we are actively working to resolve these issues and aim to have mobile phones in establishments as soon as possible.

Q2. What are the issues?

The fabric of SPS buildings are such that accessing a mobile phone signal can be challenging and there are varying signal strengths across the estate. To identify the establishments where signal strength is weak, a series of site surveys are being carried out by SPS and the mobile phone provider. This should assist us in understanding where there may be connectivity issues.

A further issue relates to calls being routed through external masts which are only set up to support a set number of calls from the community. Without work to develop capacity of these masts, any calls you would make may have difficulty in connecting to the number you have dialled. We are actively seeking to work with the provider to seek a solution to this before mobile phones are issued.

Q3. What will I be given?

You will be allocated a mobile phone, SIM card and charger that will be linked to you and your current call list. When you receive these you will be asked to sign a compact which makes clear the terms of use.

Q4. How will it work?

The mobile handset will allow you access to up to 20 telephone numbers we have taken from your existing PAN list, however this will not include international calls or legal numbers which can still be accessed by the existing PIN phone system.

You will only be able to make outgoing calls to the numbers already included on your existing call list. In addition to this, the SAMARITANS telephone number will also be available.

As with the current PIN system, there will be a number of security restrictions on the phones. The mobile phones will not be able to receive incoming calls and will not have a text messaging facility, or be internet enabled. As with the current phone system, the SPS will be able to monitor all calls made.

Q5. How much will it cost to make a call?

The mobile phones will come pre-loaded with 300 minutes per month for each user. During this current COVID 19 period, there will be no additional cost for using the mobile phone, however this will remain under review and SPS reserves the right to pass on call charges with notice to you.

In addition to the additional 300 minutes per month available through the mobile phone, you will still be able to access the prisoner PIN phone system and top this up as normal.

Q6. Can I use the phone whenever I want?

Due to the volume of mobile handsets required, there will be additional pressure placed on mobile signal distribution masts beside establishments. In order to ensure the system is operating as it should for all prisoners, control measures are required to prevent overload of the network. In the initial period after distribution, users will have their use of mobile phones scheduled to allocated times throughout the day. To ensure fairness to all, these slots will rotate on a weekly basis so calling times can be varied for each group.

Q7. Where can I use the mobile phone?

Use of the mobile handset will be restricted to within your own cell or within your section in the residential area. Handsets will **not** be permitted to be used out with these areas.

Any attempt to do so will result in the mobile phone being removed.

Q8. How do you top up your account?

During the period of this temporary measure, there will be no opportunity for you to add additional money to top up minutes on your mobile phones; this is due to the need to schedule all calls made to ensure connectivity to mobile phone masts.

PIN phone access will still require top ups as normal.

Q9. Can I add numbers?

Only the personal numbers from your existing PIN phone accounts will be available on the mobile phone. To allow us to ensure you have access as soon as possible to the mobile phones, it will not be possible to add or change numbers in the initial period after distribution however we will seek to implement a process to support changes as quickly as possible.

Q10. Can we use after lock up?

To enable the introduction of the mobile handset, we have created a schedule within each establishment which allocates timeslots per person per day. The schedule will run from 8am until 10pm. This will allow for a morning, early afternoon, late afternoon and evening session for everyone to access.

Q11. I am a new admission – will I get a phone?

On admission you will be asked to provide a list of numbers and given access to the PIN phone system. Once set up on PIN Phone system you will be allocated a mobile phone within 7 days.

Q12. What if I break or lose my mobile phone?

By signing the compact upon receipt of your mobile phone, you are agreeing to be responsible for the handset and also the conditions of use. Where it is found that you have breached any of the terms of use, the handset will be withdrawn and you will only be able to access the PIN phone system.

Q13. What if I don't want a phone?

You do not have to accept a mobile phone if you don't want one. Upon distribution of the handsets, prisoners will be required to sign a compact agreement for use and safe keeping of the mobile handset. Should you not wish to take up the opportunity, you should sign the disclaimer under the section 'Declined allocation of handset' and return to staff.

Q14. Will the current PIN phone system still be available for use?

The existing PIN phone system will still be available to you to make personal calls. You will continue to receive the additional £2.50 per week onto your PIN account.

All international calls, calls to legal representatives and calls to 3rd sector support organisations will also need to be made via the existing PIN phone system.

Q15. What happens with the phone at the end of COVID-19 – do we get to keep it?

At this time, there are no plans to extend this temporary measure beyond the current restricted circumstances around COVID-19. When directed to do so, prisoners will be expected to return the handset and any accompanying charging equipment to staff.