

Prisoner Welfare A New Perspective Post-Pandemic

Fergal Black, Director of Care &
Rehabilitation, Irish Prison Service,
October 2021



Seirbhís Phríosúin
na hÉireann
Irish Prison Service

Prisoner Welfare - A new perspective post-pandemic

- ▶ To consider a new perspective, we should review services pre-COVID 19
- ▶ What has changed?
- ▶ Pandemic necessitated a need to reduce prison numbers
- ▶ Typically services were delivered in person regularly 1:1, some in groups (Psychology, MQI etc)
- ▶ Delivery of services was not always efficient, effective or consistent
- ▶ Seek to build back better post-pandemic
- ▶ Covid forced the IPS to reimagine new ways to provide services and make services more readily available to prisoners

IPS Experience of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- ▶ Prisons identified as possible epicentres for COVID-19 transmission
- ▶ **Block** COVID-19, early *detection*, *prevent* to spread, *protect* lives
- ▶ From the start of the pandemic;
 - ▶ 180+ positive prisoners
 - ▶ 400+ positive staff
- ▶ No prisoner hospitalisations arising from COVID-19
- ▶ No deaths of staff or prisoners arising from COVID-19
- ▶ Effective collaboration between IPS staff (discipline & non discipline), prisoners, services & Public Health
- ▶ Early mobilization of Red Cross peer educators as an effective conduit with prisoner population
- ▶ Extraordinary & stringent measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission
- ▶ Impact of COVID-19 mitigation measures on people in custody

Impact on Prisoners

- ▶ Cancellation of physical visits, restricted regimes, quarantine of new committals, isolation of suspected cases, COVID-19 testing
- ▶ Concerns raised regarding quarantining, isolation, cocooning, out of cell time, meaningful human contact, cancellation of work/training & education, early stage technical difficulties with new video link calls to families
- ▶ IOP reported that “some measures had a disproportionate impact on prisoners”
- ▶ Prisoners subjected to quarantine & isolation in the view of the IOP “were held in solitary confinement” with a deleterious effect on mental & physical health
- ▶ Cocooners - Themes emerging from collaborative project (IOP & Maynooth University) food issues, outdoor exercise, social contact, regime, consultation, access to constructive activities, effects on mental & physical health

IPS Response

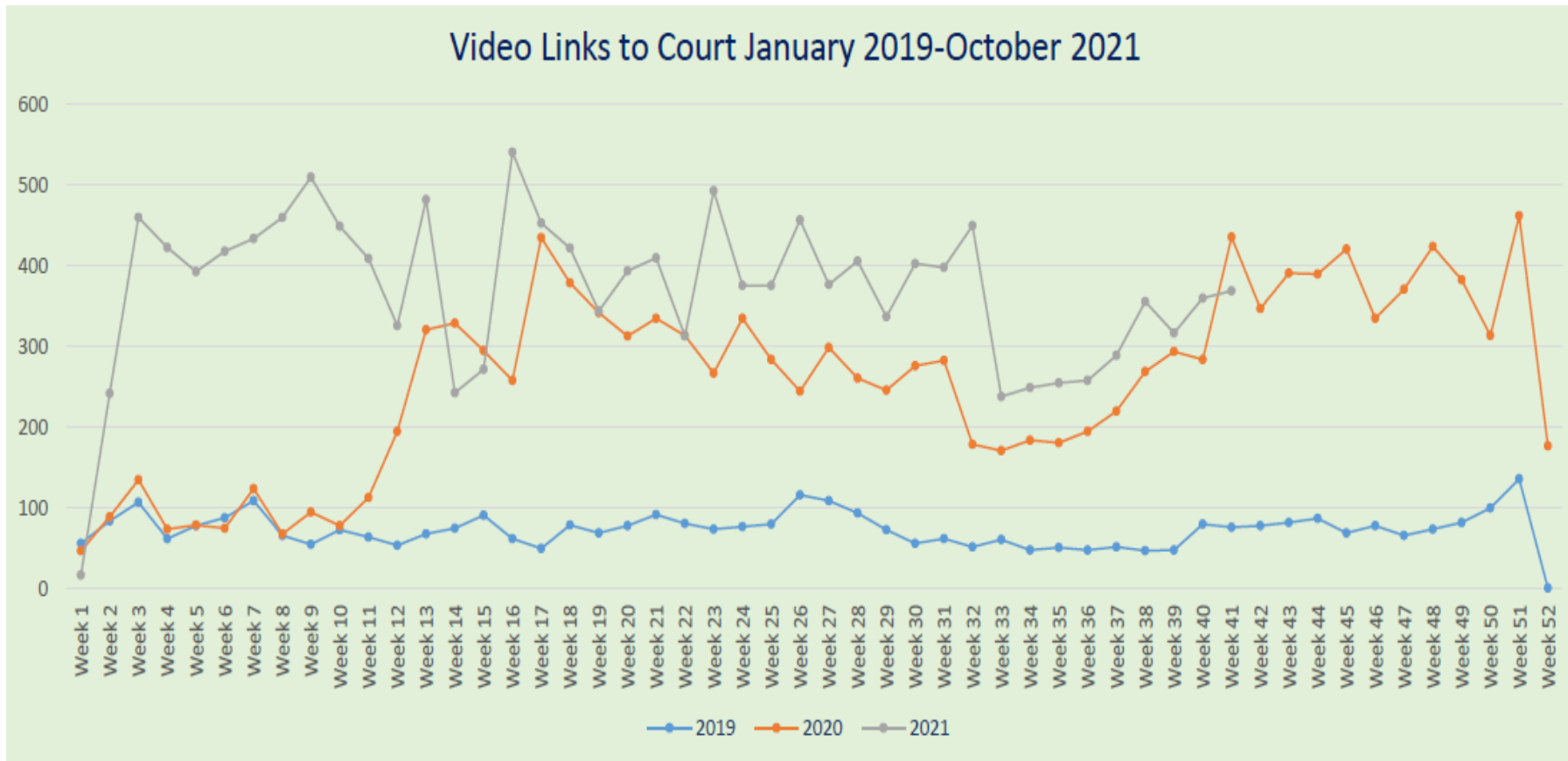
- ▶ The IPS identified the need to rapidly introduce a range of technological responses to provide prisoners and services with alternatives;
 - ❑ The introduction of family video visits
 - ❑ The expansion of court video links
 - ❑ Providing online & local alternatives to lodge money into prisoners accounts
 - ❑ Developing a prisoner TV channel
 - ❑ Installing in-cell telephones
 - ❑ Trialling the use of iPad's & video link for prisoners to engage with services
 - ❑ Developing a blended model for consultations to include telephony, video calls and direct 1:1 consultations
 - ❑ The introduction of blended learning & remote learning education programmes

Family Visits Video Links Stats

Number of Family Visits successfully scheduled to take place via video link between 02/04/21 and 08/04/21

Location	Number of Scheduled Calls	Number of Successful Calls	Number of Unsuccessful Calls
Arbour Hill	27	27	0
Castlerea	103	94	9
Cloverhill	236	224	12
Cork	118	112	6
Dochas	126	123	3
Limerick	115	95	20
Loughan House	32	32	0
Midlands	447	441	6
Mountjoy	198	191	7
Portlaoise	117	115	2
Shelton Abbey	113	107	6
Wheatfield	192	177	15
Total	1824	1738	86

Court Video Links



Remote Lodgements

- ▶ One of the knock on effects of the suspension of Visits was that prisoners could not have access to relatives funds. This was an accepted norm prior to the pandemic in that prisoner families provided funds (when attending for a visit) to their relative in prison to enable them to purchase items from the prison tuck shop such as confectionary, cigarettes, soft drinks etc.
- ▶ In April and May 2020 the IPS implemented 2 new systems to enable prisoner families to submit funds electronically to their relative in prison as follows;
- ▶ Direct Bank Transfer
 - ❑ Family members can transfer funds direct from their own bank account to the IPS Bank Account which is then assigned to the individual prisoner's IPS Customer Account (PAMS)
- ▶ An Post BillPay
 - ❑ Nominated family members (in possession of an An Post Billpay Card as authorised by a Prisoner) can attend any Post Office in Ireland and pay in funds, with such funds then being processed into the Prisoner's IPS Customer Account (PAMS).
 - ❑ The An Post BillPay card can also be used to transfer funds by way of credit card payment via the Bills.ie website.
- ▶ The systems have proved to be highly efficient and effective in getting funds to prisoners quickly and seamlessly and has removed the burden of travel on family members where they do not reside in close proximity to the particular prison.
- ▶ UP to 01/10/2021 these new electronic systems have facilitated **113,000** transactions for an amount of **€5.4M** from prisoner families to their relatives in prison.

Prisoner TV Channel

- ▶ An information/education TV channel was rolled out to all prisons in late 2020/early 2021
- ▶ Each prison channel schedule is utilised to broadcast information on prisoner services, specifically produced video materials to compliment education provision as a form of blended learning
- ▶ In addition many other services including addiction counselling, psychology, Irish Red Cross, Gaisce etc have developed bespoke materials for uploading onto the prisoner TV channel
- ▶ Finally the channel is an important communication tool and proved its worth keeping prisoners informed on regime changes during the evolution of the pandemic

In Cell Telephones

- ▶ Introduction of in cell telephones to allow prisoners to engage with services such as psychology & chaplains
- ▶ A dedicated phone line is now available to facilitate contact with services
- ▶ The IPS are rolling out in cell telephones across the prison estate. To date in cell telephony is available in Cork, Castlerea, Cloverhill, Dochas (not all rooms). The roll out is being finalised in Limerick and is commencing in Midlands prison
- ▶ A pilot 'Proof of Concept' initiative in Cork prison, to facilitate inbound calls to prisoners in cell was undertaken in June 2021. The pilot involved 4,300 calls of maximum 10 minute duration.
- ▶ A business case to develop inbound call facilities in all prisons is being developed

Trialling Use of iPad's In Cell & Videolink

- ▶ COVID-19 outbreak or prisoner confinement - Video psychology availability in the event of a prisoner requiring mental health services
- ▶ Use of video link for hard to reach prisoners to engage in psychology consultation
- ▶ Reports that some prisoners consider remote video consultations less psychologically threatening
- ▶ Expansion of use of iPad's to NVRU

Blended Learning & Remote Learning

- ▶ *Blended learning involves a combination of scheduled educational content on the Prison TV channels with specially produced workbooks and manuals to be handed into cells for those who cannot access classrooms due to COVID or who have limited access to classrooms.*
- ▶ Will complement and reinforce classroom teaching and learning
- ▶ It is not intended as a substitute for face-to-face teaching and learning (which shall remain the primary method of education delivery)
- ▶ ETB's have created over 100 audio-visual files that can be streamed
- ▶ Coursework completed will be recorded on the Prisoner Education Management System
- ▶ *Remote learning and/or facilitated work shops by video link into selected classrooms*
- ▶ Will simplify input by external organisations, lecturers etc to learners in prison classroom

Continuing & Future Priorities

- ▶ Report of High Level Task Force on Mental Health and Addiction challenges in CJS
- ▶ IPS Health Needs Assessment Report
- ▶ Maximising Out Of Cell Time & Access to Constructive Activities
- ▶ Enhanced Sentence Planning
- ▶ Improved Release Planning
- ▶ Impact of Numbers in Custody

