



**Prison Service  
Order**

**ORDER  
NUMBER  
4410**

**PRISONER COMMUNICATIONS  
VISITS**

<b>Date of Initial Issue</b>	<b>05/09/2007</b>
<b>Issue No.</b>	<b>279</b>
PSI Amendments should be read in conjunction with this PSO	
<b>Date of Further Amendments</b>	

## PRISONER COMMUNICATIONS - VISITS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
<p>This Order consolidates and replaces, with some amendments, guidance on social, official and professional visits in Standing Order 5A, Circular Instruction 11/1991 and IG 10/1994 and provides a framework for addressing some of the current deficiencies in terms of policy that have been identified. It also introduces some provisions arising from various exercises to identify good practice across the estate.</p> <p>Under Prison Rule 4, the Prison Service of England and Wales has an obligation to actively encourage prisoners to maintain outside contacts and meaningful family ties as which is integral to their rehabilitation. Visits are seen as a crucial to sustaining relationships with close relatives, partners and friends. They help prisoners maintain links with the community, and are associated with a reduced likelihood of reoffending. Prison Rules 34 and 73 (1) /YOI Rules 9 and 77 allow the Governor discretion to refuse a social visit or determine the conditions under which it takes places. Such a decision should be proportionate, taking account of Convention rights particularly Article 8.</p> <p>Visits assist in maintaining good order. Good quality visits in a relaxed environment make a significant contribution to the well being and attitude of prisoners and generally help to build better relationships between families and staff to the point where families are encouraged to share sensitive information which may have an impact on the welfare of the prisoner. Visitors - including children to whom prisons may seem daunting and overwhelming places - should be treated courteously and with respect at all times, striking a sensible balance between this requirement and those relating to the maintenance of security, good order and discipline and the prevention of crime.</p> <p>This Instruction also sets out statutory allowances and entitlements. It applies to all female establishments and Young Offender Institutions. All references to Governors should also be taken to include Directors of contracted out establishments.</p>
DESIRED OUTCOME
<p>This PSO aims to provide a framework to ensure that prisoners are encouraged through social and official visits to maintain links with their family, friends and other individuals or organisations who may constructively contribute towards the prisoner's successful reintegration into the community upon release. It also serves to highlight the safeguards that have been developed to ensure that such contact does not present an ongoing risk to children and vulnerable persons; the public at large; good order and discipline; national security; or break any prison rule.</p> <p>The PSO provides Governors and Directors with the direction to develop local social visits policies and to ensure a basic level of consistency throughout the estate. The term Governor should be taken to apply to Directors of contracted out prisons unless otherwise stated.</p>
MANDATORY ACTIONS
<p>Principal mandatory actions are specified in this PSO by the use of <b><i>bold italic typeface</i></b>.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
<p>This Order introduces few policy changes, but draws together current instructions in a single document and sets out a common framework. The Order may lead to a small amount of additional work and reallocation of resources at some establishments. Where new provisions are introduced they are based on operational good practice and are therefore already being adopted at some establishments. There is also a considerable degree of discretion as to how they should be introduced</p>

locally. Overall the additional resource impact is expected to be minimal.

A discrepancy has been identified between visits policy and the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme PSO 4000. The latter suggests that it is acceptable to place a prisoner on basic on an entitlement to two half hour visits every 28 days. This is not the case, unless the reduction has been temporarily authorised as an alternative procedure (see para 1.3). Convicted prisoners on basic are entitled to receive two visits every 28 days each of which should last for a minimum of one hour. This policy has been in place since 1991 and is a key audit baseline of the Prisoners Family Life Performance Standard.

At paragraph 2.9 you will note the clarification of present policy that may enable, *at the discretion of the Governor*, those aged between 16-18 to visit unaccompanied. Given the public protection implications, such requests will need to be considered on individual merit. This process may create some additional work. At first glance it may appear that this will place an additional burden on the Assisted Prisons Visits Scheme but given that an escort may no longer be required for those within this age range it may also make savings.

Annexed to this document is guidance on the operation of the Official Prison Visiting Scheme as well as good practice guide on visiting arrangements.

<b>IMPLEMENTATION DATE:</b>	<b>24 September 2007]</b>
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Further advice or information on this PSO or the systems contained within it can be sought from: Grant Dalton, Offender Policy and Rights Unit, NOMS, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street London SW1P 4DF - 020 035 1537.

Further advice or information on Safeguarding Children: Child Contact or the management of prisoners convicted of or charged with offences under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 can be sought from the Public Protection Unit on 020 7217 5267.

Advice on security issues may also be sought from Security Policy Group via the advice line 020 7217 6500.

**PRISONER COMMUNICATIONS – VISITS**

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 [Application form - appointment of an official prison visitor](#)

 [Official Prison Visitors - suggested letter of appointment](#)

 [Visits booking: good practice guidelines](#)

**Mandatory Action : Governors must ensure that :**

- **there is a local visits strategy in place which meets the needs of the establishment, any security considerations and the needs of visitors**
- **visiting orders are issued promptly to allow the visit to take place as soon as it becomes due. If the order is likely to be delayed, the prisoner should be told. Whenever possible visiting orders should be enclosed with prisoners' letters**
- **where a booked visits scheme is in operation an efficient system(s) should be made available for this purpose, ensuring that telephone calls are answered promptly and the booking is administered in good time.**
- **visits to unconvicted prisoners meet the requirements outlined in paragraphs 1.2 & 1.8 below**
- **subject to paragraph 1.3 below, convicted prisoners are allowed their statutory entitlement to visits i.e. one after reception on conviction within 72 hours and every two weeks thereafter**
- **subject to paragraph 1.6 a statutory visit may not be withdrawn or withheld as part of a punishment award**
- **an extra letter at public expense be allowed in the place of any statutory visit which the prisoner does not wish to take or accumulate**
- **prisoners who are assessed as posing a risk to children are required to make a written application for any person under the age of 18 to visit or have any other form of contact. Applications need to be considered under the procedures set out in Safeguarding Children: Child Contact section of the Public Protection Manual.**
- **social visits take place within the sight and, where appropriate, the hearing of a prison officer**
- **legal visits take place within sight but out of hearing of prison staff**
- **appropriate security measures are in place to prevent or detect the passing of unauthorised articles during the course of a visit**
- **the location for visits is in reasonable decorative order and, as far as security measures permit, within an environment which is as relaxed and informal as possible**
- **wherever possible, provision be made for the purchase of refreshments in or immediately adjacent to the visits area**
- **reasonable provision be made to accommodate visitors with disabilities or particular requirements**
- **visitors and prisoners are treated with courtesy and respect at all times**
- **information of relevance for the benefit of prisoners and their visitors is prominently displayed.**
- **a protocol is in place for legal and official visitors who wish to bring recording devices or papers into a legal or official visit**

## SECTION 1 - VISITS ENTITLEMENTS AND ALLOWANCES

### Local visits strategy

- 1.1 ***A local visits strategy should be developed in consultation with appropriate stakeholders***, including prisoners and those who represent the interests of visitors. This should address areas of local discretion e.g. visiting times. It should be reviewed on a regular basis and it is good practice to undertake this process at least every six months. The strategy should be displayed in the visits area within the establishment, the visitors' centre (if applicable) and in other areas used by visitors.

### Frequency of social visits

- 1.2 Governors may organise visiting arrangements to accommodate the particular needs of the establishment and the wishes expressed by prisoners and visitors, subject to the following provisions:
- a) ***each unconvicted prisoner must be allowed visits on at least three days a week, including the opportunity for a visit on Saturday or Sunday, normally every weekend and at least once a fortnight***
  - b) ***convicted prisoners, both adult and young offenders, should be allowed a visit on reception after conviction and at least every two weeks thereafter, including at least one weekend visit every four weeks.***
- 1.3 Where, exceptionally, it is not possible to allow a visit every two weeks a temporary reduction may be authorised, by the Area Manager or via the authority for approving reduction in service for contracted prisons, in relation to the Prisoner's Family Life Standard. *However, this must be reviewed regularly (at least every six months) and must not be reduced below one visit every four weeks. These measures should be reflected in the visits strategy as improvement objectives, with target dates set for their achievement.*
- 1.4 Visits will not normally take place on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and Good Friday.
- 1.5 Governors may allow convicted prisoners to receive visits in advance of their allowance, on the clear understanding that the dates of subsequent visits will remain unaltered.
- 1.6 A Governor may defer the right of a prisoner to a visit until the end of any period of cellular confinement. This should only happen when a prisoner's behaviour and attitude is such that removal from cellular confinement for the visit is clearly impracticable or undesirable. Visits may take place in the visiting room or elsewhere at the Governor's discretion.

### Length of visits

- 1.7 ***Statutory visits to unconvicted and convicted prisoners must last at least one hour.*** A temporary reduction to no less than 30 minutes may be authorised in relation to the Prisoner's Family Life Standard (as at paragraph 1.3). Again, this should be reviewed on a regular basis and increased to meet the standard as soon as possible.
- 1.8 One hour visits are a baseline requirement. If possible, visits should exceed the minimum time. This is particularly relevant if a prisoner's relatives or friends are not able to visit on a frequent basis, or have a lengthy journey.

## Issue and validity of visiting orders

- 1.9 Visiting orders may be sent to an address at which the visitor is not a resident to ensure that visitors who do not have a permanent address are able to see the prisoner. In this instance, after the prisoner has sent a written application to the Governor the visiting order should be sent to a pre-determined address or, failing this, the visitors' centre or the prison gate. *The collection point must be agreed between the prisoner and the Governor.* The visitor is required to produce approved identification in order to collect the visiting order, and should be informed of the acceptable forms of identification in advance. These should be contained in the establishment's local security strategy. Guidance on the list of acceptable forms of identification for visitors can also be found on Function 3 of the National Security Framework. In the case of Category A prisoners, advice should be sought from Directorate of High Security Prisons/Security Policy Group or Police Advisers Section.
- 1.10 The validity period of visiting orders is a local matter. *Governors must ensure that prisoners are made aware of the policy and any subsequent amendments; and that statutory visiting orders can be re-issued on application, at the discretion of the Governor.* Prisoners who wish to accumulate statutory visiting orders and have made an application to do so should be exempt from any restrictions or local expiry policies. Where a prisoner with unused visiting orders is transferred, the decision to extend the period of validity will be at the discretion of the Governor of the receiving establishment. The receiving Governor may take into consideration any written agreement that was in place or any days accrued prior to the point of transfer when determining the expiry date on an outstanding visiting order.

## Booking arrangements [Index](#)

- 1.11 ***Governors should examine the effectiveness of the visits booking arrangements in their establishment.*** In the development of visits booking Governors should take into account the good practice guide attached at [Annex C](#).

## Special visits [Index](#)

- 1.12 In addition to any statutory entitlement, Governors may allow, one or more special visits:
- a) if a prisoner's private or business affairs are not in order upon conviction, to help them make necessary arrangements in respect of unresolved private or business affairs;
  - b) for the conduct of legal proceedings or if a visit would be conducive to the welfare of the prisoner or their immediate family. This may include visits to prisoners who are at risk of suicide or self harm especially during periods of particular crisis.
  - c) subject to medical advice, to a prisoner who is seriously ill. Restrictions on the number of visitors or the time of the visits should, wherever practicable, be waived in such cases.

## Accumulated visits [Index](#)

- 1.13 During induction, all prisoners should be made aware of the opportunity to apply for accumulated visits and of the existence of the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (PSO 4405). Certain groups of prisoners may find this of particular interest when they:
- are held more than the average distance from their home area; or,
  - have had no visits for a lengthy period; or,
  - are foreign national prisoners or those with close family abroad.
- 1.14 It should be clearly explained that prisoners transferred on accumulated visits do so for only a temporary period, after which they will be returned to the sending establishment.



- 1.15 Convicted prisoners are allowed to accumulate up to 26 statutory visits during any twelve-month period. These may be taken at their current establishment or they may apply to be temporarily transferred to take them at another prison suitable for their age, security classification and gender.
- 1.16 Privilege visits may be accumulated at the Governor's discretion. When a prisoner is transferred to another establishment, either permanently or temporarily, permission to take accumulated privilege visits will be at the discretion of the Governor of the receiving establishment. In order to avoid any misunderstanding a written compact should be signed prior to the move explaining the conditions of the transfer, and that the prisoner is liable to be returned if they do not comply with the compact.
- 1.17 The Governor of either the home or receiving establishment may postpone or refuse transfers for accumulated visits if it is considered that the transfer would give rise to risks to security, safety and order – but not on the assumption that the prisoner is unlikely to receive the visits they expect.
- 1.18 A prisoner is eligible to apply for accumulated visits six months after transfer from the local prison to which he/she was sent on conviction, though earlier transfer may be possible in appropriate cases with the consent of the Governor and, in the case of Category A prisoners, of Prison Service Headquarters.
- 1.19 Prisoners may apply for further accumulated visits every six months, provided they have a minimum of six months to serve.
- 1.20 Convicted young offenders are eligible to apply for accumulated visits after having served six months, provided that they have at least four months still to serve. A young offender who has become eligible for accumulated visits retains that eligibility if reclassified as an adult prisoner.
- 1.21 Local prisons should facilitate, where possible, up to two places for use by prisoners on accumulated visits and should maintain waiting lists for those wishing to transfer. Prisoners should receive only such privileges as the regime and the facilities of the establishment allow, and may take only such items of property as are allowed at the receiving establishment. Items with a meaningful religious or cultural significance may, on application and with the consent of the receiving establishment, be allowed to accompany the prisoner on transfer.
- 1.22 Prisoners need to make a written request for accumulated visits if:
- a) they wish to be temporarily transferred to a prison in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man. Any such request should be referred to the Cross Border Transfer Section within Offender Policy & Rights Unit, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF;
  - b) they are Category A, or provisional Category A.
- 1.23 Transfers will normally be for one month but may, in exceptional circumstances be extended with the agreement of the Governor of the receiving establishment, or for Category A prisoners, Prison Service Headquarters' approval.
- 1.24 Accumulated visits may include taking visits in advance provided they do not exceed the number to which the prisoner is entitled during the remainder of the sentence, and provided that on return from temporary transfer he or she receives no more visits until any advance visits have been accounted for.
- 1.25 Transport for the accumulated visit should be booked on the electronic booking system by the receiving establishment and emailed to Population Management Section. *Booking forms must*

*only be submitted by the accepting establishment when a firm date of transfer has been agreed. The return journey should be booked at the same time. No application for transport will be considered unless both bookings are submitted. The reason for movement must clearly state accumulated visits.*

### **Inter- prison visits**

- 1.26 Visits may be allowed, on application, between close relatives as defined in paragraph 2.6 below when both parties are prisoners at separate establishments. Where a request is made for an inter-prison visit involving two prisoners who would not normally be held in the same type of establishment, - due to gender or age, Governors should still make reasonable efforts to accommodate the visit subject to security considerations. Population Management Section may be consulted for advice as to the most suitable location for the visit. *Subject to security requirements and the availability of transport and accommodation, arrangements may be made for inter-prison visits to take place at three-monthly intervals, and each prisoner must surrender one visiting order. Each visit should last as long as local circumstances permit.*
- 1.27 Where inter prison visits prove exceptionally difficult to organise Governors should consider the use of video-link facilities as an alternative. The use of video-links for legal matters will continue to take precedence and the frequency of any contact in this way will determined by local resource implications and ensuring fairness so all prisoners who wish to use the video facilities are able to do so.
- 1.28 An inter-prison visit between unconvicted prisoners may only be approved if the period of continuous custody up to the date of trial is expected to be at least a month, and where it has not been possible for the prisoners to have a visit during any of their productions at court.

### **Relatives located in the same establishment**

- 1.29 Visits may be allowed, on application, between close relatives as defined in paragraph 2.6 below when both parties are prisoners at the same establishment. Visiting Orders need not be surrendered and the frequency and length of such visits will be at the Governor's discretion.

### **Incentives and earned privileges scheme**

- 1.30 The entitlements outlined in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.7 of this Order relate to basic level under the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme (IEP). For guidance on the operation of the IEP scheme on standard and enhanced privilege levels reference should be made to the framework outlined in PSO 4000 Incentives and Earned Privileges.

**SECTION 2 - CONDITIONS FOR VISITS****Physical environment**

- 2.1 Governors should consider the suitability of lighting and ventilation and whether it is feasible to place items such as plants and appropriate toys for the children in the general visits area. The impact of the visits environment and procedures on children should also be considered in order to achieve the most welcoming and least distressing environment possible. Accessibility for visitors with mobility problems should be taken into consideration and reasonable adjustments made. Staff should also be encouraged to identify strengths and weakness in the design of the visits area, from security and health and safety perspectives. The Governor should take into account, in relation to visits areas, requirements set out in PSI 09/2007 on smoke free legislation.

**Provision of information**

- 2.2 Notices giving up-to-date information should be displayed in both the visits area, visitors' centre, and any other area used by visitors covering:
- the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme
  - visiting times and how social visits may be booked
  - guidance for prisoners and visitors on the level of physical contact permitted during the course of the visit
  - a statement regarding local protocols for the passing of documents during visits
  - a complaints procedure together with a contact point
  - the Prison Service's commitment to diversity and equality
  - Prison Service policy on searching procedures, the passage of drugs from visitors and the penalties for failure to comply
  - information on family support organisations, particularly the Prisoners' Families Helpline
  - mechanisms by which visitors may pass on their concerns to the establishment about a family member or friend in custody
- 2.3 Other relevant information should be provided, at local discretion. Depending on the location of the establishment or if particular groups are heavily represented, Governors should consider whether this information should be provided in several languages. For the benefit of those with visual impairments or literacy difficulties, consideration should be given to alternative formats such as audio tape.
- 2.4 In the absence of a visitors' centre, the Governor should consider whether information for visitors should be placed in the main visits area or other areas used by visitors.

**Number of visitors**

- 2.5 Up to three adults, together with any accompanying children, should normally be allowed at each visit. Subject to any public protection considerations, establishments need to be as flexible as possible in accommodating large families who wish to visit together. Where fixed seating is in place, freestanding chairs should be made available for additional children. These should be arranged in such a way as not to impede surveillance of the visit, or general access by prison staff, or jeopardise the welfare of the child. Should this prove impracticable due to the size of the visits area or concerns about safety, other options to ensure contact between child and parent should be explored. These may include dividing the visits into two groups.

**Visits by close relatives**

- 2.6 Any decision to refuse a visit by a close relative should only be made in exceptional circumstances. Close relatives are defined as a spouse/partner (including a person - whether of the same or different sex - with whom the prisoner was living as a couple in an established

relationship immediately prior to imprisonment) parent, child, brother, sister (including half - or step - brothers and sisters), civil partner, fiancé or fiancée (provided that the Governor is satisfied that a bona fide engagement to marry exists), or a person who has been acting in loco parentis to a prisoner, or a person to whom the prisoner has been in loco parentis. Grandparents may also be included within this definition of close relative for the purposes of social visits.

### Children visiting

- 2.7 Staff should bear in mind that children might find the visiting experience frightening, confusing or possibly even boring. The way in which establishments manage the visiting experience can make a difference to whether children wish to visit again.
- 2.8 The overriding factor in allowing any child to visit is whether such contact is in that child's best interests. The Governor has the discretion to prevent a visit by any person under 18 years of age if it is considered that such a visit would or could potentially place the child's safety at risk. All children and young persons under 18 years of age must be named on the visiting order.
- 2.9 Subject to a thorough assessment of risk in which the views of all parties - including those of the parents or guardians of the visitor - are taken into consideration, the Governor has the discretion to allow an unaccompanied visit from any person aged 16 or over.
- 2.10 ***Prisoners who are assessed as posing a risk to children are required to make a written application for any person under the age of 18 to visit or have any other form of contact. Applications need to be considered under the procedures set out in Safeguarding Children: Child Contact section of the Public Protection Manual.*** Prison staff and those working in visitors' centres should receive training in public protection that is proportionate to the likely level of contact with children, in order for them to take appropriate action if concerns are raised during a visit.
- 2.11 If a child is left unaccompanied by their carer outside the establishment a prompt check should be made to see if the carer is on the premises or in the vicinity. If s/he cannot be found the police/social services should be notified immediately. Staff should ensure the child is not exposed to any further risk until the police/social services arrive. If possible a suitably qualified adult should undertake this task but if no such person is available it is preferable for two members of staff to supervise the child.
- 2.12 Notices should be prominently displayed in the visitors' centre advising visitors of the consequences of leaving a child unaccompanied in facilities adjacent to the establishment. It is good practice for prison and visitor centre management to meet with and agree a working protocol with the police/social services, which should include an undertaking to collect the child within a specified time.
- 2.13 Staff who come into contact with children who have concerns that a child is at risk from someone outside the establishment should report their concerns to the Governor or the manager in charge of visits who will decide upon the most appropriate course of action, or to the police or social services where appropriate. It may also be necessary to share any observations with wing staff, the prisoner's personal officer, and offender manager who can act on concerns about risk to children with whom prisoners have contact.

### Children's extended visits/events

- 2.14 A risk assessment should be conducted for any prisoner wishing to take part in special children's visits, or other events which includes children and their carers. For those prisoners subject to Safeguarding Children: Child Contact procedures a separate assessment is required. While it may be appropriate for such a prisoner to have access to particular named

children under close supervision it may be inappropriate to allow the same prisoner general access to children. Irrespective of the prisoner's wishes the primary consideration must remain whether it is in the child's best interests to take part in such a visit/event. Taking into account the resource and security considerations, Governors may wish to canvass prisoners and children as to the format, environment and objectives for such an event. Prison staff may need to modify the programme to ensure that the needs of children with a disability are met.

### Visitors with disabilities

2.15 Reasonable adjustments must be made to accommodate disabled prisoners or visitors with particular requirements. Failure to do so may lead to challenges under disability discrimination legislation. It is good practice to advise visitors to give advance notice of the requirement, either through the prisoner or when the visitor books the visit. Governors should consider the needs of a visitor with a mobility, hearing, speech or sight impairment or any other disability and how the physical visits environment can be adapted to improve the quality of the visit. For example:-

- the needs of a prisoner or visitor with a hearing impairment are especially important if either is subject to closed visits restrictions;
- depending on the degree of the hearing or speech impairment, it may be necessary for the visit to take place away from the usual visits area or in a quiet portion of the visits area or in the case of a severe hearing impairment for a portable hearing loop system to be made available;
- those with a visual impairment might wish to be placed in a part of the visits hall with the least number of obstacles;
- a reasonable alternative area should be found for a visitor or a prisoner with a mobility impairment which makes it difficult for them to access the visits area;
- a medical condition such as asthma which may require the administration of medication. It would need to be borne in mind that such persons may require privacy in order that they may administer the medication;
- owing to a medical condition a visitor may require immediate access to facilities such as a toilet.

2.16 Staff should ask the visitor after the visit has taken place to establish the effectiveness of the measures in place.

### Prohibiting visitors

2.17 The Governor has the discretion to refuse, or determine the conditions under which social visits take place, on the grounds of security, maintenance of good order and discipline, prevention of crime or if there is reason to believe that the visit would either be detrimental to the prisoner's best interests or seriously impede his/her rehabilitation. This authority derives from Prison Rules 34 and 73(1) and YOI Rules 9 & 77. In deciding whether to exercise this discretion in the case of a prisoner under 18 years of age, the Governor will take account of any views that the young person's parent or guardian may express. A visitor refused entry under these provisions should be informed of the reason(s) for this decision and of any avenues of appeal. This Section does not apply to Category A prisoners for whom special arrangements exist and remain unchanged by the content of this Order. For advice on dealing with visitors or prisoners who smuggle drugs during visits refer to PSO 3610.

### **Social visits by former prisoners**

- 2.18 A former prisoner should not be refused permission to visit solely on the grounds that he or she has been in custody, or that they are under licence in the community.
- 2.19 Should a prisoner wish to receive a visit from a person who is serving a portion of a custodial sentence under licence in the community a written application should be made by the prisoner to the Governor. It will then be at the discretion of the Governor as to whether the visit should go ahead, taking into account the views of the offender manager. A specific reason for refusing the visit should be given and should not be made solely on the basis that the person wishing to visit is a former prisoner. A more specific reason is required to justify this decision. If the person falls under the category of close relative as defined in paragraph 2.6 a decision to refuse such a request should only apply in exceptional circumstances.

### **Visits to unconvicted prisoners by witnesses**

- 2.20 If an unconvicted prisoner wishes to be visited by a relative or friend who is known to be a witness in the case, the visit will not be refused for this reason unless a court has directed in writing that such visits are to be restricted or prohibited altogether. The court should establish whether the restriction applies to all visitors or only specified persons and how long the restriction is to remain in force, and should immediately inform the Governor.
- 2.21 Whenever a possible witness in the case is allowed to visit an unconvicted prisoner, it is good practice for an experienced officer to supervise the visit. Where such a visitor is accompanied by a police officer or other representative of the prosecution, the latter will be allowed to be present at the visit to ensure that matters relating to the witness evidence are not discussed. If it appears that an attempt is being made to defeat the course of justice, the visit will be terminated.

### **Visits where one party is held in detention outside prison custody**

- 2.22 Subject to resources, Governors may allow visits between prisoners and close relatives who are in custody outside the Prison Service (for example, in military detention or detained under the Mental Health Act 1983) provided that they are satisfied that the visit would not jeopardise security or control and would not impede the rehabilitation of either. Decisions should be taken in consultation with the responsible officer in charge of the other custodial establishment

## **SECTION 3 - SECURITY ISSUES**

### **Searching**

- 3.1 Visits staff should comply with the National Security Framework on Searching and with the Local Security Strategy. Where searches or other security measures are necessary they should be carried out with care and sensitivity. Particular care should be taken with the searching of children and young people. It is good practice for staff undertaking searching to explain why such measures are being taken. Copies of the information leaflet, "Understanding Search Procedures" which are available from the National Distribution Centre (VOCAB No IL001) should be made available for visitors. Staff should also take into consideration that the searching of a visitor with a particular injury/disability may require some variation from the standard procedure and a health care professional should be consulted for advice if necessary. Prison staff should also familiarise themselves with Chapter 2 of the Religion Manual PSO 4550 to ensure awareness of some of the religious and cultural sensitivities to be considered when searching.

### **Physical contact**

- 3.2 Reasonable physical contact between prisoner and visitors should be permitted, subject to security considerations and any public protection measures that may be in place. A notice should be clearly displayed advising prisoners and visitors of any local policy regarding physical contact and the consequences of non-compliance.
- 3.3 When it is necessary, visits may take place in a special or closed visiting room or a similar closed environment. In certain circumstances it may be necessary to impose restrictions on the level of physical contact between the prisoner and their visitor(s). The reason for any variation from local policy should be explained to both prisoner and visitor unless to do so would compromise the gathering of intelligence.

### **Staffing during visits**

- 3.4 Except where otherwise stated in this Order, all visits will take place in the sight of prison staff and are liable to take place within the hearing of an officer. For the majority of social visits, especially those in a common area, it should be sufficient, subject to security requirements, for officers to be present in the area where visits are taking place. Visits may be subject to closer supervision and within the close proximity of a prison officer. Consideration should be given to operating a dedicated visits team as this can promote consistency in standards and positive relationships with visitors. It can also have operational benefits in terms of security and intelligence.

### **Reporting of information**

- 3.5 If, during the course of a visit, a conversation is overheard which relates to plans to escape, obstruct the course of justice or commit a criminal act, the matter should be reported immediately to the Governor or the manager in charge.

### **Stopping of visits and disclosure of contents of conversation**

- 3.6 Stopping a visit is a very serious measure that should not normally be necessary except where:
- i) an attempt is made by the visitor to pass an unauthorised article to the prisoner, or vice versa;
  - ii) there is a threat of immediate violence towards another person, or another person is incited to an act of violence, or actual violence takes place and urgent action is needed to prevent injury. For this purpose, a verbal threat that is overheard or body language of an overtly aggressive nature are sufficient for an officer to intervene;
  - iii) an officer overhears plans being made for escapes, future criminal offences or the obstruction or perversion of the course of justice;
  - iv) an incident occurs between the prisoner and his/her visitor which threatens the smooth running and efficient management of the visits session. A verbal warning should normally precede any decision to terminate a visit under this sub-paragraph.
- 3.7 In certain circumstances information about the contents of a conversation during a visit may be disclosed. This may be appropriate, for example, where such information may relate to the commission of past or future criminal offences, plans to obstruct or pervert the course of justice, threats of violence, etc, and may be of interest to the police or the prosecution. The member of staff who overhears the conversation should immediately make a record of what he or she has heard. The information may be disclosed on the authority of the Governor or Head of Custody where the content of the conversation may:
- affect national security or public safety;

- assist in the prevention an escape from an establishment;
- help to prevent or detect crime;
- assist in the recovery of proceeds of crime;
- reveal an intention to self harm; or
- help to prevent or reveal a miscarriage of justice

### **Passing of documents at visits**

- 3.8 Governors may require prisoners to apply for permission to pass letters or documents to or from visitors during social visits. A notice defining local policy should be displayed in the visits area and through any other information channels.
- 3.9 If permission to pass documents has been granted but it becomes apparent that the rules governing the handling of correspondence are being undermined, the supervising officer should inspect the material in question or withdraw permission for the document to be handed over.
- 3.10 Letters and documents handed over to or by prisoners during visits from their legal advisers are also subject to whatever monitoring procedures would have been appropriate if they had been sent through the post. Correspondence with legal advisers may be opened for examination in the prisoner's presence but it should not be read. If a letter to which legal privilege is claimed to apply is to be handed over to or by a prisoner during a visit from a legal adviser and the officer present has reasonable grounds to suspect an abuse of this privilege, he or she should prevent it being handed over. This should then be brought to the attention of the manager in charge of visits and the Governor should decide whether it should be read.

### **Identification and disposal of unauthorised or prohibited items**

- 3.11 Officers supervising visits are responsible for ensuring that unauthorised articles are not passed to a prisoner during the course of a visit and ensuring that good order is maintained at all times. Subject to local policy, no item may be taken in or out of an establishment during the course of a social visit without prior consent. Governors should consider how this should be enforced and may wish to delegate this responsibility to the officer in charge of the visits area.

### **Equipment/recordings**

- 3.12 Subject to paragraph 3.15, visitors should not be allowed to retain cassette recorders or any type of recording device, cameras, radios, cellular telephones or any other piece of similar audio or visual equipment. Specific exemptions to this may only be made if a reasonable adjustment is required under disability legislation. Such items should be handed to prison staff or, if appropriate, placed in the receptacles provided at the visitors' centre. Items are held at the visitor's own risk. A visitor who refuses to comply with this instruction should be advised that the visit cannot take place unless they are willing to do so.
- 3.13 In the case of recording devices or cameras, the visitor should be advised that the tape or film is liable to confiscation and asked to surrender it. If the visitor fails to comply with this request he /she should be advised that if an attempt is made to leave the establishment in possession of the tape or film this would constitute a criminal offence and the police may be called.
- 3.14 Confiscated photographic film or image-based media should be developed and any images, photographs and their negatives taken within the establishment should be withheld or deleted. Any other photograph, negative or tape should be returned to the visitor providing that they are not considered to be indecent or appear to show evidence of criminal activity. If the



image is considered to be indecent or appear to show evidence of criminal activity they may be disclosed to the police or any other appropriate agency.

- 3.15 Tape or electronic recordings may only be made by legal advisers, police officers, representatives from the Criminal Cases Review Commission, Members of Parliament on official business, consular officials and representatives from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture. Officials must give a written undertaking the recording will be kept securely, not passed to a third party and will be used solely in connection with legal proceedings or the purpose of the visit.

### Language

- 3.16 Prisoners may speak in the language of their choice. However, a prisoner and their visitor(s) may be required to speak in English if it is considered in the interests of prison or national security, public safety or the prevention or detection of crime. If the prisoner and/or visitor are unable to speak English, the conversation may be listened to by a person who understands the language being used or the conversation may be recorded.
- 3.17 In such case, prisoners should be advised in advance that their visits are to be conducted in English. If the prisoner or his/her visitor cannot speak English and a visit needs to be conducted in another language, s/he must inform staff at the earliest opportunity so that the necessary arrangements can be made.
- 3.18 In the event that close monitoring of any conversation is required and the visit has to be conducted in a foreign language, every effort should be made to secure an interpreter.

## SECTION 4 - PROFESSIONAL OR OFFICIAL VISITS

- 4.1 Visits by the following should not count against a prisoner's allowance:

- a) legal advisers
- b) offender managers/probation staff
- c) pastoral visits by priests and ministers
- d) Samaritans
- e) persons appointed by the Governor under the Official Prison Visitors Scheme
- f) MPs, Welsh Assembly Members or MEPs visiting in an official constituency capacity
- g) officers of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
- h) representatives of the Prison and Probation Ombudsman, the Healthcare Commission, NHS Ombudsman and the Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman
- i) authorised researchers
- j) consular officials
- k) police officers or other public officials in discharge of their duty
- l) special visits granted under paragraph 1.12 above
- m) visits from an accredited agent of the Treasury Solicitor, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Crown Prosecution Service, or the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy, on production of the necessary authority from the department, to interview and to serve documents on a prisoner.
- n) staff of the Criminal Cases Review Commission
- o) representatives of veterans organisations such as the Royal British Legion, the Soldiers Sailors Airmen and Families Association when acting in an official capacity or assisting with resettlement issues
- p) representatives of the Commission for Race Equality (which in October 2007 will amalgamate with other organisations to form the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR)) visiting in a professional capacity or any other organisation when the purpose of the visit is specifically and solely to discuss racial or wider diversity issues
- q) visits by other officials or bodies to whom confidential access applies

- 4.2 Paragraph 4.1 is not a definitive list. If a prisoner requests a special visit from an organisation or individual not listed above, Governors have the discretion to approve it and to decide the conditions under which it takes place

### **Consent to official visits**

- 4.3 Visits will be subject to the consent of the prisoner with the exception of:
- a) visits under paragraph 4.32.a, 4.32b and visits under paragraph 4.32.d where the prisoner is detained under immigration powers. The prisoner should be informed beforehand of the reason for the visit but it will be clearly explained to the visitor and the prisoner that the prisoner is free to refuse to make any statement;
  - b) visits for the sole purpose of the service of legal process such as the serving of summons. Such visits will not attract legal privilege.
  - a) certain visits by police, immigration or Customs officers.

### **Legal advisers**

- 4.4 Legal visits are subject to Prison Rule 38 (YOI Rule 16). A prisoner's legal adviser, as defined in Prison Rules, may be the prisoner's counsel, solicitor or a clerk acting on behalf of the solicitor. Prisoners may be visited by legal advisers acting in their professional capacity and such visits should take place in the sight of a prison officer but out of hearing if the purpose of the visit is:
- a) to discuss ongoing or possible legal proceedings to which the prisoner is a party. In the case of potential proceedings, the prisoner must confirm that this is the purpose of the visit but is not obliged to disclose what the contemplated proceedings are about;
  - b) to discuss other legal business such as the sale of property or making a will. In such cases the purpose of the visit must be disclosed in advance, and must not contravene the restrictions on written communications;
  - c) to allow a prisoner to consult their legal adviser about a forthcoming adjudication.
- 4.5 If the legal adviser is visiting as a relative or friend, the arrangements relating to social visits apply.
- 4.6 Where a legal adviser who is acting for the defence of two or more unconvicted or unsentenced prisoners jointly charged wishes to interview their clients together, the Governor may allow a joint consultation, in sight but not in hearing of a prison officer.
- 4.7 Joint visits with a shared legal adviser may be allowed between co-accused unconvicted prisoners who are in different establishments and between unconvicted prisoners and their co-accused who are on bail provided that suitable transfer, accommodation and security arrangements can be made. Where different legal advisers are representing the various defendants in a single case, joint visits may be authorised provided that each defendant taking part in the visit has a legal adviser present.
- 4.8 A legal adviser may use a cassette recorder or another recording device and, on application, a laptop during the interview. If recording equipment is used a written undertaking will be required from the legal adviser that the recording will be kept securely in their office and will be used solely in connection with the proceedings or legal business discussed during the course of the visit.

### **Litigants in person**

- 4.9 Prisoners who are taking or contemplating legal proceedings without the services of a legal adviser as defined in paragraph 4.4 above should apply in writing to the Governor for any facilities such as special visits and letters that they may require. Such visits may be overheard by a prison officer.

#### **Police officers**

- 4.10 Interviews with police officers should be conducted, so far as possible, in accordance with the terms of the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act 1984, and of Code C of the Codes of Practice issued under the Act in relation to the conduct of interviews at police stations. Interviews will take place within the sight and, where appropriate, within the hearing of a prison officer.
- 4.11 Before the interview commences the prisoner will be advised of the right to consult a legal adviser unless precluded by the terms of PACE, and/or, if there are language barriers, the right to have an interpreter present during the interview. If the prisoner has a visual or hearing impairment and requires assistance in communicating this should be taken into consideration. If the prisoner is under 17 or there are grounds to believe that they may require assistance during the course of the interview an appropriate adult shall be present. A member of staff or one specifically nominated by the prisoner, if no other appropriate adult is available, may undertake such a role.
- 4.12 An interview may be recorded in accordance with section 60 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 with Code of Practice E issued under the Act, and with police regulations.

#### **Other investigative bodies**

- 4.13 Official status may also be extended to interviews by officers of other investigative bodies such as HM Revenue & Customs, the Immigration Service, the Security Service, the Serious Fraud Office, the Crown Prosecution Service and equivalent bodies of other countries. This is not a definitive list and other authorities may arise from time to time.

#### **Writers, journalists or media representatives**

- 4.14 Detailed guidance on the handling of requests for visits by media representatives is in PSO 4470 – Prisoners' Access to the Media. A prisoner is not permitted to accept any payment or gratuity in return for an interview, or for a radio or television appearance or any written article arising from an interview.
- 4.15 If the visit is social, the visitor will be required to give a written undertaking before the visit takes place that any material gained from the prisoner at any time will not be used for publication or broadcast.

#### **Priests or ministers**

- 4.16 Prisoners may be allowed pastoral visits from their home minister of religion or leader of their faith with the agreement of the Chaplain and the Governor. A visiting order will not need to be used for such a visit. The visit will take place in the sight of an officer, unless the Governor directs otherwise, and in a location determined by the Governor. Social rather than pastoral visits by a minister of religion will require a visiting order and will take place in the visits area.

#### **Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman**

- 4.17 Prisoners may request visits from the office of the Parliamentary, the Healthcare Commission and Health Service Ombudsman. The visit should take place within sight but not within hearing

range of a prison officer unless either party requests that it should be within hearing or the Governor, for reasons of security, requires this.

- 4.18 The prisoner may be allowed a friend or adviser to be present at the interview if, under normal circumstances, that person would be allowed to visit the prisoner.

### **Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC)**

- 4.19 Detailed guidance on all forms of communication between prisoners and the CCRC is given in PSO 4000 Chapter 3: Criminal Cases Review Commission. Staff from the Criminal Cases Review Commission may visit with the prisoner's agreement. Visits will take place within the sight but out of hearing of prison officers.
- 4.20 Recording equipment may be used during the course of the interview provided that a written undertaking is given to the effect that the recording will be kept in the office of the CCRC.

### **Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR)**

- 4.21 Prisoners may request visits from representatives of the CEHR. The visit should take place within sight but not within hearing range of a prison officer.
- 4.22 Representatives from the CEHR may visit at the invitation of the Governor. If a request is made to interview a particular prisoner s/he should be informed of this request. If the prisoner decides to take part in the interview the representatives from the CEHR should initially explain the purpose of the interview. The prisoner will then be able to terminate the interview at any point.

### **Members of Parliament**

- 4.23 Members of Parliament acting in a constituency capacity may visit a prisoner with the prisoner's agreement and on production of a valid special visiting order. Similar provisions may also apply to Members of the European Parliament (MEP) and Members of the Welsh Assembly (AM) who are acting in a constituency capacity. The visit should take place within sight but out of hearing of prison staff unless the prisoner or the Member of Parliament request otherwise. The Governor may also require the visit to take place within hearing on security grounds. The visitor may use a recording device during the interview.
- 4.24 This privilege is not extended to members of the House of Lords, who have no constituency obligations, or to local Councillors.
- 4.25 Members of Parliament, MEPs or AMs visiting on a purely social capacity will be required to be in possession of a valid visiting order and any social visit which takes place will be under normal visiting conditions.

### **Commonwealth or Consular Officials**

- 4.26 The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, which has been supplemented by a number of bilateral agreements between the United Kingdom and other countries, guarantees freedom of communication between consular officers and their nationals.
- 4.27 On induction, foreign national prisoners should be informed of this right to communicate with the appropriate consulate or High Commission. Consular officers have the right to visit any of their citizens in prison. For the purpose of this Order prisons should accept a prisoner's claim to citizenship.

- 4.28 These provisions should not apply to a prisoner who is seeking asylum in the United Kingdom or who is detained under the Immigration Act 1971 and is making representations against their removal or deportation from the United Kingdom on political, religious or ethnic grounds.
- 4.29 A citizen of a country without consular representation within the United Kingdom should be treated in the same way as a citizen of the country that looks after its interests here. If there is no such country or the prisoner is either stateless or a refugee, the prisoner should be given reasonable assistance in communicating with any international authority which looks after the interests of such persons e.g. the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- 4.30 Requests for such visits by Commonwealth or Consular Officials should fall under the category of special visits and be arranged as soon as possible. Visits should take place in the sight but out of the hearing of prison staff unless either party requests otherwise or the Governor requires that the visit takes place within hearing range on security grounds.
- 4.31 Consular and High Commission officials may use recording devices when interviewing prisoners.

### **Central or local government officials**

- 4.32 Public officials listed below may visit prisoners, in their professional capacity, without visiting orders and out of hearing of prison staff:
- a) an accredited agent of the Treasury Solicitor, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Crown Prosecution Service, or the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy, on production of the necessary authority from the department, to interview and to serve documents on a prisoner
  - b) Probation Officers/Offender Managers, in respect of a prisoner in whom he or she has a professional interest.
  - c) the supervising social worker, of a young offender who, on reception, was subject to a care order, or who will on discharge be placed in the care of a local authority.
  - d) an immigration officer, to interview a Commonwealth citizen or a foreign national detained under the Immigration Act 1971.
  - e) other public officials whom the Governor permits to visit. In case of doubt, the Area Manager should be consulted.

**SECTION 5 - THE OFFICIAL PRISON VISITING SCHEME** [Index](#)**The role of Official Prison Visitors (OPVs)**

- 5.1 Official Prison Visitors (OPVs) are independent volunteers appointed by prison establishments, who visit prisons in order to offer friendship to prisoners. They are neither paid civil servants, nor religious volunteers.
- 5.2 Any prisoner may apply for an OPV, whether or not he/she has visits from family members or friends. A prisoner is not required to surrender a visiting order to receive a visit from an OPV. OPVs visit all categories of prisoner, whatever their circumstances and may visit more than one prisoner. The optimum number at any one time is four.
- 5.3. Every establishment should have an Official Prison Visiting scheme, unless there are demonstrable reasons why this is not appropriate. OPVs are encouraged to operate in such a way that they are included in the general life of the prison, meeting needs which are quite distinct from, for example, those met by probation volunteers or chaplains' assistants.

**Appointment of OPVs**

- 5.4 An application form can be found at Annex A. The appointment of individual OPVs is a matter for the governor at each establishment. The aim should be to have a diverse team of OPVs of varied genders, ages, religious, race and ethnic origins. *When considering an appointment, the Governor must ensure the following criteria for eligibility are met:*
- *all applicants must be of good character;*
  - *applicants must not hold employment or office liable to cause embarrassment or conflict in their relations with the prison, prisoners, or staff;*
  - *members of the Independent Monitoring Board are ineligible for appointment.*
- 5.5 Female visitors may be appointed to male establishments and vice versa.
- 5.6 There are no age limits, but given the current age profile, applications from people between 18-50 years and from diverse backgrounds should be encouraged. Governors should have regard to security requirements when assessing new applications and in deciding the appropriate point at which an OPV should retire.
- 5.7 *All candidates must complete the application form and an appropriate member of staff, usually the OPV Liaison Officer must interview each candidate. Two references must be obtained and any other necessary enquiries completed before recommending a candidate as suitable for appointment. A Criminal Records Bureau check may be required if the appointment is likely to bring the OPV into regular contact with young persons under the age of 18. The decision to offer the appointment must be taken by either the Governor or a senior operational manager with delegated responsibility. A suggested letter of appointment is attached at Annex B and may be reproduced locally.*
- 5.8 *All appointment letters must have a copy of the Handbook for OPVs and all newly appointed OPVs must acknowledge receipt. This confirms acceptance of the conditions of appointment and must be retained in the local records. Additional copies of the Handbook are available from the Offender Policy & Rights Unit of the Prison Service (020 7035 1537) or the NAOPV General Secretary.*
- 5.9 OPVs are subject to a probationary period of three months. If confirmed, this will technically be renewable on an annual basis. However, in practice the appointment will continue until the

OPV either resigns or retires, unless there is a reason not to renew or to terminate the appointment.

### **The OPV Liaison Officer**

5.10 The Governor should designate a member of staff as OPV Liaison Officer. While this role has historically fallen to the Chaplaincy, consideration should be given to whether the role of OPV Liaison Officer is more suited to the voluntary sector co-ordinator or another manager within the establishment. The duties are as follows:

- publicising and promoting prison visiting within the establishment;
- ensuring that sufficient OPVs are available within the establishment to provide regular visits to prisoners as required;
- keeping under review the balance of the team of Visitors, in numbers, interests and backgrounds, appropriate to the needs of the establishment; and advising on possible avenues of recruitment;
- ensuring that inexperienced OPVs are adequately briefed, advised and supervised during their probationary period;
- acting as the primary contact between OPVs and the establishment, either as an ongoing source of information or a person with whom OPVs are able to raise matters of local concern;
- copying letters of appointment for new OPVs to the General Secretary of the NAOPV and the Chairman of the local NAOPV Branch;
- notifying the NAOPV of any resignations, retirements or deaths in service; and
- completing an annual return to the NAOPV of the names of all OPVs at that establishment as of 31 March.

### **Training for OPVs**

5.11 Like other volunteers, a training needs assessment should be undertaken to identify the training needs as soon as possible after the appointment of the OPV. This should be focused upon the needs and preferences of the individual but should include mandatory elements such as security awareness. The training needs assessment should aim towards satisfying the following objectives:

- to obtain a clear understanding of the essential elements of prison work and how this may impact on the working practices of the OPV
- understand and contribute towards important elements of institutional life, for example the promotion of positive race relations and the prevention of suicide and self-harm.

5.12 A training programme may include the following:-

- health and safety including security awareness
- suicide and self-harm training
- race relations and diversity training
- substance abuse
- breakaway techniques

## Arrangements for Visits

- 5.13 It is for the Governor to decide the most appropriate location for visits from OPVs, having regard to the safety of such persons and the good order and control of the establishment. In some establishments OPVs visit prisoners in their cells. Visitors may be issued with keys provided that the Governor is satisfied it is appropriate to do so. Whilst the needs of the establishment are paramount the views of the visitor and prisoner may be taken into consideration when deciding the location of visits. *Clear instructions must be given to OPVs and to staff on the times at which visits may take place, and on any special care necessary in the case of particular prisoners.* Although what is said in the visits is confidential, OPVs should record the date and time of visits to each prisoner.

## Category A Prisoners

- 5.14 *Where a Category A prisoner requests the services of an OPV, the procedure outlined within the National Security Framework must be followed. OPVs are not exempt from the Approved Visitors Scheme.*

## The National Association of Official Prison Visitors (NAOPV)

- 5.15 The National Association of Official Prison Visitors is officially recognised and financially assisted by the Service. HRH The Princess Royal is a Patron and the Lord Chancellor & Secretary of State for Justice is the ex-officio President. The Association helps to encourage and co-ordinate the work of OPVs both at local and national level. It is a matter of personal choice whether an individual visitor joins the Association, but in general, an active local branch will be helpful to both visitors and the liaison officer. The Association holds an Annual General Meeting every year. Each local branch is entitled to send one or more delegates, depending on the size of its membership (delegates may claim travel and subsistence costs for attendance from the Association).
- 5.16 At present the General Secretary of the NAOPV is Mr I Currie who can be contacted at Azure House, 10 Imperial Avenue, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex SS0 8NE (0794 8014415 or by e-mail [naopv.gensec.membership@googlemail.com](mailto:naopv.gensec.membership@googlemail.com)).

## Travelling expenses

- 5.17 Officially appointed OPVs may claim reimbursement from the establishment for travelling expenses incurred in respect of journeys between their home address and the establishment (or for the actual journey if a lesser distance is travelled) for each visit. OPVs are expected to use the most economical means of transport available. Where public transport is used, the full cost of standard class travel may be reimbursed.
- 5.18 In cases where scheduled public transport is not convenient for the visitor and a private motor vehicle is used instead, consideration may be given to reimbursement at public transport rates. *These expenses are generally limited to journeys of no more than 15 miles either to or from the establishment. In cases where motor mileage allowance is paid the recipient must satisfy the same requirements in respect of insurance as the Civil Service Pay and Conditions of Service Code requires officials to satisfy when mileage allowance is paid for official travel.* In order to aid recruitment in rural areas or to encourage a more diverse membership that reflects the needs of the establishment' Governors have the discretion to relax this mileage restriction.

## Suicide Prevention

- 5.19 As a supplement to the watchfulness of prison staff, OPVs are a valuable resource in the efforts to become aware of a prisoner's risk of self-harm. OPVs offer valuable opportunities for prisoners to talk confidentially (albeit with a duty to disclose risk of harm to self or others), and



may help prisoners to come to terms with difficult situations. Consideration may be given to involving OPVs in the local Suicide Prevention Team and in relevant training.

### **Misconduct**

- 5.20 Misconduct by an OPV is extremely rare. Liaison Officers should report any incidents of serious misconduct promptly to the Governor who may initiate an investigation and may exclude an OPV from the establishment, pending the outcome. The local NAOPV Branch chairman should be informed of progress of any such investigation. If, after enquiries, it is considered that the appointment of the Visitor is no longer desirable, the appropriate course in the first instance may be to invite the Visitor to resign rather than to terminate the appointment.

### **Handbook for Prison Visitors**

- 5.21 A Handbook for Prison Visitors sets out in full the conditions of appointment and all newly appointed *Prison Visitors must receive a copy in order to indicate their acceptance of those conditions*. The NAOPV publishes "Definitive Documents on Prison Visiting" which new official prison visitors will be able to obtain from the General Secretary.

**Application form**

**APPOINTMENT OF AN OFFICIAL PRISON VISITOR**

Prison \_\_\_\_\_

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Please complete in block capitals the following

Forenames \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Maiden name (if appropriate) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Full postal address \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Nationality \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation / Profession \_\_\_\_\_

Introduced by \_\_\_\_\_

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Have you ever been convicted or found guilty of any offence by any court? If so, please give full details below:

YES  \*

NO

\*Tick appropriate box (Answering YES does not bar you from appointment. Every application is considered on its merits)

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Please give the names of two people who are willing to act as referees for you. They should be responsible persons who have given permission for their names to be used, and who are well acquainted with you in private life. They should have known you for at least two years.

**OFFICIAL PRISON VISITORS: SUGGESTED LETTER OF APPOINTMENT**

Dear ....

I am writing following your recent interview to offer you an appointment as an Official Prison Visitor (OPV) at this establishment.

The appointment, which is subject in the first instance to the satisfactory completion of a period of three months probation, is renewable annually but in practice will continue without formal re-appointment until resignation or retirement unless there is reason not to renew, or to terminate, the appointment. I enclose for your information a copy of the "Handbook for Prison Visitors" which contains advice on prison visiting and sets out in full the conditions of your appointment.

As an OPV you will be under the guidance of (name of OPV Liaison Officer) who is the designated liaison officer for OPVs and will allocate the prisoners you are to visit. He/she will always be ready to assist and help you in your duties.

There are arrangements whereby OPVs may claim the reimbursement of travelling expenses to and from the establishment for each visit, subject to a maximum claim of 15 miles in each direction. Should you wish to claim expenses the liaison officer will be able to advise you on this matter.

The National Association of Official Prison Visitors, which is officially recognised by the Prison Service, encourages and promotes the work of OPVs and keeps all OPVs in touch with developments through the issue of a regular newsletter and an Annual General Meeting. The Secretary of the Association is being informed of your appointment and will be writing to you shortly explaining in greater detail the activities and aims of the NAOPV. [There is a local branch of the Association here, as at most establishments, and the Chair is also being informed of your appointment.]

Please let me know whether you wish to accept this appointment and, if so when it will be convenient for you to commence visiting.

cc: General Secretary, NAOPV  
NAOPV Branch Chair