

Prisons Strategy White Paper

Ministry of Justice Prisons Strategy White Paper Consultation: techUK
response

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About techUK

techUK is a membership organisation launched in 2013 to champion the technology sector and prepare and empower the UK for what comes next, delivering a better future for people, society, the economy and the planet.

It is the UK's leading technology membership organisation, with more than 850 members spread across the UK. We are a network that enables our members to learn from each other and grow in a way which contributes to the country both socially and economically.

By working collaboratively with government and others, we provide expert guidance and insight for our members and stakeholders about how to prepare for the future, anticipate change and realise the positive potential of technology in a fast-moving world.

Introduction

With the investment agreed at the Spending Review and the commitment to increase modern prison places, focus on reforming individuals through improved rehabilitation programmes, there is a vital role for digital technology in building back better from the pandemic; from modernising existing Victorian prison estates to delivering the modern prison of the future. There is an opportunity for a digital step-change in supporting staff, prisoners and prison leavers in education, work-focused skills, training and employment. With the ambition to reduce reoffending, better support staff and prisoners, making better use of data, digital tools and technology is key. Not just inside prison but within probation services as well. Not only is now an opportunity to modernise existing estates and update legacy infrastructure, but also explore innovative cutting-edge technology which can support both prisoners and staff.

Even now, February 2022, there are still too many prison estates lacking basic digital infrastructure. Without digital tools in place to speed up processes, support staff and

prisoners, the highest standards and best quality of service from workforces are unachievable.

Digital tools should be at the heart of modernising the criminal justice system and should be viewed as integral in ensuring a better-connected justice system, end to end, with data at the centre. techUK can support the Ministry of Justice's vision to:

1. **Build the next generation of prisons** by ensuring a move to more resilient estates to meet the demands of the 21st century criminal justice system.
2. **Work to support a digital probation service** and prison leavers by ensuring data flow across partner agencies.
3. **Support the delivery of the next stages of the prison build roadmap** by specifically scaling the use of digital, data and technology to create a more efficient working environment for staff, and empowering prisoners to take personal responsibility during their time in custody including through safe and secure in-cell technology.
4. **Deliver improved (digital) training programs** to enhance skills and qualifications.
5. **Deliver improved education services, including improving digital skills**, which will equip prisoners and offenders released on license to take up work opportunities in and outside the prison estate.
6. **Improve safety** by working with the innovation taskforce and conducting a 'data deep dive' to consider the best interventions for prisoners who are violent or self-harm. Supporting in the roll out of body worn video to all staff who need it.

A Roadmap to Building the Future Prison Estate

The impact of COVID-19 on the criminal justice system has been significant. However, with these challenges we have seen a digital step-change and it is clear the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is taking positive and significant steps on their digital transformation journey as they look to modernise existing UK prison estates and build the next generation of prisons which are safe, secure and support rehabilitation. With the governments investment of £100 million it is positive to see the technology being introduced to improve the safety of prisoners and staff with, for example, the roll out of X ray body scanners. Whilst these are positive developments, the strategy makes reference to 'other technology' installed and the need for 'modern technology' with no mention as to what these devices or solutions are and, how they are helping build or could help to build a modern prison estate. **We would be interested in what innovative solutions are being considered in the short, medium and long term and, whether the MoJ intends to carry out early market engagement so that industry can understand requirements.**

The strategy draws on the roll out of in-cell technology and new prisons being designed with the infrastructure to allow for digital in-cell technology. This is excellent to see especially with the challenges surrounding COVID-19. The strategy highlights the roll out of in-cell technology to another 11 prisons by Summer 2022, but we feel there are concerns surrounding the delivery timescale for this with many more prisons needing this technology sooner. An acknowledgment must be made that with only 4 male adult prisons and 1 youth offender institution with in-cell technology, there is still a long way to go. Young people and young offenders are most likely to be digital natives therefore technological advancements are most likely to positively affect them. The plans to roll out secure digital technology and in-cell devices needs to go further and faster.

The strategy lays out its ambition for digital prisons of the future and highlights the challenges surrounding legacy infrastructure in existing prison estates. Reference is made to 'a new strategy for the maintenance and renewal of the prison estate'.

Modernising existing estates need to firstly, overcome the existing challenges by moving away from legacy infrastructure and improving interoperability, but secondly, 'future gaze' what new technology can be put in place. The problem to solve needs to be firmly defined and **techUK would welcome the opportunity to engage on the strategy to support the move from legacy infrastructure and understand what the requirements are.**

The strategy makes clear reference to the transformative power of technology such as in-cell laptops, kiosks to support the development of skills and qualifications. It is excellent to see this work being carried out with rehabilitation, and particularly education, at the top of the agenda, with the changes being made clearly able to provide significant benefit in terms of reducing re-offending. However, with much of what has been included in the strategy already in progress, we believe there was a missed opportunity to make more radical change in order to reflect what works to reduce crime and create safer communities. Transformative and 'cutting edge' technology is referenced, yet nothing radical or 'art of the possible' is drawn on. **We would like to understand what changes are on the horizon, particularly around the adoption of emerging technology in the short, medium and long term.**

One step further

1. techUK members feel more radical changes were needed but also the government could have gone one step further with regards to the ambition, in particular, for improving access to education, skills and qualifications and empowering individuals. With the impact of COVID-19, the world is far more reliant on technology now than ever before. Prison leavers are entering a far more digital world but they aren't always equipped with the digital skills needed to secure employment. **We would be interested to learn what the government has in place to ensure prison leavers have the digital skills they need beyond the prison gates.**

2. An area lacking, especially when discussing the role technology will play on a modern prison estate relates to the challenges surrounding cyber security and risk management; especially with regards to in-cell technology. **techUK members feel reference should have been given to risk management, training and preventing cyber-attacks.**
3. The strategy highlights the MoJ being strongly committed to supporting the UK's net zero carbon commitments and to preparing for climate adaptation. Whilst we are glad this has been included as part of the strategy, we feel **more reference should have been made to the importance of minimising effects on the environment, the plans in place, and how this will be delivered through the new prison build programme given the ageing nature of prisons.**

Tackling Violence and Reducing Harm

The reference to cutting edge technology and digital systems for monitoring vital signs to protect and support prisoners clearly showcases the aspiration to become more innovative. The use of Body Worn Video is not new, yet incredibly important to ensure the safety of prison staff. It is great to see the plans in place to introduce a new generation of more technically advanced cameras across the service. When referencing innovation in the context of modernising prisons it is clear the need for technology to sit at the centre of this. As highlighted in the strategy, whilst an innovation taskforce can drive this work **it was disappointing to see no reference to tech industry involvement on this taskforce and the tech innovation that can be brought to the table.** There is an opportunity now more than ever to harness the power of technology and data when modernising existing prisons and future prison builds. **There is a need for a 'data deep dive' to inform thinking, understand best practice and explore ways to address the drivers of violence in prisons; exploring interventions, preventative measures and safety. Clarity on the innovation taskforce and involvement would be welcomed.**

There is academic research that demonstrates the importance of family contact within the realm of reducing reoffending. The strategy references the move to secure family video calling, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that over the next 12 months long term options will be implemented in line with the recommendations of Lord Farmer's review for maintaining family ties. The strategy does not include what these options are so, **techUK would welcome the opportunity to engage at this stage. Whilst family video calls cannot replace in-person visits, they have been critical during the pandemic.**

The Role of Prisons and Probation in Cutting Crime and Protecting the Public

Drawing on the work carried out across the health sector and roll out of digital health passports, there is an opportunity to explore whether resettlement passports can be digitised. Not only could these include, as referenced, identification, CV and a bank account but other important information. Digital resettlement passports could enable a user to view treatments, access advice, speak to support services but also offer significant detail which could point to why someone committed a crime or why they might reoffend. **We appreciate not every prison leaver has access to a device but believe digital access and digital skills are two areas that, through a taskforce, should be explored.**

An area to add, for consideration, when exploring connecting prison leavers with services is, is there a way information and advice can be pushed out to prisoners through technology to help them continue their path to rehabilitation? This would enable prison leavers to stay digitally connected with services whilst physically apart. For this to work however, we must acknowledge the importance of good quality data, data standards and the need for data sharing/transfer from prison to probation service. This in turn tracking the individuals journey end to end and their interactions with support services. **The strategy makes little reference to the role of data and no reference to the importance of data quality and data standards when joining up and supporting services, but also supporting the prison leaver on their rehabilitation journey.** There needs to be more reference and a push for the joining

up of data end to end and the need for interoperability across healthcare in particular but also education and skills.

Our People

Technology is only as good as the person using it. The strategy references the planned recruitment drive, retention framework and HMPPS fast track scheme. **We would be interested in understanding more about the framework and how industry can support. Additionally, we feel much can be learnt from the current Policing recruitment drive and we would be interested to understand how the MoJ will be ensuring diversity in its applications, including digital skills.**

techUK members feel more emphasis should be put on MoJ's commitment to delivering staff training programmes when implementing new devices – such as biometrics, X-ray devices or managing body worn video data downloads – with the opportunity for e-learning modules. **We would also be interested in understanding what engagement the MoJ is currently having with existing prison officers and the plans in place to implement these technologies/ digital changes** and, how MoJ are planning to engage industry in support of emerging technology adoption and available training.

We acknowledge the strategies vision to 'harness the latest technology to improve performance, and reduce the bureaucratic burden on staff' and therefore welcome the chance to engage with government to ensure the technology being rolled out meets the needs of the user with the aim of supporting staff, prisoners, reducing reoffending, cutting crime and protecting the public. We feel there is an opportunity to go one step further; to unlock innovation and harness the transformational power of data and digital technology in both existing and future prison builds in order to take a disruptive, whole-system approach. We would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the Ministry of Justice to help deliver the vision for prisons which are safe, secure and rehabilitative.