



**Policy name:** Prevention of Abscond (Open Prisons) Policy Framework

**Issue Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024

**Implementation Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> January 2025 \*

\*Prisons can choose to implement the policy ahead of this date.

No PSIs or service specifications will be cancelled with the introduction of this Policy Framework.

**Introduces amendments to the following documents:** None

**Action required by:**

x	HMPPS HQ	x	Governors
x	Public Sector Prisons		Heads of Group
x	Contracted Prisons		The Probation Service
x	Under 18 Young Offender Institutions		Other providers of Probation and Community Services
	HMPPS Rehabilitation Contract Services Team		

**Mandatory Actions: All groups referenced above must adhere to the Requirements section of this Policy Framework, which contains all mandatory actions.**

Governors must ensure that any new local policies they develop as a result of this Policy Framework are compliant with relevant legislation, including the Public-Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act, 2010).

The Guidance section has been classified as Official Sensitive and is therefore not for public release. It is contained in a separate document for internal use only. The Guidance provides evidence and learning on absconds and should be considered alongside the Requirements. Any questions concerning departure from the guidance can be sent to the contact details below.

In this document the term Governor also applies to Directors of Contracted Prisons.

**How this Policy Framework will be audited / monitored:**

In public sector prisons, Prison Group Directors (PGDs) will monitor compliance with requirements set out within the Policy Framework in their prisons using the auditing and monitoring tools described in this Policy Framework.

In contracted prisons monitoring of compliance will be through the standard contract management processes.

Health and Safety (H&S) assurance and monitoring for public sector prisons is undertaken through H&S monitoring and assurance within the H&S function, using the H&S audit and reporting tool compliance checklist. The H&S processes may be different for contracted prisons and therefore, contracted prisons must have their own H&S arrangements which ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees.

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Quality assurance for public sector prisons and contracted prisons is provided by HMPPS Performance, Assurance & Risk Group (PAR) through the security audit.

Mandatory elements of instructions should be subject to management checks (and may be subject to self or peer audit by operational line management), as judged to be appropriate by the managers with responsibility for delivery.

### **Resource Impact:**

The identified resource impact for this Policy Framework is staffing within the security department. The initial impact will be in terms of the time taken to update the Local Security Strategy (LSS). Following the initial rewrite of the LSS in alignment with this Policy Framework, resource implication is not expected to be any different to current requirements. Prisons will have to conduct a whole prison approach evidence-based risk assessment to identify their risks of abscond and update their LSS to reflect these.

It is expected that this Policy Framework will assist open prisons in reducing the risk of abscond. This in turn is expected to reduce financial costs to HMPPS and other partner agencies, as well as any reputational damage that results from an abscond.

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**Approved by OPS for publication:** Helen Judge, Joint Chair, Operational Policy Sub-board, July 2024

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**Contents**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
1	Purpose	4
2	Evidence	4
3	Outcomes	4
4	Requirements	4
5	Constraints	6
6	Guidance	7
7	Annexes	7

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### 1. **Purpose**

- 1.1 Open prisons are a valuable resource providing key resettlement functions that directly support His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) principles of enabling people to be their best and make positive changes in their lives; as well as organisational outcomes to reduce reoffending, provide decent and safe prisons and ensure high quality sentence management.
- 1.2 This Policy Framework provides open prisons with the information and guidance to understand and manage the risk of abscond; ultimately contributing towards HMPPS outcomes to protect the public and reduce reoffending.

### 2. **Evidence**

- 2.1 The [HMPPS Annual Digest](#) provides year on year data regarding absconds.
- 2.2 The risk of abscond is best managed as part of a holistic framework and through consistent and robust application of policies and procedures.

### 3. **Outcomes**

- 3.1 This Policy Framework provides a definition of absconds, outlines the response to be undertaken and reporting requirements, and details the actions necessary to manage and prevent absconds.
- 3.2 Use of this Policy Framework and guidance will support:
- Maintenance of security and order in open prisons.
  - Prevention of absconds.
  - Protection of the public from prisoners who seek to take advantage of open conditions or to commit further offences in the community.
  - Reduced burden on Police to locate and return those who have absconded from prison custody.

### 4. **Requirements (see Guidance for further information)**

#### **Definition**

- 4.1 All within HMPPS are to understand and report absconds correctly as per the following definition:  
A prisoner absconds if they are unlawfully at large due to leaving open prison conditions without permission. It is an escape that does not involve overcoming a physical security restraint such as that provided by a wall or fence, locks, bolts or bars, a secure vehicle, handcuffs or the direct supervision of staff. It is only possible to abscond from open prison conditions.
- 4.3 Failure to return from Release on Temporary License (ROTL) is not an abscond and must be reported as a Temporary Release Failure (TRF). For more information, see the [ROTL Policy Framework](#).

#### **Response**

- 4.4 Governors must ensure they have local contingency plans as per [Incident Management Policy Framework \(restricted\)](#) detailing the actions to take in the event of any abscond or attempted abscond.

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- 4.5 Staff must raise an alarm if an immediate response is needed. There are several ways to raise the alarm, these could include:
- General Alarm.
  - Whistle.
  - 'Urgent Message' on the radio net.
  - Dial 222 from a landline.
  - Personal alarm on the radio.
  - Dial 999 if external to the prison.
  - Shouting for assistance.

### Reporting

- 4.6 All staff in open prisons must know what action to take in the event of an abscond, suspected abscond or attempted abscond. This should be outlined as part of any local induction or training, or other relevant means.
- 4.7 Once an abscond or attempted abscond has been discovered, it must be reported immediately to the Duty Manager who will inform the Duty Governor and initiate the appropriate contingency plans. This must include notifying the police and, where any victim of the absconder is enrolled in the Probation Victim's Support Programme, the prisoner's Community Offender Manager must also be notified. If in this instance, the abscond has taken place outside of office hours, the Duty Manager of the Probation area must be informed.
- 4.8 All absconds must be reported via each of the following:
- Telephoning the 24-hour reporting process immediately.
  - Intelligence Report (IR) submitted as soon after the event as possible.
  - Deputy Director of Prisons (DDP) report submitted within 24 hours.
  - Incident Reporting System (IRS) updated within 48 hours of the event occurring.
- 4.9 An abscond must trigger a review of the prison's Abscond Reduction Strategy.
- 4.10 Governors must ensure that all security documentation including assurance records are retained in line with PSI 04/2018 Records, Information Management and Retention Policy.

### Abscond prevention and management

#### Local risk assessment

- 4.11 Governors must ensure that they conduct an annual evidence-based risk assessment to identify and manage the risks of abscond locally, as per the Local Security Strategy (LSS) Policy Framework. Any local arrangements decided upon must be consistent with the instructions provided in this Policy Framework and support a rehabilitative culture.
- 4.12 Factors to consider within the annual evidence-based risk assessment and update of the LSS should include physical location, site size, population, staffing, and other relevant local features and dynamics.

#### Abscond Review Process

- 4.14 Whilst there are no clear, common characteristics that are predictive for individuals who abscond, open prisons must ensure they have systems in place to review all prisoners who abscond in line with the national Management of Abscond Review Process (Annex A) to increase understanding and any specific circumstances relevant to their prison.

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4.15 There are four types of review:

- Local Assessment and Review of Abscond - Formal Review of a Standard ROTL Group [Medium / Low risk]. There are no formal Terms of Reference required.
- Governors Formal Review of Abscond - Standard ROTL Group [Medium / Low Risk]. Formal Terms of Reference to be used where there are possible elements of concern that need exploring further for learning purposes, or where offender is high profile or where further offending has been alleged during the event of absconding.
- PGD Independent Review of Abscond - for All Restricted ROTL Group [High Risk] absconds or any abscond where a Serious Further Offence (SFO) has been alleged during the event of absconding.
- PGD Thematic Review of Abscond – where there is an emerging trend of absconds from any open prison. Area Executive Director (AED)/PGD/Governor discussions should take place and may consider activating a review. Where a trend reaches 10 absconds per 100,000 prisoner days in any fixed business quarterly period then a review is mandated.

4.16 All formal reviews commissioned will be agreed with the PGD Office and will be completed within 20 working days of the date commissioned.

4.17 These reviews are not to be used in place of any conduct and discipline procedures. Where misconduct or wrongdoing is suspected then separate arrangements must be considered. For more information, please see Management of Abscond Review Process (Annex A).

### Abscond Reduction Strategies

4.18 Open prisons must have an Abscond Reduction Strategy in place specific to their prison, incorporating four key elements:

- Identify and understand the problem.
- Action.
- Communicate and engage.
- Review, improve and revise.

4.19 Abscond Reduction Strategies must take a whole prison approach, with representatives from all prison areas included in the development and review process.

4.20 Abscond Reduction Strategies must be reviewed regularly by the Governor or designated Senior Operation Lead; this will differ for individual prisons dependant on the rates of abscond and must be in line with the following timescales:

- Following each abscond.
- Once a month / quarterly for those prisons who have experienced 4 or more absconds within the last 12 months.
- At least once every 12 months for those prisons that do not experience any absconds in that period.

4.21 Reviews should be subject to formal discussion with PGD during prison visits and where trends of concern are detected discussions with PGD and AED may take place when reviewing individual sites or prison group performance.

4.22 Abscond Reduction Strategies must be uploaded to the LSS, to ensure all staff have access.

## 5. Constraints

### **Data Protection**

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- 5.1 Any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual recorded as a consequence of this Policy Framework will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, UK General Data Protection Regulation and PSI 04/2018 Records Information Management Policy.
- 5.2 A Data Protection Impact Assessment screening has been completed in support of this Policy Framework.

### **Freedom of Information Act**

- 5.3 This Policy Framework has been assessed as OFFICIAL and therefore suitable for public release. Additional guidance and supporting tools have been assessed as OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE and not available for public release.

### **Diversity & Inclusion**

- 5.4 When communicating to staff, prisoners or visitors, prisons are expected to ensure that briefing documents and information is available in a variety of formats including easy read, braille, voice, and other languages.
- 5.5 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in support of this Policy Framework.

## **6. Guidance**

### Rehabilitative Culture and Procedural Justice

- 6.1 A rehabilitative culture is one where all the aspects of a prison culture support rehabilitation and contribute to a prison being safe, decent, hopeful, and supportive of change, progression and stopping offending. The application of security processes as outlined in this Policy Framework should complement and underpin such a culture to ensure effective outcomes.
- 6.2 Procedural Justice (PJ) is one of the foundational features of a rehabilitative prison. Evidence shows that when people feel treated in procedurally just ways through Voice, Neutrality, Respect, and Trustworthy Motives it contributes to a host of better outcomes, including well-being, rehabilitation/reduced recidivism, safety, and stability.
- 6.3 All security processes benefit from the conscious application of procedural justice principles. The core components of PJ can be incorporated into the management of absconds through engaging all those in the prison, of all grades and roles, into the development and implementation of local Abscond Reduction Strategies to improve outcomes.
- 6.4 For more information please visit: [Procedural justice \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- 6.5 Further guidance and annexes supporting this Policy Framework have been classified as Official Sensitive and is for internal use only. This can be accessed via the [National Security Framework \(NSF\)](#) intranet page or by contacting: Security.Procedures@justice.gov.uk.

## **7. Annexes**

- 7.1 Official-Sensitive annexes can be accessed here [National Security Framework \(NSF\)](#).

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Annex A	Management of Abscond Reviews Process (OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE)
Annex B	Absconds Reduction Poster (OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE)