Dear Executive Directors, Prison Group Directors and Governors.

On 14 April HMPPS launched a temporary prison population strategy for the COVID-19 period entitled “protect and mitigate”. This short term strategy introduced measures to counter COVID-19 by exploiting new headroom created by the reduced flow from court, ‘natural wastage’ from releases and End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR). Measures included targeted op-cap reductions to release pressures in individual prisons, the suspension of Inter-Prison Transfers (IPT) reducing movements, a temporary regional reception model to introduce space between intakes and a new national Cohorting Strategy to mitigate against spread within establishments. These measures have proven extremely effective however we cannot dwell on this success. Courts are re-opening and the flow into prisons will increase, meaning we are likely to face population pressures in the coming weeks and months. We have therefore developed a new strategy to solidify gains from protect and mitigate, counter the population pressures and bridge the gap from temporary COVID measures back to our BAU population management model.

**A new strategy: focusing on Compartmentalisation & Configuration**

The new strategy is compartmentalisation and configuration. Its primary aim is to serve the Public Health imperative and manage the risks of COVID whilst simultaneously re-focusing our activity towards longer term capacity and population priorities. These objectives will be served by the introduction and implementation of four new products:

* A refreshed cohorting strategy for prisons (hereafter called the Compartmentalisation Strategy v3.0 – as we have to align language with PHE and UK Government)
* A heat-map model (visually reflecting the live outbreak status of every prison as a RAG rating to inform  capacity and population management decisions)
* The reintroduction of the business as usual process for singleton moves (reverting back to the pre-COVID process from the temporary model overseen by Gold)
* A new National Allocations Process (NAP) and prisoner flow model comes into effect from the 28th September (the reconfiguration team will be briefing each prison’s OMU (closed adult male estate 18+))

The first two of these products; the new compartmentalisation strategy and the first RED-GREEN assessment of establishments are attached. NAP formally comes on-stream on 28 September and before this point the new Compartmentalisation Strategy and Heat map model need to be live and embedded, hence their earlier release. The ‘heat map’ is not yet ready in visual format so the attached spreadsheet lists the assessments valid from 11th September 2020.  The following immediate actions are therefore required:

1. Establishments need to review their cohorting (Compartmentalisation) models locally and adopt changes contained in the new strategy
2. Establishments need to view their RED-GREEN assessment and understand how this will be used.

The Compartmentalisation strategy builds on previous guidance. The changes have all been made to make cohorting/compartmentalisation as efficient as possible to support the new NAP model. Principal changes include the removal of the requirement for routine reverse cohorting before/after transfers so that it is delivered once per prisoner and not repeated, unless under specific circumstances. Governors can now also determine whether reverse cohorting is delivered as a regime across multiple areas or in a single unit. Similarly establishments need not maintain Protective Isolation Units (PIU) if effective isolation can be achieved by keeping a symptomatic individual in their existing cell.

The heat map will be a visual tool displaying the RAG-rated outbreak status of every prison and the transmission rates in the communities around them. This information will be used to inform population management decisions and is directly linked to compartmentalisation for the first time. Prisoners  transferring from a green  (non-outbreak) to a green site will not require reverse cohorting on arrival at the receiving prison, whereas  those coming from a red site (community or prison outbreak) will need to reverse cohort on arrival. The heat map tool will be overseen  centrally but shared with establishments. Establishments will in due course need to be aware of this tool which will be updated following the notification of any prison or community outbreak or regional restriction pertinent to prisons. All establishments in England have been rated as Green in agreement with PHE with exception of HMP Lewes (due to a live outbreak) and establishments in the North West due to community prevalence. On advice from PHW, all establishments in Wales will remain Red at this point. This information will be refreshed regularly and will continue to be presented in this format until the heat map itself is available.

These new products, the Compartmentalisation strategy and the heat map model are vital enablers to the new NAP. Which itself is one of the key elements of our strategy to best use the available capacity in the system by restarting a prisoner transfer process, enabling a clear functional model for prisons (closed adult male 18+) to operate in, ensuring men are able to progress during their custodial sentence, accessing  the correct offender services. The new Compartmentalisation strategy and the heat map will also support the service to manage the challenging projected population pressure as court activity ramps up. For instance the easing of reverse cohorting requirements for drafts of men from green Local/Reception sites to the training and resettlement estate will enable more flexible access to spaces. The Custodial Capacity team will therefore begin conversations with you in regards to reversing some temporary op-cap reductions introduced during COVID. We appreciate any changes will present significant operational challenges for establishments and all decisions will be fully consulted upon. In the meantime please complete the immediate actions and familiarise yourselves with the tools and measures outlined in the guidance below.

