**Gold Briefing – Compartmentalisation v6 Addendum (21.12.21)**

The most up-to-date guidance for Cohorting our establishments to manage the COVID-19 risk is set out in V6 of the HMPPS Cohorting and Compartmentalisation Guidance which is accessible [here](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/04/15/cohorting-and-population-management/). This version of the guidance clearly sets out that Compartmentalisation of all types (reverse cohorting, shielding and protective isolation) should be treated as a **process** rather than a unit. In early iterations of the guidance, compartmentalisation has referred to using language such as ‘units’ or ‘areas’. We have moved away from this language as compartmentalisation is a series of processes which can take place in multiple locations. Any cell location can be used to deliver any element of compartmentalisation to ensure that we are able to fulfil our requirement to service the courts and utilise spaces.

Mitigations for Omicron are similar to Delta, including use of well-fitting and well-made face masks, reducing occupancy levels in indoor environments, and ensuring adequate ventilation. However, early evidence suggests there may be a risk that Omicron may spread more easily over longer distances by aerosol transmission leading to rapid transmission and outbreaks in prisons.

This means that it is pertinent that given the increased level of risk we face from Omicron that we ensure we do all we can to locate prisoners in a way that is most conducive to both infection control and usage of spaces. The guidance listed below is not intended to replace the previously issued Compartmentalisation guidance or that listed in relevant SOPs but is intended to support establishments in making defensible and sensible decisions around the location of cohorting prisoners.

It is advised that prisoner movement should be kept to a minimum and the advice of OCTs should be considered when managing an outbreak. Large scale relocations of prisoners is therefore not the intent of this updated guidance. However:

* Those that are vulnerable should be shielded from others and held separate from RCU and PIU or other high-risk populations in a distinct area.
* Where possible, reverse cohort new reception prisoners together in the same area of a wing is the most effective way of reducing potential spread of infection and increasing controls around this group.
* Where possible, cohort infected prisoners together in the same area of a wing is the most effective way of reducing potential spread of infection and increasing controls around this group.
* Where this is not feasible due to population pressures/available space, establishments should utilise the following guidance:
* Positive or symptomatic cases in protective isolation (PIU) as a priority group should be located on the highest landing.
* Positive or symptomatic cases in protective isolation (PIU) as a priority should not be located on the 1’s/ground floor or a landing where there is heavy footfall such as recreation /activity or a thoroughfare.
* Prisoners subject to reverse cohorting (RCU) should similarly be located on higher landings and not the 1’s /ground floor as a second order priority if operationally viable.
* Underlying all of these controls should be a continued focus on utilisation of controls such as face masks, social distancing and guidance in line with the relevant [SOPs.](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/04/15/safe-operating-procedures-sop-using-ppe/) For example establishments may wish to ensure that isolating prisoners have a stock of face masks in their cell to be applied every time the door is opened to reduce any potential spread of airborne virus. Similarly, establishments should follow the guidance around ventilation available [here.](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/04/15/safe-operating-procedures-sop-using-ppe/)
* Where required, and as set out in the Gold Briefing published on 25.10.21 (attached below), establishments can make defensible decisions around the delivery of compartmentalisation where application of the policy would result in a lock-out situation.

