



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
Robert Buckland QC MP
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of
State for Justice

Robert Neill MP
Chair, Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

28th April 2020

Dear Robert,

COVID-19 IN PRISONS: PHE MODELLING

During Commons Justice Orals yesterday, I made reference to the new modelling by Public Health England (PHE) and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) that provides an early indication that our COVID-19 strategy in prisons is having a positive impact in limiting deaths and the transmission of the virus within the estate.

I am writing to inform you that this has now been published on GOV.UK and is available [here](#).

We are containing the spread of COVID-19 within prisons using an approach known as 'compartmentalisation'. Through this approach, we are isolating the sick, shielding the vulnerable and cohorting new arrivals to reduce risk. This has been supported by further measures to restrict regimes and minimise inter-prison transfers. We are also easing pressures on prisons with the early release of low-risk offenders, temporary expansion of the estate, and work to reduce the number of those held on remand. While we are seeing outbreaks of COVID-19 affecting staff and those in our care, emerging data suggests that the 'explosive outbreaks' which were initially feared, are not being seen. The new modelling suggests that, if we are able to maintain this reduction in social contact, this will have a significant impact on the risk of infection in prison populations and consequences such as hospitalisation and death.

Whilst we welcome this new evidence, we are not complacent. We recognise that there is still work to be done to fully operationalise our compartmentalisation strategy across the estate, and maintain this for what may be a significant period of time. This is alongside measures to ensure the resilience of staffing at the frontline and wider roll-out of testing of staff and prisoners and PPE. The threat of COVID-19 remains, but we will continue to work closely with Public Health England and review our approach as the situation evolves.

I thank you for your continued cooperation at this challenging time.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Buckland". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and slightly larger than the rest of the letters.

RT HON ROBERT BUCKLAND QC MP