

30 March 2020

Dear Stakeholder,

Given the significant health risks for prisoners, detainees and staff during the current COVID-19 crisis, and following the Government advice issued this week, direct monitoring activity in prisons and immigration detention has inevitably been restricted.

Boards will be able to carry out some limited on-site work where it is safe and feasible to do so. However, we have also developed remote methods of providing some independent assurance at a time of heightened concern for prisoners and detainees. This is a fast-moving situation, but we have advised Boards as follows:

- All Boards should ensure they receive daily updates from the establishment they monitor, and updated regime management plans.
- Boards should continue to be informed by the establishment about prisoners or detainees in segregation or separation, and will respond to serious incidents; where possible Boards are dialling in to meetings (including segregation reviews) that they cannot attend
- In prisons, interim arrangements should be put in place to enable requests and complaints (known as 'applications') to be made to the IMB and dealt with by phone and email - these arrangements will depend on local circumstances
- We are in discussion at a national level with specialist contractors about the possibility of freephone lines to enable applications using in-cell telephony and the additional telephone capacity proposed by the Prison Service.
- In immigration removal centres we are putting in place dedicated email addresses so that people in detention can email their concerns to the IMB.
- All activities should be carried out in line with Public Health England advice on COVID-19

The Prison Service has notified prison governors of the need to assist IMBs in carrying out these tasks and informing prisoners, and the Home Office Immigration Enforcement Directorate is also assisting us in passing on information to detainees.

We are receiving regular updates from Boards through our network of regional representatives and directly from Board Chairs. This will inform our understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on prisoners and detainees. We are also in close contact with other scrutiny bodies including HMI Prisons and HMI Prisons Scotland, and with senior HMPPS and Home Office officials and Ministers about the changing situation. We will continue to update you as our own plans develop.

Yours sincerely,



Anne Owers – National Chair, Independent Monitoring Boards