



Ministry
of Justice



Home Office



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

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The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration
Home Office
Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street
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28 October 2022

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAPDC), I write regarding the deterioration of conditions at Manston and what appear to be the threats to life for those detained there.

In his evidence to the Home Affairs Committee on 26 October 2022, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, David Neal, described the “wretched conditions” and the “really dangerous situation” he witnessed during a recent visit to the facility.¹

During our IAPDC observation visit in May of this year, it was clear that the centre had been designed as a very short-term holding facility. This was apparent from its quick construction as a largely temporary structure, detention in marquees, sizeable waiting rooms spread with resting mats for emergency use. There was no separate sleeping accommodation as such and food was provided by festival caterers. There were some healthcare arrangements in place although concerns were expressed about potential overload of NHS local hospital services. The evidence suggests that there has been an influx of detainees and a drastic deterioration in conditions since our visit.

It was confirmed that there are around 2,800 people currently on site, almost double the maximum capacity of 1,600. This raises serious concerns about the ability of staff to keep people, including very young children, safe from risks of fire, disorder, and infection.

We understand that four cases of diphtheria have been confirmed, a disease that as you will know is highly infectious and can prove fatal. During the Committee session, your officials suggested that those infected would be taken to hospital “if appropriate”, and otherwise dealt with onsite, and did not specify what testing, isolation (the disease

is spread by respiratory droplets), or other measures are being used to identify and limit further cases.

Could you specify what measures are in place to ensure those who have been infected are receiving the care they need? Have any individuals within key risk categories, such as young children and older people, been infected, and what measures are being taken to protect such individuals? What measures are being taken to prevent a wider outbreak?

Further, the population is significantly larger than that of any prison, holding around a third more detainees than even the largest prison in England & Wales, HMP Berwyn.² However, according to the Chief Inspector, they are “not guarded by appropriately trained people.” Your officials have reported “isolated incidents of violence”, but in response to an Urgent Question on 27 October about the facility you described it as only “mainly stable”.³

What urgent actions are being taken to ensure individuals at the facility are being supervised by staff with proper powers and appropriate training to ensure individuals are kept safe? What fire safety measures are in place to protect the lives of detainees in the event of an accident? What contingency plans are in place to protect detainees were serious disorder or fires to break out, including in the event of an evacuation?

With increased instability in the facility, and the lack of appropriate supervision, what additional measures are in place to safeguard individuals’ mental health, particularly those who may be vulnerable as a result of past trauma and/or at risk of self-harm?

Moreover, your officials stated that some have been held at Manston for “much longer” than the legal 24-hour period, including for as long as a month, while the Chief Inspector reported meeting an Afghan family, with young children, who had been there for 32 days. Officials stated in evidence that resettling individuals held at Manston has a “very long lead time, of about two months”.

With the risks identified by the Chief Inspector and your officials, it is vital that individuals held at the facility are safely resettled on an urgent basis. What measures are being taken to ensure those held at the facility, particularly the most vulnerable, are resettled immediately?

I look forward to hearing from you on this urgent matter.

As ever,



Juliet Lyon CBE
Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAPDC)

¹ Home Affairs Committee, ‘Oral evidence: Channel crossings, HC 822’, 26 October 2022, available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/11390/pdf/>; *Guardian*, Borders watchdog left ‘speechless’ by failings at migrant centre in Kent, 26 October 2022, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/oct/26/borders-watchdog-left-speechless-by-failings-at-migrants-centre-in-kent>.

² HM Prison and Probation Service and Ministry of Justice, ‘Guidance: Berwyn Prison’, 2 August 2022, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/berwyn-prison>.

³ Hansard, ‘Cross-channel migrants: Manston facility’, 27 October 2022, available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-10-27/debates/4D7AF554-033A-452F-B059-2E94936B8948/Cross-ChannelMigrantsManstonFacility>.