



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

MoJ ref: ADR077845

4 May 2020

Dear Robert,

COVID-19: TESTING FOR PRISON AND PROBATION STAFF

Thank you for your letter of 16 April requesting an update on testing arrangements for prison and probation staff. The safety of our staff and those in our care remains our top priority, and I welcome the opportunity to provide regular updates on this.

You reference the private JSC session on 31 March where Phil Copple provided an update on our work to explore the opportunity to provide HMPPS staff anti-body testing via our Occupational Health provider. As ever, we were keen to ensure our approach aligned with that of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE) and so were in close engagement with them throughout. Further information provided by DHSC and the World Health Organisation revealed that the anti-body tests did not yet meet reliability standards required for rollout. We are maintaining an active interest in the development of these tests.

Our focus has therefore been on ensuring that HMPPS keyworkers have appropriate access to antigen swab testing as part of the national testing programme.

On 17 April my colleague, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, announced the rollout of antigen swab testing for all keyworkers, including prison staff, those working in Approved Premises (APs) and probation staff (including private sector service providers). This has now been expanded to include symptomatic members of their household too. You will have seen the further announcement on Thursday 23 April about the changes to testing for essential workers. You can read more about the processes here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>.

We are now registered on the new employer portal so that we can refer our staff to access testing whilst they are self-isolating. This means staff have access to all the testing sites across England, and we expect the locations for testing to grow further by the end of the month. Communications have been issued to all prisons, APs and probation staff, including guidance on how to register for and access testing facilities. We have also worked with our partners to ensure that staff delivering services through private sector employers can also access these services.

Prior to this, we had also been making use of interim testing capacity provided by DHSC, and as a result of this, over 2,000 HMPPS staff have already been referred for testing. Currently, we do not have access to data on uptake and results as the existing system means no consent is sought for this information to be shared with employers by DHSC. However, staff are engaging with management as part of return to work

processes and we are keen to ensure that we have data and continue to explore how this might be taken forward.

I hope this update proves useful. As ever, I must express my thanks for your continued understanding and cooperation at this challenging time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Lucy Frazer'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'L' and 'F'.

LUCY FRAZER QC MP