

Ed Humpherson | Director General for Regulation

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

01 July 2020

Dear Mr Wragg,

I have today written to Sir Richard Heaton, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), regarding the publication of statistics relating to COVID-19 in prisons in England and Wales. This letter is attached for the Committee's information.

As you know, we set out our expectation in a statement on 18 May that when management information is used publicly by ministers or officials to inform Parliament, the media and the public, it should be available to all in an accessible form, with appropriate explanations of context and sources. I also wrote to the Committee to confirm that I would raise any instances of the use of unpublished information in public by the Government.

In previous weeks, we have seen use of statistics relating to COVID-19 and the prison population by Government ministers and in the media, which were not routinely published by MOJ at the time. Following the UK Statistics Authority's approach, MOJ published the first of a new weekly official statistics release on COVID-19 in HM Prison and Probation Service in England and Wales on 26 June. By publishing these statistics, MOJ is releasing statistics in an open and transparent manner, which will promote public confidence and enable informed public debate.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation

Sir Richard Heaton
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice
(by email)

01 July 2020

Dear Sir Richard Heaton

Publication of statistics relating to COVID-19 in prisons in England and Wales

I am writing to welcome the publication of new official statistics by Ministry of Justice (MOJ), which provide weekly data on COVID-19 in HM Prison and Probation Service in England and Wales.

In previous weeks, we have seen use of statistics relating to COVID-19 and the prison population by Government ministers and in the media. These statistics, which included the number of prisoners who have tested positive for COVID-19 in prisons, the number of prisoners suspected to have died from COVID-19, and the number of prisoners who have been released from prison early, as part of the effort to manage the pandemic in prisons, were not routinely published by MOJ at the time, and therefore were not easily accessible in the public domain. My team approached MOJ, and your colleagues confirmed they were working towards publishing official statistics relating to COVID-19 in prisons, which would make this information routinely available to all.

Following the UK Statistics Authority's approach, MOJ published the first of a new weekly official statistics release on COVID-19 in HM Prison and Probation Service in England and Wales on 26 June.

Our expectation, set out in our public statement of 18 May, is that where unpublished data are used by Ministers in significant public statements, they should promptly be made available to all. By publishing these statistics, MOJ is acting in line with this principle and releasing statistics in an open and transparent manner, which will promote public confidence and enable informed public debate.

I am copying this letter to William Wragg MP, Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee, Sir Bob Neill MP, Chair of the Justice Committee, and David Blunt, Head of Profession for Statistics in MOJ.

Your sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation