



Ministry
of Justice

Sir Richard Heaton KCB
Permanent Secretary
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ
T: 020 3334 3709
E: Richard.Heaton@justice.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/MoJ

Meg Hillier MP
Committee of Public Accounts
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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Dear Chair,

Public Accounts Committee: Improving the Prison Estate, HC 244 – Follow up to Supplementary information

In my earlier letter, I said I would provide further information on COVID-19 data for BAME staff and prisoners. I am now able to provide this information for prisoners as set out below. Staff numbers will follow.

COVID-19 deaths and infections among BAME prisoners and staff

The Committee asked at Q.16 about the number of infections and deaths among staff and prisoners of BAME background.

Data was published for prisoners and probation service users on 24 July 2020 with information from 16 March 2020 to 10 July 2020¹. In this period, 20 of the 23 (87%) COVID-19 suspected deaths among prisoners were of White ethnicity. The remaining were of Asian or Asian British ethnicity with 2 (9%) deaths; and Black or Black British ethnicity with 1 (4%) death.

May I add one point? When I referred in evidence to the numbers as being small, I did not mean to imply that this level of mortality was insignificant, nor that the issue of ethnicity in relation to COVID-19 outcomes was an unimportant issue. On the contrary: we offer our sincere condolences to all of the families of those who have died; and as we have seen from the wider COVID-19 picture, understanding the effect of the virus on different communities is vitally important.

Turning to those adults and children in custody who have tested positive for COVID-19 to 10 July 2020: 410 (78%) were of White ethnicity, 40 (8%) were Asian or Asian British, 30 (6%) were Black or Black British and 40 (8%) had mixed, other or unknown ethnicity. This compares to 72% of the overall prison population who are white. Black and Black British prisoners represented 6% of all those who tested positive, notably lower than their representation in the wider prison population (13%). This may in part be explained by a greater proportion of Black and Black British offenders being from younger age groups.

¹ ^[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-and-probation-service-covid-19-statistics>

We will give the Committee a similar analysis of staff data as soon as we can. We are working hard to pull this information together using data from a number of sources. I would like to ensure the data provided to you has been properly assured for quality, given the sensitivity of the information.

I or (from September) my successor would be very happy to provide any further information that would assist the Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Heaton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

SIR RICHARD HEATON KCB