



Home Office

Sir Matthew Rycroft KCMG CBE
Permanent Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Meg Hillier MP

Chair of the Public Accounts Committee

BY EMAIL

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Dear Chair,

Thank you again for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee on 4 December on the Government's work to reduce the harm from illegal drugs, alongside Sir Chris Wormald and Rachael Millar.

I recently wrote to you on 15 December 2023 in relation to Q107 on support for prison leavers. In that letter I committed to write to you further in relation to Drug Testing on Arrest and synthetic opioids.

Q125: Would synthetic opioids be detected by the tests that are often done on people who have been arrested...?

I can clarify that the current testing devices used by policing are able to identify cocaine and heroin. The technology is not yet able to test for potent synthetic opioids such as fentanyl or nitazenes.

Within the Government's Drug Strategy, we committed to expanding the types of drugs that can be tested for, as well as extending the list of 'trigger' offences for testing. This aims to give policing the powers they need to identify wider cohorts of drug users who are suspected of committing crimes and bring consequences and support to bear. Legislation came into force in August 2023, giving policing the power to test for all Class A drugs as classified at the time the legislation was passed. There are further steps to be taken in terms of the technology and commercial processes to enable policing to use this new power, which could allow testing to be extended to drugs such as ecstasy, methamphetamine and LSD.

The Criminal Justice Bill currently before Parliament goes further by proposing to introduce the power to test for specified Class B and C drugs via regulations. This could, for example, enable testing in future for ketamine, cannabis and benzodiazepines.

I hope this provides further insight into the progress on policy and legislation to advance Drug Testing on Arrest capabilities.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Matthew Rycroft KCMG CBE