



24 March 2021

Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper MP
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Committee Chair,

Health Measures at the Border

Following our session with the Committee on 24 February 2021, alongside the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, Matthew Rycroft, and the Director General of Border Force, Paul Lincoln, I committed to write to you with some additional details on points raised throughout our exchange on health measures at the border. The Home Office role is primarily at the border and through police enforcement. I therefore think it is important to be clear at the outset that the Home Office works closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to support public health policy on isolation both at home and in the Managed Quarantine Service (MQS).

Please could you provide your latest estimate of the numbers, and proportion, of people arriving at the UK border and then proceeding to take public transport to their home address? (Q180)

The current number of arrivals is averaging between 14,000 -17,000 per day.

As you are aware, the Government has taken a layered approach to mitigating the risk of the spread of imported infections, as there is no single measure that mitigates that risk entirely, but the most important part of that layered approach is the self-isolation requirement. Further measures give an additional layer of defence:

It is currently illegal to travel abroad for a holiday and will remain so for the near future.

- Since 18 January, unless a legal exemption applies, passengers are required to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test in the form of a pre-departure test taken in the three days before the date of the international

departure. Carriers are required to check that this test is completed prior to allowing a passenger to depart for the UK.

- From 15 February, all those who are deemed to be of higher risk (those from “Red List Countries”) are required to enter the Government’s contracted managed quarantine facilities.

Recognising that arriving passengers will have a negative pre-departure test, and for those not going into managed quarantine facilities, it is understood that not everyone is able to use private transport when travelling to their accommodation to self-isolate. Whilst Border Force are unable to provide details of those who go on to use public transport on arrival to the UK, Government advice is clear that passengers must wear a face covering on public transport and will be breaking the law if they fail to do so and could be fined.

On-arrival testing is not currently part of the suite of COVID-19 border measures, but we are constantly evaluating the best available evidence and modelling available. In addition to the mandatory pre-departure testing to provide a protective effect for travel, there is a third layer of defence that requires all passengers to undertake testing on day 2, for variant surveillance, and day 8, to increase the efficacy of the isolation period. Modelling indicates that testing on arrival does not further improve the efficacy of quarantine.

The test package must be booked in advance of travel and utilises the UK’s genome sequencing capability to identify potential new variants of COVID-19. Carriers are also required to ensure this test package has been booked and further checks are then undertaken at the Border.

Please could you provide the Home Office’s estimate of the proportion of people fully complying with at-home quarantine, and the methodology used to calculate that estimate? (Q181)

The information in the Passenger Locator Form (PLF) has been critical to help stop the spread of the virus. It has been used to monitor self-isolation of those individuals who have been abroad and returned to the UK. To support the government’s border health measures, Public Health England set up the Isolation Assurance Service (IAS) now called Isolation Assurance and Compliance (IAC) that calls a sample of eligible UK arrivals. Each person contacted by the IAC is given advice to understand why they need to self-isolate, how to do so, and what to do if they are experiencing symptoms. They are also given information about taking tests on day 2 and day 8 of their self-isolation period. To date there has been a high level of compliance and the vast majority of people contacted have confirmed they will self-isolate for 10 days on arrival to the UK. Of the 75,807 people who were potentially eligible to be contacted by IAC for the week ending 01 March, approximately 75% were successfully contacted and deemed to be compliant and no further action was taken forward. However, a further 13% were not contactable for a number of reasons including because they fell into a sectoral exemption, were non-eligible for sampling, for example residents of Scotland or Wales, or were a small number of passengers who provided insufficient information on the

PLF. For the remainder, where the IAC has concerns that the contact is not self-isolating or cannot be reached, they refer these cases of concern to the Border Force Criminal Justice Unit (CJU), who identify the relevant police force and undertake some limited quality assurance to ensure the police have sufficient information to undertake their compliance checks and where necessary enforcement.

According to NPCC data, up to 14 February (i.e. the day before the introduction of hotel quarantine), there was “no further enforcement action” taken against 2,543 individuals suspected of non-compliance with quarantine requirements as there had been either no answer at the quarantine address, or nobody with the relevant name living there. This is approximately 15% of the total numbers referred to the police. Based on previous NPCC data, between 20 December and 14 February 5,837 cases were taken by police, of which 706 cases (12%) resulted in “no further enforcement action”. You committed to providing the Committee with information about how these cases are followed up (Q153ff).

a. What happens to these cases once the police have concluded that it is not possible for them to take further action? Are they referred back to the Home Office and, if so, what does the Home Office do with the information?

Of the recorded outcomes by the police during compliance visits, up to 85% were deemed compliant, where the police identified that the individual is complying with the regulations, or they successfully encourage the individual to comply and self-isolate, therefore requiring no further action. Decisions on what action should be taken are operational matters for the police to decide. The police will ensure the individual is clear on why they must isolate and seek to convince them of the requirement to do so. In some cases, the police may have evidence that the individual is refusing to comply with the regulations and so they can be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN). If it were deemed necessary, the police could also issue a summons or even arrest the individual. In all of these situations the matter is again concluded, and no further action is required.

There remain occasions where there is no answer from the person self-isolating at the address provided or the named individual is not known by those residing at the property. Where this occurs, the police will likely look at available evidence such as the electoral register or check with nearby neighbours. The police are also likely to make additional visits to check the address given and attempt to speak to the individual who has been referred. If after several visits this has still not been possible, the police will be unable to take further action. There are a number of reasons why confirming self-isolation may not have been possible. These may include but are not limited to; the person not travelling, or the changing of travel plans, multiple, or an updated PLF for a particular journey as well as inaccurate data. Outcomes are shared with the CJU to update their records and complete the feedback loop.

b. What specifically is the Home Office doing to support police forces to persist in locating individuals who may be breaching quarantine?

Home Office officials have worked alongside the police throughout the pandemic to ensure they have the powers and resources they need to enforce the measures in place. This includes working with the police on the referral system to ensure the data provided to the police is timely, accurate and of improved quality to ensure the process works effectively.

c. While the Committee understands that providing false information on a Passenger Locator Form could be severely punishable, it is concerned that the total amount of information flowing through the quarantine assurance system is not yet fully accurate. Therefore, what is Border Force doing, and planning to do, to improve checks on the accuracy of information on forms, or make changes to the form itself, so that false addresses cannot be given? How will these actions be monitored?

The PLF is a vital tool in our enforcement and compliance response, and we continue the work to simplify, improve and integrate the form. The form was updated for the MQS and Testing launch and we have already introduced the account model for users, which allows users to update journey details, without having to complete a new form. Planned ongoing simplification and automated verification where possible will drive up data quality to further support our enforcement and compliance response.

Failure to complete or provide accurate information on the PLF carries a fine of £500 for the first offence, doubling for subsequent offences up to a maximum of £4,000 for the fourth and any subsequent offences. This sits alongside other offences such as not providing relevant information such as MQS data. Border Force officers have served over 8,000 Notice of Intent to Issue an FPN to date.

d. How many of the of the 2,543 cases where “no one was at home further enforcement action” was taken, how many were referred back to Border Force, and what action was then taken? Could you please provide us with a breakdown of outcomes for those 2,543 cases, and in particular how many cases led to a of then eventually led to the issue of an FPN?

With regards to the 2,543 cases up to 14 February where no further action was taken: 1,124 cases saw officers attend an address to find that nobody with the relevant name as set out on the PLF lived at that address, so no further enforcement action could be taken. 1,419 cases resulted in no answer at all when officers attended an address, with no further enforcement action possible within the 10 day timeframe.

As set out in the answer concerning the NPCC data (Q153ff), decisions on what action should be taken are operational matters for the police to decide

but could include looking at available evidence or making additional visits. If after several visits this has still not been possible, the police will be unable to take further action.

Based on NPCC figures that 5,837 quarantine enforcement took place between 20 December and 14 February, this would suggest approximately 104 visits per day. On 27 January, you told the House that “there will be an increase of about 1,000 targeted follow-up visits a day, and that at a time when numbers are reducing”. Do you still intend to increase follow-up visits to these extent? If so, by when do you intend this target to be reached, and are you satisfied with progress to date?

There is likely to be an increase in response demand on the police across all sectors as lockdown measures are lifted over the coming weeks and the public ventures out of home. In recognition of this, the introduction of “private security” has the potential to add a further layer of checks between the IAC and the police, not only enabling additional compliance checking and prioritisation to take place; but such an approach will ensure only the most worthwhile cases are escalated to the police for enforcement.

The police have already increased their daily referrals and self-isolation enforcement visits to up to 1,000 a day. We are currently developing a model which will enable a contractor to carry out compliance checks on individuals who are quarantining at home, as an intermediate layer, between the IAC and the police. The aim would be to create capacity to ensure that more individuals are visited more frequently. The contractors would be able to refer ‘cases of concern’ to the police to ensure police resources are targeted towards those who are non-compliant. We have recently engaged with the market to procure this service and the tender was launched on 18 March and will be open until 25 March. We expect this to be operational by early April.

In oral evidence, Paul Lincoln told us that there are “about 14,000 or 15,000 people coming into the country on any given day” (Q142). He said that over a third of these were likely to be hauliers.

a. Setting aside the third of this number who are likely to be hauliers how many of the remaining c.10,000 people arriving each day do you estimate to be quarantining at home rather than in hotels?

The biggest proportion of those declaring as exempt on the PLF are hauliers and on any given day since the new MQS regulations were introduced, we estimate that between 20-35% of arrivals have been hauliers, depending on other traffic volumes. As the current number of arrivals is between 14,000-17,000 per day, we estimate that 9,000-11,000 [allowing for 35% of 14,000-17,000 to be exempt] would be in scope for home quarantining. You would also need to subtract those subject to the MQS. The data for MQS will be made available shortly by DHSC.

These are temporary measures that are kept under review and the Government will continue to be guided by the latest scientific evidence.

b. How many of these do you expect to receive a call from the Isolation Assurance Service each day?

Prior to the introduction of MQS, the IAC had been considering the increase to 5,000 new calls per day, but the IAC has now scaled up and currently attempts to contact all arrivals from countries where mandatory quarantine is not required, who are staying in England and NI, are over 18 and not exempt from isolation. As mentioned in answer to Q181 above, for the week ending 01 March, approximately 75% of those who were potentially eligible to be contacted by IAC were successfully contacted.

In response to the developing situation concerning the mutant variants of the virus originating overseas and the extra demands placed upon policing in response to the increasing number of travel bans, earlier this year, the NPCC agreed to increase the number of police activity to 1000 referrals per day.

In recent weeks, with greater numbers of calls from the IAC, the number of cases referred to police forces has risen significantly. In February alone, the number of referrals made to the police rose far in excess of the 1000 daily planned number of checks.

Yours sincerely,



**Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary**