

Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Michael Brodie
Chief Executive
Public Health England
Wellington House
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11 May 2021

Dear Michael

Public Health England advice to the Home Office regarding asylum accommodation at Napier Barracks

You will be aware of the [findings](#) of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration following site visits to Penally Camp and Napier Barracks. In particular, ICIBI key findings state:

In September/October 2020, Public Health England had advised the Home Office that opening multi-occupancy dormitory-style accommodation at Napier was not supported by current guidance, and both they and Public Health Wales expressed concerns about the COVID-safety of the accommodation. Both sites were opened before Public Health Wales and Public Health England recommendations had been actioned.

Public Health England further advised that if the accommodation was to be used, the ability to isolate positive cases and/or establish effective cohorting arrangements was essential to containing any COVID-19 outbreak. Given the cramped communal conditions and unworkable cohorting at Napier, once one person was infected a large-scale outbreak was virtually inevitable. In our resident survey at Napier, none of those who responded felt they had been kept safe from COVID-19. At Penally, where overall numbers were lower and cohorts smaller, the vast majority still did not feel they were being kept safe from the risk of infection.

In light of these statements, and apparent discrepancies between evidence given to the committee and the ICIBI report, I am writing to request that Public Health England provide the committee with the advice, assessments and recommendations that you gave to the Home Office regarding Covid-19 measures and the use of dormitory accommodation at Napier Barracks.

In addition, please confirm specifically

- (i) whether Public Health England had advised the Home Office that opening multi-occupancy dormitory-style accommodation was not supported by current guidance, prior to the opening of Penally Camp and Napier barracks in 2020;
- (ii) if so, on what date that was communicated to the Home Office, and what response was received from the Home Office to that advice;
- (iii) if not, what advice was given by Public Health England to the Home Office on the opening of multi-occupancy dormitory-style accommodation during the pandemic;;
- (iv) when Public Health England was first consulted on the decision to house asylum seekers in Napier barracks and what was your response;
- (v) what access you had to the site in advance of providing your advice; and
- (vi) what response was received from the Home Office to that advice.

Please provide a reply by Monday 24 May.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvette Cooper', written in a cursive style.

Yvette Cooper MP