

Home Affairs Committee
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From the Committee Chair

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
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4 August 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

Home Affairs Committee visit to the Kent Intake Unit

Thank you for your letter of 30 July responding to the concerns raised by the Committee, having witnessed last week the conditions in which asylum seekers are currently held on arrival in Kent.

Your letter gives rise to the following further questions, to which we would appreciate responses.

(1) In the introduction to your letter you state that “the UK has seen an unacceptable rise in the number of people entering the country illegally” yet at the bottom of page 2 of the letter you concede that “you referred to a 24% reduction in the number of asylum claims compared to last year and you are right that intake is down”.

These statements appear contradictory. Please provide further clarification as to how it is possible for the UK to have experienced an overall rise in irregular or clandestine entries when you also agree that intake is significantly down.

(2) You have not provided the requested copy of the Covid-19 risk assessment for the holding facilities at the Kent Intake Unit and Frontier House. Please provide copy of the Mitie Care and Custody risk assessments since March 2020 and the Covid Occupancy Plan, together with the ‘processes and safe systems of work guidance’ which you have advised is in place in respect of operations at Tug Haven.

(3) You have advised that both KIU and Frontier House have a maximum capacity.
(i) What is the maximum capacity in each case?
(ii) Specifically, what is the maximum capacity of the holding room at KIU where we saw 56 people being held for long periods in overcrowded conditions?

(4) On what basis has the maximum capacity for KIU, Frontier House, and specifically for the KIU holding room been determined?

- (i) What welfare considerations have been taken into consideration for children in determining the maximum capacity for the KIU holding room?
 - (ii) Does the designated maximum capacity take account of the length of time people are being held in the room?
 - (iii) Does the designated maximum capacity take into account public health and covid considerations including the lack of ventilation in the holding room?
- (5) How many times per month has the maximum capacity been breached since 1 January 2021 in
- (i) KIU; and
 - (ii) Frontier House?
- (6) How many times per month have there been more than 30 people in the KIU holding room since 1 January 2021?
- (7) Since 1 January 2021, how many people per month have been held in KIU and Frontier House for
- i) between 24 and 48 hours; and
 - ii) more than 48 hours?
- (8) What criteria must be met for the additional capacity at Lunar House, Croydon, and at Gatwick to be activated? On how many days has this additional capacity been activated, per month, since 1 January 2021?
- (9) Your letter states that all arrivals receive a covid test at Tug Haven before being moved to a holding facility. You will be aware that information provided to the Committee by the [ISU](#) indicates that staff are unable to offer food to arrivals until this test had been conducted and that on one occasion a 4 year old boy was denied food for several hours while waiting for a covid test.
- (i) In this context what, if any, maximum waiting time is specified by the Home Office for (a) adult and (b) child arrivals to receive a covid test?
 - (ii) If there is a maximum waiting time, on how many occasions each month has this threshold been breached for (a) adult and (b) child arrivals since 1 January 2021?
 - (iii) What in practice is the longest time an (a) adult and (b) child arrival has had to wait for a covid test at Tug Haven since 1 January?
- (10) Given that the accuracy of lateral flow tests is lower in advance of symptoms developing in an infected person,¹ what risk assessment has been carried out on the possibility of people that might not have been identified during the initial lateral flow test developing covid and becoming infectious during the 48 hours they are being held in confined conditions?
- (11) You have advised that Mitie Care and Custody use PPE, including face coverings, for arriving migrants yet during our visit face masks were not being worn although 56 people were packed into the small holding room.
- (i) Please confirm to us how, and how frequently, compliance with public health measures including the use of PPE, enhanced cleaning and the promotion of handwashing is monitored by the Home Office.

¹ [How reliable are lateral flow covid-19 tests](#), Pharmaceutical Journal 13 May 2021

(ii) What, if any, penalties may be charged to Mitie Care and Custody in the event that its compliance with public health measures at the holding facilities it manages is found insufficient?

(12) You have advised that enhanced cleaning and the promotion of handwashing are implemented by Mitie Care and Custody “on days when higher numbers of people are in the holding rooms”.

(i) What number of people in the holding rooms acts as the threshold for these measures?

(ii) Are the numbers monitored throughout each day, and the enhanced measures implemented at whatever point in the day this threshold is reached?

(iii) If not, what are the procedures in place to give effect to this cleaning protocol?

(13) Your letter does not cover ventilation. Given the public health focus on airborne transmission of covid-19

(i) please can you explain what risk assessment has been done in relation to keeping people in a holding room with no open windows or other external ventilation?

(ii) Please can you tell us what consideration has been given to moving the holding room to a location with better ventilation?

(14) What was the date of the last unannounced visit to these facilities either by Home Office Ministers or senior Home Office staff (including their level of seniority)?

(15) The ISU has raised concern about staffing levels and deployment. What percentage of UKVI staff working on annualised hours contracts and deployed since 1 April 2021 at Tug Haven, Kent Intake Unit and/or Frontier House had worked

(i) their full contracted annual hours

(ii) between 75% and 100% of their contracted annual hours; and

(iii) between 50% and 75% of their contracted annual hours by 31 July?

(16) The information provided to the Committee by the ISU raises further concerns about the protection of both migrants and staff, particularly relating to lack of access to proper food, inadequate sun protection and lack of access to period products for female migrants. We would be grateful if you would provide assurances that these concerns have been addressed; and if you would confirm that meetings have taken place between the ISU and Home Office Ministers to explore the concerns of front line Home Office staff who, as you have noted, are working in very difficult circumstances.

Please respond by 23 August 2021.

Yours sincerely



Yvette Cooper MP