

Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAP)

**“Keep talking, stay safe”
A rapid review of prisoners’ experience under Covid-19**

1 June 2020

About the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

The Ministerial Council on Deaths in Custody formally commenced operation on 1 April 2009 and is jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Health and the Home Office. The Council consists of three tiers:

- Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody
- Independent Advisory Panel (IAP)
- Practitioner and Stakeholder Group

The remit of the IAP (and overall of the Council) covers deaths, natural and self-inflicted, which occur in prisons, in or following police custody, immigration detention, the deaths of residents of approved premises and the deaths of those detained under the Mental Health Act (MHA) in hospital. The principles and lessons learned as part of this work also apply to the deaths of those detained under the Mental Capacity Act in hospital.

The role of the IAP, an arms-length body, is to provide independent advice and expertise to Ministers, senior officials and the Ministerial Board. It provides guidance on policy and best practice across sectors and makes recommendations to Ministers and operational services. It assists Ministers to meet their human rights obligations to protect life. The IAP's aim is to bring about a continuing and sustained reduction in the number and rate of deaths in all forms of state custody in England and Wales.

Juliet Lyon CBE chairs the IAP. The other members are:

- John Wadham, Chair, National Preventative Mechanism
- Jenny Talbot OBE, Prison Reform Trust
- Professor Jenny Shaw, professor of Forensic Psychiatry, University of Manchester
- Professor Seena Fazel, professor of Forensic Psychiatry, University of Oxford
- Deborah Coles, Director, INQUEST

Further information on the IAP can be found on its website:

<https://www.iapondeathsincustody.org/>

For more information on this paper – or on the IAP more generally - please contact: Piers Barber, Head of Secretariat (Piers.barber1@justice.gov.uk).

“Keep talking, stay safe”

A rapid review of prisoners’ experience under Covid-19

1. While Covid-19 and the experience of lockdown has brought everyone closer to understanding the privations of loss of liberty, people in custody report on being in prison within a prison. A period of increased isolation and dependence has been mitigated for some people and in some measure by good communication, sound professional relations with staff, routines and small acts of kindness. It has been exacerbated for others by uncertainty and fear, bleak conditions and poor treatment.
2. Government carries the burden of responsibility for the safety of the nation. Within their overall areas of accountability, Ministers have a distinct and fundamental duty to protect the lives of people detained in state custody. The role of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAP) is to try to enable Ministers and officials to meet their human rights obligations, prevent deaths and keep prisoners and detainees safe.
3. In line with our guiding principle to consult people in custody and their families wherever possible, the IAP has worked with National Prison Radio (NPR) to conduct a rapid review of prisoners’ experience under Covid-19. During these unprecedented times, and when independent monitoring is much reduced, it is ever more important to hear about, and to learn from, the experiences of people in custody. What prisoners have to say now will help in managing both the current situation and its aftermath.
4. Altogether, and allowing for repeat calls, the IAP has reviewed messages from around 200 prisoners, including 19 women, across 55 prisons – just under half the prison estate. Our focus is on what active steps are being, and can be taken, to protect life.
5. The findings will be presented in two parts:
 - Part one (this briefing) presents immediate findings and outline recommendations.
 - Part two (to follow in June) will present the outcomes of a further IAP consultation with prisoners, facilitated by National Prison Radio. This second briefing will provide a more in-depth analysis and will reflect national and international standards and expectations, as well as drawing on contact with prisoners’ families and our partnership with Inside Time, the prisoners’ newspaper. Our recommendations will focus on medium- to longer-term planning to keep people safe.
6. Five themes emerge from this rapid review:
 - Importance of clear, accurate information and good honest communication;
 - Staff attitudes and approaches and continuing need for independent scrutiny;
 - Cleanliness, decency and variation in regimes;
 - Mental health, wellbeing and vulnerability; and
 - Family contact, loss and bereavement.

7. Based on this review, the IAP makes the following ten recommendations:
- **Ensure that people are given clear, accurate and up to date information in accessible forms that all prisoners understand, and that this is ongoing.** A consistent approach should be taken and commitments given, whether by Ministers or prison officers, should be honoured. If any changes need to be made, they should be accompanied by clear explanations.
 - **Streamline and expedite the early release scheme to create the headroom needed to take active steps to protect life.** Given numbers of medically vulnerable people who need to be shielded, overhaul the process of release on compassionate grounds and review and halt the misuse of prison custody as a place of safety.
 - **Build on the success of the keyworker scheme to keep people safe.** Maintain prisoner:keyworker ratios of 6:1 and preserve time for one-to-one meetings. Prisoners need key people who they can turn to and trust. Staff need to know their prisoners. Good professional relationships and mutual respect between staff and prisoners protects lives.
 - **Improve support systems for staff, introduce regular, professional supervision and properly embed the lessons learned from independent scrutiny.** An effective complaints system, investigation and disciplinary process must remain in place. Together this would reinforce positive approaches, call into question negative attitudes and deal with poor or abusive treatment.
 - **Protect prisoners and staff.** Ensure that there is a proper supply of PPE for prison staff, environments are clean and that prisoners are supplied with PPE during essential work, hospital visits etc. Improve hygiene with sufficient cleaning materials to keep cells and wings clean, and soap/hand sanitiser for prisoners.
 - **Meet basic needs**, including: exercise and time in the fresh air; nutritious food; clean clothes and a range of in-cell activities to accommodate differing abilities, in a consistent manner across the prison estate.
 - **Increase prisoner engagement and peer support.** People want to be listened to and involved. Work with the Samaritans to expand the Listener scheme, use innovative means of communication and establish Listeners as essential workers in all establishments.
 - **Maintain safer custody as a priority, respond to mental health and wellbeing needs and support people who are particularly vulnerable** (such as those with autism and/or learning disabilities/difficulties, people who are mentally ill and those with dementia).
 - **Improve family contact.** Extend scope and credit for phone, video and email with family and friends and official prison visitors. Ensure family helplines are working properly across the prison estate.
 - **Introduce bereavement support and counselling for prisoners and staff.** Loved ones have died through Covid-19. Untimely loss and bereavement already characterises the lives of many people in prison.

Partnership with National Prison Radio

8. Our partnership with National Prison Radio (NPR) has enabled the IAP to review 223 phone messages recorded and received between 18 March and 5 May 2020. This time spans from the start of lockdown through to indications from government that some restrictions in the community could be eased. On Prison Radio this period included a two week focus on #HiddenHeroes, a campaign to recognise those working in prisons, and time preceding and following broadcast interviews with, amongst others:
 - Dr Jo Farrar, CEO of the prison and probation service, giving a message of encouragement and an information update;
 - Juliet Lyon, chair of the IAP, asking people to say what is helping, and what hindering, their coping in custody during this pandemic; and
 - most recently, Robert Buckland QC, MP, the Lord Chancellor, speaking on behalf of Government, providing information and answering questions from prisoners.
9. All Prison Radio messages that relate to experience of imprisonment during the pandemic have been forwarded to the IAP. They have been anonymised and selected by NPR transcribers. Where safety concerns have been raised NPR has taken action and notified officials under its safeguarding policy.
10. Throughout this rapid review, the IAP has been struck by the important role NPR plays in so many prisoners' lives, ranging from urgent messages to entertaining to comforting, receiving and giving information, and providing a place to give thanks, voice fears and lay down challenges:

'Just to say in case anything happens. I've reported feeling feverish, my head is boiling but I'm cold. I've got cold air sensation in my nostril, I've got aches up my spine into my neck and skull. I reported this to an SO at 11:45AM, asked to see a nurse, also reported at 6pm, no healthcare come to see me. I'm breathless. Leaving this message just in case something happens.'

'Just an update to tell you how great you're doing on NPR. You've been a life saver for me.'

'Thank you to NPR as well for getting us through this - we listen to you all the time.'

'And thank you for all you're doing keeping the music on and giving us hope that we're going to come to a good end with this.'

'I listen to NPR everyday, all the time, big up NPR, keep the tunes coming... Nuff love boys, keep the beltors coming.'

'I know you're the best source to help me keep my head straight.'

'I've heard from mates in other prisons that more people in prisons are getting it and dying from it. So it's messed up. But thank you for listening to my message. God bless you.'

'There's whistle blowers in here saying I'm calling NPR but I don't care, I've been in prison long enough to know we need changes soon.'

Importance of clear, accurate information and good, honest communication

'Everyone's frustrated. We're behind these doors, we don't know what's going on. We've stopped having updates now. I used to get updates every 2 days or so explaining what's going to happen. We're just frustrated because we don't know anything.'

11. The importance of providing clear, accurate information stood out from prisoners' messages. Knowing what was happening in their establishment, across the prison estate and in the wider world was important. Questions from prisoners ranged from the general – 'what is going on?' – to the specific, for example concerning the situation for individuals on remand or immigration hold.
12. Prisoners due for release were concerned about dealing with Covid-19 and about fellow prisoners at particular risk, with some asking why they had not been released. There appeared to some to be a void between what was being said about prisons and what was being done in them. For a number, expectations about early release had been raised then hopes dashed. There was also fear: Covid-19 was, and remains, a threat, both to family and friends on the outside and to prisoners themselves.
13. Timely and accessible information, produced and presented in a range of forms, from detailed explanations and translated versions to easy read and word of mouth, is of the greatest importance in helping prisoners to understand and to cope with life in prison in these unprecedented times – specifically the privations of 23 hour lock up, and all that that entails.

'Hi NPR, what's happening we need to know. Are they locking us down? We will riot. If they stop us from going out, we will riot. We've got two years left, we either need to be immediately released or we will jump out the windows in our cells. I've got an out visit Saturday and they're gonna lock us down Friday. Please please let us know what's happening.'

'What are they going to do with remanded prisoners who've obviously got custody time limit? They're saying it's going to be at the end of April but we all know that's not going to happen and then there will be a back log, so what's going to happen when we all hit our custody time limit? Please let me know thank you man.'

'Can I get some clarification because in my prison they've been doing sentences via video link but I've been here 5 months now on judge's remand so I want to know what's happening.'

'Hello, calling from HMP xxxx. I just want to know what's going on with this virus. I'm on immigration hold and I don't know what this means, they've put my release date for two dates and I don't know what's going to happen with me. So please tell us on NPR what's going to happen to prisoners on immigration hold and have to go home.'

'Tell me when my release date is supposed to be. It was supposed to be yesterday and they're just keeping the door locked. I can't phone home. I can't speak to my solicitor nor my probation.'

'I would like to ask if there is any chance of asking questions about the Coronavirus as I am being released in 35 days with no license sentence. I've got no housing in place, no benefits, and I've got nowhere to go. I've got no healthcare place. And this coronavirus thing is getting more and more lock down and transfers to other place, I don't know what to do. I've been

trying to ask prison staff but they don't even know. Is there any chance National Prison Radio can help us? Thank you.'

Recommendation 1: Ensure that people are given clear, accurate and up to date information in accessible forms that all prisoners understand, and that this is ongoing. A consistent approach should be taken and commitments given, whether by Ministers or prison officers, should be honoured. If any changes need to be made, they should be accompanied by clear, publicly available explanations.

14. Confusion was noticeably increased by high profile Government announcements which led people to believe that thousands of prisoners would be released early. On 23rd March the Prisons Minister announced that pregnant women and mothers and babies, as well as medically vulnerable people who met requirements for shielding, would be considered for temporary release. As of 26 May, just 22 of the 70 women thought to be eligible and seven of the up to 1,500 most vulnerable people have been released.
15. On 4th April the Lord Chancellor announced the End of Custody Temporary Release scheme (ECTR) to create the headroom needed in overcrowded establishments on medical scientific advice to operate a compartmentalisation strategy. This would mean that new arrivals could be put in quarantine, people with the virus could be isolated and those most vulnerable could be safely shielded. To date of the 4,000 people who were at first thought to be eligible, just 79 have been released. Eligibility criteria and the convoluted process of early release are mired in complexity and risk aversion. The schemes are hard to understand, difficult to explain and close to impossible to deliver, even for a disciplined service like HMPPS. Extension of the tried and tested Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme has failed to materialise. Meanwhile, as of Tuesday 27 May, 452 prisoners across 77 prisons and 897 staff across 105 prisons have tested positive for Covid-19.

'...no sign of early release, no staff have any clue if it's even true but it's on the news. Prisoners feel like they're sentenced to death sentence if it spreads and it's on several wings.'

'The situation is that we are on lockdown. It started from the 24th. It's saying it's going to last up and till three weeks but we don't actually know if it's going to continue. In regards to pregnant prisoners they're looking at it but as of yet they haven't got back to me. I think it will take a couple of weeks. So to all the pregnant prisoners hold tight. You'll soon be out.'

'You see they are letting out 4.000 prisoners with less than two months left - I'm alright to say that they are letting out people who are eligible for HDC at that time and they're trying to make it sound like that they are trying to help people out. When they are just really sorting out what they were supposed to sort out in the first place. Because from my experience people don't get their HDC when they meet it and when it's due. If you get what I'm saying so I feel that they are just doing what they were supposed to do anyway.'

'I wanna get a message to ask the Justice Minister and ask why they're not letting people out who are years and years over tariff.'

'I'm a high risk prisoner, high risk to the public. My FED is in July so that's my full sentence expired. I'm recall for a driving offence, I would have served 3 years for that offence in July. I'd like to know because I'm going to be released in July with no conditions, when I get to the 2 month period will I be released because of COVID-19 and on tag? Because I don't know what's going on. I don't understand releasing me with no conditions in 3 months, what's the difference in releasing me in 2 months with conditions?'

'I'm due to be released on the 12th June, will I get released earlier because I have a heart condition and COPD and I'm very vulnerable? With this CRC, they sent an email to the governor to see if I was eligible for HDC but can you find out for me.'

'I have a few questions for Justice Secretary. We understand there was a proposal for the government to release 4000 prisoners in this pandemic, we heard again that plan was suspended due to certain prisons making mistakes releasing some prisoners which has nothing to do with other prisoners. Why is this plan suspended just because certain prisons made a mistake? I understand those prisoners have returned back to prison. Second thing, we know there are prisoners who have different underlying medical conditions that are quite vulnerable to Covid19 and these people are high risk. The government need to give those prisoners some kind of temporary release during this pandemic just like other countries...My third question is in regarding to testing, we understand that there are tests available at care homes etc in the communities but there's no plans of testing for prisoners. There's lots of prisoners dying and have corona but there is no plan for testing for prisoners. Government has completely forgotten about prisoners, we are still human beings...They need to release vulnerable prisoners for example diabetics and asthmatics. Some kind of temporary release during this pandemic so the pressure can be less. Thank you.'

Recommendation 2: Streamline and expedite the early release scheme to create the headroom needed to take active steps to protect life. Given the numbers of medically vulnerable people who need to be shielded, overhaul the process of release on compassionate grounds and review and halt the misuse of prison custody as a place of safety.

Staff attitudes and approaches and the continuing need for independent scrutiny

'...it doesn't get recognised within the community. I clap on a Thursday for the NHS but also for us prisoners too, governors, healthcare staff, everybody that's working to help us prisoners get through this by being patient. So just listen out, staff that's around on a Thursday night, listen to the claps, keep up the good work, big respect to you keyworkers coming in to make sure we are safe and being away from loved ones. Be safe and thank you.'

16. The response to #HiddenHeroes campaign shows without doubt the extent of dedicated care and support that prison officers, members of the chaplaincy, NHS staff and prisoners are giving one another. Appreciation of work being done to keep people safe reinforces the keyworker approach and the importance of forming and maintaining good professional relationships.
17. Feedback from prisoners prior to this campaign is also heart-warming and worthy of note. It stands in stark contrast to the meanness and casual brutality referred to by a few prisoners as they describe treatment at the hands of certain prison officers. Staff have a duty to hold prisoners humanely and to treat them with decency and respect. Support and supervision of prison staff is fundamental in ensuring positive attitudes and approaches – everyone is worried about, and often scared of, Covid-19, and many staff are working above and beyond what would be considered normal duties. Clear and purposeful leadership by prison governors and overall by HMPPS, is vital.

'It's mad. It's mad what's going on in the world. They've got families, they're so compassionate to us. I just wanted to say a big thank you from all of the boys to the staff.'

'I'd like to thank all the staff, chaplaincy, Junction 42 and healthcare especially xxxx off houseblock 7 for bravely coming to work when he's not long had a child of his own, showing amazing support. God bless the prison service, thanks.'

'I'd just like to say thanks to all the staff and all the medical staff for coming in and looking after us. They're coming in, they've got their own families, they've got no protection, they don't have to do it but they do.'

'Massive respect for all of them, I dunno why they do what they do, I just hope they get something back from the work they're doing. It takes a strong type of person to do what they're doing. Beacons of light in the darkness for many people in prison. I just hope they get something liberating from their work. They're brilliant people, massive massive respect'

A big big thanks xxxx xxxx for just going the extra mile to help me, with things that aren't a part of their everyday job, especially in this time when there's less guards. They've just made my stay here feel much better, I feel very lucky, thank you very much. (Young offender)

I just wanna say thank you to all the NHS staff, they've previously saved my life before this pandemic and now they're doing it again, risking their own lives with not so much PPE but they're still coming out of retirement and putting their lives and their families lives at risks and every Thursday we're all banging our cells for you. So thank you.'

18. People appreciated the particular things that staff were doing:

'... keeping us safe day in, day out, coming into work as keyworkers and making sure we get out of our cells for daily exercise and a shower'

'... I mention these officers in particular because they're the ones that treat us as equal and with respect and we appreciate that'

'...using our first names which makes us feel cared for whilst inside.'

'...support for keeping us in routine. If they weren't doing their work it would have been worse.'

'...making sure we've still got our meds and that going.'

'...all their help with me being out of hospital for a week and the hard job they're up against at the minute but they were there with full support.'

'Thank you to all the guards on B wing, they've been absolutely fantastic, it's my first time in prison and I was a bit wary about the experience, but they've all helped me feel better than I did on the outside actually. They've responded to everything as fast as possible. I've had a few issues which they've sorted out for me straightaway, which is very kind and I'd like to say thank you very much.'

'I'd like to put a message of support for all the chaplaincy team. They're working really hard to bring people the books with all the services on and all the people who have different faiths.'

'...big up all the education staff. These people are committed to the job that they do and they're really helping us.'

'The staff in the segregation unit are brilliant. They have to fight day in and day out with the idiots down here but with the coronavirus they're going out of their way to help. Massive respect to all of them. The staff are absolutely phenomenal.'

'I'd also like to give a big shoutout to my padmate xxxx for supporting me through this hard time.'

'And the Governor, he's see the good in people. He saw the good in me. Anyway, long story short, that's all I wanna say.'

19. Some prisoners left messages about public services, recognition of prison staff and mainstream media:

'Shoutout to everybody who is still having to go to work, prison staff, nurses, doctors, paramedics, police, as much as I don't like police, but yeah. Keep your chin up, we'll get through it.'

'Big shoutout to all the staff here for their amazing work they're doing both NHS and disciplinary. It's a shame that this isn't being voiced on the mainstream headlines. They're doing just as good a job as mainstream workers.'

'I'd like to praise all the NHS staff out there looking after all the old people and that and people with Coronavirus I take my hat off to them and I wish them all the best. I'd like to give that old man who's walked around his garden I'd like to praise him at the age of 100, he's class.'

'Thank you to all the NHS and medical staff helping us during this time, all over the world. I feel sad that thousands of people have lost their lives. It would also be nice if the news let us know how many people have recovered so that people's spirits will be lifted.'

Recommendation 3: Build on the success of the keyworker scheme to keep people safe. Maintain prisoner:keyworker ratios of 6:1 and preserve time for one-to-one meetings. Prisoners need key people who they can turn to and trust. Staff need to know their prisoners. Good professional relationships and mutual respect between staff and prisoners protects lives.

20. Alongside widescale appreciation of what staff are doing to keep people safe, some complaints were raised about poor treatment by some staff:

'A lot of officers are doing a great job which I can't stress enough and NHS staff coming in to look after us but lots of staff are getting their own back because they've got to come in, and it's not my fault and I'm being spoken to like shit. We're getting the full front of it. I thank the staff every morning who are coming in to look after us but some staff just, I've been telling them something simple like getting phone numbers on my pin but then I get a bollocking for telling multiple staff. We're getting conflicting stuff.'

'Just to tell you I've come down with the corona virus, I'm not being treated very well in here, just on lockdown. They're not giving us the chance to see any nurses or given any medication. It's a proper disgrace. I've had a proper fever like shaking, lying in bed sweating, proper sore throat and a banging headache. It's appalling the way the staff are dealing with it. You don't get to see a doctor or anything.'

'Certain staff keep bullying me, they always keep leaving me to last, it's not right and they won't give me no stuff to clean my cell. I've had the same trousers on for three weeks. It's a repulsive joke.'

'Just an update about the Coronavirus. I'm not starving today. Thanks to all the lads helping out and keeping it safe for us. Some lads have been giving us more food which is good but officers don't want to give it. So thanks lads you know who you are.'

'Just to let you know all the girls in isolation in xxx are being treated like dogs, the food's been kicked through the door.'

'The Key Worker scheme, I've never met mine and I've been here for 7 months.'

'Just an update on what's going on in here. We just had dinner which was nice for once. There's still a lot of attitude with the staff. I understand they're under pressure but you know. I shouted out my door instead of using my bell, which they moan about. I said "is there any bread?". They said "stop shouting out your door". They don't need to be like that. They can just say "there isn't any bread" or "some bread is coming around in a minute". This is the kind of attitude we are getting. It's like it's our fault that they have to come in.'

21. Two messages from prisoners underscored the continuing need for independent scrutiny and proper, timely investigations of poor treatment and allegations of abuse:

'No one knows what's going on in here and you should have a line where you can report what's going on inside, not only for Hidden Heroes, I nominate one Hidden Hero already. This morning I think I need to speak about what's going on inside prison.

There is no social distancing going on from staff. This is in Kent where there are over 2000 case of Coronavirus. Staff do not distance themselves, staff do not take that measure in this prison. Whenever I talk to staff about this measure they say oh Mr A do you want to be locked behind your door then. Yeh I find it so odd to believe because what I'm listening on the prison radio is complete different to what I see going on in the prison. I'm in prison and I see bullying going on and I get beaten up by prison staff when I do nothing. I would like the government to make a place where prisoners can report stuff like this because it troubles my mental health and I don't know when they're going to come in and do what they done to me already. They already beat me up and left me on crutches. They talk about violent prisoners, it's the prison staff that is more violent than the prisoners. They cause the violence. I say to him I will call the radio station. This is the type of bullying going on in prison. These things are supposed to be stopped. We're all human. This is what the MOJ need to get out of prison and the staff that bully out of prison and then they will get violence out of prison. The governors are not gonna report their staff. Some of these prison officers think they're above the law. The prison officers broke my spine for no reason. Those things need to stop and then we can get a better prison God bless you all.'

'For the last three months I've been in self restricted isolation because I'm scared to go out on the wing because there's a lot of fights and stuff you know there's quite an ominous presence of gangs and that. They haven't been getting me out to go and shower, I haven't got the right kit. I haven't changed my socks in three weeks, I smell. I've been asking for nicotine patches for the last three days to keep my stress levels down. I've got ADHD and I've been really depressed. I've rung the bell yesterday. I've self-harmed quite a lot, my arms covered in cuts. I haven't been given the right support inside jail, i haven't been given a key support worker. Eventually I lost control, I smashed my cell up, all the time I was asking for patches. They've taken all my possessions, they've slapped me round the face stating that there won't be any witnesses. One punched me in the ribs and the SO kneed me above the knee. I've said something on this because I've got no one else to talk to, obviously you can't ring the police in here. I've not been violent with them. I don't have the right support. I was calling them names and shouting but it's no excuse for physical violence.'

Recommendation 4: Improve support systems for staff, introduce regular, professional supervision and properly embed the lessons learned from independent scrutiny. An effective complaints system, investigation and disciplinary process must remain in place. Together this would reinforce positive approaches, call into question negative attitudes and deal with poor or abusive treatment.

Cleanliness and decency and variation in regimes

'I spoke to a new prisoner who has been on the same wing as the prisoners in isolation. Corona takes two weeks to show up so leaving them in isolation for two weeks with prisoners with the infection. People are in isolation but the same staff rotate round the whole prison touching everyone's handles, buzzers, paperwork, door - fast way to kill all the prisoners.'

22. Prisoners were keenly aware that, in the absence of PPE, especially for staff, the risks of spreading the virus were heightened. Social distancing was hard to practice. Some wings and cells were not being cleaned. In some prisons, there was no hand sanitiser, no clean clothes and, for some, no toilet paper.
23. Most messages were critical and highlighted failures to adhere to government guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus:

'Everyone's going through this, the full world. Why are prison officers dictating us to stay two metres apart and social distancing? I'm here for it because I don't wanna catch it but prison officers standing together 4 in a group.'

'Staff not taking precautions to minimize the spread, crowding inmates, for example not wearing gloves, doing cell checks with two or more officers while prisoners are in the cells which is against the two metre rules. You get 15 mins a day out the cells, not able to use the kiosk to top up credit. They're not cleaning the wings with the proper stuff, cleaners aren't allowed in to clean regularly.'

'Things are bad in here, we have no toilet roll, no hand sanitiser, we've been locked down 23 hours. They're given us frozen food, frozen sandwiches been in the freezer for months.'

'I want to know why prison officers aren't wearing gloves, face masks and protection gear? How can we practice safeguarding/safe distancing if we are being put in the shower with four men and locked in there, only an arms distance away?'

'Just an update on what's happening here during this corona. We've had a meal, a supposedly hearty meal. We had two sausages and some rice, plus two slices of bread. The staff aren't wearing gloves, I don't know why.'

'Kit change - this is the 1st kit change since being here, meant to be one for one. Was only allowed one sheet, I can't change the others as I wasn't allowed them. I know there's limited stock but we need facilities to keep people clean. This is a pandemic we need to be kept clean, things are meant to be happening in here same as out there.'

'I would like to put this to the Home Secretary. I would like to know why prisoners are not protected from prison officers when there are people who have covid19 who aren't showing symptoms. Why does the government just leave prison like that and not doing anything to protect us? Why can't the officers get masks when they're sharing the food? Is that right? We are human beings, why are we not protected from this disease that is so dangerous? I don't want to take meals from them. I'm scared of catching this virus.'

24. There were a few positive messages:

'Thank you to the prison officers who are coming in and keeping everything clean, really appreciate it.'

'This is for all the Scouser food servers in the induction wing for all their support and that's because they all wear masks and gloves right from the very beginning before they even had to and they kept their distance out of respect. That's from a Salford lad. Thank you so much.'

Recommendation 5: Protect prisoners and staff. Ensure that there is a proper supply of PPE for prison staff, environments are clean and that prisoners are supplied with PPE during essential work, hospital visits etc. Improve hygiene with sufficient cleaning materials to keep cells and wings clean, and soap/hand sanitiser for prisoners.

25. Regimes are meagre across the prison estate. But it was the variation between regimes, if only a matter of precious minutes in the fresh air, that raised questions of fairness and legitimacy.

'The COVID 19 virus has us banged up 23 hours a day. There's no food, no nothing. No extra perks. What do you want us to do? Our minds are going to go and they'll have a riot on their hands. They need to sort something out.'

'All on lockdown, 20 mins exercise every day, showers every other day, just please play some music for us, also we don't get no extra tv channels.'

'On H wing at the moment we are getting 10 minutes of exercise a day. A shower every other day. The tv system goes off 20 times a day. When we've asked for more channels they says there's no national contract.'

'I'd like NPR to ask government officials how long prisoners are being let out of their cells for because here we are only let out 15 minutes per day. This means we're banged up for 23 hours and 45 minutes. We also haven't been issued with any form of hand sanitizers since this coronavirus outbreak. Thanks a lot I hope this message is put forward. We're treated like dogs and animals. We're isolated in cells, it's inhumane.'

26. In contrast:

'The staff are doing a great job, they're fully supporting us giving us extra TV channels, making sure we're socially distancing, giving us extra food packs.'

'I just wanna say a big thanks to all the staff who is working here and making sure that we're still getting out of our cells on time and having time out on the exercise yard and out in the kiosks. It's good that we're still doing that instead of being locked away.'

'The situation here isn't too bad. They let us out for showers and exercise but it's not consistent. They've been adding the weekly £5 to our pins. That's it really. We're hanging in there. Someone did die the other week on house block 4. They're saying he died from coronavirus but they don't know because he was old. They're trying to keep it on the hush hush.'

Recommendation 6: Meet basic needs, including: exercise and time in the fresh air; nutritious food; clean clothes and a range of in-cell activities to accommodate differing abilities, in a consistent manner across the prison estate.

Mental health, wellbeing and vulnerability

'But for these people on D wing the staff are like - they know my heads fallen off so many times. I've tried to kill myself. I've tried to do so many crazy things to myself and I just appreciate the way the staff just keep picking me up. Just keep bringing me back and keeping me focused.'

27. Being locked down for 23 hours out of 24, either in isolation or with a fellow prisoner, with little opportunity for exercise, showers, fresh laundry and telephone contact with family members and nothing to do is, not surprisingly, having a negative impact on many prisoners' mental health and wellbeing. Prisoners described going through 'a rough time', of self-harming due to stress and fear that the virus will spread.

28. There were people who felt well supported and part of a community – all in this together:

'What is it that NHS staff say "keep talking stay safe." Just stay safe innit.'

'We need to stand shoulder to shoulder and show this virus it's not welcome in our world.'

'I am getting the treatments I need to be getting even though I am still locked up... SOS team that have helped me get through my problems. SOS have been getting my point across without violence.'

'My hidden hero in this prison has to be the Safer Custody team. They've supported me through so much with the coronavirus and the lockdown and the amount of pressure and strain that they're under, they still manage to come and see me to check that I'm okay. Also my Hidden Hero is SO xxxx has helped me massively and he can see when I'm struggling even from behind my door and he will take the time to talk to me, calm me down and stop me from self-harming.'

'Rock show I'd like to give a huge shout out to all those in the prison system with mental health problems at the minute. It may be tough being stuck behind your doors but we can all get through it. I'm enjoying listening to the rock show and I hope everybody in the rock show family is alright and enjoying the music.'

29. Some responses mentioned the vital work of Samaritan listeners. The IAP understands that whether Listeners are able to do their important work in prisons is very dependent on how restrictive the prison regime is, which differs across the country.

'.. the number one Listener of the jail also the most trusted prisoner in the whole jail. He's really been there for me ever since I started in this jail. I ring for a Listener at the end of the night and he's there for me.'

Recommendation 7: Increase prisoner engagement and peer support. People want to be listened to and involved. Work with the Samaritans to expand the Listener scheme, use innovative means of communication and establish Listeners as essential workers in all establishments.

30. For some the strain was telling and support lacking:

'I'm going through a bit of a rough time right now and I need your editor to get in touch with Miss W or Miss C and get them to come and see me. I'm not in a very good place right now, mentally or healthwise. I feel that they're taking the piss and I feel myself coming to a level'

where I'm going to hurt somebody and I don't wanna do that. I know you're the best source to help me keep my head straight. I've got to go now but if you could get the message to one of the governors as soon as possible please. Thank you bye.'

'I'm sure there is a lot of prisoners suffering from severe anxiety, isolating in their cells not knowing when they're going to be unlocked.'

'Nothing handed to clean our cells or any activities to keep us occupied. People getting distressed, mental health is being affected and no support to help with this. I want to get my message across.'

'All the double cells have pad mates to talk to. They've got activities to do like playing chess. All single cells get nothing. I'm talking to walls at the moment which is affecting my mental health. We're in desperate need for some stimulation for our brains.'

'The governor says that we're working as a community, that's not right at all. We're not getting listened to at all. When we try to raise our opinions, the staff aren't listening, they just avoid us or tell us to shut up. When people are needing to see the nurse we're not getting seen to. There's a lot of people in here struggling with their mental health, staff aren't listening. What's it going to take? For people to start committing suicide, to start self-harming, it's absolutely disgraceful. They say we can go out for 20 minutes exercise and even when we keep distances, we still get officers shouting at us to move more about...a lot of people's mental health is declining and something needs to be done sooner rather than later.'

'This jail is pathetic. They moved me to G5 which is the corona wing because I had stomach cramps and headaches. They said I have symptoms of COVID. I've been here 3 days and I haven't been able to have a shower for 4 days. My emergency bell has been on and it's been over an hour and no one has come. The way people are being treated in this jail is vile. It's not acceptable. Bear in mind I have no symptoms of COVID. I've spoken to family and friends for advice. I've spoken to officers regarding health care. I'm asthmatic and they have me in the corona wing when they say I'm high risk. When they moved me onto the wing, the officers were wearing gloves and masks but I wasn't provided with anything. I could have caught corona. It's completely unacceptable. I'm going to make this public and national. A lot of prisoners are not being noticed during this hard time. I have three young children that are concerned for my health. I've been provided with credit which is a little bit reassuring but besides that, it is horrible. I won't be able to shower for another 5 more days. Other people are suffering too.'

Recommendation 8: Maintain safer custody as a priority, respond to mental health and wellbeing needs and support people who are particularly vulnerable (such as those with autism and/or learning disabilities/difficulties, people who are mentally ill and those with dementia).

Contact with friends and family

'Letting you know what's happening at 6:39 this morning. I'd like to thank the NHS for everything they've done. It was really moving last night, everyone was banging on the doors and the windows. We do realise what they've done. Coming in to give us medicine and methadone. I always say thank you to them in the morning. I do realise most staff are doing an awesome job, thank you for everyone for what they've done. People think we're scumbags but we're not. We are humans who have families so we do appreciate the NHS. Hope everyone is ok, my family is ok, everyone get through this.'

31. At times of heightened anxiety, contact with family and friends is ever more important. Knowing that their family was safe and well mattered. Some people had sought advice and information from family members about Covid-19:

'Thank you to all the staff and nurses working on houseblock 3, thank you for the support on bang up and giving us private cash £5 so we can keep in touch with families.'

'...the governor here who's doing their best to keep everyone occupied, keep family ties and that.'

'I'd like to say thank you to all my friends and family supporting me outside in these hard times. I hope they're all keeping well.'

32. Some prisoners were finding it hard to stay in touch:

'This has taken me 5 days to get a phone to phone family and friends, they wouldn't let me out to use the phone. I want to tell people what we're going through.'

'...and why at HMP xxx there are 36 men sharing one phone. Can you please get that message to the Justice Minister on National Prison Radio, thank you.'

'This is taking its toll because I don't know what's going on with my family out there.'

Recommendation 9: Improve family contact. Extend scope and credit for phone, video and email with family and friends and official prison visitors. Ensure family helplines are working properly across the prison estate.

33. Some people were having to cope with loss and bereavement:

'I would like to thank the staff on B wing for helping me through the death of my Mum on 20th March and for all the boys on B wing for their support.'

'I'd like to give support to all the staff on G Wing, vulnerable peoples wing. For all their help and love. I've lost me mum, I've lost me family, I've not nothing left. I'm sorry for all the heartache I've caused them and for all the language I've used towards them, I'm not proud of it. I'm not a bad person, I want to say sorry. I would like her to realise I am deeply sorry.'

'Please try play less news things to panic us and more friendly music. Lots of lockdown because no staff as they're off due to corona. Please play this song because it means a lot, I've lost a lot of family members.'

Recommendation 10: Introduce bereavement support and counselling for prisoners and staff. Loved ones have died through Covid-19. Untimely loss and bereavement already characterises the lives of many people in prison.

34. Risks remain – from the spread of the virus to an upsurge in prison numbers; from growing instability to a rise in suicide and self-harm. As prisons emerge painstakingly from total lockdown under Covid-19, it is important to take account of these clear Prison Radio messages from people who are in prison within a prison. Their experiences, and the IAP recommendations based on them, provide a foundation stone for a revised prison system where lives are protected and people kept safe.