



Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

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Kit Malthouse MP
Minister of State for Crime and Policing
Home Office and Ministry of Justice

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Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody to draw your attention to the way in which effective work between police, courts and health services can significantly reduce the risk of deaths in prison custody. When your pressed diary allows, may I ask for a meeting to discuss response to mental health need and substance misuse; increased use of community sentences with treatment requirements (CSTRs); street triage; and the development of liaison and diversion services in police stations and courts across the country.

As a vital measure to reduce the number of vulnerable people being received into prison custody and consequent risk of suicide and self-harm, the IAP has a keen interest in improving the use of CSTRs. We have been working with the Magistrates Association to do so. Having conducted a survey of mental health champions and bench chairs (see attached articles), we are now working together with the probation service on improving information provision and pre-sentence reports for magistrates. We are also submitting survey findings and recommendations to inform Ministry of Justice sentencing reform.

The next step, for which we would welcome your support, is to engage with police chiefs and police and crime commissioners across the 43 forces as well as the College of Policing. The IAP is keen to identify and promote best practice in liaison and diversion, street triage and partnership work between local police and health services, developed to make sure that people receive the treatment they need to improve health and reduce crime. I was pleased last Autumn to have the honour of presenting the Police Federation prize for one such scheme.

Overall, the increasing number of incidents that the police are dealing with that involve people experiencing a mental health episode, or acute behavioural disturbance (ABD), rather than criminal activity requires a more integrated approach. The IAP is concerned that the police are being asked to undertake tasks better suited to mental

health or social care professionals, and which could put both the police and such individuals at greater risk of harm. The recent IOPC report notes that ten of the sixteen people who died in police custody in 2018/19 were identified as having a mental health condition and thirteen of the sixteen had a link to alcohol or drug misuse. We would like to know your thoughts on how the increase in police officers will be managed alongside this greater demand on mental health, treatment and care facilities.

The IAP welcomes the commitment you made during the July meeting of the Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody to make sure that the Board maintains its focus on implementation of the recommendations made by Dame Elish Angiolini in her review to prevent deaths in police custody. As you know Dame Elish' review was commissioned by the then Home Secretary, the Rt Hon. Theresa May MP, following the deaths of two black men in police custody. We are due to meet your officials early in September to discuss how to proceed without delay. I will write again with advice on priorities. From longstanding membership of the Board, it's clear that it works best when driven forward by the Ministers who co-chair it. Your leadership will be pivotal in ensuring action and implementation.

Meanwhile I know that responding to unmet mental health needs and treatment for substance misuse have long been concerns of yours. And remember discussions we had at City Hall and on our shared visit to Hammersmith and Fulham women's centre when I was still at the Prison Reform Trust. I was pleased to note in your article in The Times earlier in the year that you remain resolved to deal with problem drinking and see treatment for alcohol abuse as an important way to cut crime and public order offences and for offenders to turn their lives around. The IAP supports you in this endeavour. I look forward to meeting after recess.

As ever

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Juliet Lyon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Juliet Lyon CBE, Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody
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