



Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP
Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

23 April 2020

Covid-19 and the prison estate

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you considering Community's recent letter dated 16 March 2020, as well as additional concerns regarding the early release scheme across the prison estate and the pressures facing our key workers in the justice sector.

Key workers such as prison staff play a vital role protecting the public, and during this outbreak they have done their duty at additional risk. This unprecedented challenge requires an immediate and unprecedented response to protect the safety of all prison staff and prisoners, and we are ensuring safety is the primary consideration across all decisions and new measures.

The reduction of the prison population is vital for safety and mitigating the risk of the virus to prisoners and prison staff. The Ministry announced 4,000 prisoners could be let out up to two months early to create more space, however we understand that so far as little as 18 prisoners have been released. The early release scheme must be urgently accelerated to ease pressures on staff and protect their safety. With 231 prison staff testing positive for coronavirus across 55 prisons, as well as nine prisoner escort and custody services staff, and as many as 294 prisoners across 66 prisons testing positive for the virus, we urge this to be addressed as a matter of priority.

In addition to this, and as you will be aware, many of prison officers work in the privatised justice, custodial and immigration services and we support those private contractors who are making the necessary changes to their regime in the interests of the safety of prison staff and prisoners. We further ask you to support prison contractors who are changing the daily prison regime in the interests of protecting the safety of prison staff without fear of being subject to financial penalty.

We would appreciate an urgent meeting with yourself to understand the measures the Ministry intends to take to address the issues outlined in this letter, and to offer our support throughout this crisis.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Roy Rickhuss CBE
General Secretary, Community

Steve Gillan
General Secretary, POA