

Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

*Chair: Lynn Emslie
102 Petty France
7th floor
London
SW1H 9AJ*

Damian Hinds MP

By email

www.iapondeathsincustody.org

19 July 2023

Dear Minister,

I write as Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAPDC) in relation to a recent letter from the Prison Policy Directorate providing an update on delivery of the HMPPS safety programme and some commitments which have now been dropped. As you may know, the IAPDC is an advisory non-departmental body currently made up of seven independent expert panel members and a chair, with the sole objective of providing advice to ministers and officials on how deaths in custody can be prevented.

I am pleased to note the progress already made by the safety programme, and that you will continue to drive forward on delivery of the commitments made in the Prison Strategy White Paper. The Paper was intended to deliver a joined-up package, with the success of many commitments dependent on the delivery of others. I am, therefore, disappointed to learn that the Enhanced Support Service, which was aimed at providing support to complex prisoners at risk of harm to themselves and others, and targeted where violence was most prevalent, has been discontinued. It was an important commitment with much wider possibilities for improving practice on the ground related to, among others, regime delivery, culture and care packages. The Prison Strategy White Paper stated that this service was necessary because “specialist support is needed to prevent the most at risk or challenging prisoners from harming themselves or others.” This is still the case and I urge the safety programme to consider alternative ways to deliver the same support.

Of equal concern is the withdrawal of the Innovation Taskforce, of which IAPDC member Jenny Shaw was a participant, which was intended to bring together

innovative thinking from different fields and best practice in addressing the drivers of violence and self-harm, and to pilot interventions. Bringing together experts from the front line, health, psychology, in academia and the third sector offers many possibilities for combining the expertise from different organisations to drive improvements towards better outcomes for prisoners.

These important commitments, which are crucial to the maintenance of safety in prisons, have been terminated as a result of government efficiency savings, yet funding continues to be available for expansion of the prison estate. It is vital that focus is not simply on creating more spaces to incarcerate people, but that attention is given to keeping them safe when they are imprisoned.

The IAPDC, in our [response](#) to the Prison Strategy White Paper consultation, called on the Government to make the prevention of avoidable deaths in custody its top priority and prioritise the areas of prison policy and operations which would have the greatest impact in reducing them. I therefore welcome your continued investment in growing your workforce which will enable more consistent prisoner support through the delivery of key work, improved access to healthcare and substance misuse treatment and a regime that supports safety.

I would be grateful if you could respond to let me know how you intend to plug the gap left by the abandoned commitments and fulfil your obligations to keep people in custody safe.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'L. Emslie'.

Lynn Emslie, Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody
e: lynn.emslie@justice.gov.uk