

A Record of Our Own: Executive Summary



Lockdown Experiences of Ethnic Minority Prisoners

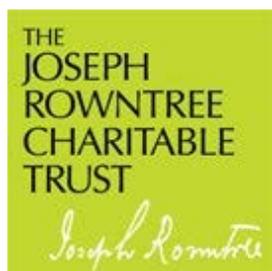
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In partnership with

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The views expressed in this report and any errors made are the author's alone and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the supporting organisations.

The Zahid Mubarek Trust is a registered charity (No. 1127834) that works to reduce discrimination and inequalities in prisons by promoting fair treatment and better outcomes for Black, Asian and other ethnic minority prisoners. For more information see: thezmt.org

Introduction

None of the high-level inquiries or reports into the impact of Covid-19 on the prison system that were published in the initial months of the pandemic focussed on ethnic minority prisoners, even though people from these communities suffer higher mortality rates from the coronavirus¹ and make up more than a quarter of the prison population in England and Wales.²

Consequently, the Zahid Mubarek Trust, in partnership with The Traveller Movement and Partners of Prisoners, decided to investigate the impact Covid-19 had on the lives of ethnic minority prisoners and their families (including those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities).

The report's findings, which are summarised below, are based on an analysis of 87 questionnaires which were completed by prison leavers (62) or family members of prisoners (25) and which described conditions in 29 prisons between 23 March and 31 August 2020.³

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¹ Analysis from August 2020 found that people of Bangladeshi ethnicity were around twice as likely to die of Covid-19 than people of White British ethnicity, while people of other Black and Asian ethnicity had a 10-50% higher risk of death when compared to White British (accounting for the effect of sex, age, deprivation and region). Public Health England, Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19, August 2020, page 6. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908434/Disparities_in_the_risk_and_outcomes_of_COVID_August_2020_update.pdf

² People from ethnic minority communities make up 27% of the prison population. Ministry of Justice, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service Offender Equalities Annual Report 2019-2020, November 2020, page 5. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938345/hmpps-offender-equalities-2019-2020.pdf

³ See the full report for details of the profiles of the 87 participants and the research methodology.

Changes to the prison regime

All 62 prison leavers said that spending 23 hours or more each day in their cells negatively affected their mental health. Of this group, 47 (76%) only spent between 30-45 minutes out of their cells a day, until the end of May.

"... it puts so many bad thoughts into your head, sometimes you think oh my god, if I killed myself, I wouldn't be in a position like this, you know. They just don't realise the impact it has." (A 35+ year-old female prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 1 September)

Participants also emphasised how there was not enough time to do even essential tasks in the limited period they were allowed out of their cells (e.g. exercising, showering, making phone calls, getting food, submitting applications and doing laundry).

"How would you use your 15 minutes out of cell? Everyone wanted showers, but no one wants to spend this limited time queuing but not getting it because someone is allowed longer time in showers." (A 34-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 8 October)

"Fresh air every day? You must be kidding. You were lucky to get marching up and down on the landing for 15 minutes." (A 31-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 29 June)

While 18 prison leavers (29%) noted some relaxation of the regime by the end of July 2020, even then their time out of their cells still did not exceed 1.5 hours a day. All participants highlighted the importance of education and employment in giving them a sense of purpose and supporting their rehabilitation. However, only prisoners employed in essential roles (e.g. cleaners, kitchen workers, etc.) could continue to work during lockdown and education opportunities were reduced to in-cell education packs.⁴

"No work or education has had a big impact on my mental health. Being a traveller we like to keep busy, we are taught this from a young age, so not being able to do this is very difficult and my mental health has suffered." (A 26-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 13 July)

Not being able to work or complete courses, along with the suspension of Release on Temporary License (ROTL) for most prisoners, affected some participants' release prospects, as they could not demonstrate to the Parole Board that they had been actively engaged in activities to reduce their risk of reoffending.

"The whole eight months that I was there, there was no work or education available to 95% of the people. So, there weren't any resettlement programmes, ROTLs. I was released on parole which was delayed for a few months and also a lot of people waiting for parole and parole answers were also affected. As you can imagine this was very stressful..." (A 25-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 7 September)



⁴ Some participants felt the process for selecting people for jobs that were considered essential "was down to favouritism" and 23 prisoner leavers (37%) said that they did not engage with in-cell education packs.

Measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19

Fifty-four prison leavers (87%) did not think that prison officers wore face masks routinely when dealing with prisoners and more than three quarters (48 respondents) said that social distancing rules were not observed most of the time by either staff or prisoners during lockdown.

"It (wearing a face mask) was not routine, no one was wearing it." (A 19-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 7 September)

"And whilst they (prison staff) always used to tell us to socially distance, they never socially distanced with each other. And we were at more risk from them than they were from us." (A 22-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 11 September)

All but two of the 29 prisons covered in this report had communal showers. Only around a quarter of participants (21 respondents) said that they or their loved ones were able to shower daily and, even then, for a much shorter period of time than usual. Participants also noted that they were sometimes unable to shower because there was not sufficient time to do so when they were let out of their cells.

Several participants spoke positively about the Government's policy to reduce the spread of Covid-19 by installing temporary accommodation units in prisons and increasing single cell occupancy.⁵ However, 35% of prison leavers (22 respondents) reported that they had to continue sharing a cell during the lockdown.

Participants noted that some prisoners were reluctant to report Covid-19 symptoms. The reasons for this included: being afraid of what would happen to them once diagnosed; not wanting to be isolated; and being concerned about the stigma associated with the disease.

Several prison leavers thought that newly arrived, symptomatic and vulnerable prisoners, who were taken to designated units to reduce the spread of Covid-19, would be worse off than those in

the general prison population. In this respect, some respondents saw these restrictions as a punishment, rather than a measure put in place for their own safety.

"This (informing staff of Covid-19 symptoms) would mean being locked away for days without showers and exercise which was the only thing to get you out of cell. No one wanted to be ignored until further notice." (A 24-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 3 July)

Communication

While the Government recognised that "Communication is everything if we are to minimise the mental health effects on prisoners"⁶, 70 participants (80%) said they did not receive sufficient information from the Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) about Covid-19 and the measures being taken to address it. Prison leavers frequently reported that their principle sources of information about the coronavirus was the TV news or their own families.

"We were told that we're in it together, but it didn't feel so. No one told us what was going on, everyone was too busy to ask anything, how was that being in it together?" (A 31-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 29 June)

"His information about Covid-19 came from myself and other family members as well as watching the news. I found it stressful to spend time explaining Covid, rather than my own family issues." (A 25-34 year-old female family member, questionnaire completed on 17 July)

Others noted that the information provided was not accessible to all inmates because they had visual impairments, could not read, were foreign nationals who did not speak English or because they didn't have time to read the notice boards when allowed out of their cells.

"Yeah, most of it was on the notice board and people was getting frustrated and that because, obviously, some prisoners can't read and write and there's a lot of fake information going around ..." (A 19-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 7 September)

⁵ By the end of June, 766 temporary accommodation units were either in use or ready for use across 26 sites. Robert Buckland MP, Oral evidence to the Justice Committee, Coronavirus (Covid-19): The impact on prison, probation and court systems, HC 299, 23 June 2020. <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/565/pdf/>

⁶ *Ibid*

Participants who did speak positively about communication from HMPPS particularly valued regular updates which provided information that was relevant to what was happening in their prison and allowed them to raise individual concerns. The report also indicates that HMPPS' communication did improve from May 2020, with 19 prison leavers (31%) stating that they started to receive regular written communication and were kept better informed from this time.

Many of the communications failings that were reported (e.g. providing generic, inappropriate or inaccessible information) could have been avoided if prisoners had been consulted on their information needs and how to best communicate with them. This would also have helped to counter the spread of misinformation and anxiety amongst prisoners.

The suspension of family visits had a huge impact on many prisoners and HMPPS sought to mitigate this and facilitate family contacts in various ways, including by: giving prisoners extra phone credit; providing additional secure phone handsets to prisons; allowing more access to personal mobile phones; and introducing video-calls.

Participants welcomed these measures, but none of them considered them to be a substitute for face to face visits. Many thought these facilities should have been brought in sooner and that prisoners should have been allowed to make calls more often and/or for longer.

"Once a month 20-minute video call does not compensate for seeing your partner and children in person. It does not." (A 25-34 year-old female family member, questionnaire completed on 23 June)

Despite these measures, 34 prison leavers (55%) still reported having significant less contact with their loved ones during lockdown. If in-cell phones had been more widely available this would have made it much easier for prisoners to stay in touch with friends and family, but only 12 prison leavers (19%) had access to a phone in their cell.⁷

The majority who relied on communal wing phones stressed how difficult this was, given the limited time they had out of their cells and the pressure there was to keep calls short because of other prisoners queuing to use the phone.

"He calls only for a minute to say that he is still alive." (A 35+ year-old female family member, questionnaire completed on 30 August)

"It's like 'Hi mum. How are you? Yeah, oh got to go. Got to go get locked up now. Just to let you know I'm ok. Bye.' That was it. I am lucky if I manage to say a word or two." (A 35+ year-old female family member, questionnaire completed on 4 August)

Healthcare

Twenty-two participants (25%) reported that they/their loved one in prison had at least one underlying medical condition and some respondents described having difficulty accessing medication for pre-existing conditions (e.g. asthma) or getting referred to a health professional.

Participants accepted that non-emergency services had to be curtailed during the pandemic, but several shared experiences in which prisoners who were in urgent need of medical assistance were not given appropriate care.

"We were told that doctor will only see those with a life-threatening situation. If you were on your last breath to be honest. A guy had a heart attack on my wing, he was asking for healthcare for days before this and was not taken seriously until he collapsed." (A 30-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 2 August)

"You had to press the emergency bell for you to see them, otherwise they can't be bothered. Every time. The man I was with was epileptic and he had fits at night ... you know it's kind of frightening and knowing that, if you press the bell, nobody would come. ... to go through that, it has impacted me, it was difficult. It was very, very difficult. (A 24-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 3 July)

A few participants spoke positively about the introduction of welfare checks in some prisons which gave more attention to a wider group of prisoners, rather than only responding to emergency healthcare needs. One prison leaver described these checks as a "lifesaver."

⁷ HMPPS stated in April 2020 that 60% of prison cells have in-cell telephony. Jo Farrar, CEO of HMPPS, Oral Evidence to the Justice Committee, The Work of the Lord Chancellor, HC 225, March 2020. <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/248/pdf/>

Mental health

The lockdown restrictions both caused and exacerbated mental health issues, with more than half of prison leavers (34 respondents or 55%) reporting increased stress, anxiety or depression, two third of whom did not experience these feeling prior to the pandemic. Several participants said they considered suicide or self-harming or witnessed incidents in which others did so.

"Prisons run on routines, on predictions, on expectations, on little perks. All these are gone. We live under the ruins of our own dreams and hopes." (A 27-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 19 September)

"The line between doing something stupid and stopping yourself was very thin." (A 20-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 14 July)

"If I had stayed there one extra week it would have been a body bag for me. Even like when you choke, it's like you want to do something stupid for them to notice you." (A 33-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 14 August)

Seventeen family members (68%) also reported feeling increased stress, anxiety, insomnia, or depression as they tried to cope with additional pressures associated with the prison lockdown.

"My son is usually even-keeled and optimistic, he keeps us all motivated when it feels that we can't take it anymore. But over the last few weeks, he sounds defeated, I've never heard him like this. It is affecting me a lot." (A 35+ year-old female family member, questionnaire completed on 16 August)

"...he was spending more money. The money however is coming from his family, myself, and of course this puts more pressure on the outside to provide for him. He found that he spent more money on cleaning and snacks." (A 35+ year-old female family member, questionnaire completed on 9 August)

Seventeen prison leavers (27%) reported being depressed because of the lack of progress with their sentence or the procedures for their release. The backlog in court cases meant those on remand had to wait longer to know the outcome of their cases. For those nearing the end of their sentence, the removal of privileges they had worked for was also hard to deal with.

"Remand is a tricky period, you are neither here or there and always feeling uncertain about anything. Because of the lockdown restrictions everything was unpredictable and very stressful." (A 23-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 12 August)

"All hopes were buried in one day, no ROTL meant there was nothing to look for. It felt like your work towards this day went in shutters. There was nothing that would stop you to think f* this, it is screwed anyway, what else can happen." (A 36-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 8 October)**

All respondents that had pre-existing mental health issues said that their symptoms got worse after lockdown began. However, none of them were aware of any specialist mental health services being delivered in the period under review and only nine prison leavers (15%) said they were aware that Listeners (prisoners trained by the Samaritans to provide support to other prisoners) were still operating during the first few months of the lockdown.

Many participants thought that more could have been done to help prisoners struggling with mental health issues during lockdown, including through: more supportive engagement by staff (e.g. checking on and talking to prisoners more regularly); greater access to peer to peer and chaplaincy support; and more opportunities to call friends and family.

"... I just needed someone to speak to because it was in my head. It got to the stage I self-harmed because there was literally no help, because I was stuck in a cell, no one to speak to, no communication. I think it was more a bit of a stress release" (A 25-34 year-old female prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 10 September)

"A thousand and one things go through your head, but nobody is there to tell you, to say 'you know what, you'll be fine' ... nobody there to talk you through it, or anything. And then obviously you can't talk to your other inmates either ..." (A 35+ year-old female prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 1 September)

"Obviously during Ramadan, we didn't have a Muslim chaplaincy ... it was hard not having a chaplaincy around when you needed someone to talk to, to get you back on the straight path, to understand things. ... it all just hit rock bottom." (An 18-24 year-old female prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 24 August)

Resettlement support

Just one out of the 37 prison leavers released before July was seen in person by a probation officer in prison. Most participants did not think the support they received through phone calls addressed their resettlement needs or helped them cope with life outside prison. For example, 13 participants reported housing issues which affected their resettlement, including spending extra time in prison because approved housing was not available and being released without stable accommodation or with no accommodation at all.

"I was supposed to be released two weeks before they let me go. I had to walk to three hostels myself before one let me in for couple of days. Don't get me wrong I was happy to be out, but I did not think it would be like as long as you are out we don't care sort of thing. It was not only me, you should talk to guys in my hostel. We all feel lost. We may never find a way out of this." (A 24-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 23 June)

"I come out of one prison into another prison, because I can't access anything out here. ... Everything just hit me, they just gave me all the information on the day of my release and that was it." (A 25-34 year-old female prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 10 September)

Those released towards the end of the summer reported receiving additional support, such as a charged mobile phone to contact community support services, information about Covid-19 restrictions and help in arranging transport. Seven prison leavers (five of whom were released after June) also spoke positively about the support they received from their probation workers.

"Access to probation has been brilliant. My probation worker she's lovely, she always listens to me, she's always very supportive. She's put me on some courses that she thinks, and I also think, will benefit me and that's just to better myself in the long run." (A 35+ year-old female prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 13 November)

Staff-prisoner relationships

When restrictions were introduced in March 2020, participants generally accepted that they were needed to protect lives. However, frustrations grew as lockdown extended over weeks and months and there was no clear information about when things might change. Several respondents felt that tensions increased when restrictions were eased in the wider community, but there was no comparable reduction in the lockdown measures in prisons.⁸

"Do you know when it hit us most? When we started asking questions about why my family could not visit me when people were going on holidays? They did not have answers" (A 26-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 13 July)

"It was hard watching a different reality on TV, people visiting seaside and parks whilst we only had ten minutes out. But do you know what the hardest thing was? Living in the unknown. ... I wish somebody had made an attempt to explain, just to talk to us. Feeling powerless was killing." (A 32-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 16 June)

Friction with staff did sometimes spill over into violence. Eight participants reported that force was used by prison officers against them or their loved ones during the pandemic.

"It was like walking on the minefield, you let a caged animal out for 30 minutes and what do you expect. Even animals are not meant to be locked up so long." (A 26-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 13 July)

"... there was so much tension because even the staff knew that, you know, when they are keeping all these guys behind their doors, you know, it might kick off and there might even be a riot. It might be uncontrollable and that almost happened on one of the wings. When the boys were all out for exercise, they refused to come back in. So, it got a bit heavy handed with the officers and they ended up having to use their cosh on some of the inmates. So, because of everything that was happening, everyone was just really uneasy, some guys ended up in seg (segregation unit)." (A 43-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 15 August)

⁸ HMPPS set out its plan for reducing restrictions on 2 June 2020, nearly a month after the Prime Minister announced a gradual relaxation of national lockdown measures on 10 May. HMPPS, Covid-19: National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services, June 2020, page 2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/889689/prisons-national-framework.pdf

Staff shortages caused by the pandemic appear to have contributed to this situation as new staff were brought in who were unfamiliar with the prison/prisoners.

Fair and equal treatment

Many participants described incidents of discriminatory treatment, including where they thought that prison officers were not using their discretionary powers fairly, particularly in relation to the allocation of jobs, the granting of ROTL and the implementation of rules on social distancing and access to phone/video calls.

"When we are on our wing, we have allocated prison officers that will be on particular shifts on that wing and won't work on other wings because that's how you maintain prisoner and officer relationships. Then we started to see the other officers coming from different wings, maybe different prisons, I don't know but we did not know them and they did not know us. They started talking to you in a different way, a lot of disrespect ... put a stand on us just to show you we're not messing around, we need this done, this and that. Some prisoners started taking that the wrong way ... There was no relationship with these officers, a lot of people ended up getting bent up and restrained because an inmate would fully kick-off." (A 23-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 29 June)

"As a woman of colour, we have to work twice as hard ... it's like, we could say a word and a white woman could say the same word, but ours would be taken negatively. It's just weird." (A 35+ year-old female prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 4 September)

Fourteen prison leavers (23%) said that they had not noticed any change in staff-prisoner relationships during lockdown. However, most respondents qualified this by explaining that there were very few opportunities to interact with prison officers or that their relationships with staff were already poor before the pandemic started.

"... I've had ill family members, my mate's dad died whilst in (name of prison), but we don't get SPLs (special purpose license). They give it to white people to go paint houses and take wives to hospital which is not fair, but they make us live with it due to our colour." (A 32-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 14 July)

"If you are asking me if it changed to better or worse, I don't think it changed. They never liked me and I kind of got used to it." (A 23-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 5 September)

"The last of the few good jobs available are going to people favoured by officers, a lot of the Travellers weren't too happy about the treatment and the underhanded comments they got to do with their background and stigma around their race." (A 34-year-old male prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 14 August)

While none of the respondents talked about improved relations with staff, some spoke positively about how they were treated or relationships they had with individual staff members.

"I'm really thankful to the staff and prisoners at (name), they made a separate room for my daughter and then the staff told me don't worry, your daughter is in safe hands and since then my daughter's getting everything she needs, she is ok and I'm ok." (A 35+ year-old female family member, questionnaire completed on 14 September)

Only one prison leaver told us that he used the complaint system to challenge prejudicial treatment during lockdown. Many prison leavers said they were reluctant to submit a complaint as they believed they would suffer negative repercussions from doing so and/or that nothing would change.⁹

"... he feels if he is to make a complaint his time in there would be made difficult. For example, his paperwork might be processed slower. He has noticed this before and spoke to other people and they have noticed it is mainly other black males that are treated differently." (A 35+ year-old female family member, questionnaire completed on 21 July)

"You get f**d for it (making a complaint). The staff will team up, because they are family you know, and then you're on their radar. Let's make this difficult for her, let's lose that app (application form), let's, you know, just give her a poke here and there." (A 35+ year-old female prison leaver, questionnaire completed on 4 September)**

⁹ These concerns may be based on previous experiences of the complaints procedure. A recent analysis of 610 complaints found that when staff submitted a complaint against a prisoner this was upheld 76% of the time (121 cases), but when a prisoner made a complaint against a staff member it was only upheld 1% of the time (4 cases). ZMT/PRT, Discrimination in prisons: Still not a fair response? April 2017.

Equality meetings and other strategic equality work which might have helped address these issues were suspended in many prisons during the first six months of the pandemic.¹⁰

Conclusions

By 31 January 2021, 10,354 prisoners had contracted Covid-19 and 86 had died.¹¹ Whilst every death in custody is a tragedy, these figures are much lower than those projected by Public Health England at the start for the crisis and indicate that the lockdown restrictions were effective in reducing the spread of Covid-19 in prisons and saving lives.

However, these measures also had a profound effect on ethnic minority prisoners and their families, particularly in relation to their mental health. All the main concerns that participants raised in relation to Covid-19 and the lockdown negatively impacted their mental health, both individually and cumulatively. These include: being locked in to their cells for 23 hours or more a day; reduced contact with family, friends and other prisoners; fear of the disease;¹² the inability to work, study or occupy oneself productively; the lack of information and control; the undermining of rehabilitation and release goals; and the inconsistent applications of rules.

Covid-19 highlighted areas of structural underinvestment in the prison system, which have contributed to overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient staffing. There is an opportunity to 'build back better' from the pandemic, including by ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to achieve single occupancy cell accommodation across the prison estate; by improving technical infrastructure to ensure that all prisons have in-cell telephones; and by increasing support services which contribute to prisoners' rehabilitation.

Another long-standing structural issue which has been brought back into focus by the Covid-19 crisis is the unequal treatment of ethnic minorities in the prison system. Many participants in this report described experiencing or witnessing incidents of racism, prejudicial treatment and unfair use of discretionary powers during lockdown. In this respect, ethnic minority prisoners' experiences during the pandemic may have reinforced, or even extenuated, existing feelings that the prison system does not treat them equally.

Ensuring that all prisoners are treated fairly and consistently is imperative for addressing issues of mistrust and building the legitimacy of the prison regime. It is also key to ongoing work to eradicate Covid-19 in prisons, including the vaccination programme, and in ensuring that the prison estate operates effectively and efficiently in the long term.

The equalities agenda is a pivotal mechanism for achieving these goals, but it was not generally seen as a priority during pandemic and it does not currently feature as a key component of recovery planning for the prison service. It is particularly important that proactive steps are taken to address the inequalities facing ethnic minority prisoners, who make up more than a quarter of the prison population and whose confidence in the system is lowest.

¹⁰ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) found that out of 20 prisons inspected between August and December 2020, 35% did not hold equality meetings or carry out any strategic equality work between the start of lockdown and September 2020 and a further 20% only started some equalities work in the summer of 2020. The HMIP reports are available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprisons/inspections/>

¹¹ Ministry of Justice, HMPPS Covid-19 Official Statistics data to 31 January 2021, February 2021. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/960361/HMPPS_COVID19_JAN21_Pub_Doc.pdf

¹² 29 respondents (33%) had already lost a close family member to Covid-19.

Recommendations

In view of the above, the Zahid Mubarek Trust makes the following recommendations in relation to how HMPPS can reduce the negative consequences of the current lockdown restrictions in relation to ethnic minority prisoners and their families and how it should approach any similar emergency in the future.

Lockdown measures

- All prisoners should be provided with longer and better quality time out of their cells every day.
- Newly arrived, symptomatic and shielding prisoners should not be held in conditions that amount to solitary confinement and wherever possible should have access to the same facilities and opportunities as other prisoners (e.g. to shower, exercise, access support, etc.).
- There should be more regular and meaningful engagement with individual prisoners to ensure their wellbeing (e.g. through welfare checks; prison staff checking on and talking to prisoners more often; by encouraging prisoners with specific needs to raise them and ensuring they are responded to; etc.).
- Counterbalancing measures to compensate prisoners for loss of time out of cells, family visits and ROTL should be brought in immediately and should seek to meet prisoners' individual and cultural needs (e.g. making more effective use of temporary release schemes; allowing phone credits to be swapped for credit at the canteen, if requested; giving greater access to compassionate video calls based on a broader understanding of the criteria that underpins the term 'compassionate'; etc.).
- Additional targeted support needs to be provided to groups of prisoners who are particularly affected by the lockdown provisions (e.g. new arrivals, those in custody for the first time, young people who are transiting into adult prisons and others with additional support needs).

- Restrictions in prisons should be eased in line with the lifting of regulations in the wider community, unless there are specific circumstances in individual prisons which prevent this (e.g. a significant outbreak of Covid-19 infections).
- Consideration should be given to classing prisoner representatives and "listeners" as keyworkers as they provide essential support to prisoners.
- Access to chaplaincy/family support services should be made more available and accessible to prisoners.

Communication

- Information relating to Covid-19 and the measures being taken to address it should be provided regularly and in a timely, transparent and accessible way, both to prisoners and their families.
- There should be regular updates which focus on the implications for individual prisons and provide opportunities for prisoners to raise specific concerns (e.g. question and answer sessions), with access to the governor where possible.
- Prisoner input should be sought during the development and implementation of each prison's communications plan.
- The roll out of digital technologies in prisons should be accelerated to ensure that all prisoners have in-cell telephones and that there is frequent access to good quality video call facilities. Video calls should be available at times that enable more families to take part (e.g. evening and weekend) and consideration should be given as to how to include families who do not have access to video calling equipment.

Physical and mental healthcare

- Key items for preventing the spread of the coronavirus, including masks, antibacterial gel and soap, should be freely accessible to all prisoners. Prisoners should also be able to shower every day.
- All prisoners must continue to receive urgent or immediate necessary healthcare and their medication for pre-existing conditions. Staff need to facilitate access to this healthcare and be clear on what types of symptoms or conditions should be considered as requiring urgent or immediately necessary treatment.
- Access to mental health support, including specialist mental health services and peer to peer support initiatives, should be maintained and enhanced throughout lockdown. All those involved in delivering these services should be considered essential workers.
- A long-term programme of support should be developed and put in place to mitigate the effects the prolonged lockdown has had on the mental health of prisoners and their families.
- In cell activity packs should take account of the needs of those prisoners with literacy and numeracy support needs.

Fair and equal treatment

- There should be more consistent application of the rules to stop the spread of Covid-19 (e.g. on social distancing, wearing of masks, etc.) amongst both staff and prisoners.
- There must be fair and consistent application of rules and access to privileges for all prisoners, both within and between prisons (e.g. access to time out of cells, showers, work, ROTL, etc.). This should be recorded and monitored.
- Equality meetings and strategic equalities work, including regular and meaningful engagement with prisoners from the protected characteristic groups, should be maintained during lockdown and beyond.

Release planning

- Preparation for release during lockdown restrictions should include assessments of accommodation and family and social support needs. Prisoners should also have a clear understanding of the community restrictions in place upon release.
- Prisoners should be given an opportunity to have regular and meaningful input into their release planning process.

Structural issues highlighted by the pandemic

- Overcrowding across the prison estate needs to be urgently addressed, including by ensuring there is sufficient capacity for single occupancy cell accommodation across the prison estate where requested.
- Equality impact assessments should be conducted and published to assess the impact of Covid-19 on equality outcomes for prisoners.
- Action plans need to be implemented to address longstanding inequality issues in prisons, including the poorer perceptions ethnic minority prisoners have in comparison to white counterparts regarding their treatment in areas such as relationships, complaints, behaviour management and healthcare.
- Access to Discrimination Incident Reporting Forms (DIRFs) and the quality of the complaints investigation process needs to be improved, including through a robust and ongoing independent scrutiny process.