



Ms Anna Loxton
HM Assistant Coroner for Surrey
HM Coroner's Court
Station Approach
Woking
GU22 7AP

By email: [REDACTED]

07 February 2025

Dear Ms Loxton,

HANNAH MARY AITKEN REGULATION 28 REPORT TO PREVENT FUTURE DEATHS

Thank you for the Regulation 28 report, dated 14 November 2024, sent to the Home Secretary following the inquest into the death of Hannah Mary Aitken, who tragically died on 14 September 2023. I am responding on behalf of the Home Secretary, in my capacity as the Security Minister.

Firstly, I would like to offer my heartfelt condolences to Ms Aitken's family and loved ones at this difficult time. My thoughts are with them as they continue to navigate their profound loss.

Thank you for the additional time provided to the Department to respond to the concerns raised in your report, which I have carefully noted. I am very grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Your report has raised several matters of concern, which are relevant to both the Home Office and Department of Health and Social Care, namely:

- *The substance in question can be purchased domestically with no restrictions save a duty on sellers to report suspicious transactions;*
- *The substance in question can be purchased from abroad and imported to Great Britain with no restrictions;*
- *The substance in question is sold at levels of purity and in quantities which represent significant risk to life whether by self-harm or terrorist use;*
- *The quantities and purity in which the substance in question are sold do not appear to be those required for their legitimate use;*
- *It does not appear there is any consideration of regulating/monitoring the use of the substance in question outside the limited provisions of the Poisons Act 1972, and it is not clear which Government department would be responsible for this.*

Your report also highlights that there have been several tragic cases where this material has been used in incidences of death by suicide. Please note, following another tragic

incidence of death following ingestion of the same substance, the Home Secretary has recently written to Ms Catherine McKenna, the Area Coroner for Greater Manchester North, detailing action the Home Office is taking on this issue. The letter emphasised the Government's determination to ensure all reasonable steps to prevent further loss of life are taken.

The Home Secretary has also written to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ask that they give priority to this issue as part of their continued work on implementing the goals of the Suicide Prevention Strategy. This sets out actions aimed at reducing the rates of suicide in England. I have provided further detail below on joint action that is already underway.

The substance described in your report is a "reportable" poison listed in Part 4 of Schedule 1A of the Poisons Act. For the avoidance of doubt, this means that whilst it can be bought by members of the public, suspicious transactions need to be reported by retailers if there are questionable grounds for suspecting it is intended for any illicit use. The Poisons Act was amended in October 2023 to strengthen controls, and enhance our suspicious activity reporting requirements, including new obligations for online marketplaces. As well as the requirement to report suspicious transactions, economic operators supplying any reportable substances must now demonstrate that their personnel are aware about which of their products contain listed substances, and are instructed on their obligations.

As your report captures, the Home Office is aware of the issues relating to this substance. My officials have been undertaking work across Government to both reduce access to this substance, and raise awareness to suppliers of the dangers of this substance. To this end, the Homeland Security Group (HSG) have been working to improve retailer awareness of their legal obligation to report suspicious activity for regulated and reportable substances.

Specifically, HSG have engaged with online platforms to encourage them to voluntarily remove the sale to individuals in its pure form. Government expertise in relation to substances of concern is also shared to inform retailer sales practices. This includes encouraging suppliers to use declaration of use forms for sales of such substances. This work will continue to ensure suppliers are meeting their requirements under the Poisons Act. Furthermore, if during the processing of suspicious activity reports a safeguarding concern is identified by Counter Terrorism Policing, consideration will be given to disseminating this intelligence to police forces to consider a welfare check.

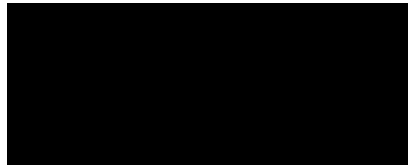
Similarly, Border Force has introduced guidance for its officers (operating within its existing legal provisions). This guidance provides instructions on the action they can take if they are in receipt of information, in any form or manner, that leads to a detection of goods at the border containing an item that may be intended to assist with suicide. This of course relies on Border Force working closely with police forces and other relevant agencies to safeguard vulnerable individuals to the full extent possible. This work is complex, and Border Force will continue to monitor its policies, exploring opportunities to improve its ability to take action. Where possible, Border Force will also continue to ensure that frontline staff who may encounter these items know what action to take, and are supported on a case-by-case basis when required.

On the issue of further regulation, an aspect of the concern you have raised relates to individuals based in Great Britain, purchasing this substance from overseas retailers. As the Poisons Act only applies to Great Britain (i.e. England, Scotland, and Wales), there is no obligation for retailers based outside the specified jurisdiction to report transactions which they believe to be suspicious. The Department is seeking to address this, as well as

the other issues raised in your report, such as the purity and quantities of the substance in question that are available for sale. My officials are working closely with the Department for Health and Social Care, convening relevant stakeholders to consider the potential benefits and proportionality of further regulation.

Thank you for your report and for bringing these important matters to my attention. I hope that my response, alongside that of DHSC, has been able to address some of your concerns. I can assure you that the Home Office will continue to work in collaboration with relevant Departments and wider partners to take action in this area.

Yours sincerely,



Security Minister