



HMIPS

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

PRESS RELEASE

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland publishes inspection report on HMP Glenochil

Date: 4 November 2025

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) has today published its inspection report on HMP Glenochil, following an inspection conducted in February 2025. The inspection was conducted in partnership with Health Improvement Scotland (HIS), the Care Inspectorate (CI) and Education Scotland (ES).

While the inspection found many areas of positive practice, including excellent healthcare provision for an older population, the report serves yet another reminder of the systemic challenges facing the justice sector in Scotland. Serious concerns were raised about overcrowding, those held in solitary confinement, food hygiene, the complaints process, the daily regime and the treatment of vulnerable prisoners.

Health and wellbeing stood out as a key strength. The healthcare team demonstrated strong and compassionate leadership in caring for an ageing and often infirm prison population. Inspectors commended staff for their commitment and compassion to men who were ill, disabled, or dying. They also noted improvements in pharmaceutical services and the introduction of a non-emergency ambulance service to ensure essential medical appointments went ahead.

The prison demonstrated innovative leadership in its use of peer mentoring and support, particularly in delivering induction to new arrivals and supporting recovery programmes.

Employment opportunities allowed a three-day working week for convicted prisoners who were motivated to work, despite the operational pressures the prison faced.

The report paints a sobering picture of a prison struggling under the crippling effects of overcrowding and staff shortages. As in previous inspection reports, the findings highlight that the capacity crisis across the estate has reached an intolerable level. Conditions continue to breach minimum standards of human dignity with 244 men sharing cells built for one. Decency has been another casualty with concerns about food hygiene and cleanliness.

There is barely any aspect of prison life which is not affected by overpopulation. Particularly disadvantaged were those on non-offence protection, who experienced more limited access to work, faith services, addiction support, and release preparation activities than the rest of the prison population.

Inspectors expressed disquiet about the number of men held in solitary confinement, with 16 prisoners segregated outside the formal Separation and Rehabilitation Unit with no regime and limited oversight.

When things go wrong in the public sector, individuals have the right to complain and seek redress. Prisoners are no different, but at Glenochil, inspectors found confidence in the complaint system was low. This echoes consistent findings from previous inspections and

from the Scottish Human Rights Commission report [Access to Justice for Prisoners: The Complaints System](#), which recently found that prisoners lack a meaningful way to raise complaints. This matters not only because individuals cannot have their concerns addressed but because establishments lose vital feedback needed to improve and make evidence-based decisions. HMIPS again calls on the Scottish Prison Service to introduce a complaints system which has the confidence of prisoners and their families.

The prison had experienced significant staff shortages leading to an inconsistent and unpredictable regime. Prisoners were regularly unlocked late in the morning for activities and typically locked up from 4 p.m. with no evening activities, and weekend opportunities were particularly limited. The new senior management team had begun to stabilise operations, focusing on a more reliable, though still restricted, regime. Inspectors recognised the leadership's openness and commitment to recovery. Personal Officers lacked the time and support to build constructive relationships with prisoners which are key to rehabilitation and reintegration.

Record keeping in relation to suicide prevention procedures was inconsistent and there was limited staff awareness of anti-bullying policies. Of particular concern was the high number of prisoners being managed under the Management of Offenders at Risk due to any Substance (MORS) procedures. In December 2024 alone, 19 prisoners required emergency hospitalisation, reflecting the serious risk posed by illicit substances.

Key desired outcomes

HMIPS has moved from making recommendations which simply end up being repeated, (see report by the Scottish Human Rights Commission [Review, recommend, repeat: An assessment of where human rights have stalled in places of detention](#)), as these have clearly been ineffective in driving change. We are instead describing what we want to find on our return and asking the Scottish Prison Service to provide us with an action plan outlining the steps they propose to take to achieve these. This report describes 77 such desired outcomes. Of these we highlight the following ten for prioritisation:

- 1: Prisoners in situations of vulnerability receive appropriate care across the board. Staff are confident and supported in managing those at risk of suicide and self-harm and subject to bullying, and those pressured to use illicit items coming into the prison. Prisoners dealing with these issues feel well supported by staff.
- 2: Prisoners receive reliable and equitable access to a full day of activities during the week and at weekends. At least 80% of the employment places are taken up daily.
- 3: The excellent use of peer mentors is extended to regular participation by prisoners in discussions about issues which concern them with regular feedback provided to all prisoners on decisions reached by management.
- 4: On the next pre-inspection survey, prisoners judge the quality and acceptability of food more highly than on this inspection and standards for the safe handling, preparation and serving of food are met.
- 5: Prisoners and staff benefit from clear systems which deliver good basic hygiene and cleanliness throughout the prison. Staff and prisoners are trained and confident in how to maintain hygiene with appropriate equipment and kit provided.
- 6: Every member of staff benefits from good management support, including regular discussions about role, performance, training and development through the appraisal process.
- 7: Prisoners have swift access to the activities and programmes they need to address their assessed risk to the public.
- 8: Prisoners have confidence in the complaint system and can evidence complaints being acknowledged, responses in line with SPS targets and resolution of legitimate requests.

9: One prisoner only is held in cells designed for one person.

10: Those held under Rule 95 are in suitable accommodation with a staff group dedicated to ensuring all statutory rights are met and that the conditions in which they are held do not amount to solitary confinement. Staff continually work with them towards a return to mainstream location.

Conclusion

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Sara Snell, said:

“This inspection highlights the dedication of staff providing care and support under difficult circumstances, particularly in health and social services. It also exposes unacceptable conditions resulting from overcrowding, poor food hygiene, and limited opportunities for those deprived of their liberty. Prisons exist to keep the public safe and that duty extends far beyond ensuring no one escapes. Staff must have the time and support to engage with prisoners, encouraging them to learn new skills, prove their suitability for parole, address basic needs and support a return to society as contributing citizens. This was not happening at Glenochil for too many prisoners.

The improvements made so far are fragile and must be sustained through strong leadership and continued investment in staff, safety, and decency.

We need a national conversation on the appropriateness of prison for people who are exceedingly frail, terminally ill and assessed as no longer posing a threat to society. There are different options for older prisoners with complex health needs, including dementia, who can surely be more appropriately cared for in potentially less expensive and lower security settings.”

HMIPS will ask the Scottish Prison Service to advise how they will deliver the necessary improvements, and by when, within 3 months of the publication of this report and ask for a progress update one year later. These responses and updates will be published on our website.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Sara Snell, was appointed in February 2025.
- The full inspection report for HMP Glenochil is available at www.prisonssinspectoratescotland.gov.uk
- For further information please contact Kerry Love, Head of Business Management at kerry.love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.