



HMIPS

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

News Release
Independent Prison Monitoring Annual Reports 2025-2026

Independent Prison Monitoring Highlights Growing Pressures Across Scotland's Prisons

During 2025-2026, Independent Prison Monitors carried out over 1,100 visits across Scotland's 17 prisons and responded to nearly 1,700 prisoner requests for contact. Through their statutory weekly visits to every prison in Scotland, IPMs provide immediate insights into the day to day running of each establishment. They engage with prisoners and staff, letting senior prison managers know what they find, and filing reports on His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons Scotland (HMIPS) standards and the issues prisoners raise with them for the attention of HM Chief Inspector.

The role of independent prison monitoring is a critical aspect of ensuring people deprived of their liberty are not subject to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. They are people from outwith the prison world who bring to their visits the "ordinary" person's view about what constitutes "normal" and for that they are extraordinary. HMIPS are proud of the work of all volunteer IPMs, past and present. The reassurance of their presence remains an important component of a fair and transparent prison system in Scotland.

The monitoring year highlighted the continuing impact of population pressures across Scotland's prisons. Overcrowding remained a significant and recurring concern, increasingly affecting key aspects of prison life, including access to purposeful activity, progression opportunities, accommodation, healthcare, and the overall operation of prison regimes. Monitors also noted that the growing complexity of the prison population has intensified these challenges.

Access to progression remained a particular concern. In several establishments, prisoners experienced delays in accessing programmes, assessments and interventions required to support progression through sentence plans and preparation for release. These issues were most evident against a backdrop of sustained population pressures.

Healthcare also featured prominently in monitoring findings. While monitors identified examples of effective care and support, concerns remained regarding access to healthcare services, including mental health support and specialist provision. The needs of an increasingly complex and, in some establishments, ageing prison population were also evident.

The financial hardships of imprisonment continued to be raised by prisoners across the estate. Concerns regarding the affordability of everyday items reflected the wider cost-of-living pressures experienced by those in custody and many remand prisoners were unable to work leaving them with no means to supplement any support they might receive from families.

Despite these challenges, independent prison monitors consistently highlighted the commitment and resilience of prison staff. Positive relationships between staff and prisoners were evident across many establishments, with staff continuing to support safe and decent environments in increasingly demanding circumstances.

Monitors also identified examples of effective practice in rehabilitation, education, employability, family support and throughcare services, demonstrating the sustained efforts being made to support people in custody and prepare them for release.

Overall, monitoring findings during the period covered by these annual reports point to a prison system whose staff continue to deliver care, support and rehabilitative opportunities with dedication.

The findings also point to a system operating under sustained and growing pressure. Overcrowding, an increasingly complex prison population and resource constraints continue to affect progression, healthcare, and access to purposeful activity and services.

The reports warns that these pressures are increasingly affecting the experiences of those in custody and, if they continue, risk undermining efforts to provide safe, decent and rehabilitative prisons across Scotland.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Sara Snell was appointed in February 2025.
2. On publication the reports can be found at www.prisonsofscotland.gov.uk
3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, at Kerry.Love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.

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