



HMIPS

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

PRESS RELEASE

Independent Prison Monitors Raise Alarm Over Overcrowding and Systemic Challenges in Scottish Prisons

Date: 5 November 2025

The latest mid-year report from Scotland's Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs), covering April to September 2025, highlights persistent and worsening issues across the prison estate, with overcrowding once again emerging as the most critical concern.

The report reveals that prisoner numbers are rising inexorably and may soon surpass the all-time high of 8,420 recorded in 2012. IPMs describe the continued use of shared cells, originally designed for single occupancy, as "unconscionable," warning that overcrowding undermines safety, restricts access to regimes, and hampers rehabilitation efforts.

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

"It is deeply troubling that in 2025, we are still seeing prisoners housed in conditions Victorian society deemed unacceptable. Overcrowding is paralysing the system and placing immense strain on staff and services."

The report also highlights:

- Structural challenges within the Scottish Prison Service, including staffing shortages and limited space.
- A rise in prisoner complexity, with more individuals requiring offence-protection or linked with serious organised crime.
- Concerns over regime changes, including shortened days, which may exacerbate tensions.
- Ongoing issues with the prisoner complaints system, echoing calls from the Scottish Human Rights Commission for urgent reform.
- Segregation practices that may breach legal safeguards due to extended periods without ministerial oversight.

Despite these challenges, IPMs noted positive developments, including:

- Increased progression to open conditions at HMP Greenock.
- Examples of compassionate staff interactions.
- The rollout of the UpSide programme, supporting short-term and remand prisoners with throughcare services.

Monitoring activity also increased, with 589 visits conducted and over 2,100 hours spent in prisons, reflecting both growing awareness and demand for IPM services.

The report concludes that a stark choice lies ahead. Without either a reduction in the use of imprisonment or significant investment in capacity, the current situation is unsustainable.

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Notes to Editors:

- HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Sara Snell, was appointed in February 2025.
- On publication the report can be found 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.