HMIPS
HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS FOR SCOTLAND
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

UPDATE ON CHANGES AT HMIPS **10th June 2026**

Dear Colleagues,

Background

As you may be aware, HMIPS is amending its organisational structure to strengthen both its monitoring and inspection functions. This communication provides some detail about the reason for the changes and an update on what it means for staff and stakeholders.

Independent inspection

Since I joined HMIPS early in 2025, it has been evident that the small team was significantly overloaded.

At the same time, it was clear to me that HMIPS lacked sufficient independence in its approach to inspection. An inspection and monitoring team consisting of thirteen people, excluding me, is inadequate for the task of scrutinising the treatment and conditions of over 8,500 prisoners in seventeen prison establishments. We have leant heavily on the Scottish Prison Service, the organisation that we are inspecting, to provide at least three staff to join every inspection, alongside the inspectors from partner organisations HMI Education Scotland, the Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland. Our Thematic Lead has also been provided to HMIPS by the SPS, free of charge.

HMIPS have experienced criticism for this objective lack of independence, such as from prisoners and the families of prisoners, as well as the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). Whilst we have had excellent and much valued support from SPS staff over the years for which I am grateful, I recognise it exposes us to accusations of potential bias and lack of independence. Given the current financial constraints, I have been increasingly concerned that HMIPS could not deliver its statutory duty to inspect all prisons in Scotland on a regular basis, should the SPS or any of our partner organisations withdraw their services.

Review of our Standards for Inspecting and Monitoring Prisons and Court Custody Provision in Scotland

The current inspection and monitoring standards, introduced in 2018, were a revision of the 2015 version, which in turn, were heavily based on the original standards from 2007. While they incorporated human rights principles, they have not been systematically reviewed since. Changes in legal obligations, prison demographics, and operational practices have necessitated a comprehensive update which we hope to complete within the current business year. Our updated standards will apply to court custody provision and give clearer support to independent prison monitors.

The rising number of deaths in Scottish Prisons is of major concern and one that HMIPS is not currently adequately resourced to research, analyse, or scrutinise. Our revision of HMIPS' standards for inspecting and monitoring will weave scrutinising deaths in custody into our inspection model,

Moving to Unannounced Inspections

In line with views expressed to and by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs in Parliament and the model other scrutiny bodies in Scotland follow, we are looking to move from prison inspections that are currently announced around eight weeks in advance, to unannounced inspections. I should also like to introduce short unannounced follow-up inspections on a risk assessed basis and we are not currently resourced to do this. This requires proper scoping with those under inspection to understand the implications.

Staffing and Structure

- **Monitoring team**

To help to facilitate all the aforementioned changes, we are changing the way HMIPS is staffed. I am attaching our updated staffing structure organigramme for your information which is now in effect. Monitoring, inspection and corporate functions will report to the Deputy Chief Inspector who reports directly to me. The HMIPS Monitoring Team will be moving to a new structure with four reshaped Prison Monitoring Coordinator (PMC) roles sitting under two newly created Strategic Monitoring Leads (SMLs). Vicky Dunlop and Chris Collins will move into these SML roles, effective from 1st July. Recruitment of the new PMCs is underway and is expected to be concluded by the end of summer. During the transition period, Vicky and Chris Collins will provide existing PMC cover alongside Chris Johnston and Vilma Kirvelaite, ensuring continuity until the new PMCs are in post and have been trained.

Chris Johnston will move into a Project Management/Organisational Development role, supporting monitoring colleagues with the transition as well as other HMIPS projects, and he will also act as an additional Prison Inspector.

Vilma Kirvelaite and Szymon Jung will continue in their current roles, providing continuity and support within the monitoring function. Vilma will also continue piloting the new reshaped PMC role (which is proving effective).

- **Thematic and research team**

Ewan Mackenzie will move into the now permanent role of Thematic Lead Inspector, where he will focus on strengthening the way in which monitoring, inspection and evidence are brought together to further develop our understanding of what is driving issues across the prison estate.

We are increasing our research/data analyst resource by one and Viktoria Eriksson joins us at the end of July at which point we will bring the thematic and research work into one team under Ewan. This strengthens our ability to carry out the research necessary for both prison and thematic inspections and analyse trends and themes.

- **Inspection team - Associate Inspectors**

To address the lack of sufficient independence and move towards unannounced full and follow-up inspections as well as incorporating scrutiny of deaths in prison custody into our inspection model, the last significant staffing change we are embarking on is to employ a pool of fee paid Associate Inspectors. We anticipate this new arrangement will be in place towards the end of 2026.

What will this mean for our stakeholders?

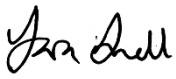
- **IPMs:** The new structure requires us to allocate prison IPM teams to the new PMC set up, detailed in the chart below. While this will bring a degree of uncertainty to the monitoring service during the transition, as any change project does, IPMs should not experience any disruption to the level of support and guidance they currently benefit from. Once the new structure is embedded, we will be in a much stronger position to support IPMs and monitoring in the ways we have received consistent feedback about from monitors.
- **SPS:** Individual prisons should expect a similar level of engagement from IPMs and with PMCs and SMLs.
- **Prisoners:** There should be no change to prisoners' experience of inspection and monitoring other than some new personnel to get to know.

We will continue to review and update our transition planning and update you as things progress.

Our clear focus during the transition, as always, is to ensure that inspection and monitoring remain consistent, well-supported, and continues to provide high-quality, credible evidence to support improved outcomes for prisoners.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any queries or comments.

Yours sincerely



Sara Snell

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

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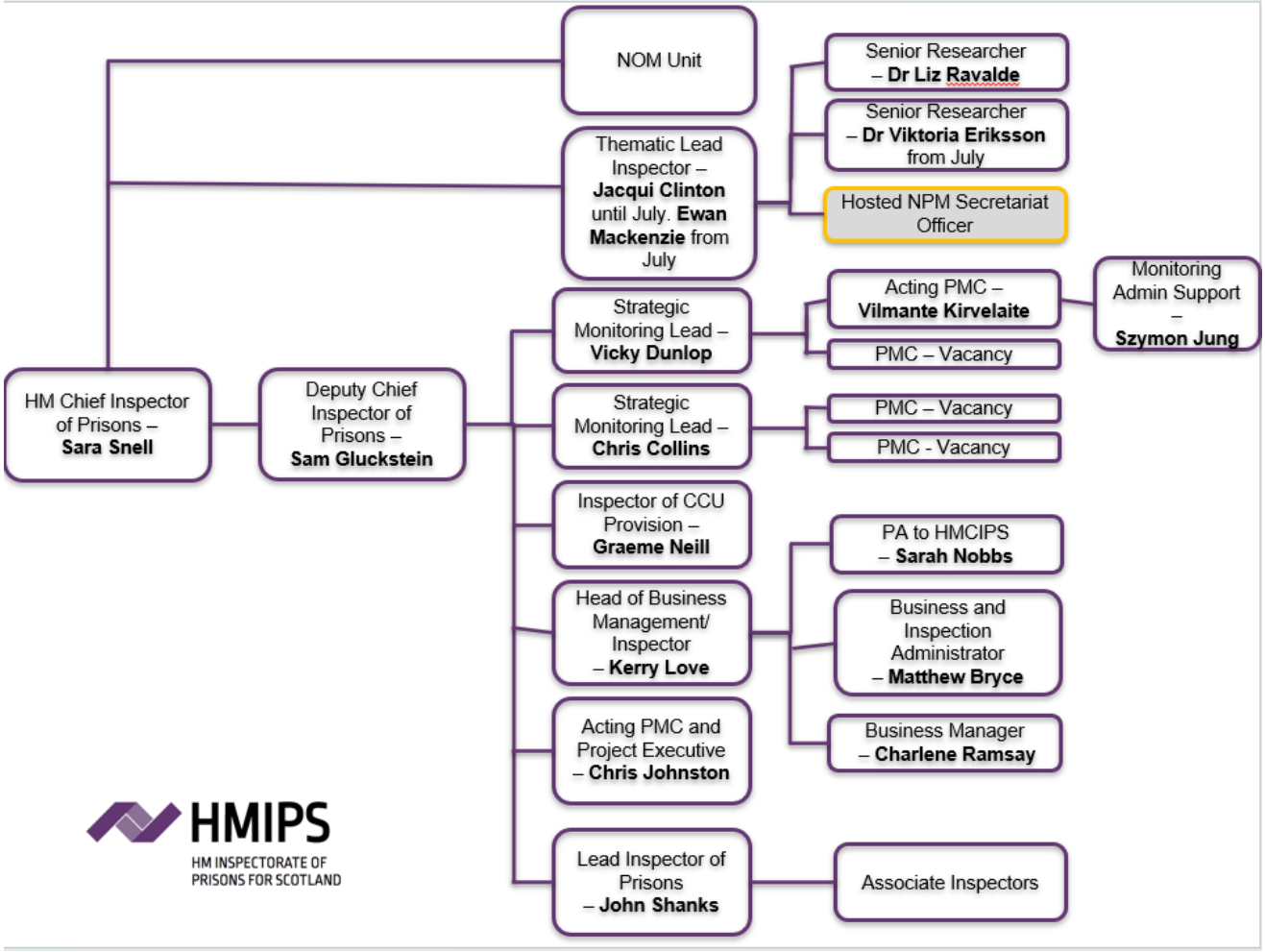
Annex 1 – Updated HMIPS Staffing Structure



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Annex 2 – Prison Allocation

Monitoring Hold Allocation – Effective from July 2026

Chris Johnston	Chris Collins	Vicky Dunlop	Vilma Kirvelaite
- Grampian - Inverness - Castle Huntly - Perth - Low Moss	- Addiewell - Edinburgh - Polmont - Glenochil	- Shotts - Barlinnie - Kilmarnock	- Greenock with EM as Senior - Dumfries with EM as Senior - Stirling Cluster with VD as Senior

Expected Post B2 Appointment Allocation

SML 1 – Chris Collins		SML 2 – Vicky Dunlop	
PMC 1	**PMC 2**	**PMC 3**	**PMC 4**
- Edinburgh - Glenochil - Polmont - Inverness	- Addiewell - Kilmarnock - Grampian - Castle Huntly	- Stirling Cluster - Greenock - Barlinnie	- Shotts - Low Moss - Perth - Dumfries