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Dear Wendy

HMIPS - Repeated Calls for the Cessation of Routine Body Searching in the Women's Estate of the Scottish Prison Service (SPS)

Thank you for your letter of 10 April highlighting your concerns about the ongoing issue of routine strip searching of women in prisons in Scotland.

While there can, as you note, be a legitimate role for body searching when it is based on robust intelligence or reasonable grounds for suspicion, I share your concern that body searching of women in custody has been carried out on a more routine basis, despite being raised by you previously.

I recognise that you have called upon SPS to reduce routine body searching as part of inspection activity, including through recommendations, and other forms of engagement over a period of years as well as your letter of 12 October last year.

SPS is committed to becoming a more trauma-informed organisation, which is an important part of the SPS Corporate Plan 2023-28. Trauma-informed training has taken place across the women's estate, and SPS plan to extend this to staff across all establishments in the next five years, with the aim of supporting the rehabilitation of those in SPS care.

As confirmed by Teresa Medhurst in her letter to you on 16 November, SPS always look to utilise available technology which can be used to help create safe and secure environments for those who live, work, and visit our establishments, where this is viable. There are body scanners in place within several establishments including HMP & YOIs Polmont, Stirling and HMP Grampian, as well as an X-Ray body scanner within HMP Barlinnie. SPS has committed to implementing this technology in other establishments and is aware of the impact that this can have on minimising intrusive searching where there is an operational need for the searches to be carried out. I have sought assurance from SPS that, whenever

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the opportunity to do so arises, establishments use body scanners or other available technology to conduct searches to minimise more intimate searching arrangements. I have also sought further assurance that body searching is only used where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion based on robust intelligence, and where there is no reasonable, practicable.

I understand your particular concern about practice in the recently opened Community Custody Units following your inspection of the Liliias Centre in late February and the Bella Centre in early March. A trauma-informed approach is central to the ethos and running of these centres and I agree it is important that body searching, which is the most invasive form of searching, should not be routinely used. It is important to note, as you have done in your letter, that there is a legitimate role for this type of body searching where there is no reasonable or practicable alternative. Whilst this is an operational matter, I am keen to understand the reasons why such searches were undertaken, and what steps need to be taken to ensure that we are minimising the use of routine body searches as much as possible.

I meet regularly with Teresa Medhurst and I will discuss the issues you have raised with her and ask that SPS write to you to provide a further update on progress being made in reducing use of routine body searches, particularly, in the women's estate where technology is available.

I can assure you that we are committed to ensuring that the human rights of the people in our prisons are respected, protected, and fulfilled. Although the revised version of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) are not legally binding, they set out what is generally accepted as being good principles and practice in the treatment of prisoners and prison management and SPS work towards them.



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