HMIPS
HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS FOR SCOTLAND

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS

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national preventive mechanism

HM Chief Inspector's Annual Report 2024-25

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Contents

1. Introduction

Foreword by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

I am conscious of the privilege and the responsibility that lies with taking up the role of Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland. I know I step into the boots of illustrious predecessors, most recently Wendy Sinclair-Gieben. It is her work and that of her team to which this report speaks, as I took up position at the end of the annual report period. Like Wendy, I am most grateful for the support provided by my colleagues in HMIPS and our dedicated team of Independent Prison Monitors, who volunteer their time so willingly to ensure continued weekly scrutiny of our prisons, as well as our partners without whom we would not be able to inspect fully.

Prisons are places which few have access to or understand. The monitoring, inspecting and reporting role of HMIPS brings to the outside world knowledge of what is going well and what the challenges are for Scottish prisons. When prisons stop being positive and purposeful and become human warehouses everyone suffers, including the public, as only the smallest number of those incarcerated are never released.

Losing your liberty, as well as working in a prison where people's liberty has been forfeited, has always been tough, but it is now probably as hard as it has been in recent decades. The burden on prisoners and prison staff in a prison system struggling to cope with the numbers it is being asked to accommodate, and keeping people safe with the complexity of today's prisoner population is evident. The long-standing pressure of a prison population that has consistently exceeded design capacity has been raised repeatedly by my predecessors. and yet the problem remains. We see the long-term toll on front-line staff, prison officers, health teams and social workers as well as their managers, Governors and SPS Headquarters staff.

Overcrowding in prisons has a paralysing effect. Daily firefighting affects every aspect of prison life and prevents strategic planning and improvement. An unending game of chess with people instead of pieces, sees prisoners moved from one cell to another to make space for new people arriving from court; people being giving the unwelcome news that they are being transferred to a prison further away from their families to make space for new arrivals; and multiple regimes being delivered in prisons, sometimes in one hall, to offence-protection, non-offence protection and main stream prisoners.

Staffing shortages and increasingly complex multiple populations across prisons mean prisons find it difficult to ensure core human rights, such as an hour's access to fresh air, are met for every prisoner. We saw at our inspection at Barlinnie that prisoners could not shower daily. Purposeful activity supporting rehabilitation is compromised, with inadequate access to work, education and other positive activities, and with increasing delays in accessing offender behaviour programmes.

Increasing numbers of people are locked in their cells for more than 22 hours a day, despite the best efforts of staff. Lack of access to purposeful activity and programmes adversely affects mental health, which is particularly disturbing in the context of the extremely worrying rise in the number of deaths in custody in Scotland, and the number of suicides in Scottish prisons.

Opportunities to support people in prison to make changes which help them stay away from crime on release are compromised. The difficulties in finding time to do qualitative work is damaging the personal officer scheme in Scotland, intended to enable front line staff to support prisoners to navigate their way through their sentence and to integrate successfully on their return home. We nevertheless see excellent staff/prisoner relationships in places like Dumfries which ensure prisoners have someone they can turn to when needed.

The daily pressure in keeping prisons running makes it harder to give staff the training and development, mentoring, coaching and support the job needs and deserves. The mentoring initiatives for new staff are positive but there is a need for more highly developed mental health and trauma-informed training for all staff. There is an increasing understanding of issues of neurodivergence for the prison population and staff deserve greater training and support in working in this specialised area.

There are no quick or easy answers to the challenge of a prison system where overcrowding has become deeply entrenched. HMIPS supported the Emergency Release of Prisoners scheme in June 2024 and the Prisoners (Early Release) Scotland Act 2025 in February 2025, as offering necessary short-term breathing spaces but emphasised that these in no way address the root causes of over-population.

The Sentencing and Penal Policy Review, announced in February 2023, started its work at the end of the period this report covers. It has an enormous burden of expectation upon it, both that its findings and recommendations deliver the solutions needed and that they are enacted. It is vital longer-term solutions are adopted swiftly to avoid more short-term options being resorted to and because long-term systemic change takes time to take effect.

Over the past decades, there has been increasing emphasis on human rights and a recognition globally of the need for strengthened transparency and independent monitoring of places of detention. Prisons pose unique challenges for the promotion of human dignity, far from public view and containing people who garner little public sympathy; the tensions of balancing safety and human rights were then exacerbated during a lengthy pandemic and are now compromised by overcrowding.

Moreover, without scrutiny, as we have pointed out before, it is all too easy for even well intentioned staff to become subconsciously complacent or start to accept standards that in any other setting would be unacceptable.

Scotland has invested hugely in the prison estate in the last 25 years; the building of two prisons run by the private sector, two new prisons run by the public sector and the recent build of a new women's prison and two community custody units, are testimony to the commitment to hold in safe and secure custody those sent by the courts.

Despite this welcome investment there is one issue with far reaching consequences that I and my predecessors have consistently reported on: the stubbornly entrenched issue of overcrowding in Scotland's prisons. The high numbers in Scotland's prisons and the issues that it causes are sadly not unexpected and remain a serious concern.

Sara Snell
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

2. Our Vision, Our Values, Our Strategic Ambition

Our Vision

"All people in places of detention are treated humanely, with dignity and respect."

Our Values

We will demonstrate these values in the way that we work together as an organisation and in all of our interactions with our partners.

Independence

We will fulfil our statutory duty to report accurately, impartially and publicly concerning the treatment and conditions for prisoners in Scotland.

Integrity

We will be open and transparent about our inspection and monitoring processes, and ensure our inspection and monitoring reports are accessible when we report publicly on our findings.

Transparency

We will demonstrate the highest professional standards of behaviour and build trust with all those we engage with.

Respect

We will treat all people we engage with, with dignity, courtesy and respect.

Our Strategic Ambition

"To be recognised globally as leading edge in the scrutiny of how people in detention in Scotland are treated."

3. Our Key Partners

Our prison inspection teams comprise HMIPS staff and subject experts from other organisations. HMIPS would like to take this opportunity to thank its key partners for their continued support. Our five key partners are:

Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS)

HIS takes lead responsibility for inspecting Standard 9 – Health and Wellbeing. One of the biggest and often most challenging elements of prison inspections is the inspection of prisoner healthcare. Standard 9 was developed in conjunction with HIS and a range of their key stakeholders, and the Quality Indicators under the Standard reflect a human rights approach as well as the Health and Social Care Standards: My support, my life principles and HIS Quality of Care Approach.

Education Scotland

Education Scotland participate in all prison inspections and take lead responsibility for inspecting Standard 6 – Purposeful Activity. This Standard focuses on evaluating how well prisons provide employment, training, and educational activities for prisoners while they serve their sentences and is one of the key differentiators in reducing reoffending. Education Scotland also consider whether prisoners spend their time purposefully and constructively in out of cell activities, including physical education and cultural activities.

Care Inspectorate

The Care Inspectorate take lead responsibility for Standard 7 – Transitions from Custody to Life in the Community. They look at what support is in place in the lead up to people being released, and importantly what support is in place once released, to assist people to reintegrate into the community and become responsible citizens. We also conducted A Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons with them.

Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC)

SHRC provide support and expert advice to HMIPS inspectors on human rights issues and contributed to the development of our current inspection and monitoring standards.

Risk Management Authority (RMA)

We conducted A Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons with the RMA.

Community Justice Scotland (CJS)

We conducted A Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons with the CJS.

4. The Year in Brief

Summary of Work Undertaken

1,178
IPM visits to prisons

1,636
prisoner requests dealt with

6
FOIs responded to

10
court custody provision full inspections

6
full prison inspections

4
evidence sessions attended at Scottish Parliament

3
thematic reviews

- A Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons (published June 2024)
- "Planned Failure" A Thematic Review of Prisoner Transport in Scotland (published December 2024)
- Thematic review of prison-based social work (published April 2024)

2
Responded to two Scottish Parliamentary requests for evidence and consultations

- Criminal Justice Committee Pre-Budget Scrutiny – 25 October 2024
- Criminal Justice Committee Automatic Early Release of Prisoners Scrutiny – 1 November 2024

The UK National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)

The UK National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) was established in 2009 following the United Kingdom ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). HMIPS is one of 21 bodies that make up this consortium-based organisation, each contributing to fulfilling the OPCAT mandate. The NPM also connects national bodies to the international framework – offering international best practice advice to scrutiny bodies and liaising with the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT).

All inspections carried out by HMIPS contribute to the UK's fulfilment of its international obligations under OPCAT. HMIPS values collaboration with other NPM bodies to address systemic issues seen in places where people are deprived of their liberty across all four nations.

The outgoing HMCIPS, Wendy Sinclair-Gieben, was chair of the UK NPM until August 2024 when she left her post. In her final months as chair, Ms Sinclair-Gieben chaired the 2024 NPM Annual Conference, focused on the theme of scrutinising institutional culture, and continued to lead the ambitious two-year NPM strategy, rolling out a new training resources section on the NPM website and launching new preventive monitoring guidance for leaders, staff and volunteers to an audience of more than 200 individuals working towards the NPM mandate.

HMIPS is also one of six NPM bodies that make up the NPM Scotland Subgroup, which meets to address Scotland-specific issues. In 2024-25, the group published a major report entitled Review, Recommend, Repeat: An assessment of where human rights have stalled in places of detention, launched an analytical review of deaths in prison custody and contributed to a Recommended Standard on tracking mental health bed transfer

times. Through NPM work, HMIPS continues to report our findings and, where findings are similar to other NPM bodies, a wider body of evidence can support recommendations for change.

HMIPS supports the NPM's rights-based approach to monitoring and inspection, and echoes the four NPM values:

1.Detainee-Focused

- The treatment and conditions of detainees will always be the core of our work.

2.Independence

- We are independent of government and external influence. We are impartial, balanced and without bias.

3.Human Rights

- We are a human rights organisation and human rights experts. Our parent treaty is the UN Convention against Torture, but we recognise human rights are interconnected and as such all human rights are relevant to our work.

4.Collaboration

- We work collaboratively with each other, sharing expertise and good practice.
- We work collaboratively with civil society and external partners to broaden our perspective and help fulfil our objectives.

Thematic reviews undertaken

Thematic review of prison-based social work

In April this year, we published a Thematic Review of Prison-based Social Work, jointly with the Care Inspectorate. This report concluded the first phase of work to review the service. It considered the direction of Scotland's prison-based social work services within the context of the changing prison population, resource constraints, and competing demands. Recognising the critical contribution of social workers across the prison in assessing risk and preparing people to return to communities, it also highlighted that this important role is not as visible or well understood as it could be amongst local and national partners. It focused on the impact of pressured resources on capacity and found that there was a lack of consistently robust performance management and quality assurance measures to drive improvement. At the strategic level, the report found there was no clear national vision concluding that "fundamental reform" is needed. Having considered the operating context, the next phase of the joint review will focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of prison-based social work practice.

A Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons

Published in June 2024, HMIPS Thematic Progression Review examined the effectiveness of the SPS Risk Management, Progression & Temporary Release policy and practice designed to prepare sentenced individuals for release and test their ability to manage their identified risks in readiness for access to the community. The review focused on the performance of three core component parts of the SPS policy that govern the prisoner's progression pathways through to release – Integrated Case Management, Risk Assessment and Risk Management Teams. Conducted with the Care Inspectorate, Community Justice Scotland and the Risk Management Authority, the review concluded that the whole system is not meeting the needs of the Scottish Prison Service and is in urgent need of re-evaluation and further investment.

"Planned Failure" A Thematic Review of Prisoner Transport in Scotland

Published on 17 December 2024, this report was informed by the experience of people in custody and from across the criminal justice system. It illustrated how necessary to people deprived of their liberty an effective prisoner transport service is – to health and wellbeing, to family connection and to progression, as well as access to justice.

Whilst acknowledging recent improvement, as well as the effect of changes in the operating context brought about by increased demand. this report described the profound impact on people when transport provision failed. It had 25 recommendations for improvement across the following five key areas:

1. Improved contract specification, giving greater priority to some critical events that are not court-related, and better resources and more professional contract management, including better management information.

2. Improved resilience through offering pay and conditions capable of maintaining an adequate workforce.

3. Better collaborative working and contingency planning and delivery.

4. Improved governance and external scrutiny to improve performance.

5. Reducing demand through digitalisation and modernisation of the wider criminal justice system.

We have been told the recommendations and lessons learned have been taken into account by SPS in the design of the future transport contract.

Remand Prisoners' Experiences in the Scottish Prison System: An HMIPS Analytical Review

With the completion of the pre-inspection survey across Scottish prisons, we initiated an analytical review of experiences of remand in Scottish prisons. HMIPS has expressed concern over the course of prison inspections about the consistent increase in numbers of remand prisoners, as well as the length of time people in Scotland spend on remand. This was also raised in the previous CPT visit to Scotland.

Inspectors have seen people on remand spending long periods locked up in their cells with little to do, increasing their risk of isolation and poor mental and physical health. They have seen over-crowding on remand halls, a shortage or lack of purposeful activity or rehabilitative work for remand prisoners, instances in which remand prisoners are not offered the amount of family contact to which they are entitled, and inadequate support for physical and mental health issues or addictions among the remand population.

This analytical review examines the conditions for and treatment of remand prisoners across the prison estate, and their experiences of life on remand. Using a mixed methods approach, it will provide robust, systematic evidence on areas of concern and possibilities for improvements.

We will report on our findings in next year's annual report.

5. Strategic Challenges for Prisons and the Criminal Justice System

The prison system, and the criminal justice system more widely, continues to face strategic challenges we have highlighted on many previous occasions.

Overcrowding and a more complex prison population to manage

Scotland has one of the higher prison populations per capita in Europe and overcrowding continues to blight Scotland's prisons. Despite an early release scheme during the spring and summer of 2024 and new legislation later in the year allowing prisoners serving sentences under four years to be released when they had served 40% of their sentence, pressure on the system was only temporarily eased.

By the end of March 2025, the prison population totalled almost 8,200 and remained more than 400 above total design capacity, with 10 prisons overcrowded. HMP Barlinnie was the most affected, operating more than 30% above its design capacity. This level of overcrowding frequently results in two people having to share small single cells only designed to hold one, breaching core human rights and internationally recognised minimum space standards. In HMP & YOI Grampian, due to overcrowding and the failure of the prisoner transport provider, we found that prisoners had been obliged to sleep on mattresses on the floor for a short period earlier in the year.

Overcrowding imposes additional pressures on staff and compromises their ability to provide normal daily activities for prisoners. This results in problems ensuring reasonable time out of cell and adequate access to showers, employment, education, healthcare, addiction services and offender behaviour management programmes as well as time in the fresh air and at the gym. All of this can affect a person's readiness for release and reduction in the risk posed by some individuals to the public.

The SPS also has a more complex prisoner population to manage, with increasing numbers of prisoners being managed separately, either due to the nature of their offence or the number of enemies they have within the prison system, particularly where they are affiliated to serious organised crime groups and changing allegiances within those groups. When combined with the pressures of overcrowding this has led to mixed cohorts of protection and mainstream prisoners, or convicted and remand prisoners, being in the same residential areas, the latter breaching rule 11 of The United Nations Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

An emerging issue this year is the number of prisoners being separated from their peers but managed in residential areas rather than in Separation and Reintegration Units. This intensifies the challenge in providing fair and adequate access to activities for all prisoner groups, and maximising use of employment and education facilities while maintaining safety. It increases the burden on the staff whose role it is to provide that access.

A rising number of older prisoners with greater care and support needs means staff are caring for people with vulnerabilities in accommodation unsuited to hospital beds and wheelchairs. This is especially difficult in the older prison estate where adaptations for disabilities are expensive and difficult to make. In HMP Barlinnie, for example, with its high walkways and steep steps that are difficult to negotiate, older prisoners had to be located on the ground floor and there are only five accessible cells for a total population of over 1,300 prisoners. The new HMP Glasgow will alleviate the design issues but not the illness and infirmity of these prisoners, and it is still years away from completion.

The limited steps the SPS can take to increase capacity to address the overcrowding, such as the partial reopening of Cruden Hall in HMP & YOI Grampian, have been taken. But the issue is one of too high imprisonment levels for the estate to accommodate. The prison population will continue to grow unless a different approach is taken. The Sentencing and Penal Policy Review was announced in February 2024 but only began its work in February 2025. Implementation of any agreed options will not come quickly enough to address the intense pressure that the prison system faces.

Deaths in custody

The number of deaths in custody, from completed suicide, drug overdoses and natural causes in an increasingly aged population, were a major cause for concern.

As reported in Nothing to See Here? Deaths in Custody and their Investigation in Scotland in 2024 - SCCJR 64 people, the highest number ever recorded, died in prison in 2024 in a prison population of around 8,100, a 60% increase compared with 2023, making Scotland's mortality rate amongst the highest in Europe. This means that the mortality rate now stands at 790 deaths per 100,000, more than double that in 2014. The number of recorded completed suicides was 17, again, the highest number yet in Scottish prisons. This increase in numbers of people dying is of urgent concern to us all.

We were asked by Angela Constance, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, to review the action taken by the Scottish Prison Service in response to the findings of the Fatal Accident Inquiry into the deaths of Katie Allan and William Brown. This will be a key focus for us during 2025-26, and our aim will be not just to review whether appropriate action has been taken on the recommendations but what difference it has made in terms of overall action to minimise the risk of suicide.

Substance use

The number of instances of prisoners being placed on observations under the Management of Offenders at Risk Due to Any Substance (MORS) policy, because of concerns that they have taken illicit substances, increased significantly (by 21%)

As reported in Nothing to See Here? Deaths in Custody and their Investigation in Scotland in 2024 - SCCJR the number of deaths in custody linked to substance use has also increased. Deaths from drugs are increasing faster than deaths from other causes: there were at least 10 drug deaths in 2024, a number likely to rise as more causes of death are determined. These are profoundly troubling trends and preventing drugs getting into prisons and managing the consequences when they do is a significant challenge for the SPS, the NHS and the police.

Healthcare and mental health support

Healthcare and mental health support continue to be a concern in some individual prisons, as does the number of secondary care appointments having to be cancelled due to failures with the prisoner transport. Our report "Planned Failure" A Thematic Review of Prisoner Transport in Scotland, highlighted the number of times that some prisoners had had important secondary healthcare appointments cancelled and the additional stress that created.

Progression

A Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons highlighted that the whole progression system was flawed and in need of significant reform. With long waiting lists to access programmes and backlogs for getting an assessment for which programmes might be required, the limited availability of accredited offence-focused treatment programmes was a barrier to progression and a source of frustration to staff and the people requiring these interventions to progress towards release.

The SPS has accepted the need for reform to its progression and case management systems but expect to take several years to implement this fully.

The SPS has reprioritised delivery of its offender behaviour programmes to focus on those with the most complex behavioural needs. Questions remain, however, about the support available to those who would previously have attended the programmes that have stopped running, and how they are supported to address their offending behaviour and demonstrate the necessary reduction in risk before their release. Neither the criminal justice system nor the public are served well unless such risks have been reduced. The continued failure to make full use of capacity in HMP Castle Huntly, the Open Estate, partly because challenges with the progression system does nothing to help ease overcrowding elsewhere in the prison estate.

The SPS Anti-bullying Strategy

Another area of concern identified repeatedly in our prison inspection reports has been the inability to embed the SPS national Anti-bullying Strategy – Think Twice. Staff mostly demonstrate little understanding of the current anti-bullying process and not having an effective way to challenge those that bully others has a significant effect on safety. Our pre-inspection surveys and interviews with prisoners indicate that few would report bullying despite significant numbers of prisoners reporting that they have been subject to verbal abuse, harassment or bullying from other prisoners and from staff.

Complaints system

Our long-standing concerns about the lack of confidence prisoners have in the SPS complaints system has not changed. In some prisons it is not possible to submit a complaint without first discussing it with an officer, and in most prisons no proof is given that a complaint has even been lodged. A fully electronic system for logging complaints, tracking progress and securing a response within the official timelines is long overdue. It is especially challenging for those who do not have English as a first language to access the complaints system.

Vocational training

All prisons inspected offered employment opportunities to convicted prisoners, and some were assessed as offering well-organised work opportunities suited to the abilities of their prisoner population. Those who attended employment regularly, often engaged enthusiastically and reported that they had benefited. For too many prisons though there were insufficient opportunities for the whole prison population and long waiting lists for popular work parties.

Vocational training was a common area of concern. Apart from HMP Barlinnie, most prisons inspected during the last year offered minimal, or no, access to vocational qualifications, sometimes because of not having appropriately trained staff to deliver certification. There was a consistent need across all establishments to align training more closely with labour market demands and ensure access for all prisoner groups.

Staff shortages in prisons and the challenges of inexperienced staff

In almost all our recent prison inspections, staff shortages through sickness absence have had a significant detrimental impact. Too often work parties had to close to release staff to cover staff shortages in the residential areas. Even then, we have seen prisoners locked in their cells for too long with very little out of cell activity in the evenings.

There has been a drive to recruit more staff, but it takes time to build knowledge and experience. Many of the staff who were recruited during the pandemic, when there was little activity and prisoners were mostly locked up, are still adjusting to busier and noisier prisons with more prisoners out of their cells at the same time. Prisoners complain that less experienced staff are less able to support them or provide basic information and lack knowledge about progression opportunities. In response to this issue, some prisons have introduced a formal mentoring scheme for new recruits, team building events, and a 'soft landing' after their induction at the SPS College, where new recruits can learn about other parts of the prison before starting their role.

Court custody attendance and transport costs

During our inspection of 10 court custody units this year, we still found examples of prisoners being called to attend who, in the end, were not required at all, or who appeared in court for just a few minutes as part of their legal process. There is huge scope for key agencies including the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service (SCTS) to improve court scheduling and make greater use of video court technology. This would reduce unnecessary transport time and costs and allow more effective engagement with purposeful activity in prison.

An emerging area of concern is some inconsistency or lack of understanding between GEOAmey, the SCTS, and Criminal Justice Social Work teams, as to whose responsibility it is to ensure that custodies who are released from court have the means to get home and keep themselves safe. HMIPS will continue to monitor this further and make recommendations where needed.

6. Monitoring

Prison Monitoring

A volunteer Independent Prison Monitor (IPM) team visits every prison in Scotland every week. Around 120 people currently volunteer their time to visit prisons and check on the treatment and conditions. This vital scrutiny helps us fulfil our OPCAT and domestic requirements. More importantly, it provides an HMIPS presence in all establishments on a frequent basis. As one prisoner explained, the simple presence of IPMs in the prison helps to reduce poor practice.

The IPMs also provide intelligence for our inspection work and inform our strategic thinking. The IPMs' top concerns centred on overcrowding and its insidious impact across the entire prison estate. However, they also raised significant concerns about the complex prisoner population being held in many prisons, the impact of drugs and drug taking within prison, the number of prisoners being segregated for long periods outside of designated Separation and Reintegration Units, ongoing barriers to prisoners' progression through their sentence, and the concerning number of deaths that have occurred in Scottish prisons during the reporting year. There are links to the IPM annual reports published on our website later in the report.

HMIPS were re-awarded the Investors in Volunteers award August 2024, with praise for the opportunities and support offered to volunteers. As an organisation this recognition is important to us and helps us work to ensure that we continue to develop ourselves to attract more volunteers. Over the last two years we have reinvigorated our volunteer recruitment and training processes, moving from fixed recruitment events to an ongoing programme to appoint volunteers. We now have an online application form and have significantly reduced the time from applying to becoming a monitor. We have been successful in increasing the number of volunteers we have. Developments have also been made in training, and feedback from the annual volunteer survey has shown the positive impact of this. We plan

significant further work around this including the development of interactive e-learning modules and case study seminars.

This year was the first full year using the new IT Prisoner Case Management (PCM) system, which has allowed us to manage IPM visit reports and requests from prisoners more efficiently. More importantly it improves our collection of trends and patterns which better feeds into the HMIPS assessment of which prisons need to be prioritised for inspection. Analysis of this information allows a more strategic way to determine which areas might require additional attention including thematic inspections. Engagement in thematic work adds value to the work the volunteers do.

Independent Prison Monitoring Advisory Group (IPMAG)

The Independent Prison Monitoring Advisory Group (IPMAG) plays a crucial role within HMIPS. Comprised of independent experts, IPMs, and HMIPS staff, and independently chaired, the IPMAG provides valuable oversight and advice to HMCIPS regarding the monitoring of prisons in Scotland.

By collaborating with HMIPS, the IPMAG enhances the transparency and effectiveness of prison monitoring processes. Their input helps to ensure that monitoring is comprehensive, fair, and focused on promoting the wellbeing, safety, and rights of individuals in custody.

Through their valuable contributions and recommendations, the IPMAG strengthens the accountability and quality of Scotland's prison system, contributing to ongoing efforts to improve conditions and promote a rehabilitative approach to incarceration.

During the reporting period 20024-25 the volunteer IPMAG members were:

- Kathrine Mackie (Chair), retired Sheriff and Advisor to the Community Justice Scotland Board

- Jim Murdoch, Academic, Glasgow University

- Jim Farish, Scottish Human Rights Commission, and former SPS Prison Governor

- Jim Watson, Academic and member of the Prison Expert Group

- Gil Long, IPM at HMP Barlinnie

- Sarah Cox, IPM at HMP Perth, and the Bella Centre Community Custody Unit

- Tina Harris, IPM at HMP YOI Grampian, and HMP Inverness

- Margaret Roberts, IPM at HMPs Kilmarnock and Greenock

- Mark Hamid, IPM at HMP Edinburgh

In addition, HMCIPS is a member of the IPMAG, along with the Deputy Chief Inspector, and the four HMIPS Prison Monitoring Co-ordinators. A representative from the Scottish Government's Justice Directorate attends as an observer.

During this reporting year, the IPMAG met quarterly in May, September and November 2024, and February 2025. Discussions focused primarily on the key purposes of the group as set out in the Public Services Reform (Inspection and Monitoring of Prisons) (Scotland) Order 2015, namely:

- The effectiveness of the independent prison monitoring system.

- The recruitment, retention and training of IPMs.

- Annual review and further refinement of the Guidance for IPMs.

- Recommendations for improvements in respect of the above.

The IPMAG provided views on how to monitor the effects of overcrowding due to the rising prison population, on-going problems with prisoner progression, access to healthcare, and the effects of lower staffing levels for both SPS and NHS services. The group also maintained an overview of the progress in recruiting IPMs to those teams most in need of new volunteers. In addition, the group monitored the launch, implementation, and on-going use of the new IT system for IPMs to use in support of their weekly visits.

We would like to give special thanks to Kathrine Mackie who stepped down as chair in February this year, and also to Gill Long, Tina Harris, Mark Hamid and Margaret Robertson who also stood down this year after serving their full term as Independent Prison Monitors.

7. HMIPS Priorities for 2025-26
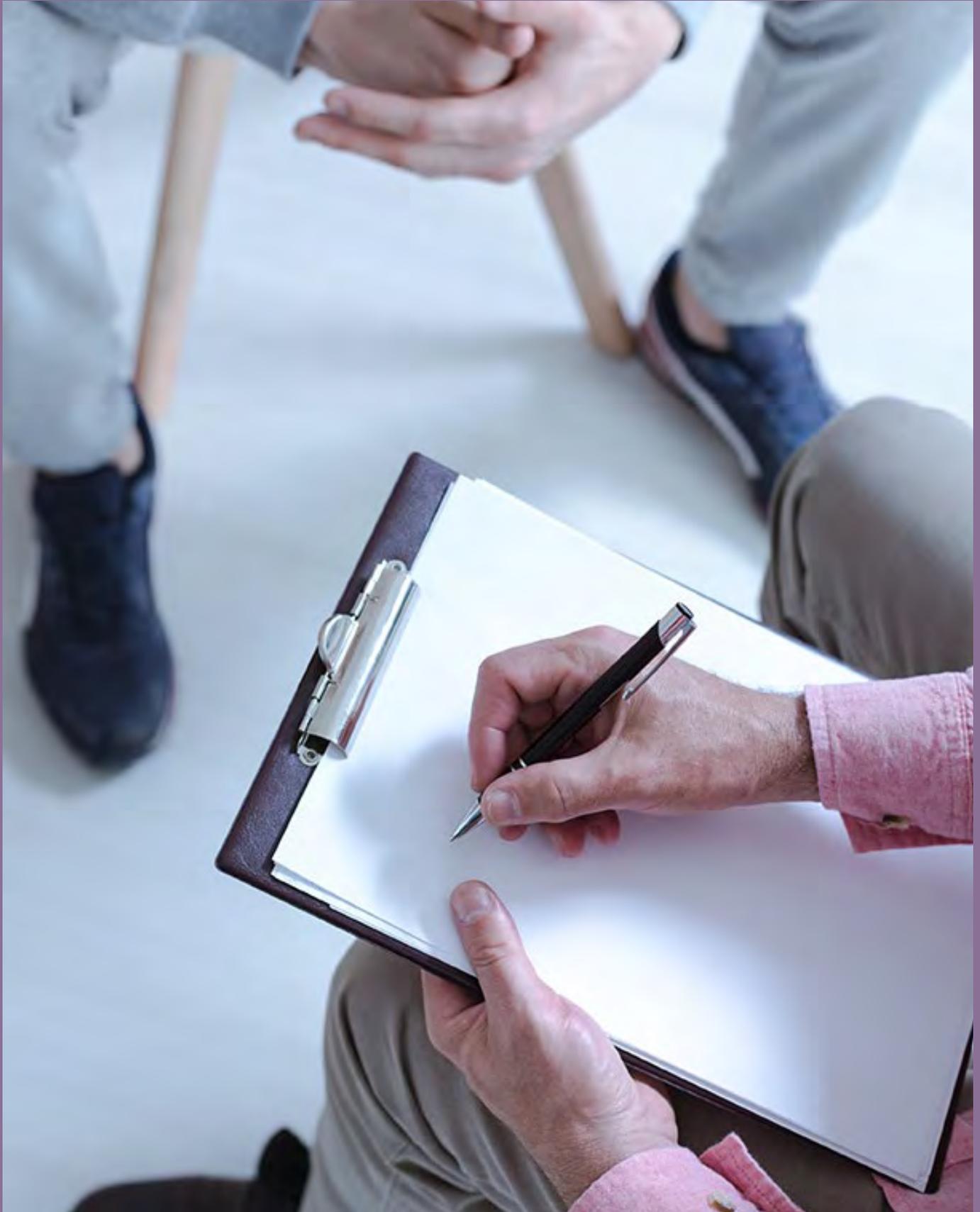
Regrettably, many of the issues which concerned us in 2024-25 remain unchanged from previous years. The HMIPS team completes good work with the limited resource available, but this has not resulted in the change sought. Accordingly, we will move in 2025-26 to a new system of making outcome focused recommendations and seek to hold the SPS and others to account for delivering the changes required by publishing their action plans in response to our inspection reports.

We will maintain continued scrutiny through our prison and CCU inspections, thematic reviews and independent prison monitoring teams on the key strategic and operational issues highlighted earlier in this report.

- The impact of overcrowding - compounded by an increased complexity in the population.

- Staffing shortages and inexperienced staff affecting the treatment and conditions of prisoners.

- Monitoring progress to reduce overcrowding that the SPS have under their control such as HDC and progression.

- Health and wellbeing particularly for those with mental health needs, alcohol and substance use, age-related issues, and secondary care.

In addition, we will:

- Monitor progress with development of the new prisons HMPs Glasgow and Highland, replacing HMPs Barlinnie and Inverness, whose fabric and condition have long been unsuited to a 21st century prison population and staff.

- Monitor the progress in ensuring cells designed for one person hold only one person.

- Monitor progress made on desired outcomes from our inspections and thematic reviews.

- Support the NPM with their joint work on key detention issues, including the development of a training package for the prevention of torture and a mental health review across all four UK jurisdictions.

- Complete a review of the experience of prisoners held on remand.

- Initiate a full revision of the inspection and monitoring standards. Last reviewed and revised in 2018, there is a pressing need to bring them in line with more recent international and national standards and norms. With a small team, this will prevent our being able to conduct other thematic inspections in the forthcoming business year or complete a review of the Use of Force that we had previously envisaged.

8. Staff and Finances
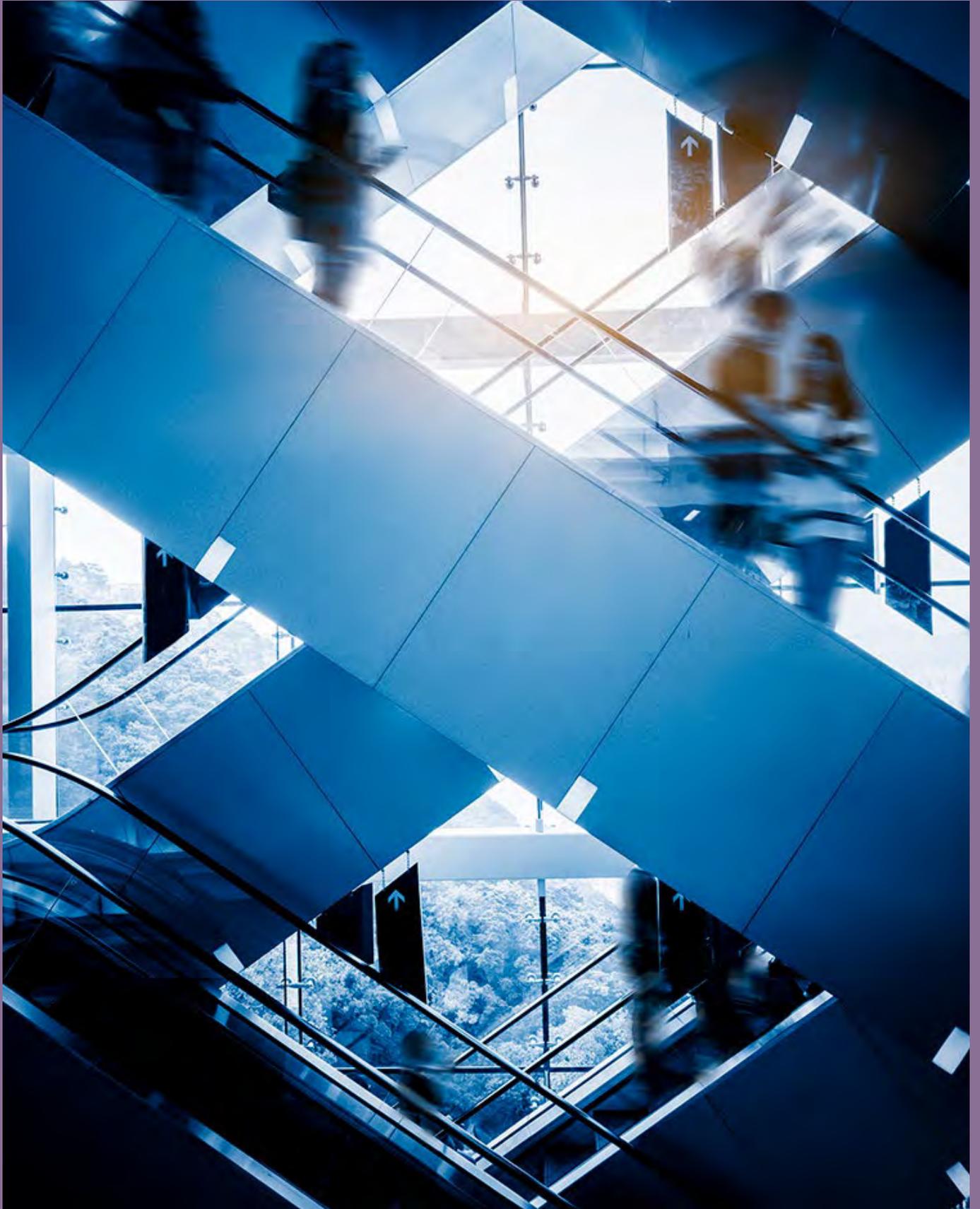
Staff

Wendy Sinclair-Gieben, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland until 31 August 2024

Sara Snell, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland from February 2025

Stephen Sandham, Deputy Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

Calum McCarthy, Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

Jacqui Clinton, Thematic Inspector

Chelsea Keenan, Scottish NPM Co-ordinator

Liz Ravalde, Senior Social Researcher

Christopher Johnston, Prison Monitoring Co-ordinator, Region 1

Vicky Dunlop, Prison Monitoring Co-ordinator, Region 2

Chris Collins, Prison Monitoring Co-ordinator, Region 3

Ewan Mackenzie, Prison Monitoring Co-ordinator, Region 4

Kerry Love, Head of Business Management/Inspector

Graeme Neill, Inspector of Court Custody Units

Dorothy Halliday, Executive Assistant for HMCIPS until November 2024

Vilmante Kirvelaite, Prison Monitoring Support Officer and temporary Executive Assistant from November 2024

Shea Murray, Administrative Assistant until September 2024

Matthew Bryce, Administrative Assistant from December 2024

Finances

Costs for the year were as follows

	(£)
Staff costs	1,053,611
Travel and subsistence	54,971
Overseas travel	0
Printing and Binding	19,957
Conference Fees	0
Hospitality	0
Staff training	134
Public relations	0
Other running costs	34,731
Total	**1,163,404**

9. Annexes

Annex A

Independent Prison Monitoring Regions and Annual Reports

Region 1 🔵
 1. HMP Glenochil
 2. HMP & YOI Grampian
 3. HMP Inverness
 4. HMP Open Estate
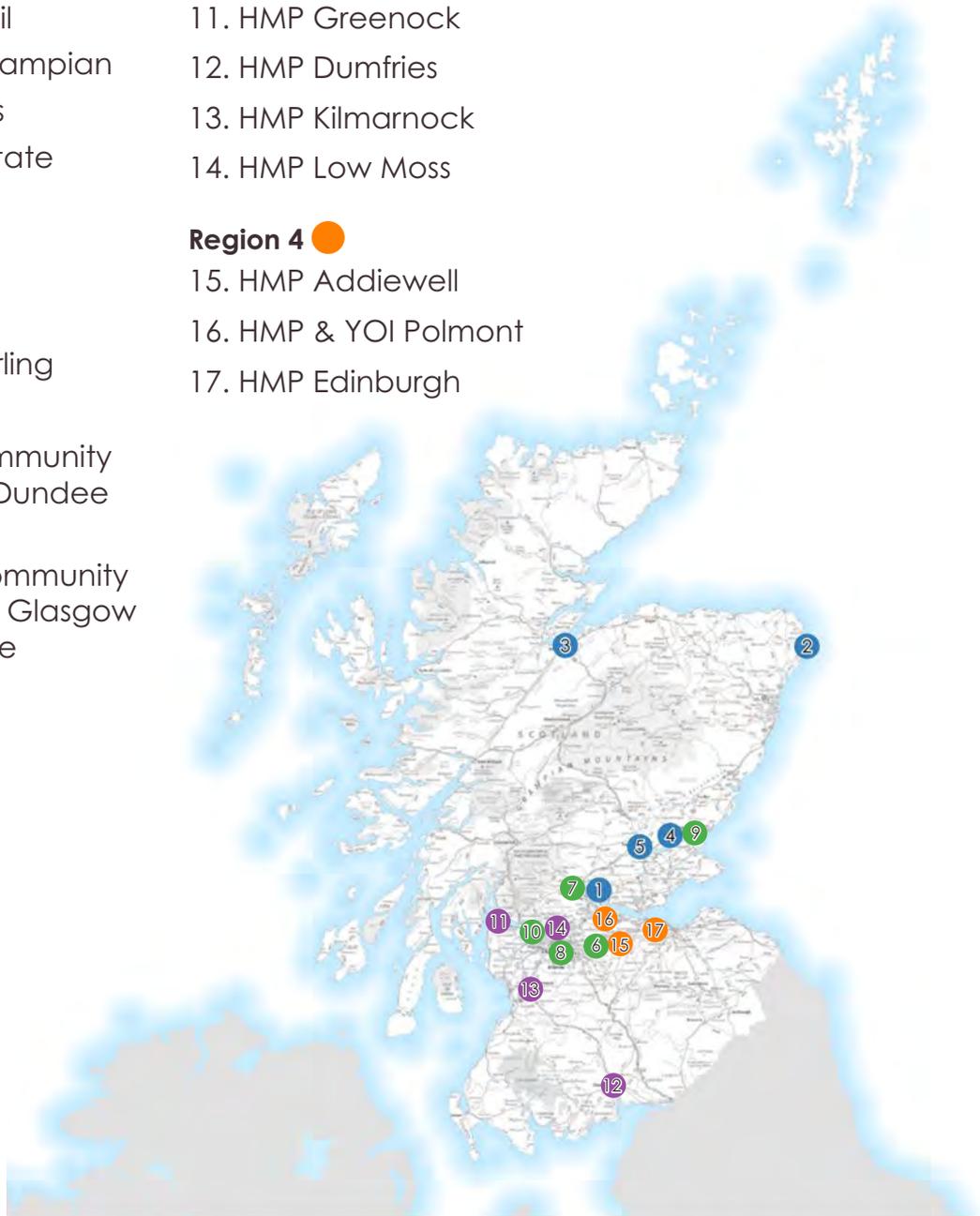 5. HMP Perth

Region 2 🟢
 6. HMP Shotts
 7. HMP & YOI Stirling
 8. HMP Barlinnie
 9. Women's Community Custody Unit Dundee – Lillias Centre
 10. Women's Community Custody Unit Glasgow – Bella Centre

Region 3 🟣
 11. HMP Greenock
 12. HMP Dumfries
 13. HMP Kilmarnock
 14. HMP Low Moss

Region 4 🟠
 15. HMP Addiewell
 16. HMP & YOI Polmont
 17. HMP Edinburgh

Scotland's Prisons - 2024

with monitoring and inspection regions

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Scale 1:3,101,600

Scottish Government Geographic Information Science & Analysis Team. September 2022. job6287rs.

HMP Addiewell
9 Station Road
Addiewell
West Lothian
EH55 8QF

HMP Barlinnie
81 Lee Avenue
Riddrie
G33 2QX

Bella Centre
81 Ann Street
Dundee
DD3 7TF

HMP Castle Huntly Open Estate
Longforgan
near Dundee
DD2 5HL

HMP Dumfries
Terregles Street
Dumfries
DG2 9AX

HMP Edinburgh
3 Stenhouse Road
Edinburgh
EH11 3LN

HMP Glenochil
King O'Muir Road
Tuillibody
Clackmannanshire
FK10 3AD

HMP & YOI Grampian
South Road
Peterhead
AB42 2YY

HMP Greenock
Old Inverkip Road
Greenock
PA16 9AJ

HMP Inverness
Duffy Drive
Inverness
IV2 3HH

HMP Kilmarnock
Mauchline Road
Kilmarnock
KA1 5AA

Lilias Centre
41 Shawpark Street
Maryhill
Glasgow
G20 9DR

HMP Low Moss
Crosshill
Bishopbriggs
Glasgow
G64 2PZ

HMP Perth
3 Edinburgh Road
Perth
PH2 8AT

HMP YOI Polmont
Brightons
Falkirk
FK2 0AB

HMP Shotts
Canthill
Shotts
ML7 4LE

HMP & YOI Stirling
Stirling
FK9 5NU

Annex B - Key findings from our inspection partners

Healthcare Improvement Scotland Findings

Primary Care - Areas for Improvement

■ Given the diverse population within prisons, it is crucial to have referral forms and accessible information available in the most common languages spoken. This ensures that non-English speakers can understand and access healthcare services. Additionally, providing information in formats accessible to individuals with literacy issues is essential. These are not available in all Scottish prisons.

■ There have been ongoing issues with the current escorting contractor. GeoAmey has been a major contributing factor in secondary care appointments being cancelled and people not receiving health screenings upon arrival at a prison. This remains a significant risk to patient care, but health teams are managing and mitigating these risks.

■ There is a noticeable lack of person-centred care plans for those with long-term conditions. These plans should be discussed and agreed upon with patients to ensure their needs are met. The absence of such plans risks inadequate care.

Primary Care - Good Practice

■ Providing up-to-date waiting times through electronic systems, or displays, in health centres helps manage patient expectations and reduces anxiety. By giving patients appointments, they can better plan their visits, which can improve overall patient satisfaction.

■ The development of the Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) role in prisons is a positive development. Robust ANP services follow patients up, not only the day after admission, but continuously ensure that patients receive ongoing care and support during their time in prison.

■ There have been excellent examples of Occupational Therapy (OT) services offering daily living support which helps patients in work, daily living and completing daily tasks to regain their independence and improve their quality of life. These services are tailored to individual needs and play a critical role in rehabilitation.

Mental Health Care - Areas for Improvement

■ Care plans should be tailored to each patient's unique needs and preferences. This involves actively involving the patient in the development process to ensure their goals and concerns are addressed. Additionally, care plans must be easily accessible to all team members. Some prisons lack adequate mental health care planning.

■ Risk assessments should be consistently conducted for all patients receiving care from the mental health team. Utilising standardised tools, preferably electronic, can help ensure uniformity and accuracy in assessments. Again, we have seen a lack of standardised assessments and tools in some prisons.

Mental Health Care - Good Practice

■ We see many examples of 'Person of Concern Groups' which supports collaborative care for individuals with complex issues, including serious mental health conditions and comorbidities.

Substance Use Services - Areas for Improvement

■ Psychosocial interventions for patients are sometimes limited due to staffing levels, with priority given to referrals and Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) management. Staff training availability also affects these interventions. Additionally, individualised care plans are often lacking for people receiving care from substance use teams, as with the issues seen in mental health care.

Substance Use Services - Good Practice

■ We have identified detailed and robust liberation care planning with evidence of good communication and links with community services for ongoing support and engagement. These liberation care plans ensure that patients receive continuous care and support upon release.

■ There are motivated approaches to implementing and understanding Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) standards, with improved awareness and a focus on patient choice regarding OST. Additionally, there is a robust process for offering harm reduction and pre-liberation sessions (including naloxone training) to all patients, not just those on the substance use caseload. This comprehensive approach helps prepare patients for release and reduces the risk of harm.

Medicines Management - Areas for Improvement

■ Patients not having access to working in-cell safes is a significant issue, leading to challenges with medication possession and, in some cases, patients having to share safes. Ensuring all patients have access to functional in-cell safes is crucial for secure and individualised medication storage. Additionally, medications are being administered outside of therapeutic timeframes, with evening medications given mid to late afternoon, including night sedation and sedative medications. Administering medications within the appropriate therapeutic timeframes is vital for their effectiveness and for maintaining patient health.

Medicines Management - Good Practice

■ Encouraging patients to manage their own medication in preparation for release helps them become more self-sufficient. Patients have access to the Pharmacy Team, including a Clinical Pharmacist, and can directly refer themselves for personalised support.

Leadership and Governance - Areas for Improvement

■ Staff need full access to complaints training and the ability to share learning from complaints to ensure effective resolution of patient concerns.

■ The ageing prison estate and poor state of repair in healthcare areas hinder effective cleaning and infection control, necessitating improvements to the physical environment.

Leadership and Governance - Good Practice

■ Patients can share their feedback through focus groups, drop-in sessions, and engagement sessions.

■ New staff are allowed to be supernumerary, giving them time to complete their induction and familiarise themselves with the prison environment. Role-specific training is provided, including joint sessions with the SPS to enhance collaboration and understanding.

Education Scotland Findings

Education Provision

■ Each establishment provided access to education in varying forms, ranging from structured classrooms to informal or in-cell learning. Almost all offered well-equipped and inclusive education spaces. The Bella Centre, while lacking a dedicated classroom, effectively used communal areas and in-cell learning resources to support personal development.

■ HMP Barlinnie's education unit is proactive in the distribution of learning packs, and in sourcing external funding initiatives that allowed prisoners to retain study materials. In contrast, HMP & YOI Stirling, The Lilias Centre and HMP Dumfries faced challenges with engagement and attendance, often due to narrow subject offerings or lack of promotion. The Bella Centre's education provision was personalised and practical, offering Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) courses in areas such as nutrition, personal development, and mental health, alongside cookery classes tailored to independent living. HMP & YOI Grampian had good prisoner engagement. However, the range of subjects offered to prisoners was limited and some prison populations had fewer scheduled opportunities to attend education.

Health and Fitness

■ All establishments offered physical education. HMP & YOI Grampian and HMP Barlinnie had well-equipped gyms and maintained high participation. Stirling's gym buddy scheme was highlighted as an example of holistic peer support that fostered wellbeing. The Lilias Centre and The Bella Centre, despite limited space, encouraged daily activity through flexible access and initiatives such as The Bella Centre's 'daily mile.' However, half of establishments did not offer recognised health or fitness qualifications due to staff training challenges.

Library Services

■ Library services were inconsistent across the estate. HMP & YOI Grampian and HMP Dumfries operated welcoming and proactive library environments, with full-time staff and creative initiatives such as HMP & YOI Grampian's 'Book Bingo.' The Lilias Centre and The Bella Centre maintained modest collections suited to their populations.

■ HMP Barlinnie's library provision was rated poor, with outdated stock, low engagement, and no formal cataloguing system. HMP & YOI Stirling's library was also under-resourced, lacked external partnerships, and had no formal link to education services.

Recreational, Cultural and Religious Activity

■ Cultural and recreational activities varied significantly. All prisons offered a wide range of activity, including participation in the Koestler Awards and arts contributions to prison publications, celebrations such as International Women's Day, and creative expression through art and themed events. HMP Barlinnie offered recreational events, but some lacked cultural inclusivity or educational value. HMP Barlinnie was encouraged to develop a prison-wide activity plan that reflects cultural diversity.

■ Chaplaincy teams were generally visible and accessible. HMP & YOI Stirling stood out for their interdisciplinary approach to pastoral care, with faith teams collaborating across prison services and maintaining detailed records of support provided. Most sites had access mechanisms for minority faith support.

Examples of Good Practice

Across the prison estate, notable practices were identified:

HMP & YOI Grampian:

■ The Book Bingo initiative that encouraged prisoners to read a wider genre of materials.

■ The prison had built additional time into the regime timetable for escorting prisoners to the exercise yards to ensure they got their full hour outside.

HMP Dumfries:

■ Their effective approach to work allocation and encouraging participation in prison activity.

The Lilias Centre:

■ The education timetable provided an opportunity for each prisoner to meet regularly with a tutor to discuss progress with their individual learning plan.

HMP & YOI Stirling:

■ A gym buddy programme was in place. Physical training instructors supported gym buddies well, in their role to provide peer support to help empower women to take action to improve their health and wellbeing. This holistic support to improve prisoners' health and wellbeing encouraged wider participation.

■ Chaplaincy staff liaised with other disciplines to ensure that the pastoral support being offered was not at odds with work being offered by other service providers.

The Bella Centre:

■ The Hub area provided a lovely welcoming setting for visits, and supervision of visits was done sensitively.

HMP Barlinnie:

■ The education unit have identified external funding to allow prisoners to buy and keep books to support their studies.

■ The education staff work well to make best use of learning opportunities for prisoners. They were pro-active in visiting residential halls to find the reasons for non-attendance and actively encouraging prisoners to re-engage. They also promoted helpful in-cell learning packs and had a very high take up.

Shared Recommendations

A number of recommendations apply across the prison estate to varying degrees between institutions. SPS should consider:

- Vocational Training: expand certificated, employment-relevant vocational programmes. Train staff to deliver qualifications in practical fields such as cleaning, food hygiene, and health and safety.

- Education: broaden the subject range of education and promote learning more effectively. Educational content should be tailored for underrepresented and less-educated prisoners.

- Fitness and Wellbeing: reintroduce qualifications for prisoners.

- Library Resources: improve resources, catalogue collections, and partner with local authorities to enhance library provision across all prisons.

- Cultural Inclusion: design diverse, meaningful cultural and recreational activities that reflect the lived experience of the prison population.

- Equity of Access: ensure all prisoners, including short-term, older, and protection population, have equal access to employment, education, and cultural activities.

- Chaplaincy and Faith Support: improve access to multilingual religious texts and ensure the visibility and responsiveness of faith teams.

Care Inspectorate Findings

Preparing People for a Successful Return to the Community

- Staff actively encouraged people to participate in pre-release planning arrangements in all prisons inspected. There were established arrangements for involving people serving long-term sentences in preparation for their re-integration into communities. The Enhanced Integrated Case Management (ICM) processes were particularly well-embedded and implemented.

- There was consistent, purposeful attendance at ICMs from community-based and prison-based social workers, along with other appropriate and relevant agencies. We noted an improving focus on promoting attendance of family members within the ICMs. Regular attendance and full participation of personal officers in ICM processes was less well-developed and their contribution, along with how they were enabled to support case management, varied across establishments. Where personal officers were meaningfully participating, they made relevant contributions which were recognised as invaluable by the person in prison and by other professionals.

- Strong partnership working between prison and social work staff helped to ensure that planning for release and reintegration into the community operated effectively. In the main, prison staff and prison-based social workers worked collaboratively with community-based social workers to ensure key decisions about progression and release were informed by timely and comprehensive assessments and reports.

- While case management processes for people serving short-term sentences were less consistent, there were examples of positive multi-agency collaboration and reintegration planning either already established or emerging across all prisons. Encouragingly, attention was being given to developing approaches to support people on remand, including planning for their potential release.

- People mostly spoke positively about their experience of release planning processes and valued the support they received from staff in prison and from external agencies. They described being included in planning, that they understood key processes, and had opportunities to contribute and express their views on reintegration and release arrangements.

- Pre-release planning processes helped to ensure that most people were successfully guided toward appropriate services to support them in their transition from custody to the community. Effective engagement between prisons and the range of agencies and services represented within establishments was key to supporting efficient exits from custody.

- Prisons were supporting developments aimed at further strengthening collaboration across agencies and addressing challenges in trying to meet peoples' community integration needs. Activities within Link Centres and a range of effective case management approaches were central to the success of these developments. While multi-agency links at both strategic and operational levels were well established, there were instances where some staff or people in prison were unaware of the full range of services available to them.

- For young people in prison there was relevant attention to the Whole System Approach, however some staff were less confident or clear about how this translated into case management practice. Across the women's prison population and the Community Custody Units, suitable efforts were being made to establish and embed supports and approaches to working which took account of women's vulnerabilities and experiences of trauma.

- Delivery of recovery groups in prison for people with drug and alcohol issues were in the main well-established or in the process of development, but there were significant waiting lists. Effective links were being made for shifts to community-based services delivering treatment and addictions support where relevant. There were however examples of where continuity between custody and community proved challenging, which resulted in delays being experienced.

National issues

- With the exception of the Community Custody Units, people experienced significant challenges in timely access to accredited offence-focused treatment programmes.

- Prisons had a good understanding of the extent of programme need. However, they were often limited in the actions they could take to meet these needs due to the availability of resources, the need to transfer to other prisons where programmes were available, and backlogs in waiting lists.

- There were positive examples of where programmes staff, prison-based social work and prison psychology were delivering constructive alternatives to accredited programmes. All these partners were working collaboratively to fill gaps in accredited programme delivery.

- The limited availability of accredited programmes across the prison estate was a barrier to progression and a source of frustration for staff as well as the people requiring these interventions to progress towards release.

- The size and profile of the prison population was a constant challenge for all prisons. Increasing numbers and complexity of needs affected the allocation of resources, delivery of programmes, and the capacity of integrated case management teams and processes in considering how best to manage risk and meet needs in preparing for transition to the community.

national
preventive
mechanism

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland is a member of the UK's National Preventive Mechanism, a group of organisations which independently monitor all places of detention to meet the requirements of international human rights law.