



**HMIPS**

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland  
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

**News Release**  
**Inspection of HMP Barlinnie**

HMP Barlinnie dates back to 1882. It is not surprising therefore that with high narrow walkways and narrow steep flights of stairs in the main residential areas, which prisoners are expected to negotiate safely carrying trays of hot food, the prison infrastructure represents a barrier to safety and acceptable living standards. Our 2019 inspection report identified Letham hall, which houses the National Top End, as being in a state of disrepair. Five years later, despite some refurbishment, it remained in a wretchedly poor state.

The need for a replacement prison through the planned new HMP Glasgow remains overwhelming and urgent. The other deeply concerning factor was the unacceptable level of overcrowding. Designed for single occupancy, at the time of our inspection, the prison was more than 30% above its design capacity, with almost two thirds of prisoners having to share cells designed for one person. Overcrowding makes it harder to access basic entitlements. It also makes it harder for staff to build and retain positive relationships, and the additional daily transactional work in dealing with more prisoners than a prison is designed to accommodate can put a strain on services and relationships. That may in part explain the most worrying aspect of our pre-inspection survey, where more than half (55%) of prisoners said they had witnessed staff members abusing, bullying, threatening, or assaulting another prisoner, and 42% reported that staff had abused, bullied, threatened, or assaulted them. Inspectors never witnessed any unacceptable behaviour and indeed observed staff engaging prisoners in cheerful but respectful light-hearted banter, but these results were worse than for other closed prisons and gave serious cause for concern. We encourage the prison to reflect further on the survey findings.

It was pleasing to see that the SPS had completely refurbished the reception area, and the Health Centre had been reconfigured and modernised, creating a better experience for prisoners in these areas. The introduction of a new Resource Hub, where prisoner could seek the help of external agencies, as well as the library, or play snooker or pool was an impressive development. Prisoners only got access to this great facility for a minimum of 45 minutes once a month.

The therapeutic work done in the Wellbeing Hub, which provided support for particularly vulnerable prisoners, was highly commendable. The sensory room was an excellent resource where families and children could access a quiet space. A 'Healthy Dads / Healthy Kids' initiative was testament to a prison that reached out to work with others in innovative ways.

Effective use was being made of in-cell learning opportunities and the range of subjects and uptake in the Education Centre was good, while the well-equipped gym was well used.

The prison appeared safe to inspectors, although we urge the prison to reinvigorate the SPS Anti-Bullying Strategy - Think Twice. Most prisoners said they felt safe, but the need to hold mixed categories of prisoner in A and B hall due to overcrowding limited the ability of staff to get people out of their cells safely. This meant that prisoners who were not at education or work could be locked up for 22 hours a day, which is unacceptable.

As a result of the overcrowding, there was a shortage of employment opportunities and long waiting lists to access work. Library provision was poor.

Progression and waiting lists for rehabilitation programmes remained a problem in Barlinnie, with 200 prisoners awaiting an assessment of what programmes they might need to complete. There were also lengthy waiting lists for addiction and alcohol recovery services. The prison needs to work with partners to address these capacity issues. Long-term prisoners in particular felt let down by the services and support available to them, and we question whether the prison is currently geared up to manage LTPs appropriately.

Although still not satisfactory, healthcare had improved from 'Poor' in our last inspection to 'Generally Acceptable,' partly because of the investment in improved healthcare facilities. However, concerns remained. For reasons beyond the prison's control, the unreliability of the prisoner transport service was still resulting in too many prisoners missing hospital and other secondary care appointments, as HMIPS has repeatedly highlighted. Late arrivals also compromised the Healthcare Team's ability to provide important health checks on arrival. The number of prisoners being placed on Management of Offender at Risk due to Substance (MORS) after using illicit substances was a significant challenge for the SPS and the NHS, and they were trying their best to keep people safe in very difficult circumstances. We have sympathy for hard pressed SPS and NHS staff, and their partner organisations, who do their best to try to work around intolerable levels of overcrowding.

In many ways HMP Barlinnie proved to be a better place than we expected from our pre-inspection survey, in no small part due to the determined efforts being made by dedicated staff. However the perceptions of prisoners in the pre-inspection survey indicate that until a new modern HMP Glasgow comes on stream, further efforts must be made to overcome the significant challenges posed by an antiquated and overcrowded prison. We strongly urge the Scottish Government to do more to reduce the overall prison population and tackle the fundamental problem of overcrowding that affects HMP Barlinnie.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. Deputy Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Stephen Sandham was appointed in November 2018,
2. On publication the report can be found at [www.prisoninspectoratescotland.gov.uk](http://www.prisoninspectoratescotland.gov.uk)
3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, at [Kerry.Love@gov.scot](mailto:Kerry.Love@gov.scot) or on 07939 980452.

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