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HMIPS

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

News Release

National Mid-Year Independent Prison Monitoring Report for the period April to September 2024

From August 2015, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland assumed overall responsibility for the monitoring of prisons, which is carried out on a day-to-day basis by around 110 volunteer Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs). The Chief Inspector is pleased to report that we have seen an increase in the number of volunteers, the number of visits, and hours spent, monitoring prisons compared to last year. However, this has been matched by an increased demand from prisoners to seek assistance from the IPMs.

During this report period, IPMs observed some good practice in all the prisons in Scotland. Staff acted with compassion and humanity. Activities, when they took place, provided a real opportunity for prisoners to start a journey away from crime. The improvement of Prisoner Forums and Prisoner Information Action Committees at some establishments demonstrated the impact that can be made when prisons engage with prisoners and allow them meaningful participation.

However, the majority of concerns raised in the 2023 National Mid-Year report remain unchanged.

IPMs continue to have serious concerns about the Scottish Prison Service's (SPS) ability to 'transform lives and unlock potential,' as the number of people held in Scottish prisons continues to exceed the capacity for which it was designed. Efforts earlier in the year to reduce the population brought short term relief, but did not achieve a sustainable reduction in the prison population. It is hoped that the legislation currently before the Scottish Parliament brings about sustained change. IPMs note that it is unconscionable that in 2024 two prisoners are being held in cells designed for one in many prisons across the Scottish prison estate.

There remains a significant concern regarding the remand population and the prevalence of short sentences under 12 months. Additionally, the regime in many prisons is inadequate resulting in a considerable proportion of prisoners spending excessive time confined to their cells and a notable lack of meaningful activities and opportunities for prisoners to access rehabilitation, which would support eventual reintegration into society on release.

IPMs again call on the SPS and the Scottish Government to urgently look at the resources available to prisons if they truly want to offer rehabilitation, reduce the prison population and end the cycle of crime and imprisonment that blights so many lives.

The current key national concerns of IPMS are:

- Population: Overcrowding caused more prisoners to have to share a cell, some of which are not suitable for sharing. The remand population remains stubbornly high and the SPS estate is not equipped to deal with this rising population. Action taken thus far to address this has proved inadequate, but HMIPS welcomes the Prisoner (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill currently before the Scottish Parliament as an important step in reducing the current pressures in the prison system.
- Regime: Related to the issues of overcrowding, the regime available for many prisoners is not acceptable. Prisoners are spending too long locked in their cells without access to rehabilitative activities.
- Progression: Many prisoners are unable to access offending behaviour programmes in a timely manner and move to less secure conditions to help them prepare them for release. The concerns raised in the HMIPS [Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons](#) published earlier in the year therefore continue.
- The cost of living: As in the rest of the country, the costs of goods/food for prisoners are rising without a matching increase in prisoner wages. This not only harms prisoners, but also increases the cost of imprisonment on their families who often supplement their earnings. IPMs are also concerned that the SPS is not adequately funded to provide three healthy meals per day per prisoner.
- Complaints: Prisoners lack faith in the SPS prisoner complaints system. It does not follow best practice, as advised by the SPSO, and should be reviewed by the SPS as a matter of urgency. Lack of action on this matter since last year is a matter of concern for IPMs.
- Staffing: Several prisons reported issues with staff shortages, which impacts the prison's ability to provide services and increases the demand on existing staff, leaving hard pressed officers without the time to do the quality work they would wish with the people in their care.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Interim HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Stephen Sandham was appointed in August 2024.
 2. On publication the report can be found at www.prisoninspectorscotland.gov.uk
 3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, Head of Business Management at Kerry.Love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.
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