



HMIPS
HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

News Release
Independent Prison Monitoring Annual Reports 2023-24

HM Chief Inspector of prisons for Scotland, Wendy Sinclair-Gieben stated:

The concerns highlighted by Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) during this reporting period were mostly linked to overcrowding in Scotland's prisons, but also the failings of the prison transport provider GEOAmeY, the delivery of healthcare, and prisoner progression, compounded by staff shortages. They also generated significant concerns on access to healthcare, in particular mental health, an impoverished daily regime and the cost-of-living crisis for prisoners with rises in the price of goods and no increase in prisoner wages. Each establishment' IPM annual report is available on our [website](#).

Overcrowding: In May 2024 Scotland reached record levels of prisoners incarcerated, 8346, 700 of which had sentences of under 12 months. Overcrowding in Scottish prisons undermines the human rights of prisoners but also poses substantial risks to prison staff and public safety. Inevitably, reduced access to essential services hinders the potential for rehabilitation and therefore successful reintegration into society upon release. Scotland already has one of the highest prison populations per head in Europe, and a prison infrastructure which cannot cope with the size and the complexity of the prison population. We are seeing no clear diminution of the numbers on remand or the numbers in custody. We welcome the emergency release power coming into effect but recognise this will only provide a temporary fix.

GEOAmeY: The right to health and other health-related human rights are legally binding commitments enshrined in international and UK human rights instruments. Every human being has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. As recently as February 2024 I wrote to the Chief Executive of the SPS with concerns that enduring issues of cancellations for non-court appearances, and in particular critical healthcare appointments, remain deeply concerning. The fluctuating performance of GEOAmeY and transport cancellations has been impacting on prisons for some considerable time now. I am pleased to note that there has been a recent reduction in the number of critical hospital appointment cancellations, but we are a long way from seeing sustained improvement to an acceptable standard.

Health and Mental Health: Health remains a significant concern with NHS staff shortages increasingly perturbing impacting heavily on prison care. Discussion on alternatives needs to take place between Health and Justice around the safe and appropriate location of prisoners with mental health issues. IPMs observe and interact with a high proportion of mentally unwell prisoners, many of whom are in segregation. We find prison used as a 'place of safety' and lengthy periods of waiting for those who require in-patient care. Women are at the extreme end of the waiting times and if requiring high secure in-patient treatment are transferred to England.

Sentence progression: This was a major concern for convicted prisoners. If individuals do not have their risks and needs addressed in prison, the rate of recidivism will remain high, and at significant cost to the public purse. Published in June 2024, [A Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons](#), there were a number of recommendations, but the key point is that the whole system is currently not meeting the needs of the Scottish Prison Service and is therefore in urgent need of re-evaluation and further investment.

Staff shortages: The SPS, the prison transport provider and the NHS have experienced significant issues recruiting and retaining sufficient staff to run a rehabilitative and purposeful regime with proper access to health care services. GEOAmey's significant failures against the contract has resulted in prisons having to provide escort staff for urgent appointments, sometimes affecting essential regime activity, through to late arrivals to the prison causing clinical concern. For the SPS and their private sector partners preserving the crucial balance of experienced staff and new recruits has at times caused serious concern, and for the NHS the pressure on the clinical staff remains acute. IPMs spoke of SPS and NHS staff working hard help to deliver a decent regime and keeping prisoners safe during very testing times, but despite their hard work, in many prisons the regime has still not recovered since the restrictions of the COVID lockdown.

Finally, I want to thank and pay tribute to the volunteer IPMs who are in Scotland's prisons on a weekly basis monitoring prisoner treatment and conditions. They continually provide us with valuable feedback that informs our future strategy.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Wendy Sinclair-Gieben was appointed in July 2018.
2. On publication the report can be found at www.prisoninspectoratescotland.gov.uk
3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, Business Manager, at Kerry.Love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.

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