



HMIPS NATIONAL MID-YEAR INDEPENDENT PRISON MONITORING REPORT



April-September 2023

98 IPMs volunteering across 17 prisons

515 visits conducted

1825 hours spent monitoring

679 requests received from prisoners

INDEPENDENT PRISON MONITORS (IPM) SUMMARY OF THE STATE OF SCOTLAND'S PRISONS

IPMs saw some good practice in all the prisons in Scotland. The roll out of in-cell phones has made a huge difference to the lives of prisoners. Where they exist, the Recovery Cafes are doing excellent work but cannot cater for the number of people who could benefit from them. In all prisons, IPMs witnessed staff caring for people with compassion. It is evident that for many staff working in prisons it is not simply a job, but a vocation, and they are dedicated to improving people's lives. However, IPMs have serious concerns about the SPS ability to 'transform lives and unlock potential' whilst the number of people held in Scottish prisons exceeds the capacity it was designed for, whilst simultaneously not having a full complement of staff.

Too many people are held on remand, and too many continue to be given short sentences. The regime in many prisons is inadequate, with too many prisoners spending far too long confined to their cells. There is not enough meaningful activity, and the opportunities for prisoners to access rehabilitation and progress towards release are poor. SPS senior managers and the Scottish Government urgently need to 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.

KEY NATIONAL CONCERNS OF THE INDEPENDENT PRISON MONITORS

• **Population**

Overcrowding caused more prisoners to double up in cells, some of which are not suitable for sharing. The remand population remains stubbornly high, and people continue to receive short sentences. The SPS estate is not adequately equipped to deal with this rising population.

• **Regime**

Related to the issues of overcrowding, the regime available for many prisoners is not acceptable. Prisoners are spending too long locked in cells without access to purposeful activity. This is a particular concern for those held on remand who wish to work.

• **Progression**

Concerns about progression are one of the most common causes of frustration for prisoners who are unable to access offending behaviour courses and move to less secure conditions to help prepare them for release. HMIPS are conducting a thematic review on this issue which is nearing completion.

• **The cost of living**

As in the wider community, costs of goods are rising without a matching increase in prisoner wages. This not only harms those in prison, but also increases the cost of imprisonment on prisoner's families who supplement prisoner earnings

• **Prisoner escorts**

The current delivery of the prisoner escort contract is failing. Transfers between prisons are routinely being cancelled. In the worst instances escorts to funerals and hospital appointments are cancelled at the last minute; sometimes prison staff were able to undertake the escort, with the contract in place this is not their remit, and causes staff shortages elsewhere.

• **Medication**

Across nearly all prisons evening medication is being issued at inappropriate times. IPMs have reported that some prisoners are given medication to help them sleep in the late afternoon. There also appeared to be shortages of healthcare staff in most prisons.

• **Complaints**

Across most prisons, prisoners report a lack of faith in the SPS Prisoner complaints system. The system does not follow best practice as advised by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and should be reviewed by the SPS as a matter of urgency.

• **Staffing**

Several prisons reported issues with staffing, which has an impact on the prison's ability to provide the services required and increases the stress and demands on the existing staff.

*This report represent the most common concerns of the IPMs from across the 17 prisons. The list may not reflect the situation in each prison and should be understood as a summary of the Scottish prison estate.