



HMIPS

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

NEWS RELEASE

LIAISON VISIT TO HMP DUMFRIES 7 & 8 APRIL 2021

This report is part of a programme of liaison visits of prisons carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency and was conducted under the [HMIPS - Liaison Visit Framework - Prison and Court Custody Units](#). These liaison visit reports provide assurance to Ministers and the wider public that scrutiny of the treatment and conditions in which prisoners are held has continued during the pandemic.

HMP Dumfries was the first prison in Scotland to suffer a COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020 and a second more severe one in February 2021. However, there were no positive cases amongst prisoners between these two outbreaks, and the resilience, professionalism and flexibility shown by SPS and NHS staff in responding to the pandemic, particularly the second outbreak, is highly commendable. Positive relationships between staff and prisoners helped when large parts of the prison had to be put into full lockdown during the second outbreak. The Governor in Charge is a strong and capable leader who deserves credit for her team's management of this second outbreak when at times there were very few staff, including senior management, available to maintain the service.

Regrettably, however, prisoners went without core human rights when they were denied access to fresh air and virtual visits were suspended during the second outbreak. This occurred for lengthy periods on the advice of Public Health Scotland and the local Incident Management Team. While efforts were made to protect core human rights, the continual resetting of the clock with regard to periods of isolation following contact with suspected COVID cases meant that some prisoners were subject to extreme restrictions for weeks at a time.

Care Inspectors welcomed the flexibility to ensure systematic, multi-agency case management planning continued. Planning for early release was established quickly and SPS staff worked well with other agencies to provide support before liberation.

Areas of good practice identified including development of a self-referral triage system at the start of the pandemic to reduce footfall in healthcare facilities and use of a PCR test to reduce the risk of infection transmission into the community on liberation. Relationships between NHS and SPS teams within the prison were strong and HMP Dumfries had been well supported by Public Health colleagues outside the prison. The use of a virtual team huddle by NHS staff through Microsoft Teams was seen as an excellent support mechanism promoting mutual support and communication.

HMIPS welcome the fact that prisoners in HMP Dumfries have access to their in-cell phones until 22:00 at night and we encourage the SPS to ensure this is the case in all establishments.

The regime for prisoners had been severely impoverished as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, but was starting to recover at the time of our visit, for example with the education centre open again, although with only half the places available prior to COVID. HMP Dumfries was nevertheless working to reopen facilities and extend opportunities in line with the easing of national restrictions. We encourage HMP Dumfries to reintroduce social dining as soon as practical and improve the quality and choice of vegan menus.

One issue affecting progress with casework was a lack of access to SPS systems for prison-based social work teams; this should be addressed as a priority. Similarly, access to video conferencing platforms for interaction with external partners will improve participation in progression processes.

HMP Dumfries must also ensure that the GP room and treatment room are fit-for-purpose and can be effectively cleaned to minimise infection transmission risks.

In essence, HMP Dumfries remains a Victorian prison with developments bolted onto it, including flat roofs with a history of water ingress issues. Remedial work to the flat roofs, alongside that required at HMP Greenock, must proceed.

HMIPS welcome the planned development of a new accessible cell later this year, but HMP Dumfries will still be left with a number of old fashioned residential areas, some without in-cell sanitation or showers, and a limited number of accessible cells. All of this is out of step with what might be expected in a 21st Century prison system. Moreover, these residential areas currently contain a number of single staffing posts. Staff in these posts did not express concern for their own safety, but inspectors were left with a concern about the implications for staff safety or potential coercion out of sight of other staff.

Taking these factors together, while delighted that many of the very positive aspects identified in our last full inspection report had continued, we wish the Scottish Government and the SPS to bring to fruition long-standing aspirations for the development of a more modern facility. We welcome the priority being given to development of a new HMP Glasgow and HMP Highland, but replacements for both HMP Dumfries and HMP Greenock should follow swiftly.

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.prisonsofscotland.gov.uk
3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, Business Manager, at Kerry.Love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.