



HMIPS

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

NEWS RELEASE

LIAISON VISIT TO HMP PERTH 16-17 SEPTEMBER 2020

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 HMIPS' new, albeit temporary, [Liaison Visits Framework for Prisons and Court Custody Units published in April 2020](#). 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 been continued during the pandemic.

Following advice from Health Protection Scotland (HPS), HMP Perth, like all other prisons in Scotland, had been forced into running a limited regime. However as lockdown eased, the prison had looked to increase the opportunities for purposeful activity and time in the fresh air. The increased access to work, time in the fresh air and education was appreciated by prisoners. HMIPS would like to see the SPS progress an increase in rehabilitative activity opportunities for all prisoners in the establishment and more of the innovation that characterised HMP Perth prior to COVID. However HMIPS welcomed the excellent pre-release planning and support to obtain employment with local employers that had been achieved for some prisoners, which again highlights the value of reinstating throughcare support services to maintain support in the crucial first weeks of liberation.

Family contact is important so the introduction of mobile phones, virtual visits and subsequently face-to-face visits was very much welcomed by HMIPS, and prisoners. HMIPS particularly appreciated HMP Perth allowing children to visit their fathers.

To encourage more meaningful contact between prisoners and their families as well as access to a greater number of help lines, HMIPS would like to see a system introduced that will allow in-cell phones to be capable of 24 hour access, ability for prisoners to top up their accounts, an increase in the number of freephone helplines and confirmation that when final lockdown is over that in-cell telephony and virtual visits will remain.

There was clear evidence of a decision-making process and planning through the prison COVID-19 Action Plan and Recovery Plan. This plan indicated a phased return to a more recognisable daily regime including ensuring the human rights entitlements of 60 minutes of fresh air daily for all prisoners. It was pleasing to observe that Parole Tribunals and Integrated Case Management case conferences for pre-release had continued throughout lockdown, as well as Risk Management Teams and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement processes, albeit carried out via conference calls. In common with the rest of Scotland's prisons, concerns remain about progression opportunities and the risk of a return to overcrowding, with single cells having to be used as doubles.

Posters with pictures illustrating how to keep safe and hygienic were in abundance and the use of the British sign language for those with impaired hearing was welcomed. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment was developed in June to ensure that as HMP Perth introduced easing of the lockdown restrictions, no group was disadvantaged.

Communication channels were good and the prison updated prisoners on a variety of subjects on a regular basis, for example the closure and reopening of face-to-face visits and how to keep safe.

HMIPS welcomes the generally positive assessment of healthcare, but cleaning in the older parts of the prison was a concern to the NHS team. HMIPS was also concerned by the lack of engagement of NHS teams when assessing risks in case management processes. Stronger collaboration is needed at senior management level between the SPS and NHS teams to resolve their respective concerns,

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.