



Independent Prison Monitoring Bulletin

National Summary

January to March 2018

Key Findings

- **Staffing:** A key theme which appears to be emerging in an increasing number of prisons relates to staffing levels, both in terms of SPS staff and healthcare staff. In some areas this relates to vacancies, and in other prisons staff sickness levels also play a role. There is a concern that inadequate staffing is having an impact on the regime in some prisons, and could mean prisoners are spending more time in cell, and failing to access purposeful activity and other rehabilitative inputs as they should. We will continue to monitor this area and gather details of any impact staffing levels have on regimes, along with any examples of good practice to address this.
- **Complaints processes:** Considerable variation has been noted in the operation of complaints processes across different prisons and regions. While Monitors have been able to sample complaints and confirm appropriate response times in some cases, in other prisons there are concerns about whether people are receiving responses to their complaints in good time, and whether clear feedback is received when complaints are made at the lower level.
- **Family relationships:** Monitors continue to praise the efforts by officers across the estate to support and promote positive relationships between prisoners and their families. The introduction or improvement of visitor centres, the use of bonding or play oriented visits for those with children, and the inclusion of families in prison activities where possible have all been noted as positive.
- **New Psychoactive Substances (NPS):** Monitors continue to hear concern in many prisons about the prevalence of NPS. While it is clear that it is not always possible to be sure about the nature of substances involved in incidents in prisons, staff and prisoners report concerns about personal safety, impact on regimes and resource demands associated with incidents believed to involve NPS.

Updates and Actions

- **Time in cell and population management:** The continued theme of time in cell and access to regimes amongst particular populations of prisoners remains. While it is noted that SPS is currently working on new plans around population management, this work appears to be behind schedule and there is no clear information available on what changes are proposed. However, Monitors were pleased to note changes and improvements in some prisons, where these issues had been particularly acute. This has included making small changes in larger prisons to ensure prisoners have better access to the prison regime, and that their time in cell is minimised.
- **New Psychoactive Substances (NPS):** While the issue of NPS remains a concern, there has clearly been progress in terms of improving information available on NPS. It is noted that new leaflets, including harm reduction information, will soon be available to officers, prisoners and their families. This is welcomed.
- **Smoke-free Prisons:** Monitors continue to be included in work underway across the estate to prepare for the move to Smoke-free Prisons. Monitors have been encouraged to hear clear plans for the move, seeking to improve access to smoking cessation. There has also been clear information about changes to the smoking-replacement items available via the canteen. This is an area Monitors will continue to seek updates on.