

**Independent Prison Monitoring Bulletin****National Summary****January to March 2017**

Key Findings

- **Separation and Reintegration Units (SRUs):** IPMs recognise that prisoners held in SRUs are particularly vulnerable, and recent NPM guidance on monitoring isolation in detention settings means that the IPM team at HMIPS are focused on this issue. IPM teams regularly monitor treatment and conditions in SRUs and the trend nationally is that units are well-run, with professional and conscientious officers and approaches that seek to minimise time spent in formal isolation.
- **Healthcare:** Healthcare remains a concern for IPMs, accounting for a significant proportion of requests from prisoners. Improved interaction with healthcare teams and improvements in staffing levels in some prisons have led to IPMs finding their concerns are quickly resolved. However, there remain clear themes of problems with communication, and frustration around different prescribing practice between prisons, and between prison and community settings.
- **Bullying:** Issues around bullying account for a small number of requests and are seldom observed by IPMs during monitoring. However, in seeking to resolve the few cases identified, IPMs have become concerned at the apparent lack of a clear national approach to this issue. It is clear that prisons take allegations of bullying seriously, and try to take action to protect victims, but a clear, consistent approach is needed.
- **Progression:** Although prisoners consistently raise problems about progression, IPMs seldom find that critical dates around progression are missed. However, a national picture has emerged of long waiting times for programmes, particularly for prisoners with limited access to regimes. This suggests that many prisoners could progress more quickly through their sentences but are 'held up' by programme availability. There is also a perception amongst prisoners that decision making about progression is not fair or transparent, with IPMs finding that the process is poorly understood.
- **Food:** Food and meal choices are amongst the most common issues discussed with IPMs, sometimes via prisoner requests but more commonly through informal interaction between IPMs and prisoners. Prisoners are most positive about prison food where there are clear, accessible ways to participate in menu choices and planning, and where food is linked to cultural events, social activity and educational activity.

Updates and Actions

- **Separation and Reintegration Units (SRUs):** The IPM team at HMIPS is in liaison with the SPS around the new NPM guidance for monitoring isolation. IPMs will receive support during Summer 2017 on how to implement the guidance.
- **Healthcare:** The Scottish Parliament Health and Sport Committee's inquiry into prisoner healthcare calls for better leadership at a national level and the development of a strategy for improvement. This is welcomed.
- **Bullying:** The IPM team at HMIPS will find out more about the SPS's plans for developing a national strategy to tackle this difficult issue.
- **Progression:** Ongoing discussions about population management may enable better programme availability. There are clear local efforts to maximise places available. In addition the new initiative at HMP Open Estate to improve the transfer arrangements to open conditions may also support improvements in this area, particularly in terms of prisoners' understanding.
- **Food:** It is positive that most prisons hold regular food focus groups, or similar, and prisoners are encouraged to participate. IPMs are keen to see the SPS build on these creative, participative approaches.