

# Prison Governors Association – Scotland

*The Scottish Branch of the Prison Governors Association, which represents the Prison Governors of the United Kingdom*



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30th April 2024

Ms Audrey Nicoll MSP  
Convener Criminal Justice Committee  
The Scottish Parliament Edinburgh EH99 1SP

Dear Convener,

## Follow Up Request Regarding Prison Population Pressures

The Prison Governors Association Scotland PGA(S) formally raised our significant concerns around prison population pressures and the predicted trajectory of further increase in population numbers in October 2023. We remain concerned at the increasing complexity of Scotland's Prison Population and the ability to appropriately locate individuals, given the pressures on physical space.

We noted that continuation on this path, at best, provides humane containment, albeit even this may be at a stretch. In April 2024, we exceeded 8200 people being held in custody, and **now have 7 of Scotland's Prisons declaring a RED RISK status**. Given the predictions on prison population numbers by Scottish Government, we recognise that this rise in population numbers was foreseen by Government. We acknowledge that a lot of work has been done by SPS to maximise capacity internally and that work has not yet reached its full conclusion and Prison Governors are doing everything they can to mitigate risk. That said, we would again reiterate that the population pressures in Scotland, **require intervention across Justice**, requiring partnership working and **immediacy of action**. We would contend that **the role of this crisis should shape Justice Policy in Scotland in a way that is both progressive and courageous**.

Whilst some policy windows have been created, we would contend that they are unlikely to have the scale of impact required, or indeed, at a speed that is required. Our members are working in a state of 'permacrisis', working with constant pressures due to the mix of population complexity and physical numbers. We are operating with a prevailing sense of **'only just coping'** and **remain concerned that emergency action will only be taken when something goes significantly wrong**. It is important to put on record that our members cannot directly impact the number of people being sent to prison and in particular the number being held on remand.

The complexity of the prison's population mix is significantly different than it was when we previously had this type of pressure on physical numbers. Over the last 10 years, there has been a gradual, accumulation of various justice changes and policy decisions that have eroded the legitimacy of where we find ourselves today. In some cases, the effects of the increased numbers are felt immediately, however the combination of increased numbers and the time/ strain and impact on the regime and

people in custody, **leaves us in a heightened state.** More prisons are operating restricted regimes, resulting in the provision of little or no positive rehabilitative work.

As noted previously, these increased population numbers require increased staffing, often the need to work extra hours, and we see our staff getting tired. Our membership and all staff in prisons already do a very challenging job but are currently under significant strain.

The PGA(S) would welcome the consideration of urgent mitigation in the form of emergency release measures, greater use of electronic monitoring **-particularly used instead of remand,** greater use of alternative disposals, as well as a review of the impacts of the Control of Release Bill and its impacts on the status of the Long-Term Prisoner Population. Furthermore, we would welcome an update on both the short- and longer-term actions and impacts, as well as preventative solutions.

Yours sincerely,



Natalie Beal  
**CHAIR**  
PGA Scotland