



HEADQUARTERS

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LINDA POLLOCK

Deputy Chief Executive

David Linden
Deputy Convenor
Criminal Justice Committee

9 September 2026

Dear Deputy Convener,

**FOLLOW UP INFORMATION IN RESPONSE TO MATTERS RAISED DURING
COMMITTEE EVIDENCE SESSION ON 2 SEPTEMBER**

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee on 2 September and for your interest in the people in our care, our staff, and our establishments.

As you and Committee members have seen first-hand during your visit to HMP Low Moss, the size and complexity of our prison population is already creating significant pressure for those in our care, our staff, and our establishments, and further growth will make it unsustainable.

We therefore welcome the Scottish Government's consultation and public discussion around what a safe and sustainable prisons population is for Scotland. I am clear that as a prison service, we need adequate capacity, facilities and resources to allow our staff to do the work they do best – build relationships, support rehabilitation and reduce the risk of reoffending, which ultimately helps build safer communities.

I am writing to provide further information on a number of matters raised during the evidence session.

Operational Staffing

The Committee sought further information regarding frontline operational staffing levels and the number of staff currently available for duty.

As of 3 September 2026, SPS employed 4009 operational (frontline) staff, equating to 3797.09 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts.

On the same date, 3442.18 FTE operational staff were available for duty. This figure represents the operational workforce, excluding staff absent due to sickness, parental leave, suspension, special leave and other authorised absences. It also excludes staff temporarily undertaking duties outwith their substantive operational role, including those deployed to non-frontline positions.

The operational staffing complement stood at 3667.07 FTE, meaning that 3442.18 FTE staff were available for duty, representing a variance of 234.89 FTE (-6.4%).

It is important to recognise that operational staffing figures must be considered within the context of a 24-hour, seven-day operational environment. Staff are deployed across shifts according to local operational requirements and population needs, meaning that not all available staff are deployed simultaneously at any given time.

Dirty Protest Procedures

Committee members referred to their recent visit to HMP Low Moss, during which an individual was undertaking a dirty protest. A question was subsequently raised regarding whether it was normal practice for an individual to remain in such conditions for that period of time.

In my response, I advised that SPS would clean the affected accommodation within a three-day period, or up to 72 hours, in line with operational guidance.

For clarity, I would like to place on record that the timescales referred to are set out within SPS Dirty Protest Guidance, which establishes the organisation's policy and operational approach to managing such incidents. While my evidence reflected SPS practice, I would be grateful if the Official Report could reflect that this requirement derives from SPS policy and operational guidance rather than the Prison Rules themselves which do not go into this level of detail. *This does not change my assertion that SPS abides by its required obligations.*

I would also emphasise that as I noted, establishments seek wherever operationally possible to remove individuals from these cells to allow the affected accommodation to be cleaned more frequently than the maximum timescales permitted within the guidance.

First Night in Custody Units

The Committee also requested further information on First Night in Custody units and the impact that current population pressures are having on their operation. Dedicated First Night facilities are maintained within all SPS admission establishments:

- HMP Barlinnie
- HMP Dumfries
- HMP Edinburgh
- HMP & YOI Grampian
- HMP Inverness
- HMP Kilmarnock
- HMP Low Moss
- HMP & YOI Polmont
- HMP & YOI Stirling

The First Night model is intended to provide enhanced assessment, support, induction and monitoring during an individual's initial period in custody. We recognise

that these first few days can be a particularly challenging stage of a person's time in custody, and the model is designed to ensure that support needs are identified at the earliest opportunity.

With the continued growth in the prison population, this has increasingly affected establishments' ability to utilise First Night accommodation exclusively for its intended purpose.

In particular, the growth in offence protection, non-offence protection, and remand populations, who all require to be managed separately from our convicted, mainstream population, has resulted in some circumstances in which First Night accommodation has to be utilised to house individuals from these groups where alternative accommodation is not readily available. The size of our remand population, and the length of time many individuals spend on remand, has further intensified these pressures.

Disruption to First Night custody units has happened within HMPs Barlinnie, Edinburgh, Kilmaronock, Low Moss, Grampian, Perth, Greenock and Inverness. Local management teams work hard to mitigate these challenges and still provide support to those who are entering custody for the first time. As an organisation, recognising the challenge of entering custody, we continue to seek to prioritise and support this model and adapt as best as is possible.

Additional Accommodation

As discussed, work is ongoing as referred to by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice on additional accommodation, including consideration of modular units. We have visited sites in England and engaged with both Ministry of Justice and professional contractors to consider options that could be possible. Any decision on infrastructure investment would be for the Scottish Ministers.

HMP Castle Huntly Design Capacity

The Committee commented on the change of design capacity of HMP Castle Huntly.

Castle Huntly plays a critical role in supporting people in their rehabilitation journey in custody and supports their transition to less secure conditions and community testing. For the period April 2023 - March 2024 there were 154 liberations from HMP Castle Huntly of which 81% remained out of custody for 12 months or over, demonstrating the impact of the open estates to support desistance from re-offending. Recently, to reflect the purpose and success of the operating model with Castle Huntly, the Design Capacity was amended to support the evidence of an appropriate model for the establishment.

The rationale for the change was also outlined in response to Parliamentary Question **S7W-00999** in June 2026. [Written question and answer: S7W-00999 | Scottish Parliament Website.](#)

On the morning of 3 September 2026, HMP Castle Huntly's unlock population stood at 189 individuals.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my invitation to members of the Committee to visit HMP Castle Huntly at a mutually convenient time. This would provide an opportunity to see first-hand the unique contribution that Scotland's national open prison estate makes to rehabilitation, progression and community reintegration, as well as the practical considerations that underpin accommodation and capacity decisions within the establishment.

I would welcome the opportunity to host Committee members and to continue our constructive engagement with the Committee. Should any further information be required, I would be pleased to provide it.

Yours sincerely,

LINDA POLLOCK
Chief Executive