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Colin McConnell
Chief Executive

Margaret Mitchell MSP
Convenor
Justice Committee
Scottish Parliament
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1 July 2019

Dear Margaret,

PRISON OFFICERS AGED OVER 65 EMPLOYED BY THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE

I refer to my evidence to the Justice Committee of 28 May in which I committed to providing information on the number of prison officers employed by the Scottish Prison Service who are aged 65 or over.

I can confirm that SPS currently employ 13 prison officers aged 65, 5 prison officers aged 66, 2 prison officers aged 67 and 8 prison officers who are aged 68 or older. All of these members of staff are trained in Control and Restraint and they carry out the full duties of the prison officer role.

As I advised in my evidence to the Committee, there was previously an upper age limit which prevented prison officers working beyond the age of 60. The age limit for prison officers no longer exists and prison officers can continue to work, beyond their Normal Pension Age, for as long as they are fit and competent to do so with part time working a very popular option for this group of staff.

SPS very much welcomes the continued service of those fortunate enough to be in this category and it is important to highlight that those prison officers currently working well into their 60s, and beyond, are choosing to work beyond their Normal Pension Age. However, as a consequence of the Public Service Pensions Act 2013, from 1 April 2022 those prison officers who have not yet reached their Normal Pension Age must work until their State Pension Age, which is scheduled to rise to 68, in order to achieve a full pension or face actuarial reductions for each year it is taken early.

This change is already having an impact on staff morale, and we are currently seeing a significant increase in prison officers leaving the Service due to poor health. The age profile of the Scottish Prison Service workforce compounds this concern. The majority of prison officers are aged 45 or older with 25% of all prison officers aged 50 to 59. Whilst those fortunate enough will continue to work on until their Normal Pension Age and in some cases beyond, the information available to us suggests that for many a full pension will be simply out of reach due to a lack of physical capacity.

I trust you find this information helpful. Should you require any further information, please contact my office.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Colin McConnell', with a stylized initial 'C'.

COLIN McCONNELL
Chief Executive