

## Health inequalities in Scottish prisons

Cross party group meeting on Tuesday, 7 February 2023

### Criminal Justice Committee consideration

As part of its work programme this session, the Criminal Justice Committee has considered several issues related to health inequalities in Scottish prisons.

### ACTION PLAN

The Committee has an action plan, which includes areas where it wishes progress to be made. The action plan is considered periodically.

Prisons and prison reform is a key area. Specific issues included in the action plan are outlined below.

#### *Where progress has been made*

- **Access to medical prescriptions upon liberation** - The Scottish Government confirmed the introduction of a new process in response to the Committee raising this issue:
  - Prison Healthcare teams will receive communication that prisons should provide individuals with a 28-day supply of medication at the time of liberation. This may be in the form of medication to be handed to the patient or via a prescription to be presented at the chemist on return to the community.

The Committee is to decide whether to monitor the implementation and effect of this new approach.

- **End Friday releases** – the Committee asked the Scottish Government to consider changing legislation to end Friday releases. The Committee is currently considering the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill. Section 6 seeks to improve access to services for prisoners upon release. It does this by further restricting the days on which prisoners are released from custody – thereby bringing forward the release dates of affected prisoners.
- **Residential rehabilitation** – the Scottish Government confirmed it is providing financial support for people to access residential rehabilitation for substance use on release from prison through the prison to rehab (P2R) pathway funding.
- **Regular exercise and activities** – The Committee received a commitment from the Scottish Prison Service that prisoners will be provided with regular access to exercise and time outdoor for fresh air, and consideration given to what other activities would be suitable for prisoners on remand.
- **Purposeful activity** – the Committee wishes to see the re-introduction of this to previous levels as we recover from the pandemic and consideration of the extension of appropriate elements of this activity to shorter term and remand prisoners. SPS confirmed it is undertaking an Activity Profile review which seeks to understand the current purposeful activity delivered within the prison estate, the perceived outcomes and to consider what might constitute

meaningful and effective activity in the future. However, at present, there are few signs of extending the regime of purposeful activity and work to those on shorter term sentences or remand.

### ***Other issues – where consideration is ongoing***

- Tackling the number of women and children in prison and improving their care.
- Reducing remand numbers.
- Recovery cafes in prisons - the Committee is seeking confirmation of whether the Scottish Government will provide funding for a cafe in each institution, where appropriate. These cafes provide support to prisoners prior to their release and whilst in the community. For example, help with addiction issues and housing.
- The Committee recommended the reintroduction of the Throughcare service in the prison estate. The SPS Throughcare Support Officer Service was one element of a wider throughcare provision, for both long and short-term prisoners.
- In-cell telephony/technology – the Committee is keeping under review the further roll out of suitable systems across the prison estate, where appropriate.
- Trauma training – the Committee recommended further roll out of trauma-informed training across the criminal justice sector, where this has not already been provided.
- Resumption of in person visits and retaining face to face contact by phone/video – unless Covid-19 isolation rules need to be applied.

### **Tackling drug deaths and problem drug use**

The Committee is undertaking joint work across relevant Committees to consider all of the areas which can contribute to drug deaths and problem drug use, and how these can be addressed.

The Committee agreed this approach in response to a request for cross-portfolio consideration at a roundtable evidence session from those talking about their own experiences.

The remit for this work is to consider progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce.

In 2022, the Criminal Justice Committee held three joint committee meetings with the Health and Social Justice Committees. The Committees also led a joint debate in the Chamber.

The Committees heard from UK and Scottish Government Ministers. Members considered issues, such as:

- The implementation of a UK-wide public health approach to drug use.
- The provision of appropriate support before and throughout sentences, and a care and treatment plan, in line with community settings on release.
- Funding for alcohol and drug partnerships.