



Oifig An Chigire Príosún
Office of the Inspector of Prisons

Annual Report 2025

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01

Foreword by the Chief Inspector

2025 was characterised by worsening conditions in Irish prisons triggering national and international concern.

The population in Ireland's prisons is inching ever closer to the grim milestone of 6,000 people, for a bed capacity of just 4,736. As I write, 5909 people are in prison custody, over 10% of whom are not even being provided with a bed. That 599 people are being obliged to sleep on mattresses on the floor in overcrowded cells next to unpartitioned toilets is a national disgrace.

I have written and spoken about the scourge of overcrowding on many occasions since taking up the role of Chief Inspector of Prisons in 2022. I have also had the opportunity to raise the issue in face-to-face meetings with every politician who has held the position of Minister for Justice over the past three years. However, we have yet to see a Minister grasp the nettle of resolving the crisis engulfing the prison system with the requisite degree of bold political action.

Consequently, it was welcome that, towards the end of 2025, my voice was amplified by the Council of Europe's European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). In an unusual move, reflecting the gravity of its concerns, the CPT paid a return visit to Ireland only four months after the publication of a highly critical report on its 2024 visit to the country. Speaking in Dublin at an event jointly organised by the Inspectorate and the Council of Europe, the CPT's Executive Secretary expressed the view that the inhuman and degrading conditions in our prisons could easily lead to the European Court of Human Rights finding Ireland to be in violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights; I can only agree.

Our programme of regular prison inspections continued in 2025 with a follow-up inspection of Mountjoy Prison and full unannounced inspections of Castlerea and Wheatfield Prisons. As usual, our team received excellent cooperation from prison staff, including unfettered access to all parts of the prisons, during each of these inspections.

Unfortunately, towards the end of the year, the unblemished cooperation record of the Irish Prison Service was marred by attempts to impose constraints on the OIP's operational autonomy during a thematic inspection of the treatment of older people living in prison. This ultimately led to the suspension of the inspection, and I issued a Statutory Notice of Concern to the Director of the Irish Prison Service (see Appendix 2). In early 2026, the Inspectorate was able to complete a full unannounced inspection of Limerick Men's Prison in relatively unencumbered conditions, but the issue is still not fully resolved. This will be the subject of further discussions with the Irish Prison Service with a view to ensuring that the OIP's operational autonomy is always respected in practice.

After a record number of deaths in prison custody in 2024 (31), 2025 saw a significant reduction in the annual number of deaths (to 14). However, there have already been 8 deaths in prison custody in the first three months of 2026. I am grateful for the steps that the Irish Prison Service has taken to implement some of the recommendations in the OIP's death in custody reports. These include improved procedures for monitoring people suspected of ingesting drugs, reducing the risk of fatal consequences. However, that there is no room for complacency; certain key OIP recommendations to the IPS, such as providing basic life support training to all prison staff, remain to be implemented.

The clock continues to tick on Ireland's failure to ratify the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) and designate the OIP as a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) for the criminal justice system. The legislation designed to facilitate this – the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill – continued to languish in the Office of Parliamentary Counsel throughout 2025. There are some indications that the Bill may now be listed for priority publication, with a view to its enactment in 2026. This would end Ireland's outlier status, as the only European Union member State that has yet to designate a NPM. I hope that this will be last annual report in which I have to record that it is almost two decades since Ireland signed the OPCAT but has yet to ratify it.

Nonetheless, with the full support of the European Union (SG-Reform) and the Council of Europe, the OIP has continued to build new NPM-related institutional relationships with An Garda Síochána, the Courts Service, Fiosrú, the Policing and Community Safety Authority, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the Mental Health Commission, HIQA and other bodies and stakeholders. Our intention is to design and test the necessary new monitoring frameworks, in order to be ready for enactment of the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill. You will find these activities reflected in this annual report.

Work to overhaul the defective prisoner complaints system has also been characterised by inertia. This is despite the best efforts of the Ombudsman, the Director General of the IPS and the OIP, which have been working together closely on the development of a new and better system. Our inspection survey findings during 2025 once again highlight that, with good reason, prisoners have no confidence in the current system. The ongoing absence of an effective complaints system, including in relation to the most serious complaints of assaults by prison staff, can only encourage officers minded to ill treat prisoners to believe that they can do so with impunity.

The significant volume of work completed by the Inspectorate in 2025 has been carried out by our small but highly dedicated team. Recruitment of additional staff is currently underway, which will enable the OIP to increase the frequency of its prison inspections, report more rapidly, clear its backlog of death in custody investigations and assume new monitoring functions.

Notwithstanding the considerable challenges outlined in this annual report, I remain convinced of the value of independent monitoring of places of detention. I am hopeful that our annual report for 2026 will be able to record that significant progress has been made in implementing our recommendations.



Mark Kelly
Chief Inspector

02 Introduction

Functions of the Inspectorate of Prisons

The Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons was established pursuant to Section 30 of the Prisons Act 2007 (“the Act”) in January 2007. The Chief Inspector of Prisons is appointed by the Minister for Justice to perform the functions conferred on him by Part 5 of the Act. The current Chief Inspector was appointed on 1 June 2022 for a five-year term in office with effect from 15 August 2022, under Section 30 of the Act. The Chief Inspector of Prisons is independent in the performance of his functions.

Section 31(1) of the Act places an obligation on the Chief Inspector of Prisons to carry out regular inspections of prisons.

In addition to inspections, the Chief Inspector of Prisons may be requested by the Minister for Justice to carry out an investigation into any matter arising out of the management or operation of a prison, and, if so requested, is obliged to carry out the investigation. The Chief Inspector may also carry out an investigation of his own volition.

The role of the Chief Inspector of Prisons includes:

- Regular Inspection of all 13 prisons in Ireland;

- Carrying out investigations of deaths in custody and also of any death of a person on temporary release that occurs within one month of his/her release;

- Investigating any matter arising out of the management and operation of a prison at his own volition or at the request of the Minister for Justice;

- Receiving and replying to letters from prisoners in accordance with Rule 44 of the Prison Rules 2007-2020;

- Oversight of the Irish Prison Service prisoner complaints system and carrying out the functions assigned pursuant to Prison Rule 57B of the Prison Rules 2007-2017.

It is not a function of the Chief Inspector to investigate or adjudicate on a complaint from an individual prisoner, but he may examine the circumstances relating to a prisoner complaint where necessary for performing his functions (Section 31(6) Prisons Act 2007).

The Chief Inspector of Prisons does not currently have statutory authority to publish inspection reports, investigation reports or annual reports. In accordance with Section 31 or 32 of the Act as applicable, as soon as practicable after receiving a report from the Inspector of Prisons, the Minister must, subject to the following caveats, lay it before both Houses of the Oireachtas and publish the report.

However, the Minister may omit any matter from any report laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas if of the opinion that:

1. Its disclosure may be prejudicial to the security of the prison or of the State, or
2. After consultation with the Secretary General to the Government, that its disclosure
 - a. would be contrary to the public interest, or
 - b. may infringe the constitutional rights of any person.

Where any matters are so omitted, a statement to that effect must be attached to the report concerned on its being laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas, and on its publication.

The Inspectorate Team

On 31 December 2025, the staff serving in the Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons were:

 <p>Chief Inspector of Prisons Mr Mark Kelly</p>	 <p>Deputy Chief Inspector Ms Helen Casey</p>	 <p>Senior Inspector Ms Pia Janning</p>	 <p>Senior Inspector Mr Gerald O'Regan</p>
 <p>Lead Inspector Ms Michelle Martyn</p>	 <p>Lead Inspector Mr Mark Wolfe</p>	 <p>Lead Inspector Ms Laura Anderson</p>	 <p>Inspector Mr Matthew Butterly</p>
 <p>Inspector Dr Sarah Curristan</p>	 <p>Inspector Mr Gerry Cronin</p>	 <p>Inspector Ms Orla Dick</p>	 <p>Data Analyst Dr Douglas Nanka-Bruce</p>
 <p>Office Manager Ms Louise Joyce</p>	 <p>Executive Officer Ms. Joanne Mooney</p>	 <p>Executive Officer Mr. Kevin Cleary</p>	

Our Vision, Mission, Values & Strategic Goals

Our Vision

A criminal justice system that respects, protects and fulfils the human rights of people deprived of their liberty.



Our Mission

To ensure that the human rights of those deprived of their liberty are upheld and to promote accountability across the criminal justice system.



Our Values

- 01 We are **Human Rights-Focussed**, valuing diversity and respecting the dignity of all individuals. We act with kindness and strive to create an inclusive environment where everyone is treated with fairness and respect;
- 02 We are **Independent & Impartial**, maintaining a steadfast commitment to independence and impartiality. Our work is guided by authoritative knowledge, rigorous standards, and a dedication to objectivity in all we do;
- 03 We are **Transparent & Collaborative**, working openly and inclusively to build trust. Through collaboration, influence, and expertise, we foster professionalism and accountability in all our engagements;
- 04 We are **Progressive & Responsive**, challenging conventional thinking and embracing innovation. We take initiative, remain adaptable, and respond proactively to the needs of those we serve.

Our Strategic Goals

- 01 To bring about measurable improvements in the lives of people deprived of their liberty, in line with national and international human rights standards, and best practice.
- 02 To create and implement a world class National Preventive Mechanism, that independently monitors the treatment of people deprived of their liberty across the criminal justice system.
- 03 To continue to ensure high standards of corporate governance, and build an organisation fit for the future

03

Developing a Criminal Justice National Preventive Mechanism in Ireland

NPM engagement at National Level

During 2025, Chief Inspector Mark Kelly, Senior Inspector Pia Janning, and Lead Inspector Laura Anderson represented the OIP at the IHREC Heads of Agencies Steering Group for OPCAT. As the designated future NPM coordinating body, within the General Scheme of the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill 2022, IHREC established the steering group to bring together agencies with an oversight function, that are expected to be designated as members of the NPM or will work closely with the NPM, once OPCAT is ratified in Ireland. The first meeting of the newly formed group took place in March, followed by further meetings in July and November 2025. The purpose of the meetings was to engage in pre-legislative planning, to discuss capacity building, to facilitate learning, to share legislative updates, and to establish working relationships between the different agencies.

Engagement with An Garda Síochána

In October 2025, Chief Inspector Mark Kelly, Lead Inspector Mark Wolfe and Lead Inspector Laura Anderson met with Garda Commissioner Justin Kelly, Deputy Commissioner Shawna Coxon and Acting Deputy Commissioner Paul Cleary, at Garda Headquarters. The meeting was held early into Mr. Kelly's tenure as Commissioner and provided the opportunity to discuss the anticipated Inspection of the Places of Detention Bill which will designate the OIP as the future Criminal Justice NPM and broaden the OIP's mandate to include the monitoring of Garda custody, transportation and court holding cells. The meeting provided a platform to listen to the views of the senior Garda management team and to commence working collaboratively to ensure coherence and alignment between both agencies prior to the development of a police detention monitoring framework.

OIP meeting with An Garda Síochána, (left to right), Deputy Commissioner **Paul Cleary**, Commissioner **Justin Kelly**, Chief Inspector **Mark Kelly**, Deputy Commissioner **Shawna Coxon**.



NPM engagement at Regional Level through the NPM European Forum

In 2025, the OIP continued to build its engagement with NPMs established across Europe, through the Council of Europe NPM Forum. The first event of the year was a workshop entitled, 'Tackling overcrowding in European prisons: strengthening NPMs' role in safeguarding rights and ensuring effective oversight', held on 5-6 February 2025 in Strasbourg. The OIP was represented by Chief Inspector Mark Kelly, Senior Inspector Pia Janning, Lead Inspector Laura Anderson and Inspector Sarah Curristan.

Chief Inspector Mark Kelly addressed the workshop participants on the theme of strengthening NPMs' role in oversight and advocacy, providing an overview of the situation in Irish prisons and sharing his expertise and experience of monitoring places of detention.

A range of international speakers provided insights into practices, challenges and proposed solutions relating to overcrowding, all sharing learning from their own jurisdictions. The event also facilitated smaller workshops examining sentencing and legal reforms, infrastructure and capacity management, and rehabilitation, social services and reintegration. A final presentation introduced the topic of European standards on Artificial Intelligence.

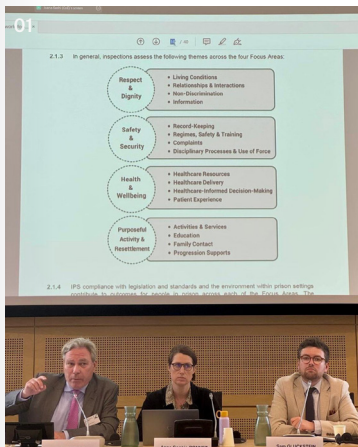
Group photo from the European NPM Forum on Tackling Overcrowding in European Prisons, Strasbourg, February 2025



In June 2025, Chief Inspector Mark Kelly, Lead Inspector Mark Wolfe and Lead Inspector Laura Anderson represented the Inspectorate at two Council of Europe events in Strasbourg. The first, on 5 June 2025, was the European NPM Forum Annual Conference. The conference was entitled, 'Monitoring Police Detention' and gathered approximately 80 participants representing 36 European countries. Following a presentation from the Council of Europe, there were sessions on the European Court of Human Rights standards on police detention focusing on jurisprudence and implementation insights, and monitoring police detention with consideration of those with specific vulnerabilities. The remaining sessions were on interactions with police services, implementing standards through technical cooperation, and finally, NPM monitoring of police detention for which Chief Inspector Mark Kelly was a panel member. The second event, on 6 June 2025, was a roundtable focusing on combating informal prisoner hierarchies organised by the Human Rights Directorate of the Council of Europe with the support of the NPM Forum.

On 19-20 November 2025, Chief Operating Officer Gerald O'Regan, Lead Inspector Laura Anderson and Inspector Matthew Butterly attended the final NPM Forum event of the year in Strasbourg, a workshop entitled, 'Effective NPMs: Strengthening skills, teamwork and strategy". The event began with an address from the Executive Secretary of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), followed by presentations from representatives of European NPMs reporting on strengths and challenges within their own countries leading to a group discussion on what makes an effective NPM. The workshop progressed with sessions on writing reports and recommendations, the tracking and implementation of recommendations, communications skills and media relations, and ethics in NPM work. The event concluded with a presentation on mental health supports for staff working in NPMs followed by final remarks summarising the two day event from the Council of Europe.

- 01. European NPM Annual Conference on Monitoring Police Detention, Strasbourg, June 2025, left to right, Chief Inspector **Mark Kelly** (OIP), **Anne-Sophie Bonnet** (French NPM) and **Sam Gluckstein** (UK NPM)
- 02. European NPM Forum in session, Combating Informal Prisoner Hierarchies, Strasbourg June 2025
- 03. Group photo from the NPM Forum workshop on Effective NPMs Strengthening skills, teamwork and strategy, Strasbourg, November 2025
- 04. NPM Chief Inspector Mark Kelly presenting at the NPM Forum in Strasbourg, alongside Anastasiia Saliuk (CoE) and Alessandro Albano (Italian NPM)



“Technical Support for More Effective and Resilient National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs)”

Project, co-funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Following the launch of the project in 2024, 2025 commenced with the first Advisory Group meeting, held on 31 January 2025. In attendance were representatives from the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the Cypriot Ombudsman’s office and the OIP, namely Chief Inspector Mark Kelly, Senior Inspector Pia Janning and Lead Inspector Laura Anderson. The meeting heard updates from all parties and participants then collectively focused on planning next steps which included the issuing of tenders to commence the project activities.

A further two Advisory Group meetings were held in 2025, on 19 May 2025 and 30 September 2025, with the same members in attendance and the purpose to reflect on the project’s progress and plan accordingly. In between meetings, the OIP maintained frequent communication with the Council of Europe to progress the project’s objective, to notably improve respect for the rights of persons deprived of their liberty, and in Ireland’s case, to do so through supporting preparations for the ratification of OPCAT. Here are some of the activities from the project that were achieved or commenced in 2025:

Project Tenders

During the first quarter of the year, the Council of Europe issued tenders to engage consultants with expertise in Communications and Public Relations, Law and Human Rights, and Research and Data Collection. As a result of that process, throughout the latter half of 2025 the OIP had the opportunity to consult with the successful applicants to support the ongoing endeavours of preparing for the Inspection of the Places of Detention Bill, which remained on the priority drafting list of the Legislative Programme for Government in 2025. In particular, the OIP worked with We the People on communications, Quality Matters and Nazia Latif regarding research development and Dr. Julia Kozma on matters of legal analysis relating to human rights. Ongoing collaboration between the OIP, the Council of Europe and the experts identified will continue into the next phase of the project in 2026.



Presentation of the CPT’s Ireland 2025 visit (left to right), **Hugh Chetwynd**, Executive Secretary of the CPT, **Francesca Gordon**, Advisor CPT, **Gunda Wössner**, 2nd Vice-President of the CPT, Chief Inspector **Mark Kelly**

Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) Report Presentation event

On the morning of 11 November 2025, an event supported by the project entitled ‘Technical support for more effective and resilient National Preventive Mechanisms Presentation of the CPT’s Ireland 2025 visit report’ was held at the Royal College of Physicians in Dublin. The aim of the event was to provide a platform for participants to hear about the CPT’s observations, engage with the CPT’s recommendations, and explore strategies to implement necessary changes to prevent torture and inhuman conditions for people deprived of their liberty in Ireland. There was a diverse audience of participants including representatives from government departments, Seanad Éireann, civil society, the Irish Prison Service including senior management, academia, oversight bodies, human rights advocates, the Cypriot NPM, and criminal justice agencies.

The event began with introductory speeches outlining the main conclusions and recommendations of the CPT report, led by Gunda Wössner, 2nd Vice-President of the CPT and supported by her colleagues Hugh Chetwynd, Executive Secretary of the CPT, and Francesca Gordon, Adviser CPT Secretariat. Chief Inspector Mark Kelly then followed with his opening remarks on the report.

The second session of the event was facilitated by the CPT delegation and Chief Inspector Mark Kelly and focused on the implementation of the main recommendations of the report, particularly overcrowding, ill-treatment prevention, deaths in prison, and issues related to mental health in prisons and psychiatric facilities. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and this facilitated a meaningful discussion regarding detention facilities in Ireland.

The third and final session addressed the prospects of OPCAT ratification in Ireland. Tigran Karapetyan, Head of Division, Transversal Challenges and Multilateral Projects with the Council of Europe, moderated a panel consisting of David Hogan, Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, Rebecca Keatinge, Head of Monitoring and Compliance, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, and Sam Gluckstein, Expert Senior Adviser on OPCAT implementation to the OIP.



Presentation of the CPT’s Ireland 2025 visit report event, November 2025, Panel (left to right), **Tigran Karapetyan** (CoE), **David Hogan** (DoJHAM), **Rebecca Keatinge** (IHREC), **Sam Gluckstein** (OIP)

Mental Health Roundtable

On the afternoon of 11 November 2025, the Council of Europe through the project, in partnership with the OIP and the Mental Health Commission, held a roundtable event on mental health, human rights and the deprivation of liberty, at the Royal College of Physicians. In attendance were a range of stakeholders including representatives from civil society, academia, health and criminal justice agencies, the Cypriot NPM, as well as mental health professionals, human rights advocates, and government officials.

Opening statements were provided by John Farrelly, Chief Executive, Mental Health Commission, Chief Inspector Mark Kelly and Professor Gautam Gulati, Chair (Health Group) of the CPT. The event had three panels, all moderated by John Farrelly. The first panel included Professor Gautam Gulati, Chief Inspector Mark Kelly and Catherine Creamer, mental health expert. Together they explored current mental healthcare challenges for detainees in Ireland.

The second panel's discussion title was, 'Bridging gaps: appropriate mental healthcare pathways for people with mental illness'. Sitting on the panel were Professor Jim Lucey, Inspector Mental Health Commission, Brenda Wright, Executive Clinical Director, Central Mental Hospital, Fíona Ní Chinnéide, Deputy Director, The Probation Service, David Carroll, Chief Executive Officer DePaul Ireland, and

Olivera Vulic, Psychiatrist and former member of the CPT. There was a diverse range of experience across the panel leading to a wealth of information regarding pathways for people with mental illness.

The final panel explored the topic of advancing legal protections and accountability in mental health detention, discussing challenges and legislative reforms. The panel consisted of Chief Inspector Mark Kelly, Orla Keane, Head of Tribunals and General Counsel, Mental Health Commission, and Lisa-Marie O'Malley, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Mental Health Reform. The discussion explored legislation across health and justice sectors and the importance of a patient centred approach.

All panels were followed by question and answer sessions and facilitated significant cross-sectoral discussions demonstrating the importance of cooperation and collaboration of those working in the fields of both criminal justice and healthcare. The establishment of a multi-member NPM, following the ratification of OPCAT, will place such cooperation and collaboration on a statutory basis, bringing together expertise from a range of disciplines, to improve conditions for people deprived of their liberty.

The event concluded with closing remarks from Tigran Karapetyan from the Council of Europe and Micaela Musacchio Strigone representing the European Commission.

Study Visits

In December 2025, through the project, Lead Inspector Mark Wolfe and Inspector Gerry Cronin spent a week observing the French NPM, the Contrôleur Général des lieux de privation de Liberté (CGLPL), monitoring police detention facilities in Lille and surrounding areas. The OIP inspectors, each supported by interpreters, were assigned to two separate inspection teams which included experts with backgrounds in policing. The locations for the monitoring visits included Gendarmerie barracks, police stations and court detention facilities. The inspectors were provided with a fully immersive experience as they were provided with full access to staff from the Police Nationale, Gendarmerie and Prosecutor’s office. Following the monitoring visits, Lead Inspector Mark Wolfe and Inspector Gerry Cronin participated in a debriefing meeting

with the Council of Europe and the CGLPL at their office in Paris. On their return to the OIP, both inspectors shared their learning with the wider team and spoke about the benefit of observing the undertaking of preventive monitoring of specialised police units, including those specifically for anti-terrorism, human trafficking, sexual and domestic violence, cyber-crime, drug enforcement, immigration detention and serious organised crime.

Paper: Ireland: A law on National Preventive Mechanisms – Main Requirements according to the OPCAT

In December 2025, Dr. Julia Kozma, Member of the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT) and expert consultant for the Council of Europe, prepared a draft paper on the key requirements and essential legal provisions a law on NPMs in Ireland should include. The paper will be further developed in early 2026 and will serve as a useful tool in preparation for the ratification of OPCAT.



Group photo from the Roundtable on Mental Health, Human Rights and Deprivation of Liberty, November 2025

04

Activities – Inspections and Investigations

Inspections

In 2025, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP) continued the delivery of its inspection programme across the prison estate in Ireland. The Inspectorate conducted two General Inspections, one Follow-Up Inspection and commenced a Thematic Inspection. All of these inspections were carried out under the OIP's [Inspection Framework \(2024\) A Framework for the Inspection of Prisons in Ireland.](#)

Summary of Findings

In 2025, the Inspectorate assessed recommendations made following a general unannounced inspection of Mountjoy Prison that occurred in late 2022, during a Follow-Up Inspection of Mountjoy Prison (28 April–2 May 2025).

The Inspectorate also conducted two full and unannounced General Inspections of the following prisons:

- Wheatfield Prison (19 June–2 July 2025);
- Castlerea Prison (8 September–16 September 2025).

The OIP continued its partnership with the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) Inspectorate, which assessed and reported on the provision and quality of education in the General Inspections of Wheatfield Prison and Castlerea Prison.

The OIP was also supported in its inspection activities by members drawn from its Expert Panel. The Inspectorate was accompanied during inspections by national and international experts in a wide array of fields including healthcare and security.

Finally, the Inspectorate commenced an announced Thematic Inspection on Ageing in Irish prisons (13 November–21 November 2025). The Inspectorate visited a number of prisons including Midlands Prison, the Training Unit, the Dóchas Centre with plans to also visit Arbour Hill Prison. However, the Thematic Inspection was suspended on 18 November 2025 as a result of attempts to interfere with the operational autonomy of the Inspection Team. See further below and Appendix 2.



Refurbished Cell in Medical Unit
Mountjoy Prison

Key Prison Inspection Findings

01. Mountjoy Prison (Follow Up Inspection, 28 April 2025–2 May 2025)

Monitoring is an essential component of the Inspectorate's work. Follow-up inspections are key to assessing the implementation of previous recommendations. The Inspectorate completed a follow-up inspection of Mountjoy Prison (28 April–2 May 2025). Previously, the Inspectorate had conducted an unannounced general inspection of Mountjoy Prison (28 November–9 December 2022).

The follow-up inspection examined developments since the OIP's general inspection in 2022, with a particular emphasis on overcrowding. Of particular concern was the increased number of men sleeping on mattresses on the floors. On the first day of the 2022 inspection, there were 750 people accommodated in Mountjoy Prison; operating at 99% capacity and there were 35 people sleeping on mattresses on the floor. On the first day of the follow-up inspection in April 2025, there were 986 people in custody. The prison was operating at 122% capacity, and there were 90 men sleeping on mattresses on the floor.

The standard of cleanliness and state of repair varied across the prison, it was particularly poor for protection prisoners accommodated in A and B Divisions in the main prison. Cells were observed to have broken windows, torn linoleum, mould, leaking toilets and sinks. These cells were poorly ventilated and temperatures were excessive. Essential cell repairs could take several weeks. Some common areas of the main prison were also dirty or in poor repair.

By contrast, the refurbishment of the Medical Unit (F1 and F2) and Mountjoy West (B) has seen a significant improvement in living conditions for men accommodated in these cells. Cells were observed to be clean, bright, modern and easy to maintain.

The scheduling of mealtimes to match with community standards was a previous recommendation made by the Inspectorate. It was positively noted that Mountjoy West continues to serve a main meal at 4pm rather than at lunchtime although this recommendation remains open for the main prison and the medical unit.

The Inspectorate previously recommended that Mountjoy Prison (post COVID-19) resume the acceptance of packages delivered to the prison by family members. The use of post as the only system for receiving packages imposed an additional financial burden on families. We were pleased to find that family members were allowed to hand deliver items to the prison.

Record keeping was an area of concern that was highlighted during the 2022 general inspection. During the follow-up visit, the Inspectorate observed some improvements in the quality of record keeping. It was particularly noteworthy that NIMS (National Incident Management System) forms were now being completed and entered on the NIMS system far more quickly and efficiently than previously.

Despite these improvements, some significant gaps in record keeping were identified. Not all incidents were being recorded. Incidents in which prisoners had injured each other were being noted; however, incidents in which prisoners allegedly sustained serious injuries requiring hospitalisation at the hands of staff were not. The level of detail in use of force and relocation recording required improvement.

The inspection team followed up on a number of recommendations made in relation to healthcare staffing and resourcing. It was positive to note during the follow-up inspection that there was administrative support for the healthcare team. However, there was only one nurse on duty at night, covering Mountjoy Main, Mountjoy West, and the Medical Unit. This creates a serious risk if two or more medical emergencies occur simultaneously. Given the number of prisoners currently held at the prison, the Inspectorate recommends that a second nurse be present at night.

At the time of the 2022 inspection, there were three full-time and one part-time addiction counsellors at Mountjoy Prison. During the 2025 inspection, there was just one full-time counsellor in place; although with the welcome re-opening of the Drug Treatment Programme, the Inspectorate was made aware of plans for increased resourcing, with the addition of two full-time counsellors.

At the closeout meeting following the 2022 inspection (and in the inspection report), the Inspectorate recommended that the use of a temporary Portakabin structure to conduct the healthcare screening portion of the committal process should be brought to an end. However, the Portakabin remained in use during the follow-up inspection, despite the fact that it is manifestly unfit for this purpose. Healthcare interviews should only take place in premises that enable medical confidentiality to be fully respected. This shortcoming should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Appropriate access to purposeful activity is essential for personal development and progression. Overall, the Inspectorate found that there was limited access to purposeful activity in the prison. Regular school closures (both full and partial) as well as limited access to the gym were due to the redeployment of staff. It is recommended that both the gym officer and education officer positions be ring fenced on the regime management plan to ensure that greater access for prisoners is achieved.

Out of cell time for protection prisoners was limited and the Inspectorate would encourage Mountjoy Prison to renew its efforts to increase time out of cell for men on protection.

This follow-up inspection report of Mountjoy Prison was published on 4 February 2026 and can be accessed at the following link: [Follow-up-inspection-Mountjoy-Prison](#)

02. Wheatfield Prison (General Inspection, 19 June 2025 -2 July 2025)

Between 19 June and 2 July 2025, the Inspectorate carried out an unannounced general inspection at Wheatfield Prison. As with the majority of prisons across the estate, Wheatfield was operating beyond its capacity. On the first day of the inspection, Wheatfield was at 110% capacity, with 685 people in custody.¹ 38 men were sleeping on mattresses on the floors.

The impact of overcrowding on living conditions, regimes, and the wellbeing of people living in the prison was evident.

Living conditions at Wheatfield Prison varied. There were some pockets of living space that offered reasonably good living conditions, such as the Independent Living Skills Unit (ILSU), single-occupancy cells on East Wing, and the enhanced landings in the old part of the prison. However, conditions were significantly worse on standard landings in the old part of the prison where cells were grubby and unpleasant; these conditions were further exacerbated by over-occupancy and mattresses placed on the floor as a result of prison overcrowding.

In all cells, toilets were not fully partitioned which undermined the dignity of people living in shared cells. In addition, many communal showers on the landings were found to be out of order and in a very poor state.

Of significant concern was the level of out of cell time for men in Wheatfield Prison. When staffing numbers were reduced, a staggered unlock protocol was implemented; this meant that, rather than the scheduled time of unlock, prisoners remained locked back in their cell on their landings and awaited to be unlocked in sequence.



Overcrowded Cell Conditions at Wheatfield Prison

¹ Irish Prison Service (2025). [Prisoner Population on Thursday 19th of June 2025](#)

This protocol significantly erodes daily out of cell time. Records were not formally maintained as to when staggered unlock is implemented or the extent to which out of cell time is lost. A review of staffing numbers for the quarter prior to the inspection indicated that a staggered unlock was imposed 57 times in the 91-day period. The frequency with which this protocol has been imposed strongly indicates that greater staffing numbers are required at Wheatfield to implement the basic prison timetable.

In relation to healthcare at the prison, the healthcare team were highly committed and dedicated, with good examples of innovative practice in place. However, people in prison reported significant difficulty and long wait times to access a doctor. At the time of the inspection, GP provision was filled by locum doctors which undermined the ability to manage waiting lists, and to structure healthcare delivery in the long-term. Like many prisons, at night, Wheatfield Prison is staffed by just one nurse on duty; the Inspectorate again reiterates its position that this practice is unsafe.

The level of violence at the prison was a concern. In the previous 12 months, there were 95 recorded prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and 11 recorded prisoner-on-staff assaults. Only 29% of people who took part in the Inspectorate's survey reported that they felt safe in the prison (68 of 235). The Inspectorate found significant issues concerning record keeping for serious incidents, and there was no evidence of a formal risk assessment process with respect to cell allocation or cell-sharing.

For people living in the old part of the prison, there was very limited access to the prisoner complaints system as complaint boxes and forms were not available on landings. Confidence in the complaints system was extremely low with just 4% (9 of 229) of prisoner respondents reporting that the system worked well.

Wheatfield Prison offered excellent and spacious work training facilities. However, these facilities were under-utilised, and capacity for work training placements could not accommodate the population of the prison. On 19 June 2025, there were 166 prisoners engaged in work – just 24% of the total population.

There were fourteen areas of essential work and work training. Of these, three were closed in the long-term, and two were regularly affected by closures. Contributing to closures were the high number of vacant posts for the Work Training Officers required to oversee these workshops and deliver certification. At the time of the inspection, just one workshop offered certified training. Certification is essential to help employment prospects on release.

It was positive to note that in-cell phones have been installed in all cells. However, the six-minute capped duration of phone calls remains too short to support family contact; the Inspectorate will continue to raise this issue with the Irish Prison Service.

03. Castlereia Prison (General Inspection, 8 September 2025 – 16 September 2025)

A general unannounced inspection was carried out in Castlereia Prison from 8 – 16 September 2025. On 8 September 2025, the first day of the inspection, the prison was operating at 119% capacity and there were 442 people in custody. Of these, 35 people were sleeping on mattresses on the floors.

Living conditions varied considerably across the prison. Conditions were excellent in the new accommodation in The Grove Unit, which provided single room occupancy. The exteriors of the pre-existing houses at The Grove Unit had been repainted, but the interiors of some of these houses required urgent repairs and renovation.



Self-Contained Apartment in The Grove Castlereia

In the main prison, A Division was severely affected by overcrowding, with 26 men sleeping on mattresses on the floors. Access to showers was very poor, with nine showers to serve approximately 239 men.

In the report on its 2024 visit to Castlereia Prison, the Council of Europe’s European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) noted that the conditions of detention of the vulnerable people held in C1 and C2 Divisions may well amount to inhuman and degrading treatment. The Inspectorate observed that there had been no changes to these Divisions since the CPT’s visit.

The quality of food at Castlereia Prison was excellent and it is commendable that mealtimes continued to be aligned with times in the community. In this area, Castlereia Prison provides a model for other prisons to follow.

Some ordinary prisoners on A Division had a highly restrictive regime, and in common with other prisons across the estate, the regime for prisoners on Rule 63 (protection) on B Division was very restrictive. A review of records maintained on the landings indicated that men on protection received between 15-75 minutes of time out of cell each day. Out of cell time on A1 landing was generally limited to an offer of one hour in the yard per day, with very limited access to purposeful activity. For example, on 8 September 2025, of the 73 men accommodated there, just seven attended the school and 13 prisoners attended the gym; the remaining 53 remained locked back in their cells.

In terms of risk assessment, there was a paucity of information regarding links to other prisoners who may constitute a threat or to whom an arriving prisoner may present a threat. Moreover, there was no link between information of this kind and data on past propensity to violence of prisoners arriving in the prison establishment.

Overall, the inspection team found that record keeping was poor. The recording of decision-making for placement on Rule 63 was deficient; in some instances, no reasons were recorded for placement. There was little or no evidence of regular reviews. The quality of Use of Force reporting also required improvement. Operational reports and statements from officers tended to contain limited information, in many cases the level of detail was insufficient for management to determine if the level of force used was necessary, lawful and proportionate in the circumstances.

The Castlerea Health and Safety Register pilot scheme is a positive initiative which could potentially provide greater managerial oversight of serious incidents in the prison. However, as part of the development of the system, steps are required to ensure that statements provided by officers about the circumstances where they have used force are uploaded onto the register and onto NIMS.

During the inspection, many people living in the prison raised concerns with the inspection team regarding access to healthcare, highlighting long waiting times and the cancellation of

external appointments. For those with routine concerns, access was limited. New committals and urgent cases were prioritised. However, other patients could wait months to access a doctor. There appeared to be no systematic recording of how long individual patients had been waiting. Consequently, the average length of waiting time indicated to the Inspectorate by the healthcare team (3 weeks) cannot be considered to accurately reflect the experience of many patients at Castlerea.

Regarding external appointments, the number of non-attendances of hospital appointments due to the lack of availability of prison staff for escort is a matter of concern. For example, one in six external hospital appointments scheduled in Q1 and Q2 2025 did not proceed because staffing numbers did not allow for escort. Although appointments may be rescheduled, the cancellation of appointments has significant detrimental consequences on healthcare delivery and the prognosis of patients.

Access to the dentist was very poor. Current dental in-reach time is one day per month. At the time of inspection, the waitlist for the dentist was 176 people – or two in five prisoners at Castlerea. The estimated wait time was between 12-18 months.

There was an insufficient number of prison officers assigned to the surgery and in-reach corridor to make effective use of services' client-facing time. Additional staff resources should be allocated to these areas.

While the Inspectorate welcome management’s plans to prioritise purposeful activity in particular work and training; some important facilities such as the Equine Unit were barely utilised at the time of the inspection. There was no indoor recreation area for men on A Division and recreation areas were not in use for men on B and C Divisions.

The prison’s ability to be able to provide consistent and ongoing work training was impacted by 13 Work Training Officers (WTO) vacancies. There was no permanent Chief Work and Training Officer at the time of the inspection. On 10 September 2025, 41% (184/446) of prisoners had access to some type of work and training activity. Given the high priority the prison is according to promoting work training activities, there is a need to increase the number of work training spaces available. There was limited certification available for men in work and training and increasing access to certification would support personal development and access to employment upon release. There was no work training activity for men on protection.

Prison management were committed to keeping the education centre open and it was positive that there were very few school closures. There was also consistency in relation to the officers assigned to the school. It was positive that men in The Grove Unit could avail of evening classes, weekend education provision, and access services such as the Red Cross, and AA and NA meetings for example.

04. Ageing in Prison (Thematic Inspection, commenced 13 November 2025)

The proportion of older people within the prison system in Ireland has been steadily increasing over the past number of years.

The age at which a person is considered ‘old’ in a prison context differs from the threshold applied in the wider community mainly due to the concept of ‘accelerated ageing’.² For this reason, the age criteria applied for the thematic inspection was aged 50 years or over.

The Inspectorate’s Thematic Inspection aimed to look at the needs of the older prisoner population. The Inspection Team in particular, focused on two inspection focus areas under the (2024) Inspection Framework, [A Framework for the Inspection of Prisons in Ireland: Respect & Dignity and Health & Wellbeing](#).

This announced inspection to the Irish Prison Service was carried out with Public Sector Duty obligations in mind.³

2 Those in prison experience ‘accelerated ageing’ which means that a person in their 50s may have the physical appearance and health problems of someone at least 10 years older than in the community. See Irish Penal Reform Trusts (2016) [“In Here, Time Stands Still” the Rights, Needs and Experiences of Older People in Prison](#).

3 [Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act](#).

The objectives of the thematic inspection were to examine:

- The experience of this cohort, including the risk and protective factors of being an older person in the prison system.

- Whether the rights and dignity of older persons in prison are being respected and upheld including the appropriateness of the prison environment, their ability to fully participate in the regime, and preparations for release.

- Whether the healthcare needs of this cohort are being met in relation to resourcing, policy, and practice, including practices in relation to preparing for end of life.

Areas examined during site visits to prisons included: prison infrastructure and regime, healthcare challenges, palliative care, release and resettlement challenges.

The Inspectorate conducted site visits to the Midlands Prison, the Training Unit and the Dóchas Centre.

Following attempts to interfere with the operational autonomy of the inspection team at Midlands Prison on 13 and 14 November 2025, the Chief Inspector of Prisons wrote to the Governor of the Midlands Prison and the Director General of the Irish Prison Service. Further attempts were made to interfere with the operational autonomy of the inspection team in the Dóchas Centre on 18 November 2025 resulting in the issuance a Statutory Notice of Concern by the Chief Inspector of Prisons (see Appendix 2).

Despite a meeting at IPS Headquarters with the Director General and her team, as well as an extensive exchange of correspondence, this regrettable situation remained unresolved at year end.

Thematic Survey Findings across 2025 General Inspections (Wheatfield and Castlereagh Prisons)

As part of the full unannounced General Inspections carried out by the Inspectorate between June and September 2025, 454 people in prison and 267 members of operational and service staff completed the Inspectorate’s inspection surveys.

Prisoner surveys were conducted using secure digital tablets and staff surveys were hosted on the Inspectorate’s website. The use of electronic surveys allowed the Inspectorate to identify potential lines of enquiry during the course of inspection, and also provided an anonymous way for prisoners and staff to engage with the Inspectorate.

The surveys captured demographic information for both cohorts, as well as information about experiences of living and working in the prisons. The Inspectorate tracks survey responses over time to determine potential changes in specific prisons.

In 2025, the Inspectorate confirmed a number of themes emerging from previous survey findings in the two inspected prisons.

01. Grievance Procedures

Both prisoner and staff survey respondents indicated a strong reluctance to engage in grievance procedures. Three out of five people in prison who completed the Inspectorate survey (63%, 271 of 430) reported they did not feel safe making a complaint in the prisons. Only 21% of prisoner survey respondents (89 of 430) believed the complaint system works well.

Two out of five staff respondents (42%, 101 of 240) reported they did not feel comfortable expressing work-related grievances in the prisons.

63%

of prisoners surveyed by the OIP did not feel safe making complaints in prison

82%

of staff surveyed by the OIP believed prisoner rehabilitation was an important part of the job

02. Experience Working in Prisons

Less than half of operational and service staff surveyed in the two inspected prisons (45%, 110 of 246) were satisfied with the quality of their working life, and 58% (141 of 242) reported feeling safe working in the prisons.

Two out of five staff respondents (42%, 99 of 236) looked forward to coming to work in the prisons, and 82% (195 of 237) felt that rehabilitation of people in prison was an important part of their job.

Staff respondents had mixed opinions about their levels of work-related stress, with 38% (92 of 245) reporting satisfaction with the stress they experienced at work and 44% (109 of 245) reporting dissatisfaction with their levels of work-related stress.

Prison staff who completed the survey reported satisfaction with their level of training in the areas of control and restraint (58%, 123 of 219), human rights (37%, 85 of 227) and personal protective equipment (41%, 91 of 221). However, many staff did not feel satisfied with their training [or no training] in combatting human trafficking (70%, 155 of 223). Only a minority of staff felt satisfied with their training when working with prisoners with mental health issues (14%, 31 of 218). Similarly, less than a quarter of staff reported satisfaction with training in CPR/First Aid (23%, 52 of 222) while only a minority were satisfied in training received in gender-based violence (14%, 31 of 225).

03. Experience Living in Prisons

Overall, two out of five prisoner survey respondents (41%, 175 of 427) felt safe in prison.

Of 436 prisoner survey respondents, 31% (134) reported spending less than two hours out of their cells on a typical weekday. Three out of ten prisoners (37%, 160 of 436) reported spending between two and five hours out of their cells each day.

A majority of prisoner survey responses (61%, 185 of 305) alleged experience of discrimination in the prisons.

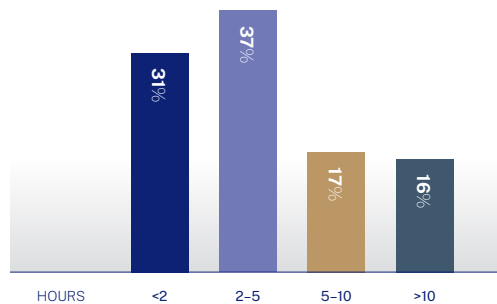
Most frequently reported was discrimination based on Membership of the Traveller Community (21%, 63 of 305), followed by Nationality (15%, 47 of 305), and Race/Ethnicity (12%, 38 of 305).

Prisoner survey respondents who indicated they were Irish Traveller, Roma, Any Other White Background, Black, Asian and Other - including mixed group/background, reported different experiences of imprisonment as compared to prisoner survey respondents who indicated they were White Irish.

- While less than half of White Irish respondents (46%, 78 of 169) indicated they had experienced discrimination in the prisons on one or more grounds, 79% of respondents who were Irish Travellers, Roma, Any Other White Background, Black, Asian and Other, including mixed group/background, (96 of 121) reported the same.
- 53% (139 of 262) of White Irish respondents and 50% (69 of 138) of respondents who were Irish Travellers, Roma, Any Other White Background, Black, Asian and Other, including mixed group/background, reported having a job in the prison. Similarly, 49% (128 of 262) of White Irish respondents and 51% (70 of 137) of respondents who were Irish Travellers, Roma, Any Other White Background, Black, Asian and Other, including mixed group/background, indicated they attended school in the prisons.
-

Nearly half of White Irish respondents (47%, 118 of 249) reported that staff treated them fairly, while 38% (48 of 128) of respondents who were Irish Travellers, Roma, Any Other White Background, Black, Asian and Other, including mixed group/background, were treated fairly by staff.

- Less than a fifth (18%, 24 of 134) of prisoner survey respondents who were Irish Travellers, Roma, Any Other White Background, Black, Asian and Other, including mixed group/background, reported feeling safe making a complaint, while less than a quarter (22%, 56 of 256) of White Irish respondents reported similarly.
- Two-thirds of White Irish respondents (66%, 172 of 262) and almost three-quarters (73%, 101 of 139) Irish Traveller, Roma, Any Other White Background, Black, Asian and Other, including mixed group/background, respondents indicated spending up to at least 19 hours a day in their cells



Investigations

Deaths Investigated in 2025

During 2025, 14 deaths fell within the scope of the Inspectorate’s remit for investigation. This represents a significant decrease compared with 2024, when 31 deaths were recorded, the highest number investigated in any year since the Inspectorate commenced death investigations in January 2012. The reduction of 17 deaths, equating to a decrease of 55%, is considered significant.

The Inspectorate is of the view that this reduction may, in part, be attributed to the implementation of Death in Custody recommendations arising from published investigation reports by the Irish Prison Service. A breakdown of the deaths investigated in 2025 is provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1: 2025 Deaths in Custody

Prison	Total Number of Deaths	Death in Prison Custody	Death in Hospital	Death within 1 Month of Temporary Release
Arbour Hill Prison	3		3	
Central Criminal Court (while in custody of IPS)	1	1		
Cork Prison	2			2
Dóchas	1		1	
Loughan House	1			1
Midlands Prison	5	3	1	1
Mountjoy Prison (Training Unit)	1		1	
TOTAL	14	4	6	4

In 2025, one death was recorded in a women's prison, one in a men's open prison, and one involving a prisoner while in the cell complex of the Central Criminal Court. The youngest person to die was 21 years of age and the eldest was 82. Ten of the investigations related to individuals aged over 55, of whom five were aged over 70.

Objectives of DiC Investigations

The objectives of investigations of deaths in custody are to:

- Establish the circumstances and events surrounding the death, including the care provided by the IPS;
- Examine whether any changes in IPS operational methods, policy, practice or management arrangements could help prevent a similar death in the future;
- Ensure that the prisoner's NoK has an opportunity to raise any concerns they may have and take these into account in the investigation; and
- Assist the Coroner's investigation and contribute to meeting the State's obligations under Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, by ensuring, as far as possible that the full facts are brought to light and any relevant failing is exposed, any commendable practice is identified and any lessons from the death are learned.

Meeting with Family / Next-of-Kin

To ensure that a prisoner's family or next-of-kin (NoK) has an opportunity to raise any concerns, the investigation team offers to meet with the family or NoK shortly after the death of their loved one. Some families choose to engage with this process, while others prefer not to do so. Throughout the investigation, the Inspectorate endeavours to address any questions or concerns raised by the NoK.

A second meeting with the NoK is offered shortly in advance of the publication of the investigation report. The purpose of this meeting is to advise that publication is imminent and to provide a general outline of the investigation's findings, including whether the report contains any recommendations.

Following publication of a Death in Custody investigation report by the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, a copy of the anonymised report is provided to the NoK.

Death in Custody Publications and Recommendations in 2025

While the Inspectorate is independent in the performance of its functions, it does not have the statutory authority to independently publish its investigation reports. During 2025, 21 investigation reports were submitted to the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and

Migration for publication. By year-end, 17 reports had been published. At 31 December 2025, a total of 13 investigation reports remained awaiting publication by the Minister. Details of the published reports are outlined in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Death in Custody Recommendations Made in Reports Published in 2025

Prison	OIP Reference	Death in Prison	Death in Hospital	Temporary Release	Number of Recommendations
Mountjoy Prison	Mr. A 2023		X		1
Wheatfield Prison	Mr. B 2023	X			1
Limerick Prison	Mr. C 2023	X			8
Castlerea Prison	Mr. D 2023	X			4
Limerick Prison	Mr. E 2022	X			0
Limerick Prison	Mr. G 2023			X	0
Mountjoy Prison	Mr. H 2022		X		2
Limerick Prison	Mr. L 2020	X			7
Midlands Prison	Mr. L 2023				5
Castlerea Prison	Mr. M 2020			X	4
Midlands Prison	Mr. M 2022	X			0
Cloverhill Prison	Mr. O 2022	X			5
Midlands Prison	Mr. P 2022		X		4
Wheatfield Prison	Mr. Q 2022	X			1
Mountjoy Prison	Mr. S 2024			X	0
Midlands Prison	Mr. T 2023			X	0
Cork Prison	Mr. V 2022			X	1

The Director General of the Irish Prison Service (IPS) is invited to confirm the factual accuracy of each Death in Custody investigation report prior to the final report being formally transmitted to the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration.

Where considered appropriate, Death in Custody investigation reports include recommendations for consideration by the Irish Prison Service. The Director General is requested to confirm whether the recommendations contained in each report are accepted, part-accepted, or not accepted. In respect of recommendations that are accepted or part-accepted, the Director General is also requested to provide an Action Plan outlining the measures proposed to address those recommendations. Where a recommendation is not accepted, the Director General is asked to provide the reasons for that decision.

Action Plans developed by the Irish Prison Service in response to recommendations are submitted to the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration and are published on the Inspectorate’s website in conjunction with the relevant investigation reports.

As outlined in **Table 2**, the seventeen investigation reports published during 2025 contained a total of 43 recommendations for consideration by the Director General. Of these recommendations:

- **26 were accepted;**
- **6 were part-accepted; and**
- **11 were not accepted.**

Themes Arising from Recommendations

Recommendations made in 2025 typically related to policy, health and wellbeing, record keeping, and the safe operation of prisons, including measures to prevent the entry of illicit drugs into the prison system. As observed in previous years, the Inspectorate continued to encounter deaths associated with synthetic opioids entering prisons during 2025. There was also a notable increase in recommendations relating to the medical needs of geriatric prisoners.

The most common areas giving rise to recommendations are summarised on the following pages.

Temporary Release Procedures: A number of recommendations related to the operation of Temporary Release, particularly in circumstances where prisoners with addiction issues are released without appropriate supports in place. The Inspectorate considers that such practices are counterproductive to rehabilitation, contribute to recidivism, and undermine the objectives of the Temporary Release scheme. For example,

one investigation report recommended that where a prisoner is required, as a condition of Temporary Release, to engage with community services that operate only on weekdays, release should occur between Monday and Thursday to ensure continuity of care and support.

Healthcare: Prisoner healthcare continues to be a significant area of concern arising from Death in Custody investigations, particularly in respect of the welfare of geriatric prisoners. Recommendations in this area included, for example, that concerns regarding defective medical equipment be immediately escalated to the Chief Nurse Officer. Other recommendations related to the management of prisoners returning from hospital with documented decisions not to be resuscitated, emphasising the need for prison healthcare staff to take active steps to ensure that such decisions reflect the free and informed consent of the prisoner and that this is fully documented within the Prison Healthcare Management System (PHMS).

Record Keeping: Deficiencies in record keeping continued to feature prominently in recommendations made during 2025. Of particular concern were findings relating to the falsification or inaccuracy of records. The Inspectorate emphasised that IPS management and oversight bodies must be able to rely on the integrity and accuracy of official records. Recommendations were made requiring IPS management to take immediate steps to ensure that comprehensive and correct records are maintained. Similar issues had previously been identified in Death in Custody investigations relating to Mr. H (2014) and Mr. D (2019).

Mental Health: The mental health of prisoners continues to raise serious concerns, particularly regarding the appropriateness of committing individuals suspected or convicted of minor offences, who have significant mental health disorders, to prison rather than to local psychiatric hospitals. Addressing these concerns is likely to require the development of appropriately secure intensive care facilities or designated beds within civil psychiatric hospitals and will necessitate a coordinated, multi-agency approach.

The Inspectorate again recommended that there is no systematic justification for the routine placement of prisoners in refractory clothing while accommodated in a Close Supervision Cell (CSC). The Inspectorate recommends that this practice be brought to an immediate end. This position is fully consistent with the views of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). The continued reliance on CSC placement for prisoners with mental health issues is considered both worrying and unjustified.

Next of Kin Issues: During 2025, ongoing concerns were raised regarding the accuracy of next-of-kin (NoK) records and the handling of compassionate circumstances, particularly where one or more family members are also imprisoned following a death in custody. Recommendations were made that the Irish Prison Service review its policies to allow imprisoned family members to visit and provide comfort in such circumstances.

To ensure the accuracy of NoK details, the Inspectorate continues to recommend that, on committal or as soon as practicable thereafter,

contact is made with the nominated next of kin to confirm their consent to be recorded as NoK and to verify that the details provided are correct. Similar recommendations were made in the Death in Custody investigations relating to Mr. H (2019) and Mr. F (2018).

Contraband and the Secretion of Drugs:

The presence of contraband in prisons, and the serious risks associated with the internal secretion of drugs, continued to be a significant factor in Death in Custody investigations during 2025. As in 2024, a number of robust recommendations were made in this area. Of the 43 recommendations made in published reports, 13 arose from two investigations that raised significant concerns regarding the management of prisoners suspected of internally secreting drugs.

The Inspectorate reiterates its position, consistent with that of the CPT, that the Irish Prison Service should introduce a healthcare-led policy to respond to the risks posed by the internal secretion of drugs and other contraband. Where there is suspicion that a prisoner may be concealing drugs internally, healthcare professionals should take the lead in decision-making regarding supervision and care, supported by a documented risk assessment. Similar recommendations were made in the investigation into the death in custody of Mr. I (2020) and were accepted by the IPS.

To enhance healthcare monitoring in such circumstances, the Inspectorate again recommended that the IPS explore the use of remote monitoring technology for vital signs within prisons. This recommendation was

previously made and accepted in the report relating to Mr. K (2024), published in July 2024. The Director General committed to the establishment of a sub-group to examine this technology, and the Inspectorate looks forward to receiving the findings of that work.

Safety and Security of Prisoners: The use and functionality of cell call systems across the prison estate were identified as vulnerabilities during Death in Custody investigations. Inspectors found evidence of tampering with volume settings in prison class offices, as well as inconsistent operational practices between prisons. The Chief Inspector had previously issued an Immediate Action Notification in relation to the cell call system in Cork Prison, highlighting the significant risks associated with delayed responses to cell call activations. Similar concerns were also identified in the Death in Custody report relating to Mr. G (2021). The Inspectorate reiterated its recommendation in a 2025 investigation report that responding promptly to cell call notifications is a core duty of prison officers. It further recommended that the Irish Prison Service develop a national Standard Operating Procedure governing cell call activations, including the establishment of national standards for response times. Additional recommendations were made for the implementation of monitoring, compliance measures, and regular testing of all associated equipment across the prison estate.

05 Complaints

The Chief Inspector of Prisons has a statutory role in relation to general oversight of the Irish Prison Services (IPS) Prisoner Complaints System. It is not a function of the Chief Inspector of Prisons to investigate individual complaints, but the Inspectorate may examine the circumstances relating to a complaint where necessary for performing the functions of the Office.

To provide a higher degree of oversight to the Category A complaints process, the Inspectorate continued its procedure of the issuance of Rule 57 oversight letters. These letters are issued by the Chief Inspector of Prisons to the Governor of the relative place of detention reminding them of their obligations under Rule 57 of the Prison Rules 2007-2020.⁴

Category A Complaints

There are specific reporting obligations on the IPS under Rule 57(B) in relation to allegations of a serious nature, such as assault or use of excessive force against a prisoner or ill treatment, racial abuse, discrimination, intimidation, threats – i.e. referred to as Category A Complaints.

The breakdown of Category A Complaints (by prison) notified to the Inspectorate during 2025 is provided in the following tables.

Analysis of Category A Complaints

As illustrated in **Table 3**, the Inspectorate received notification of 62 Category A complaints in 2025 from across the Irish prison estate. The number of Category A complaints had slightly increased from 2024.

⁴ The letter seeks confirmation that the Governor has (a.) arranged for any relevant material, including CCTV recordings, to be preserved for as long as they may be required for any investigation; (b.) arranged for the prisoner in question to be examined and any injuries or marks recorded and photographed if any physical force is alleged; (c.) arranged for the names of all prisoners, staff and others who may be potential witnesses to be recorded; (d.) advised the complainant that the complaint is being investigated and of the procedures involved; and (e.) Informed An Garda Síochána in all cases where that is required by law.

Table 3: Category A Complaint Notifications to the Inspector of Prisons

Prison	2025 Notifications of Category A Complaints	2024 Notifications of Category A Complaints	2023 Notification of Category A Complaints	2022 Notification of Category A Complaints	2021 Notification of Category A Complaints
Arbour Hill Prison	0	0	0	0	3
Castlerea Prison	5	3	6	3	5
Cloverhill Prison	16	15	12	3	32
Cork Prison	7	2	3	5	5
Limerick Prison	4 (3 men's prison; 1 women's prison)	4 (3 men's prison; 1 women's prison)	7	7	1
Loughan House	0	0	0	0	0
Midlands Prison	1	10	19	24	17
Mountjoy Men's Prison	5	6	6	10	8
Mountjoy Women's Prison Dóchas Centre	4	5	4	3	3
Portlaoise Prison	3	4	1	12	9
Prison Service Escort Corps (PSEC)	5	1	-	-	-
Shelton Abbey	4	0	0	0	1
Wheatfield Prison	8	5	6	3	5
TOTAL	62	55	64	70	89

Table 4 provides further detail with regard to notification requirements and compliance with Rule 57(B).

Table 4: Notification in accordance with Rule 57(B) Prison Rules 2007 – 2020

Rule 57(B) Prison Rules 2007 – 2020	Total Received in 2025	Notification Received Relating to 2025
Notifications of Category A complaints	62	62
Governor notification to Inspectorate within 7 days of being notified of the complaint [57B(4)]	48	48
Inspectorate shall be notified of the appointment of the investigator [57B(5)(a)]	46	28
Complaints deemed by the IPS DG to be vexatious, without foundation, or outside scope of rule and terminated. Inspectorate is notified of the decision and reasons for the decision [57B(5)(b)]	7	7
Complaints withdrawn by prisoners and DG decides investigation should be terminated. OIP is (a) advised and (b) the reasons documented [57B(5)(c)]	(a) 1 (b) 1	(a) 1 (b) 1
Complaints that proceeded to Investigation	44	54
Full investigation reports received by Inspectorate	45	16
Interim reports submitted to Inspectorate	37	15
Number of investigation reports received where complaint was grounded, upheld or partially upheld	6	3

Notification Received Relating to 2024	Notification Received Relating to 2023	Notification Received Relating to 2022	Notification Received Relating to 2021	Notification Received Relating to 2020
55	0	0	0	0
49	0	0	0	0
19	21	0	0	0
13	5	0	0	0
(a) 0 (b) 0	(a) 1 (b) 1	(a) 0 (b) 0	(a) 0 (b) 0	(a) 0 (b) 0
19	21	0	0	0
11	33	1	0	0
14	19	0	0	0
0	2	0	0	0

Table 5 illustrates IPS compliance with statutory obligations related to investigation of Category A complaints in 2024, compared with previous years.

Table 5: Requirements of and Compliance with Rule 57B

Rule 57B Prison Rules 2007 – 2020	% Compliance 2025
Governor notification to Inspector of Prisons within 7 days of being notified of the complaint [57B(4)]	77%
OIP shall be notified of the appointment of the investigator [57B(5)(a)]*	45%
Complaints deemed by the IPS DG to be vexatious, without foundation, or outside scope of rule and terminated. Inspector of prisons is notified of the decision and reasons for the decision [57B(5)(b)]	100%
Complaints withdrawn by prisoners and Director General decides investigation should be terminated. The OIP is (a) advised and (b) the reasons documented [57B(5)(c)]	(a) 100% (b) 100%
Complaints that proceeded to investigation	45%
Full investigation reports received by OIP for new complaints in particular year	25%
Investigation reports received within 3 months	4%
Interim reports submitted to OIP for new complaints in particular year	24%
Number of investigation reports received where the complaint was grounded or upheld	4%

*Measured from the number of cases which proceeded to investigation against cases which are pending investigation

% Compliance 2024	% Compliance 2023	% Compliance 2022	% Compliance 2021	% Compliance 2020
89%	86%	95%	84%	81%
35%	44%	56%	63%	2%
100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(a) 100% (b) 100%	(a) 100% (b) 100%	(a) 100% (b) 100%	(a) 100% (b) 100%	(a) 100% (b) 100%
35%	44%	67%	87%	86%
20%	24%	24%	49%	32%
9%	7%	17%	24%	3%
25%	12%	15%	40%	12%
0%	0%	17%	13%	8%

Based on the data presented, in 2025, the following key headline issues are noted:

Decline in Category A Complaints Notifications

- In 2025, there was a 30% decrease in the number of Category A statutory complaint notifications compared to 2021. However, this was an 8% increase from 2024.

Complaints outside the scope of Category A

- Compared with previous years, there were a number (7) of Category A Complaints from 2025 deemed by the Director-General of the Irish Prison Service as outside the 'scope' of the Category A complaints process

A New and Better Complaints Procedure?

Throughout 2025, work by the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration to overhaul the defective prisoner complaints system has been characterised by inertia.

This is despite the best efforts of the Ombudsman, the Director General of the IPS and the OIP, which have been working together closely on the development of a new and better system. Our inspection survey findings during 2025 once again highlight that, with good reason, prisoners have no confidence in the current system.

The ongoing absence of an effective complaints system, including in relation to the most serious complaints of assaults by prison staff can only encourage officers minded to ill treat prisoners to believe that they can do so with impunity.

Urgent action is needed, at the very top level of the Department, to breathe new life into these long-overdue reforms.

06 Letters from Prisoners (Rule 44)

Rule 44 Correspondence

Under Rule 44(1)(h) of the Prison Rules 2007–2020, a person in prison is entitled to confidential correspondence with the Office of the Inspector of Prisons. Rule 44 correspondence is an important channel of communication, which enables people in custody to convey any issues they are experiencing in prison. This information is drawn upon during the Inspectorate’s inspection and monitoring work.

In 2025, the Inspectorate received a total of 56 letters from 39 individual prisoners. Seven letters were received from anonymous correspondents. Letters were received from 11 prisons. The volume of letters received represents a decrease in Rule 44 correspondence in comparison to previous years.

Table 6 illustrates the number of letters received from each prison in 2025, alongside the volume of correspondence received in the previous three years.

Table 6: Number of Letters Received by Prison

PRISON	2025	2024	2023	2022
Arbour Hill Prison	6	0	3	8
Castlerea Prison	10	1	1	6
Cloverhill Prison	3	3	1	11
Cork Prison	1	2	5	2
Dóchas Centre	1	4	2	6
Limerick Men’s Prison	1	6	22	3
Limerick Women’s Prison	8	3	8	0
Loughan House	0	0	0	0
Midlands Prison	6	47	52	70
Mountjoy Men’s Prison	13	7	7	6
Portlaoise Prison	3	14	5	17
Shelton Abbey	0	0	1	0
Wheatfield Prison	4	4	14	13
TOTAL	56	91	122⁵	142⁶

⁵ One letter was received in the general post without an indication as to which prison it came from. No further correspondence was received from that person.

⁶ One letter was received in the general post without an indication as to which prison it came from. No further correspondence was received from that person.

Within Rule 44 letters, the correspondent commonly writes to convey more than one issue. The most common issues raised in Rule 44 letters are summarised in **Table 7**, with recognition of primary, secondary, and tertiary issues raised.

Living Conditions: Twelve letters were received which made reference to poor living conditions, hygiene and sanitation. These letters identified issues of cell hygiene, damp and cold conditions in cells and a lack of shelter in prison yards during inclement weather. Another letter from a different prison also identified limited access to showering facilities which had the knock-on effect of not being able to avail of sufficient gym time.

Healthcare: Eleven letters were received which described issues with healthcare in prison. The issues raised concerned both primary care as well as a lack of support for mental health. In terms of primary care, letters received described issues in relation to changes to medication that was previously prescribed in the community, dissatisfaction with engagements with healthcare staff, and difficulties accessing the primary care team. In three of the letters received, correspondents wrote to describe the impact of poor mental health and described difficulties in accessing necessary mental health supports.

Exercise & Recreation: Ten letters received in 2025 primarily identified purposeful activity as an issue. Five of those ten letters were from individuals who are currently on a restricted regime identifying the challenges they face trying to access education, recreation areas, and the gym as they cannot mix with others. These letters pertained to a specific landing in one prison. Due to being on a restricted regime, these prisoners were effectively locked in their cells for up to 22 hours per day. This severely limited their ability to access meaningful purposeful activity. The remaining letters described the impact of prison overcrowding and staff shortages now impacting on prisoners' ability to be able to access the prison gym regularly.

Table 7: Issues Raised in 2025 Rule 44 Letters

Issue	Primary Issue	Secondary Issue	Tertiary Issue	Total Occurrences
Living Conditions	7	5	0	12
Healthcare	6	4	1	11
Exercise & Recreation	2	1	7	10
Education	5	2	0	7
Release Processes	6	0	0	6
Restricted Regimes	1	5	0	6
Family Contact	3	2	0	5
Information	5	0	0	5
Temporary Release / Schemes	2	2	1	5
Staff-Prisoner Relationships	2	2	0	4
Out of Cell Time	3	1	0	4
Healthcare Resources	0	3	0	3
Integrated Sentence Management	1	2	0	3
Rule 44 Correspondence	3	0	0	3
Use of Force	3	0	0	3
Complaints Processes	0	2	0	2
Contraband	0	2	0	2
Disciplinary Processes	1	1	0	2
Non-Discrimination	1	1	0	2
Violence	1	0	1	2
Healthcare-Informed Decision Making	1	0	0	1
Specialist Healthcare	0	1	0	1
Staff-Staff Relationships	1	0	0	1
Staffing	0	0	1	1
Work Training	1	0	0	1

07 Activities and Events

Events and Stakeholder Consultations

The Office of the Inspector of Prisons continued to work alongside, and in dialogue with the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, the Irish Prison Service and other key stakeholders. Throughout 2025, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons met

with a number of stakeholders to exchange views and foster relationships. They also attended a number of events to network with various stakeholders and engage with new stakeholders.

Date	Event/Meeting	Location/Hosts
28 January 2025	Presenting the Prison Life Index	Penal Reform International
29 January 2025	CORD Implementation Group	Criminal Justice Open Research Dialogue
30 January 2025	Meeting on IPS Transgender Policy	OIP/IPS
31 January 2025	Project advisory group meeting with Council of Europe, DG Reform and Cypriot NPM	Council of Europe
05–06 February 2025	Tackling overcrowding in European prisons: strengthening NPMs' role in safeguarding rights and ensuring effective oversight	European NPM Forum
18 February 2025	Introductory meeting with new Head of Monitoring and Compliance for IHREC	IHREC
27 February 2025	IHREC Strategy Statement 2025-2027 Launch	IHREC
04 March 2025	Meeting with Enda O'Neill, Head of Office Ireland UNHCR and OIP	OIP

Date	Event/Meeting	Location/Hosts
06 March 2025	Data Sharing Agreement meeting	Irish Prison Service, OIP, Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration
07 March 2025	Data as a Driver	Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration
13 March 2025	Penal Dreams, Penal Realities	Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice
14 March 2025	CORD Implementation Group	Criminal Justice Open Research Dialogue
20 March 2025	Meeting OIP and IPRT	OIP
21 March 2025	Meeting OIP and Department of Education	OIP
30 March 2025	Heads of Agencies Steering Group (OPCAT) meeting	IHREC
08 April 2025	Project panels and other matters – Ireland and the Council of Europe	Council of Europe
09 April 2025	Celebrating 10 years of the Traveller Justice Initiative	St Stephen's Green Trust/ Irish Penal Reform
10 April 2025	Celebrating 30 years of the Irish Penal Reform Trust	Irish Penal Reform Trust
12 May 2025	CORD Implementation Group	Criminal Justice Open Research Dialogue
14 May 2025	Meeting OIP and IPRT	OIP
14 May 2025	Complaints Meeting with DoJHAM (Rachel Woods, Mary O'Regan)	OIP
19 May 2025	Project advisory group meeting with Council of Europe, DG Reform and Cypriot NPM	Council of Europe
21 May 2025	Prison Oversight: Improving Rights in Europe (POIRE)	Council of Europe
22 May 2025	Meeting between PCSA and OIP	PCSA
23 May 2025	Meeting with State Pathologist	State Pathologist
28 May 2025	Meeting with Phil Cople, HMPPS	OIP

Date	Event/Meeting	Location/Hosts
30 May 2025	Meeting OIP and Department of Education	OIP
05 June 2025	NPM Forum – Monitoring Police Detention	Council of Europe
06 June 2025	NPM Forum – Combating informal prisons hierarchies	Council of Europe
16 June 2025	Cord Implementation Group	Criminal Justice Open Research Dialogue
09 July 2025	Heads of Agencies Steering Group (OPCAT) meeting	IHREC
10 July 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and ‘We the People’ regarding the communication tender for the project	Council of Europe
11 July 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and Katy Diggory and Sarah McKinley regarding the communication tender for the project	Council of Europe
17 July 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and Quality Matters regarding research for the project	Council of Europe
17 July 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe to review the project	Council of Europe
18 July 2025	Meeting with IHREC on OIP Inspection Framework	IHREC/OIP
20 August 2025	International Launch Event – UK NPM Reporting Dashboard	UK NPM
03 September 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and ‘We The People’ consultants	Council of Europe
22 September 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and the Mental Health Commission, John Farrelly (CEO) and Prof. Jim Lucey (Chief Inspector)	Council of Europe

Date	Event/Meeting	Location/Hosts
26 September 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and Dr. Julia Kozma (Council of Europe Expert and member of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT))	Council of Europe
30 September 2025	Advisory Group meeting, OPCAT Project	Council of Europe
02 October 2025	Meeting with An Garda Síochána Commissioner Justin Keely, Deputy Commissioner Shawna Coxon and Acting Deputy Commissioner Paul Cleary	AGS
03 October 2025	Women Leading Change in Law and Justice	IPS
10 October 2025	The Centenary of Prison Visiting Committees in Ireland Celebratory Event	DoJHAM
14 October 2025	Ageing in Prison: Understanding Challenges, Respecting Rights	OIP
16 October 2025	Meeting with Eanna Rutherford (SOLAS) and Philip Larragy (Release)	OIP
21 October 2025	CORD Implementation Group	Criminal Justice Open Research Dialogue
30 October 2025	Workshop on National Preventive Mechanisms in Europe	LINC (KU Leuven) and GREPEC (UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles)
05 November 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and We the People	OIP
06 November 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and the Mental Health Commission	MHC
10 November 2025	Meeting with the Committee for the Prevention of Torture	OIP
10 November 2025	Heads of Agencies Steering Group (OPCAT) meeting	IHREC

Date	Event/Meeting	Location/Hosts
10 November 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and the Mental Health Commission	MHC
11 November 2025	Presentation of the CPT report on its 2024 visit to Ireland event	Council of Europe/European Union/OIP
11 November 2025	Roundtable on Mental Health, Human Rights and Deprivation of Liberty	Council of Europe/European Union/OIP/MHC
12 November 2025	Meeting with the Council of Europe and the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration	DoJHAM
18–20 November 2025	NPM Forum Workshop – Effective NPS: Strengthening Skills, Teamwork and Strategy	Council of Europe
02 December 2025	Progress in the Penal System 2024 Report Launch	IPRT
08–10 December 2025	Study/Peer shadowing visit to French NPM (police detention facilities inspections)	Council of Europe
10 December 2025	Launch of Fiosrú’s Research Report on Referrals of Incidents of Death or Serious Harm	Fiosrú

- 01. IPRT visit to the OIP, Left to right, **Laura Anderson**, **Michelle Martyn**, **Pia Janning**, **Douglas Nanka Bruce**, **Mark Kelly**, **Tom Lord (IPRT)**, **Orla Dick**, **Anne Costello (IPRT)** and **Saoise Brady (IPRT)**
- 02. MTG OIP meeting with the Office of the Ombudsman and the Prison Ombudsman for Northern Ireland - **Mark Wolfe**, **Aoife Drudy**, **Elaine Cassidy**, **Mark Kelly**, **Darrin Jones**, **Mandy Wilson**
- 03. MTG Chief Inspector **Mark Kelly**, presenting at the IPRT event on the CPT report on its visit to Ireland
- 04. OIP meeting with the PCSA, left to right, **Helen Hall (CEO, PCSA)**, Chief Inspector **Mark Kelly (OIP)**, **Elaine Byrne (Chairperson, PCSA)**, **Laura Anderson (OIP)**.
- 05. Chief Inspector **Mark Kelly** attending the launch of **Tosú - New Beginnings for People with Convictions**, pictured alongside **Tosú CEO Sharan Kelly**



08

Corporate Information

Audit

During 2025 the Internal Audit Unit carried out a review of internal controls in the Office of the Inspector of Prisons. The review examined the operation of internal controls between 1 January and 31 December 2024 and made nine (9) low priority recommendations. A follow up review in November 2025 found that three of the recommendations had been fully implemented while a further two (2) had been partially implemented and a work was ongoing in relation to implementing the remaining four (4) recommendations.

Financial matters

The Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons is funded under the Justice Vote (24), for which the Secretary General of the Department is the Accounting Officer. The budget allocation for 2025 was €3.028 million.

Protected Disclosures

As the Inspectorate is currently structured as an independent statutory agency under the aegis of the Department of Justice, the Inspectorate currently follows departmental policy in relation to Protected Disclosures. The Office of the Inspector of Prisons received no Protected Disclosures during 2025.

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

The Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP) is fully committed to ensuring that its obligations under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014 are fulfilled. The Office recognises its responsibility to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect the human rights of public sector staff and service users.

The OIP's Public Sector Duty working group coordinates the Office's Public Sector Duty activities and oversees the OIP's Public Sector Duty action plan. The composition of the working group broadly represents all functions of the Office, and includes representation from senior management.

The working group met nine times during 2025. The following sections summarise the main outputs of the working group in 2025. A full update on progress against the action plan is available on the OIP's website.

Staff Training

Action 4 of the action plan sets out that OIP staff will undertake training on their obligations under the Public Sector Duty, as well as relevant training to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to service delivery. At the end of 2025, 79% of staff had completed training on the Public Sector Duty.

Throughout the year, staff also undertook training on a range of topics related to the Duty and service delivery. These included: document accessibility, disability awareness, trauma-informed practice, as well as human rights training on monitoring women and LGBTI+ people in places of detention.

The PSD working group developed a repository of training resources on human rights and equality topics relevant to the Duty that can support and inform inspection and investigation practices. In 2025, the working group continued to maintain and develop this repository, adding new resources and materials.

Policy Audit Tool

The PSD working group developed an audit tool to assist in the development or revision of policies and standard operating procedures. This tool is intended to guide consideration as to how a policy or a procedure may differentially impact groups represented by the nine grounds for discrimination covered under the Equal Status Acts, and to address any such deficits at an early stage of the drafting / review process. A presentation on the audit tool was made to all staff in September 2025.

Focus on Ageing in Prison

Action 11 of the PSD action plan outlined the OIP's commitment to exploring issues faced by older people in prison, in particular regarding age-related disability. The action sets out a commitment to undertaking a thematic inspection on this topic. The rationale for this thematic inspection was underpinned by issues observed by OIP staff in the course of inspection activities, and as well as through death in custody investigations.

In the second half of 2025, the OIP began preparations for a thematic inspection, this involved cross-team collaboration, desk-based research, and knowledge building.

In October 2025, the working group organised a stakeholder event 'Ageing in Prison: Understanding Challenges, Respecting Rights'. The event featured guest speakers with expertise in prison health, prison monitoring, and human rights. These included Mr Enda Kelly, National Nurse Manager, Irish Prison Service; Director Áine Flynn, Decision Support Service, Mental Health Commission; Dr Marie Brasholt, DIGNITY & UN Subcommittee for the Prevention Against Torture, and a contribution from Ms Ellen Graham, Secretariat Coordinator of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People. The event provided an opportunity for open discussion and highlighted recurring issues in relation to the rights and dignity of older persons in custody.

Publication of PSD Action Plan Update

Finally, in June 2025, the PSD working group provided an update of progress in relation to its action plan. A summary of all actions progressed or completed were compiled. This summary and an updated version of the action plan were then published on the OIP's website.

Freedom of Information/GDPR

4 requests under FOI Legislation were received during the year.

Integrity at Work

The Inspectorate has an Integrity at Work Membership Agreement with Transparency International (Ireland). In maintaining this membership, the Inspectorate recognises the importance of an ethical workplace.

Training

Members of the Inspectorate Team attended a number of training courses during 2025 including the following:

- Introduction to Data Protection 2025, One Learning

- PDF Accessibility Training Webinar, Department of Justice

- Trauma Awareness in Frontline Policing, Police Oracle/Red Snapper Group

- Recruit Prison Officer Training, Irish Prison Service (training provision)

- Trauma Informed Interviewing, Freedom Lab

- Cyber Security Awareness Training, Department of Justice

- Monitoring LGBTI+ People in Detention

- Trauma Informed Training with DE Inspectorate

- Mental Health First Aid

- Death in Custody Training

- Disability Awareness Training, Probation Service

- Online Deaf Awareness Training

09 Appendices

Appendix 1: Governance

Internal Controls

The “comply or explain” provision of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016) applies to the Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons. As the Office currently falls under the Justice Vote (Vote 24), it does not yet have its own Internal Audit Unit or Audit and Risk Committee. Furthermore, it is not yet required to produce Annual Financial Statements. The Office has access to the Department’s Internal Audit and Internal Audit and Risk Committee in relation to financial governance. The Department’s Financial Management Unit reports on the Office’s income and expenditure in its monthly management reports. Procedures are in place to ensure expenditure is authorised in accordance with the Department’s policies and procedures. The Office is compliant with tax law obligations.

All Irish public bodies are obliged to treat public funds with care, and to ensure that the best possible value for money is obtained whenever public money is being spent or invested. The Public Spending Code is the set of rules and procedures that ensure that these standards are upheld across the Irish public service. The Office of the Inspector of Prisons has adhered to all relevant aspects of the Public Spending Code.

The Code of Governance for State Bodies 2016, requires the provision of a Statement of Internal Controls (SIC). The SIC applies to all controls operating in the Office of the Inspector of Prisons, including ICT matters. The IM&T Division in the Department of Justice has confirmed that, to the best of its knowledge and belief, adequate ICT controls, as set out in a Statement of Assurance, are in place and operating effectively.

The Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons maintains a Risk Register which is kept under continuing review. This Register sets out current controls to mitigate risks and actions to improve controls. Updated versions of the Risk Register were provided to the Department of Justice during the course of 2025.

Procurement activity undertaken by the Office during 2025 was carried out in accordance public procurement guidelines

Table 8: Performance Agreement Targets

Output area or Initiative	Metric	Assoc. strategic objective	2025 Target	2025 Outurn
Prison Inspection	% of prisons in Ireland to have received full general inspections by end 2025 (Base Year for comparison is 2022)	1, 3	85%	84%
Prison Inspection	Average time between full unannounced inspections of each prison	1, 3	3 Years	Less than 3 years for Mountjoy Prison and Cloverhill Prison (on track.)
Prison Inspection	% of reports on 2025 inspections sent to the DG of the IPS within a maximum of 6 months of the end of the inspection concerned		50%	0%
Death-in-Custody investigations	% reduction in the number of deaths in custody investigation reports outstanding for more than 2 years after the death concerned		50%	64%
Death-in-Custody investigations	% of new (July 2025 onwards) death in custody investigation reports completed within six months of the death concerned		25%	0%
Letters received from prisoners under Rule 44 of the Prison Rules	% of correspondence received from prisoners under Rule 44 acknowledged within five working days		100%	97.56%
Letters received from prisoners under Rule 44 of the Prison Rules	% of final replies issued within 20 working days		100%	97.56%
Review of Category A prisoner complaints	% of Category A complaints reviewed within 20 days of receipt		100%	100%

Table 9: Other Targets and Outturns 2025

Output area or initiative	Target and Timeframe (Quarter)	Assoc. strategic objective
Full costing, drawing upon appropriate external professional expertise, of the additional human and financial resources required for the OIP to assume its functions as the Inspectorate of Places of Detention (OIPD)	Initiation Q1 2026	2.2/3.2
Development of a new framework for monitoring detention by An Garda Síochána (AGS), in consultation with AGS and other relevant stakeholders	Initiated Q4 2025 anticipated completion Q2 2026	2.3
Completion of the OIP’s new strategic plan	Completed and Published Q4 2025	3.1-3.4
Implementation of a new CMS system for the OIP	Initiation Q1 2026	3.2

Oversight Arrangements

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (“the Code”) sets out the fundamental governance standards that should be respected by all State Bodies. The Inspectorate is fully cognisant of its responsibilities under the Code. In July 2025 a new Oversight Agreement were signed between the Office of the Inspector of Prisons and the Department of Justice effective to 31 December 2025.

Performance Agreement

In July 2025, a new “Performance Delivery Agreement” was signed between the Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons and the Department of Justice. **Tables 8 and 9** provide further information.

Climate Statement

Overview

In 2024, the OIP drafted and submitted to the Department of Justice, its Climate Action Roadmap.

The Climate Action Roadmap is drafted in line with the updated Public Sector Climate Action Mandate, published in Climate Action Plan 2024 (CAP24) in December 2023.

The purpose of the Climate Action Roadmap, is to provide the Inspectorate with a strategic vision, coordination, organisation and mobilisation regarding its public sector climate obligations. The Roadmap has been drafted in line with the [Public Sector Climate Action Strategy 2023-2025](#) and the [SEAI Climate Action Roadmap guidance](#).

The Roadmap will be reviewed in 2026 in line with an annual review of the Public Sector Climate Action Mandate

Senior Management Statement

The Office of the Inspector of Prisons, as a Public Sector Body, has a responsibility to play its part in a whole of Government approach to combating the threats posed by climate change. Collective commitment and concrete action are required to combat and mitigate against the very real challenges that we face. The actions set out within our Roadmap, will be actively led and supported by the Senior Leadership Team and we will invest the necessary time and resources to ensure that the commitments set out within this document can be successfully actioned and implemented.

Senior Leadership Team, Office of the Inspector of Prisons

Staff Engagement

In 2024, the OIP nominated a Climate and Sustainability Champion at senior management level and established a Green Team with representatives from across the organisations.

Staff members of the Inspectorate will engage in climate and sustainability training in order to enhance knowledge across the organisation.

Reporting

The Inspectorate has expanded its accommodation during 2025 and arrangements are being made to calculate a new baseline for reporting purposes in future years.

The OIP is linking in with the SEAI and reports into its Public Sector Monitoring and Reporting platform.

Sustainability Actions undertaken in 2025

- Inclusion of sustainability criteria in procurement processes;
-
- Ceasing the use of disposable plates, cups and cutlery in the day-to-day operation of the office. Progressive elimination of the use of single use items during events/meetings.

Appendix 2: Statutory Notice of Concern



Oifig An Chigire Príosún
Office of the Inspector of Prisons

STATUTORY NOTICE OF CONCERN – SECTION 31(1)(c), PRISONS ACT 2007

FROM:	Mark KELLY, Chief Inspector of Prisons
TO:	Caron McCaffrey, Director-General of the Irish Prison Service
DATE:	18 November 2025
REFERENCE:	OIP/SN/DC/1/2025
SUBJECT:	SUSPENSION OF INSPECTION

Section 31(1)(c) of the Prisons Act 2007 provides that, in the course of an inspection, or arising out of an inspection, the Chief Inspector of Prisons may bring any issues of concern to him or her to the notice of the Governor of the Prison concerned, the Director-General of the Irish Prison Service, or the Minister or of each one of them, as the Chief Inspector considers appropriate.

In the course of the current thematic inspection of the treatment of older people in prison, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons has experienced attempts to interfere with the operational autonomy of its inspection team in the Midlands Prison, Portlaoise and in the Dóchas Centre, Dublin.

Following attempts to interfere with the operational autonomy of the inspection team at the Midlands Prison on 13 and 14 November 2025, the Chief Inspector wrote to the Governor of the Midlands Prison, copying the Director-General of the Irish Prison Service, in order to bring this issue of concern to their notice (cf. letter appended to this Statutory Notice)

Unfortunately, further attempts were made to interfere with the operational autonomy of the inspection team in the Dóchas Centre on 18 November 2025, leading the Chief Inspector to issue the following **Statutory Notice of Concern**.

Oifig an Chigire Príosún, 29 Sráid Theach Laighean, Baile Átha Cliath 2, D02 PF82
Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 29 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2, D02 PF82

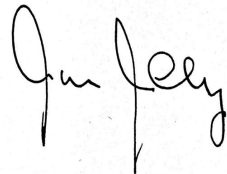
STATUTORY NOTICE OF CONCERN**SECTION 31(1)(c), PRISONS ACT 2007**

Having regard to section 31(1)(c) of the Prisons Act 2007, as Chief Inspector of Prisons, I hereby formally notify the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that:

- Instructions issued by the Operations Director of the Irish Prison Service to the Governors of the Midlands Prison, Portlaoise and the Dóchas Centre, Dublin, have impeded the operational autonomy of the Office of the Inspector of Prisons, by:
 - o attempting to impose unprecedented and unwarranted conditions upon the freedom of movement of inspection team members inside the prisons concerned.
- In consequence of this attempt to impose unprecedented and unwarranted conditions upon the freedom of movement of inspection team members inside the prisons concerned, I have taken the formal decision to **suspend** the current thematic inspection of the treatment of older people in prison.
- The current inspection will remain suspended until, as Chief Inspector of Prisons, I receive a formal written assurance on behalf of the Irish Prison Service that the operational autonomy of the Office of the Inspectorate of Prisons will be fully respected during this, and all future inspections. This should include an unambiguous statement that the Irish Prison Service will not seek to impose upon members of inspection teams a requirement that they be “escorted” while in the performance of their statutory duties.

Having regard to section 31(1)(c) of the Prisons Act 2007, I reserve the right to further escalate the level of this Statutory Notice of Concern should this situation remain unresolved.

Done at Dublin, 18 November 2025



Mark Kelly
Chief Inspector of Prisons



Oifig An Chigire Príosún
Office of the Inspector of Prisons

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