



UK detention scrutiny body reports a perfect storm of crises adversely affecting detainees

The UK's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) publishes its 13th annual report today.

The NPM's 21 independent bodies have powers to visit and report on all places of detention including prisons, police custody, places of immigration detention, secure settings for children and young adults, and mental health settings. The UK's NPM exists by virtue of the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), which the UK ratified in 2003.

Chair of the NPM Wendy Sinclair-Gieben reflects:

"A year of scrutiny has evidenced a varied picture in detention settings across the UK. We must now see a determination, grounded in the human rights framework, to resolve staffing issues and ultimately improve outcomes for detainees. While this should be a concerning report for the State – I do pay tribute to the professionalism and commitment shown by various professionals to support those in their care during difficult times. The issues with detention in the UK are entrenched, complex and cross-cutting. A paradigm shift has long been required where detention is utilised only as a last resort. Our organisations will continue to inspect and monitor places of detention to prevent ill treatment, and uphold our human rights mandate."

While some dedicated professionals working in very challenging circumstances are noted, this report outlines that the entrenched issues we have identified over the years remain. Crises of staffing, funding and slow COVID recovery led to severely reduced provisions for people deprived of their liberty across the UK. While the report covers a period where COVID restrictions eased in the community, detention settings were sluggish to recover.

Affecting all provision across the UK were severe shortages in staffing and resources. This was somewhat related to COVID-19 related absences, but deeper problems with recruitment, retention, training and support are posing chronic problems in the justice and health systems.

In prisons, people were too often locked in their cells for up to 23 hours a day, with severe impact on mental health, purposeful activity and rehabilitative opportunities. Inadequate provisions for women, particularly those with mental ill-health, was a concern for several members, and rates of self-harm remained concerningly high among women and girls.

In custody, women did not always have access to female staff where appropriate, and were sometimes detained or transported with men, including some with a history of violence against women, risking retraumatisation.

In health and social care, overstretched mental health services compromised safety. The shortage of available spaces could result in geographical displacement far from community links for prolonged periods of time. This increased the risk of closed cultures developing, where ill-treatment is much harder to identify and prevent.

The NPM's annual report, published in compliance with Article 23 of OPCAT, details the monitoring and inspection work of our 21 members across this reporting period, highlighting their work to prevent ill-treatment in places of deprivation of liberty.

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Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the Annual Report can be found on the [NPM website](#).
2. The NPM was established in March 2009 under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). A UN treaty, OPCAT was ratified by the UK in 2003. OPCAT requires states to have in place a 'national preventive mechanism' to visit all places of detention and monitor the treatment of and conditions for people deprived of their liberty, as it is recognised that they are particularly vulnerable to ill-treatment.
3. The NPM consists of 21 independent bodies throughout the UK, with powers to regularly inspect or monitor places of detention and share the aim of preventing ill-treatment of anyone deprived of their liberty.
4. The 21 bodies who make up the NPM are:

England and Wales

Care Inspectorate Wales
Care Quality Commission
The Children's Commissioner for England
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
Healthcare Inspectorate Wales
Independent Monitoring Boards
Independent Custody Visiting Association
Lay Observers
Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills)

Northern Ireland

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
Independent Monitoring Boards (Northern Ireland)
Northern Ireland Policing Board Independent Custody Visiting Scheme
The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Scotland

Care Inspectorate
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
Independent Custody Visiting Scotland
Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland
Scottish Human Rights Commission

United Kingdom

Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation