

# Examining the discipline exercised in Scottish prisons

Scotland's prison inmates were given more than 30,000 discipline raps in just a year, it can be revealed – for offences including drugs, violence, smuggling and arson.

Scottish Prison Service (SPS) figures show unruly prisoners caused widespread disruption behind bars, amassing 31,110 discipline breaches in 2023/24.

The figure is up from 24,199 the previous year.

Prison chiefs dished out 64,146 punishments to inmates flouting regulations – up from 47,803 in 2022/23 – ranging from loss of privileges to fines, cell confinement and loss of “other entitlements”.

A report shows officers were assaulted and verbally abused and drugs and other banned items were smuggled and abused, while inmates battled among themselves and refused to obey orders, destroyed property and misused mobile phones.

Data shows 7,206 prisoners were rapped by prison chiefs after being found in possession of “unauthorised or prohibited” articles, with 6590 having concealed them “about their body or orifice”.

According to the report, nine officers were seriously assaulted with another 309 attacks inflicting minor injuries

on others.

There were 114 serious “prisoner on prisoner” assaults, with inmates notching up 2,219 fights.

Data shows there were 2,024 recorded assaults with another 4771 incidents involving inmates “intentionally or recklessly” endangering the health or safety of others.

Deliberately obstructing someone in the “performance of that person’s work at the prison” led to 193 inmates being punished, with 1989 disciplined for destroying or damaging property and 41 for arson.



Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr MSP said the report “lays bare the widespread breakdown of discipline in Scotland’s jails”.

He said: “Sustained SNP cuts to the prison service have left hard-working officers overstretched and ill-equipped when it comes to maintaining order and keeping themselves and inmates safe.

“The drug epidemic inside Scotland’s jails is costing lives and also resulting in other dangerous offences occurring including thousands of assaults.

“SNP ministers are totally detached from the stark reality of disorder in Scottish prisons. It is vital that they urgently provide the prison service with the resources they need to restore discipline on the estate.”

Scottish Liberal Democrat Justice spokesperson Liam McArthur MSP said: “Scottish Liberal Democrats have long campaigned to make our prisons humane and productive places by creating a properly funded justice system.

“That means giving hard-pressed prison staff the resources they need, including a roll out of mental health professionals across the estate.”

According to the report, loss of privilege raps were given to 29,174 prisoners, with 28,897 having their wages or “other cash” docked, with 3014 confined to cells and 2045 given cautions.

Another 1016 forfeited other entitlements.

Crisis-hit prison bosses have been firefighting a series of crises and controversies engulfing the organisation and previously warned the situation was “unsustainable”.

The early release of hundreds of convicts as an emergency response by the Scottish Government has failed to ease the burden of overcrowded prisons with numbers of inmates having quickly risen again.

An SPS spokesperson said: “We have been managing an extremely high and complex population for more than a year, with nine prisons now at red risk status, and the number of people in custody set to rise even further.

“This has an increasingly destabilising effect on our establishments, with staff unable to do the critical work of building relationships and supporting rehabilitation, and prisoners frustrated by the impact on their daily lives and

the opportunities available to them.

“We need to see a reduction in our population, so we fully support people in our care, reduce their risk of reoffending, and help build the safer communities we all want to see.”

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: “We continue to work with the Scottish Prison Service to improve the wellbeing of those in prison, recognising the complex nature of the prison population.

“Everyone should be able to live and work safely in prisons. Any attacks on prisoners and prison staff are completely unacceptable and the prison service has measures in place to tackle the risk posed by illicit substances.

“SPS works closely with Police Scotland and other justice partners to prevent the availability and supply of illicit substances and also published a new ten-year Alcohol and Drug Recovery Strategy in February this year.

“All incidents involving alleged criminality are reported to Police Scotland.

“To continue to provide a safe and secure prison estate, we have increased investment in the Scottish Prison Service resource budget by 10% to £481.5 million in 2025/26.”