



# **Life in prison: Contact with families and friends**

A findings paper

by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

**August 2016**

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## Introduction

- 1.1** This findings paper is part of a series which focuses on daily life in adult prisons and in young offender institutions holding young adults (aged 18 to 21). The series explores particular issues that are regularly reported to us during our routine inspections. We hope these short findings papers will be of interest to practitioners, will provide the public with an insight into the reality of life in prison, and will be used to encourage good practice. We expect that the findings and good practice detailed in this paper will support the development of prison services.
- 1.2** This paper summarises the literature concerning the importance of prisoners maintaining relationships with the outside world and, in particular, with their family and friends.<sup>1</sup> It draws on evidence from recent inspections of adult prisons undertaken by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and survey data from inspection reports published between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.<sup>2</sup> These data are aggregated and overall responses for the year are presented. Comments from confidential prisoner surveys conducted as part of the inspection process are also included in this report; these quotes are not ascribed to individual prisons or inspection reports. This paper provides an overview of the ways in which prisoners are able to keep in contact with their family and friends, and how they experience this.

## Background

- 1.3** When people are detained in custody, their contact with family is restricted and mediated by the prison. A person in custody can only receive visits from family and friends who have been added to their list of visitors. Upon arrival, all visitors will have their identity checked. In the case of high secure establishments, visitors need to be approved by the prison prior to their visit. Phone contact with family and friends, regardless of the prison's security level, may be monitored by the prison's security department and prisoners can only call numbers that have been added to their PIN<sup>3</sup> account. While prisoners can generally write to and receive letters from anyone, the prison may monitor their mail. Prisoners may be denied contact with certain people, for example, with victims, with children if there is a child protection or safeguarding concern, where a restraining order is in place that prohibits contact, or when someone has requested not to be contacted by a prisoner.
- 1.4** While family members may sometimes be the direct or indirect victims of a prisoner's offence, or may have contributed to the offending behaviour, maintaining family contact, where appropriate, is recognised as a key source of support for prisoners during their time in custody and on their release. In 2002, the Social Exclusion Unit highlighted the importance of prisoners maintaining contact with family members to reduce reoffending<sup>4</sup> and since then family contact has been one of the seven priority pathways under which prisons and YOIs have organised most of their practical resettlement work. Other academic research and reports<sup>5,6</sup> have confirmed the importance of this work. Our 2014 joint thematic on

<sup>1</sup> Within this report the term 'family' is used to refer to partners, children and close friends.

<sup>2</sup> Survey and inspection data from 36 inspection reports were analysed. This included 31 adult male prisons, two women's prisons, and three young offender institutions holding young adults.

<sup>3</sup> All prisoners have a PIN account which they use to make telephone calls; this is a personal account to which prisoners add money so that they can make phone calls.

<sup>4</sup> The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*. London: Social Exclusion Unit.

<sup>5</sup> Loucks, N. (2002) *Just visiting? A review of the role of prison visitors' centres*. London: Prison Reform Trust/Action for Prisoners' Families.

<sup>6</sup> Mills, A. (2004) 'Great Expectations?' *A review of the role of prisoners' families in England and Wales*. Selected papers from the 2004 British Society of Criminology conference, Portsmouth.

resettlement provision for adult offenders<sup>7</sup> cited family and friends as the most important 'resettlement agency' for prisoners on release. Over half of those interviewed as part of the thematic, reported that they were due to move in with family on release. Similarly, in our earlier thematic on the resettlement of children, over half said that they would be living with family on release.<sup>8</sup>

- 1.5** Maintaining contact is also important for the family and children of prisoners. While the Prison Service does not regularly record whether prisoners have children under the age of 18, half (52%) of the prisoners we surveyed in 2015–16 reported that they did, and it is estimated that 200,000 children had a parent in prison at some point in 2009.<sup>9</sup> Maintaining contact with parents in prison is important for children in terms of their development, including educational attainment, social inclusion and mental health.<sup>10</sup>
- 1.6** Among the prisoners surveyed in 2015–16, 55% of women reported having a child under the age of 18. While the number of dependants and family circumstances are not routinely recorded for either men or women, studies<sup>11</sup> have indicated that the latter are more likely to be single parents and thus have more caring responsibilities. The impact on children is also greater when mothers are in prison,<sup>12</sup> thus maintaining contact can be highly beneficial to the child.
- 1.7** In 2014, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) published a *learning lessons bulletin*<sup>13</sup> that again reiterated how important it was for prisoners to maintain family ties and for prisons to facilitate this. However, the Ombudsman reported a range of complaints received in this area, including family days being removed for specific groups of prisoners, delays in families being brought in for visits, inappropriate mail restrictions, and poor access to telephones. The Ombudsman's key recommendation was that the Prison Service ensures that prisons are applying their own Prison Service Instructions on facilitating contact between prisoners and their families.

## Our expectations

- 1.8** HM Inspectorate of Prisons inspects against criteria known as *Expectations*.<sup>14</sup> These are the expected standards by which we assess treatment and conditions for prisoners, and each inspection assesses the outcomes for the prisoners held in that establishment against them. Each expectation is underpinned by 'indicators', which set out what inspectors would normally expect to find if the expectation is met. Family contact is assessed under two healthy prison areas: respect and resettlement.

<sup>7</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2014) *Resettlement provision for adult offenders: Accommodation and education, training and employment*. London: HMI Prisons.

<sup>8</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2011) *Resettlement provision for children and young people: Accommodation and education, training and employment*. London: HMI Prisons.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Justice (2012) *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/12, Ministry of Justice Analytical Services.

<sup>10</sup> The Social Care Institute for Excellence (2008) *Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties*.

<sup>11</sup> Young, D. and Smith, C.J. (2000) 'When moms are incarcerated: The needs of children, mothers, and caregivers', in *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, Vol. 81, No. 2, pp. 130–141.

<sup>12</sup> Dallaire, D. (2007) 'Incarcerated mothers and fathers: A comparison of risks for children and families', in *Family Relations*, 56, pp. 440–453.

<sup>13</sup> Prison and Probation Ombudsman (2014) *Learning lessons bulletin: Maintaining family ties*. Available at: [http://mojppo.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/LLB-Complaints-05\\_Family-Ties\\_web\\_final.pdf#view=FitH](http://mojppo.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/LLB-Complaints-05_Family-Ties_web_final.pdf#view=FitH)

<sup>14</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of prisoners in prisons*. London: HMI Prisons.

## Respect

- Prisoners can maintain contact with the outside world through regular and easy access to mail, telephones and other communications.

## Resettlement

- Prisoners and children in custody are encouraged to re-establish or maintain relationships with their children and families where it is appropriate.
- Prisoners and children in custody can maintain access to the outside world through regular and easy access to visits. Prisoners are aware of the prison procedures and their visits entitlements.
- Prisoners and children in custody and their visitors are able to attend visits in a clean, respectful and safe environment which meets their needs. Prior to arrival, visitors understand the prison routines and how to access available services.

**1.9** *Expectations for women in prison*<sup>15</sup> recommends the identification of imprisoned mothers and of family circumstances, in order to be able to develop support plans and help women maintain contact with their families. The following expectations are included:

- Women's family situations are identified and support plans are developed to proactively assist them in maintaining contact.
- Women and their families receive ongoing active support to maintain or re-establish relationships, where it is appropriate.
- Women have sufficient access to visits to sustain healthy relationships with their children and families. Women are aware of the prison procedures and their visits entitlements.
- Prisoners and their visitors are able to attend visits in a clean, respectful and safe environment which meets their needs.
- Women are actively supported to maintain contact with children and families through regular and easy access to mail, telephones and other communications.

## Our findings

**1.10** In all prisons, prisoners are able to maintain contact through visits, by telephone (using prison telephones as they are not allowed mobile phones) and by mail. The 'email a prisoner' scheme provides additional opportunities for prisoners to stay in touch with their family and friends in some, but not all prisons. In addition, some prisons provide programmes to help prisoners develop healthy relationships with their families and children, and release on temporary licence (ROTL) can include home visits in order to maintain or rebuild family links. Other more specialist services are available in some prisons, such as Storybook Dads or Storybook Mums, and various organisations operate in prisons to support prisoners and their families.

## Telephones

**1.11** Prisoners cannot routinely receive incoming calls and are not permitted to have mobile phones; they therefore rely on the phones provided by prisons. Prisoners can only make outgoing calls to a list of numbers that have been added to their PIN account by the prison. Those subject to public protection restrictions would need to have the phone numbers

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<sup>15</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2014) *Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of and conditions for women in prisons*. London: HMI Prisons.

vetted and approved by the prison before being added to their PIN account. A prisoner can have up to 20 social numbers added onto their account. Prisoners pay for their calls (credit is added to their PIN account as prisoners cannot handle cash) using either their earnings from work at the prison, or money sent in by family. Generally, £1 credit will equate to a 10-minute call to a landline, or a five-minute call to a mobile.<sup>16</sup>

**I.12** At the majority of prisons, telephones are located on wing landings and are shared between all those on the wing. In 2015–16, 26% of prisoners surveyed reported that they had had problems getting access to phones, and this was highest in local prisons (39%). We would expect prisoners to be able to make a call every day, but this was not achieved in all of the establishments we inspected in 2015–16. The most common barriers we came across included:

- Delays in approved numbers being added to PIN accounts.
- Not enough phones on the wing. This was found in a number of recent inspections including at HMP Belmarsh (2015), HMP Isle of Wight (2015) and HMP New Hall (2015).
- Access to phones being limited to association time. As association can be the only time prisoners are able to access wing facilities, there can be queues for the phones or prisoners may have to choose what to prioritise – for example making a phone call or having a shower. Prisoners do not always receive association every day – during our inspections of HMP High Down (2015) and HMP Wandsworth (2015), prisoners had limited access to phones due to restricted regimes or association periods being cancelled. The time of association can also cause issues if it occurs at a time when family members are at work, school, or otherwise engaged. For example, at HMP Bullingdon (2015) and HMYOI Aylesbury (2015), evening association was not available for most prisoners.

*'They should do more family days and let you communicate more on the phone with family. Being on D wing, association is at 18.30 till 19.30 which is too late and it is hard to get a phone call.'*

*'If evening time association is stopped it would stop me being able to speak to my kids due to them being at school during the day.'*

**I.13** Where telephones are on wing landings, there is also an issue of privacy and other prisoners being able to overhear phone conversations; during 2015–16, at almost one in five prisons inspected, we found that wing phones did not have adequate privacy hoods such as the hood in the photograph below.



<sup>16</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2015) *Life in prison: Earning and spending money*. London: HMI Prisons.

- I.14** However, even when there are hoods, privacy may be deemed insufficient. Our inspectors would prefer to find telephone ‘booths’ or boxes that would guarantee privacy.

#### **HMYOI Aylesbury (2015)**

Telephone booths had been introduced in the exercise area. This is an example of good practice, as it provided the young adults with additional opportunities to make telephone calls in private and keep in touch with family and friends.

- I.15** A small number of prisons have in-cell telephones. These are still subject to the same security processes as wing phones and calls can only be made to numbers from the prisoner’s PIN account, but they enable prisoners to make phone calls at any time during the day when they are in their cell. However, they are still unable to receive incoming calls from family and friends. The National Audit Office, when commenting on new accommodation in its report into managing the prison estate,<sup>17</sup> acknowledged the important role that in-cell telephones play in allowing prisoners to maintain family contact. At recent inspections, we found them at prisons including HMP Dovegate (2015), HMP Rye Hill (2015), HMP Doncaster (2016) and HMP Ashfield (2015). In-cell phones are much more common in newer prisons such as HMP Lowdham Grange (2015), or in newly-built house blocks such as at HMP Peterborough (2015); however, they are much less likely to be found in older prisons. In-cell phones are also mostly available in prisons that are privately run. Nonetheless, at HMP Rochester (2016), one of the older, publicly run prisons, in-cell phones were available to prisoners, who could ‘buy’ a phone to use in their cell. HM Inspectorate of Prisons supports the use of in-cell telephony and encourages establishments to implement this system, where possible.
- I.16** Foreign national prisoners, who made up 13% of prisoners surveyed in 2015–16, rely more on the telephone than British national prisoners as their families live further away and they may also be further disadvantaged by the high price of telephone calls.
- I.17** At our inspection of HMP Doncaster (2016), we found that foreign nationals could send a free weekly email letter and also received an additional £10 per month telephone credit if they did not have any visitors. However, foreign national prisoners at HMP Lowdham Grange (2015) only received a free monthly phone call if they had not received a visit in the preceding month. While foreign national prisoners without visitors received a free phone call at both of these establishments, the amount of phone credit was dependent on the institution. At HMP Maidstone (2015) foreign national prisoners could reduce the cost of their calls overseas if their friends and families registered for a Skype telephone number, and notices explained this.
- I.18** The use of internet-based video services (including Skype) was withdrawn from all prisons nationally at the end of 2014, due to operational concerns about the control measures available to safeguard this type of communication. At our inspection of HMP Lowdham Grange (2015) we were disappointed that the use of Skype had been discontinued as it was viewed by prisoners as a positive initiative which enabled foreign national prisoners to stay in contact with families overseas.

<sup>17</sup> National Audit Office (2013) *Managing the prison estate*. Available at: <http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/10304-001-Full-Report.pdf>

- I.19** In the case of prisoners who have partners, or close relatives in another prison, inter-prison phone calls can be made. One of the two prisoners has to gain permission in order to be able to receive a phone call on an official prison telephone. In our 2015 inspection of Close Supervision Centres (CSC)<sup>18</sup> we found that inter-prison phone calls were well used. At HMP Wandsworth (2015) and HMP Woodhill (2015) video link was used as a way of providing inter-prison ‘visits’.
- I.20** While a similar proportion – approximately half – of men and women in prison report having children under the age of 18, women are more likely to be primary or sole carers. The Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey found that around one-fifth of SPCR prisoners (not including those who reported being homeless or sleeping rough before custody) reported that they lived with their dependent children under the age of 18 at the time of imprisonment and that there was no difference in the proportions of men and women prisoners who reported living with dependent children.<sup>19</sup> When properly risk assessed and supervised, we would expect children and those caring for them to be able to make calls to their parents in prison. However, even within the female estate this is rarely achieved.

## Mail

- I.21** Prisoners can send and receive an unlimited amount of mail and can purchase stamps for the same price as in the community. However, in 2015–16 nearly half (44%) of all prisoners reported having problems with sending or receiving mail, often through delays in post being processed in the prison.

*‘This prison makes it impossible to have contact with family via mail. Mail is always two weeks late and regularly goes missing. My phone account was cut off so I had no contact with family whatsoever at one point.’*

- I.22** A growing number of prisons now operate the ‘email a prisoner’<sup>20</sup> scheme, which allows family and friends in the community to email letters to prisoners for a small charge (30p for a 50 line message). The prison prints the email and delivers it to the prisoner at the next mail delivery. At our inspections of HMP Leicester (2016), HMP Dovegate (2015) and HMYOI Aylesbury (2015), we not only found the scheme to be in place, but it was also working well.

*‘The email a prisoner enables my children and family to maintain daily contact with me and is very important in maintaining my parenting connection. It would be very positive for prisoners to be able to email back in some type of secure format.’*

- I.23** However, even where mail is administered efficiently, an estimated 60% of the prison population is said to have difficulties with basic literacy skills.<sup>21</sup> While prisoners may receive help from other prisoners with literacy skills to communicate in writing, it is important that prisoner family contact is not limited to written communication.

<sup>18</sup> Close Supervision Centres (CSCs) hold around 60 of the most dangerous men in the prison system. CSCs can be found in the high secure estate and comprise of small units or individually designated cells.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, K., Papadopoulou, V. and Booth, N. (2012) *Prisoners’ childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners* Ministry of Justice Analytical Services Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/12.

<sup>20</sup> <http://emap.prison-technology-services.com/index.cfm>

<sup>21</sup> Clark, C. and Dugdale, G. (2008) *Literacy changes lives: The role of literacy in offending behaviour, a discussion piece*. London: National Literacy Trust.

## Visits

- I.24** Prison visits provide a valuable opportunity for prisoners to see their family and friends while they are in custody. The process for arranging a visit varies between prisons, but what is common across all establishments, is that all visitors have to pre-book a place, either themselves or through the person in custody, and prisoners only receive a limited number of visits.
- I.25** All visitors need to bring some form of identification with them, such as passport or driving licence (acceptable identification varies between prisons) in order for the establishment to check their identity against the names on the visitors' list of the prisoner they wish to see. A prisoner cannot have more than three adult visitors at the same time. For the purpose of prison visits, anyone over the age of 10 is usually considered an adult.
- I.26** Visitors, regardless of age, will be searched prior to entrance in the visits hall. The search usually involves a rub down and may at times also involve drug dogs. Children, babies and people with special needs or requirements should be searched in an appropriate and sensitive fashion.

### Number of visits

- I.27** Visit sessions vary in frequency between establishments; sentenced prisoners are entitled to a minimum of two one-hour visits in every four week period and unconvicted prisoners are entitled to a minimum of three one-hour visits per week.<sup>22</sup> This is the basic legal requirement and any additional visits are dependent on the institution and on the prisoner's incentives and earned privileges (IEP)<sup>23</sup> level. Prisoners on the enhanced level would normally receive more visits than prisoners on standard and basic levels. Most prisons also allow further visits for specific purposes. For example, a prisoner could be given extra visits as part of a parenting or family relationship programme. HM Inspectorate of Prisons expects establishments to offer more visits than the statutory amount – at least one visit per week for a minimum of one hour regardless of the prisoner's IEP status.<sup>24</sup> However, that is rarely the case and it is usually only enhanced level prisoners who benefit from additional visits.
- I.28** The number of visits a prisoner receives is dependent on the availability of visitors and their ability to travel to the prison and afford the journey. How often and when visits take place varies across establishments and functional types. For example, when we inspected HMP Woodhill (2015), a local prison, we found there were sufficient visit spaces and sessions available every day of the week. Similarly, at HMP Wealstun (2015), a category C training prison, there was good visits provision which took place every day. However, at HMP Isle of Wight (2015), a category B training prison, visits were available only in the afternoons, from Friday to Monday. At HMP High Down (2015), a local prison, we found that visit sessions were available Tuesday to Thursday and on weekend afternoons. However, the weekend afternoon sessions were fully booked at least a week in advance. At HMP Kirklevington Grange (2015), an open prison, similar issues arose. Despite the fact that visit sessions were available on Saturday and Sunday, prisoners could not always receive a weekend visit as all

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/staying-in-touch-with-someone-in-prison/visiting-someone-in-prison>

<sup>23</sup> The IEP scheme is a national scheme with four distinct levels: entry, basic, standard and enhanced. The scheme has the following aims: to encourage responsible behaviour by prisoners; to encourage effort and achievement in work and other constructive activity by prisoners; to encourage sentenced prisoners to engage in sentence planning and benefit from activities designed to reduce reoffending; and to create a more disciplined, better-controlled and safer environment for prisoners and staff. These aims are achieved by ensuring that privileges above the statutory minimum are earned by prisoners through good behaviour and performance and are removed if they fail to maintain acceptable standards. *National Offender Management Service Incentives and Earned Privilege PSI 1112011*.

<sup>24</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of prisoners and conditions in prisons*. London: HMI Prisons.

places were often booked up well in advance. This disadvantaged prisoners whose visitors worked during the week and who then only had the option of weekend visits.

- I.29** In our survey, only 30% of prisoners reported that it was easy or very easy for family to visit them at their current prison and 16% said they did not receive visits. Although this may be for a range of reasons, a common barrier is the distance a prisoner is held from their home area and/or the remote location of the prison.

*'My family live a three hour drive from here, and neither drive. The train from London is the most expensive in the country so visits are difficult. They talk about a support network, but knock back transfers for no real reason.'*

*'Now I'm not in my local prison I will not see my partner until I get out and this is killing me and others. Something needs to be done as it is clear that some prisoners are cutting up or doing drugs to cope with the problem.'*

- I.30** The Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS)<sup>25</sup> provides financial assistance to prisoners' close relatives, partners or sole visitors who are in receipt of a low income or qualifying benefits when making visits to prisons. However, APVS will normally only offer help and support for visits every two weeks and for up to 26 visits in a year. As such, for those prisoners who are on the higher level of the IEP scheme (enhanced), and entitled to extra visits, the number of visits they receive may depend on their visitors' ability to pay for themselves. At HMP The Mount (2015), a free minibus service operated on Friday afternoons between the local train station and the prison, but it was not available at weekends. At HMYOI Deerbolt (2015), NEPACS (North East Prisons After Care Society) provided a dedicated bus service from Darlington train station.
- I.31** If visitors cannot travel regularly to the prison in which their family member or friend is held, that prisoner can save up visits. These are called accumulated visits and the process involves the prisoners being moved to an establishment closer to their family and friends for a short period of time. This process can only take place twice a year and is available after the prisoner has served six months in the same prison. At our 2015 inspection of CSCs, as well as at HMP Lowdham Grange (2015) and HMP Warren Hill (2015), we found that accumulated visits were used well. However, at HMP Isle of Wight (2015), HMP Stocken (2015) and HMP Maidstone (2015), provisions for accumulated visits were minimal. Our inspectors therefore recommended that all eligible prisoners should have access to accumulated visits.
- I.32** Prisoners who do not receive any visits can also be helped to maintain contact with someone from the outside should they choose to. Organisations such as the National Association of Official Prison Visitors (NAOPV)<sup>26</sup> and New Bridge Foundation<sup>27</sup> offer 'befriending' opportunities, whereby volunteers establish and maintain contact with prisoners. At HMP Bullingdon (2015) and most other prisons, social support was provided through the chaplaincy. When we inspected HMP Bullingdon (2015), 12 individuals were providing social visits for prisoners who did not have any outside contacts. New Leaf Community Chaplaincy also continued to provide support after release.

## Booking visits

- I.33** Facilities for booking visits vary across prisons: while visitors to some establishments are able to book online or in person (booking their next visit while already at a visit), at other establishments bookings can only be made over the phone. Where bookings are by phone

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/assisted-prison-visits>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.naopv.com/Aims.htm>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.newbridgefoundation.org.uk/befriending.html>

only, booking lines are not always staffed on a full-time basis and provision is not always sufficient to meet demand; for example at HMP Humber (2015), visitors told us that it was difficult to get through and we did find some delays with the service. A national online prison booking system<sup>28</sup> is now in operation, enabling visitors to book visits through a centralised system. However, not all prisons are included on this system and some visitors still need to contact a prison directly to arrange a visit.

## Facilities for visitors

- I.34** Visiting centres, where available, are located outside the prison and provide facilities for visitors while they are waiting to be taken in for their visit. Research has found that these centres are important in the maintenance of family ties as staff can help prisoners' families and friends overcome many of the barriers to visiting people in custody – for example, the stress of being in an unfamiliar and daunting environment, or not having sufficient information or support – which can prevent regular visits.<sup>29</sup> Visiting centres also often offer advice and access to services in the community that may benefit families, including access to support groups and advice.
- I.35** Facilities for visitors at establishments inspected during 2015–16 were mostly found to be good:
- At HMP Peterborough (2015), the newly built visitors' centre was welcoming and pleasant, providing good support to first-time visitors (see box below).
  - At HMP Littlehey (2015), the visitors' centre was run by Ormiston (a children's charity based in East Anglia) and provided a good range of support to the families and friends of prisoners.
  - At HMP Ranby (2016), the visitors' centre continued to offer good support and facilities.
  - At HMP Pentonville (2015), the inspectors found that the visitors' centre run by prison staff and Spurgeons (a children's and family support charity) provided a welcoming environment. They were pleased to discover that excellent support was offered to first-time visitors and to those who had difficulties in booking visits due to language issues.
- I.36** However, we also came across some disappointing examples. At HMP Leicester (2016), the visitors' centre was in a poor state of repair, and provided very little apart from protection from the weather. At HMP Maidstone (2015), we found that the visitors' centre was cramped, and while there was a children's play area, there was no longer a play worker to supervise the children. HM Inspectorate of Prisons encourages establishments to consult with visitors and to regularly ask for feedback from visitors, as well as prisoners, in order to improve their experiences during visits.

### HMP Peterborough visiting provisions

HMP Peterborough (2015) had a newly built visitors' centre, which provided a welcoming and pleasant environment. Adfam, a drug and alcohol support agency, had a helpdesk in the centre and provided families with general support. The visits hall was large and bright with soft furnishings, offering a welcoming environment.

We saw both Adfam and prison staff interact positively with prisoners. In addition to that, the children and families work was comprehensive. Ongoing feedback from prisoners and their families was used to inform the prison about their needs, leading to the creation of an action plan.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/prison-visits>

<sup>29</sup> Loucks, N. (2002) *Just Visiting? A review of the role of prison visitors' centres*. London: Prison Reform Trust/Action for Prisoners' Families.

**I.37** As with the visiting centre, the visits hall – where the actual visit takes place – is important for both prisoners and visitors alike. The visits hall should offer a clean, respectful and safe environment for visits to take place, including appropriate facilities for children. In our inspections, facilities and the level of comfort varied; for example, at HMP High Point (2016), we recommended that the visits hall should be in good order and redecorated as at the time of the inspection the visits hall on the north side was shabby, with fixed plastic seating arranged in rows. On the other hand, inspectors were impressed with the visits hall at HMP Woodhill (2015), which was large and bright, with a play area for children and a well-stocked refreshments bar. At HMYOI Brinsford (2015), the visits hall was also large and bright, providing a positive environment; it also contained a soft play area for children and other activities. However, although we acknowledged this welcoming environment, there was fixed seating where prisoners had to sit on their own on one side of the table, rather than alongside their family and friends. We found these seating arrangements at other inspections which might not be appropriate in all cases. The level of privacy offered by fixed seating tends to be quite limited as the clusters of tables and chairs are not far apart from each other.

### HMYOI Brinsford (2015) visits hall



**I.38** Prisoners and their families can also receive support from external agencies. During 2015–16, we found that, at a number of prisons, children and family services were delivered by organisations such as Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), Spurgeons, Parents and Children Together, Ormiston Trust, etc. We were particularly impressed with the services at HMP Manchester (see box below), and HMP Holloway (2016), where Spurgeons ran monthly extended children’s visits, where mothers enjoyed activities with their children in the gym, and quarterly children and families visits, which involved the whole family. They also delivered a toddler group and a homework club every week. None of these additional visits required a visiting order and women appreciated them.

### **HMP Manchester (2015)**

The English Churches Housing group managed a well-run and fully equipped visitors' centre supported by a team of dedicated staff and long serving volunteers. The team had strong links with local community projects and worked closely with the local Out There project, which provided support to families of prisoners in the community and coordinated the prison visitors' forum. The forum met regularly in the community to discuss individual and collective concerns, which were shared with the prison through the visitors' centre. The local Mothers' Union also ran a regular coffee morning in the visitors' centre, which discussed the impact of prison on family life.

## **Experience of visits**

- I.39** Those visiting a friend or family member in prison are required to bring proof of address and identity on their first visit, although what is required for subsequent visits may vary between prisons. On the whole we found that searching was carried out respectfully and with sensitivity to religious and cultural needs. There were some concerns at HMP Rochester (2016) regarding the length of time it took for visitors to be searched and enter the visits area. The inspectors found this process to be quite excessive causing delays to the start of visits.
- I.40** We expect methods for identifying prisoners during visits to be respectful and proportionate to the risk presented.<sup>30</sup> The means by which prisoners are identified include, but are not limited to, wearing prison-issue clothing or identification bands. At HMP Maidstone (2015), we found that prisoners had to wear a purple sash, despite the fact that all visitors, including children, had their hand stamped with an ultraviolet marker, which was checked on entry and exit. At HMP Manchester (2015), HMP Doncaster (2016), HMP Ashfield (2015), HMP Bullingdon (2015) and HMP Belmarsh (2015), prisoners had to wear an identifying bib, a high-visibility vest, or a coloured sash during visits. The inspectors found this unnecessary as other security measures were in place. On the other hand, inspectors were happy to find that at HMP Humber (2015), prisoners could wear their own clothes during visits and did not have to wear a bib either.
- I.41** In our inspections we found that delays to the start of visits were common and, as a result, visits were often shorter than the allotted time. Prisoners and visitors, particularly those who had had long journeys, found this, and the wait, frustrating.
- 'When a visit is booked, visitors are told to be here for 2pm but do not actually get into the prison until 2.45pm or 3pm. This frustrates prisoners as they are kept in a holding cell until their visitors have been granted access.'*
- I.42** Visits usually, but not always, last for two hours – at HMP Kirklevington Grange (2015), a category D resettlement prison, the time-length of visits had been reduced from two hours to one. This was because there had been an increase in demand for visits as a result of national directive changes to reduce home visits on ROTL. While this measure to reduce the visit time-length to the statutory minimum could be seen as an appropriate response to the increased demand, enabling the prison to facilitate more visits, it did not solve the problem. Despite these changes, weekend visits were still fully booked and not all prisoners could attend one. The prison addressed this issue by increasing the number of tables and chairs in the visits hall.

<sup>30</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of prisoners and conditions in prisons*. London: HMI Prisons.

- I.43** The time-length of visits can also be affected by the facilities available at different establishments. A lack of toilet facilities at HMP Dovegate (2015) and HMP Bullingdon (2015) meant that visits would be terminated if prisoners needed to use them. However, inspectors were pleased to find that, at HMP Rochester (2016), both prisoners and visitors had access to toilet facilities during visits without having their visit curtailed.
- I.44** Visit arrangements for vulnerable prisoners<sup>31</sup> vary from prison to prison. At HMP Doncaster (2016), inspectors found that vulnerable prisoners felt unsafe when attending visits, which were at the same time as those attended by the rest of the prison population. The inspectors recommended that vulnerable prisoners should be kept safe and free from abuse at all times. However, inspectors were pleased to find that at HMP Woodhill (2015), there was a separate visits area for vulnerable prisoners and at HMP High Down (2015), vulnerable prisoners were separated from the main population by attending morning visits, while main population prisoners attended afternoon visits.

### Closed visits

- I.45** Prisoners and/or their visitors can be placed on closed visits if there are security concerns (for example passing contraband), where a glass screen separates the prisoner and visitor(s), making physical contact impossible. Provisions for closed visits vary from one establishment to the other. We expect prisoners to be placed on closed visits only for reasons directly related to visits.<sup>32</sup> However, this is not always the case and prisons are able, within their own rules, to use closed visits as a restriction in response to other breaches of security unrelated to visits. For example, at HMP Stocken (2015), inspectors found that too many closed visits were imposed for reasons not directly related to visits. Reviews took place monthly, but many were cursory and prisoners usually stayed on restrictions for at least three months without further supporting information. Similarly, at HMP Humber (2015), at the time of the inspection, 49 prisoners were subject to closed visits, and the sanction was not removed at the earliest opportunity.
- I.46** Closed visits were also used in the CSCs. While most of the visits took place in the main visits hall, closed visits were sometimes used without prisoners receiving an individual risk assessment to justify it. Our inspectors recommended that closed visits should only take place subject to an individual risk assessment.
- I.47** The facilities in closed visits areas also vary. Inspectors were pleased to find that, at HMP High Down (2015), four closed visit rooms and one bereavement suite were available, which were adequately screened and allowed clear communication between prisoners and their visitors.
- I.48** At some institutions, prisoners who need to use the toilet during a visit would subsequently have to continue the rest of the visit in closed conditions. This was found to be the case at HMP Lowdham Grange (2015), and inspectors recommended that closed visits should only be authorised when supported by intelligence.

<sup>31</sup> Vulnerable prisoners are predominantly those who have been remanded or convicted of a sexual offence. However, vulnerable prisoners could also be other individuals who are at an increased risk of victimisation from other prisoners, such as former police officers. Vulnerable prisoners are often segregated from the main population by living on separate wings.

<sup>32</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of prisoners and conditions in prisons*. London: HMI Prisons.

## Family days

- I.49** Along with standard visits some prisons also offer family visit days, which give parents the opportunity to spend an extended period with their children and to play in a more relaxed, child-centred environment than the visits hall. Our inspectors found that family visits were not available at all prisons and even where they were available, demand was often higher than availability.

*'More family day visits so we can play with our kids. It is hard to sit still with a two-year-old.'*

- I.50** Prisoners' access to family days is sometimes inappropriately linked to the IEP scheme and therefore family visits are not always available to those on the basic or standard level. Our concern regarding this approach is that it is often the family, or more importantly the children of prisoners, who are most affected. Moreover, it is often the prisoners on the lower levels of the IEP scheme that would benefit most from family support. Our inspectors found that at HMP Dovegate (2015), HMP Maidstone (2015) and HMP The Mount (2015), only enhanced prisoners were able to access family visits. At HMP Isle of Wight (2015) and HMP Wealstun (2015) only enhanced and standard prisoners were able to access family visits, whereas at HMP Hatfield (2016) all prisoners could have family visits (see box below). At HMP New Hall (2015), a women's prison, extended family visits for children up to age 18 and grandchildren, were held every school holiday and were available to everyone regardless of their IEP level.

### **HMP Hatfield (2016)**

At HMP Hatfield, all prisoners regardless of their IEP status could have family visits and the provisions were deemed excellent. Quarterly family days were well run and themed. Families could see where prisoners lived and worked, and participate in activities with them. The prison had set up a family committee, which included prisoners, to discuss future provision for family visits; this was a welcome new initiative.

- I.51** The number of family days and the facilities available are dependent on the establishment. Inspectors were pleased to find that, at HMP Highpoint (2016), family days were available once a month, even to those without children. Children family days were held bi-monthly and allowed prisoners to eat a hot meal with their families and have a photograph taken together. Shortly before the inspection, Ormiston Trust had run a 'dad's day', which had involved third sector organisations and a firm of solicitors making presentations to prisoners and their families. Feedback about the day was positive. These initiatives were greatly appreciated by prisoners. The children's crèche, staffed by two qualified play workers, was excellent. Prisoners could enter the crèche during children and family days. Good provisions were also found at HMP Woodhill (2015). The visitors' centre ran a 'Family matters' advice group for prisoners' families, there was a monthly 'Father and child' Saturday session where prisoners with children could play with them, and there were six family activity days a year held during school holidays. On the other hand, inspectors were disappointed to find that family days had stopped at HMP Rochester (2016) and had not taken place during the year of the inspection at HMYOI Aylesbury (2015).

## Resettlement pathway work

- I.52** Maintaining contact with family, where appropriate, is important in its own right for the prisoner and their family. It can also play a key role in supporting a prisoner's successful release and resettlement into the community. Visits, telephone calls and mail are a crucial

part of this, but prisons should also be offering more structured and supported family work to help maintain contact.

- I.53** In some prisons there are family support workers who provide a number of services, including running parenting courses, liaising with social services and other agencies, and being a point of contact and information at visits. For example, when we inspected HMP Belmarsh (2015), we were pleased to find that a family worker helped prisoners and families affected by alcohol and substance use to maintain, repair and improve family relationships. At HMP Lowdham Grange (2015), the 'Storytime Dads' scheme, whereby prisoners could produce and record visual and audio stories for their children, was very effective and widely used. At HMP Stocken (2015), the 'Me and My Dad' scheme helped prisoners and their children create a memory book, by completing structured activities and sending them to each other. At HMP Kirklevington Grange (2015), a North East Prison After Care Society (NEPACS) family support worker was based in the prison, a service much valued by prisoners. Support was provided for a range of complex issues such as mediation with former partners, contact with children and initiating court action if required.

#### **HMP and YOI Parc (2016)**

At our 2016 inspection of HMP and YOI Parc, we found the resettlement provision to be excellent. The prison had an innovative and radical approach to working with families to ensure they were involved in the rehabilitation of prisoners. T4 wing remained the family intervention unit, where prisoners could access a range of programmes and activities. T4 wing also incorporated the 'Invisible walls' project, a four-year initiative offering targeted help and support for a number of prisoners during the last 12 months of their sentence and the first six months following release. The prison had recently been awarded the 'Investors in Families' accredited chartermark, indicating the high quality of their work.

- I.54** Where risk assessed as appropriate, prisoners may be able to receive ROTL to help them maintain or rebuild family ties. This may involve resettlement day release, resettlement overnight release, or childcare resettlement release, which is specifically for prisoners who have a sole caring responsibility for a child under 16 to help prepare for the resumption of their parental duties on release. However, ROTL for childcare resettlement is not widely available and in the case of prisoners unsuitable for ROTL, in-house arrangements and extra prison support are not common. Examples of such assistance include additional phone credit in order to maintain and develop family ties, as well as targeted support from family workers and the availability of family conferences for prisoners with specific problems (for example, substance misuse). At HMP Manchester (2015) we recommended improved opportunities for prisoners to use ROTL to help maintain family relationships. At HMP New Hall (2015), we found that ROTL was not used to help women maintain contact with their dependants.

*'It's difficult to get ROTL to maintain your family ties, even if you need to see your kid to speak about a problem at home that's affecting them.'*

- I.55** At our inspection of HMP Humber (2015), we found that ROTL had been used over 300 times between January and June 2015, providing more opportunities for resettlement and improving family ties. At HMYOI Brinsford (2015) we were pleased to find that the number of actual ROTL events had almost doubled since the previous inspection. However, it was disappointing that the number of prisoners who benefitted from it was similar to that at the last inspection.

## Conclusions

- I.56** It is widely accepted that good family contact has an important role to play, not only in supporting prisoners through their sentence, but in supporting their rehabilitation after release. Family members themselves, particularly children, may suffer emotionally and practically as a result of a family member's offence and subsequent imprisonment.
- I.57** Access to telephones, mail provisions, as well as the number of visits a prisoner can have, vary across establishments, and visiting provisions are not only dependent on the prison, but also on the prisoner's status in the IEP scheme. While most of the visiting facilities inspected during 2015–16 were good, we have also found examples of visitors' centres and halls that were not very welcoming. The presence of various facilities is particularly important for family days, as is the existence of different schemes to help maintain a bond between children and their parents. ROTL events are also important for successful resettlement in the community, as well as for building and maintaining family ties.
- I.58** Our findings show that despite some very good practice, arrangements to help prisoners maintain and strengthen those crucial contacts are too variable. Therefore, we have a number of recommendations to help improve family contact.
- I.59** We recommend:
- i. All prisons should have staff with a specific family support role and this should be overseen by a senior governor.
  - ii. The rollout of in-cell telephones to existing prisons should continue as resources permit and all new prisons should incorporate in-cell telephones.
  - iii. Prisoners should be allowed to receive incoming calls from their children or their carers on a risk-assessed basis.
  - iv. A pilot should be undertaken allowing risk-assessed and supervised prisoners to have family contact through social media and/or Skype. The findings should be evaluated and the results published.
  - v. Restricted or limited family contact and/or support should not be used as a punishment for activities or behaviour unrelated to visits and/or family access.
  - vi. Prisons should consult with visitors regarding visiting arrangements in order to improve the visiting experience.
  - vii. Prisons should develop a strategy to help prisoners maintain and enhance their support networks.
  - viii. Administrative delays in admission to visits caused by prisons' own procedures and processes should not impact upon the time length of the visits.

# Acknowledgements

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