



HM Prison &
Probation Service

A Response to the HMIP Inspection: Safety, well-being and hope:

The untapped potential of family contact in prisons

Action Plan Submitted: 28 April 2026

Report Published: 17 March 2026

INTRODUCTION

HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and HM Inspectorate of Probation for England and Wales are independent inspectorates which provide scrutiny of the conditions for, and treatment of prisoners and offenders. They report their findings for prisons, Young Offender Institutions, and effectiveness of the work of probation, and youth offending services across England and Wales to Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). In response to the report HMPPS / MoJ are required to draft a robust and timely action plan to address the priority and key concerns. Action plans provide specific steps and actions to address the priority and key concerns, that are clear, outcome focussed, measurable, achievable, and relevant with the owner and timescale of each step clearly identified. Action plans are sent to HMIP and published on the GOV.UK website. Progress against the implementation and delivery of the action plans will also be monitored and reported on.



2.	<p>Prisons were often failing to get the basics right in relation to visits. Problems included inefficient booking systems, incorrect visiting times on prison websites, insensitive and excessive searching, and visits often starting late.</p>	<p>An enhanced public facing on-line booking system will be deployed.</p> <p>All establishments will be encouraged to use the national booking services that will give national oversight of visits.</p> <p>As part of the refresh of the visits policy framework, HMPPS will develop and deliver a guide for all establishments on what a good end to end visit looks like, including visits running to time. Prisons will be held accountable by this standard through the performance measure.</p> <p>HMPPS will develop a comprehensive staff training package to support the standard training offer. This will include a focus on ensuring that the diverse needs and expectations of visitors are met and raise awareness of the impact of prison staff behaviour on their experiences.</p> <p>Prison specific family strategy documents are being migrated to gov.uk which will ensure all visiting and contact information is easily available, accurate and regularly updated. HMPPS will commission a national review of establishment's visitor pages on gov.uk and introduce quarterly assurance testing of visits information.</p>	<p>Justice Digital</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate / MoJ Families Policy Team</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p>	<p>October 2027</p> <p>January 2027</p> <p>April 2027</p> <p>December 2026</p> <p>February 2027</p>
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		<p>Planned development of the HMPPS funded Prisoner Family Helpline, including the development of a chat feature will support clearer information sharing.</p> <p>HMPPS will remind prisons that searches of visitors should always be conducted sensitively and in the least intrusive manner possible using principles of procedural justice, by explaining what is happening and why. This will be delivered through the Risk and Capabilities Learning Hub and Head of Security bulletin.</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>Risk and Capabilities Unit</p>	<p>December 2026</p> <p>August 2026</p>
3.	<p>Not enough was done to support family contact during the early days in custody. The system to help families locate prisoners was slow and there were frequent delays in approving phone numbers for prisoners' accounts.</p>	<p>HMPPS are revising and updating the 'Supporting Prisoners Family and Relationship Ties' policy framework, which contains new operational guidance on the importance of supporting family & other ties during induction.</p> <p>HMPPS will monitor compliance with the revised framework processes through the family performance improvement measure.</p> <p>HMPPS will continue to monitor demand for the 'Find-a-Prisoner' service to ensure resources are allocated appropriately. Staff responsible for the service are being cross trained to increase</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p>	<p>August 2026</p> <p>March 2027</p> <p>August 2026</p>



		<p>capacity and help ensure that families receive a timely update on where a loved one is located.</p> <p>HMPPS will explore monitoring systems for responsivity in approving contacts on a prisoner's PIN using the performance improvement measure to monitor delivery.</p> <p>HMPPS will develop new metrics that monitor response rates to the find a prisoner service, including investigating with the Digital Team whether AI/Workflow tools can improve efficiencies and reduce overall wait times.</p> <p>A workshop with PGDs will be held which will cover thematic findings and provide particular focus on the new performance measure and related assurance requirements, along with key deliverable activity.</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>Prison Operations Directorate</p>	<p>December 2026</p> <p>September 2026</p> <p>September 2026</p>
4.	Families were rarely involved in supporting prisoners at risk of self-harm or violence, despite evidence that family contact can have substantial impact on mental health and behaviour. Some prisoners were unaware that family involvement was a possibility.	The revised and updated 'Supporting Prisoners Family and Relationship Ties' policy framework (due for publication in the Summer of 2026) will include details for prisons on the importance of involving families in processes supporting prisoners' mental health, as well as instructions on how to involve families during processes such as support through an Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) document.	Prison Safety Team / HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate	August 2026



		<p>Delivery of this work will be monitored by the family performance measure.</p> <p>HMPPS will begin a programme of assurance checks of ACCT reviews on establishment visits. Additionally, HMPPS will collect related data via the new performance measure. Findings will be shared with the Prison Safety Team and learning will be disseminated to establishments.</p> <p>We will add an agenda item to our quarterly provider meetings, to inform our partners about the above 2 actions.</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate / Prison Safety Team</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p>	<p>May 2026</p> <p>June 2026</p>
5.	HM Prison and Probation Service's self-assessment system did not provide adequate assurance or sufficiently drive improvement.	<p>Family Services are currently working with specialist colleagues to revise the performance improvement measure to make the assurance processes more robust. The measure itself will be more focussed on data driven outcomes, whilst still maintaining a qualitative element that is essential when working with a range of stakeholders. This combination will drive overall performance improvement. In addition, the workshop to be held for PGDs (referenced above) will include further guidance on the completion of self-assessments.</p>	<p>HMPPS Performance / HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p>	<p>June 2027</p>



		<p>HMPPS will circulate the findings of the review of the performance measure to share good practice, and support consistency of delivery.</p> <p>HMPPS will explore funding for analytical support to implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. In the interim, the MoJ Families Policy Team will keep family service providers updated with any emerging themes to support family services in evidence-based delivery.</p> <p>Family Services will work with the Assessing Risks, Needs and Strengths (ARNS) team to review the focus of the questions in the tool, that record information on a prisoner's family and relationships.</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>MoJ Families Policy Team</p>	<p>June 2026</p> <p>June 2027</p> <p>November 2026</p>
6.	<p>Family work was largely seen as the responsibility of the contracted family provider, rather than a joint endeavour with the prison. Prison leaders did not always understand the importance and quality of family ties in motivating good behaviour in their prisons.</p>	<p>The revised and updated 'Supporting Prisoners Family and Relationship Ties' policy framework will clearly define the roles and responsibilities of prison senior leaders in delivering an effective family offer and emphasise the importance of embedding family work in all aspects of prison life.</p> <p>HMPPS will hold a 'Family and Relationships' week in August 2026, promoting safe and secure relationships across the prison estate.</p>	<p>Deputy Director Rehabilitation Strategy & Interventions</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change</p>	<p>August 2026</p> <p>August 2026</p>



		<p>HMPPS will enhance promotion of family work activities, using a variety of mediums, including the internal intranet, newsletters, conferences and family network meetings.</p> <p>A nominated Area Executive Director will act as a senior sponsor, supporting cultural change across HMPPS.</p> <p>MoJ and Department for Education (DfE) are working together on the commitment to identify and support children affected by parental imprisonment, raising the importance of prisons' role in this. HMPPS will explore how best to identify Children of Prisoners and work with Other Government Departments to reflect Children of Prisoners in existing policy, processes and provision.</p>	<p>Directorate / Prison Operations Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>AED North East, Yorkshire & Humber</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate / MoJ Families Policy Team / DfE</p>	<p>November 2026</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>December 2027</p>
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Key Concerns

7.	The number of visits had reduced substantially since the COVID-19 pandemic, and we found little analysis to understand and address the issue. Only one prison had evening visits and prisons did not sufficiently	HMPPS recently published an ad hoc statistical report - <i>Impact of Social Visits in Prison in Prison on Reoffending, Self-harm and Accommodation</i>	MoJ Analytics	Complete
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	<p>advertise financial support available to help mitigate the burden on families.</p>	<p><i>Outcomes</i>¹. This report complements our earlier publication, <i>Social Contact in Prison</i>² (December 2025), which quantified social visits in prison, by examining their impact using propensity score matching.</p> <p>As part of our detailed analysis of pre- and post-COVID prison visits, HMPPS will examine data from the 32 prisons for which Family Services currently manage social visit bookings representing approximately 25% of the national estate. The findings will feed into the updated Social Visits Policy Framework (due for publication in Q4 of 2026/27). The results of that analysis will be used to inform the content and direction of the revised framework.</p> <p>In March 2026 a new suite of information packages informing the public about the financial support available for those visiting prisons was distributed across the estate.</p> <p>The eligibility criteria for Help with Prison Visits will be reviewed to explore the intention of improving access.</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate / MoJ Families Policy</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>MoJ Families Policy Team</p>	<p>February 2027</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>March 2027</p>
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¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/impact-of-social-visits-in-prison>

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69381b465cc812f50aa41e47/Final_PDF_Social_Contact_in_Prison.pdf

8.	Social video calls were underused.	<p>Revised guidance will be re-issued to ensure that video calling is offered as widely as possible including reminding establishments about the call length options.</p> <p>A detailed analysis of the delivery of Social Video Calling will be completed as part of the work around producing the revised Policy Framework.</p> <p>HMPPS will work with each prison to understand their needs which will inform allocations that require additional equipment. This may include providing additional equipment or the redistribution of underused resources.</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate / Prison Operations Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>Justice Digital</p>	<p>July 2026</p> <p>February 2027</p> <p>December 2026</p>
9.	Not all prisons had a process for identifying and supporting prisoners who did not get social visits.	<p>Establishments will be required to demonstrate that prisoners who do not have positive relationships with external contacts have been encouraged and supported to establish at least one meaningful connection. This will be measured through the Family Ties performance measure.</p> <p>HMPPS will continue to work with all prisons to ensure they provide the minimum offer for building positive relationships and to deliver community days. The delivery of those</p>	<p>AED North East and Yorkshire and Humber/ Prison Operations Directorate</p> <p>AED North East and Yorkshire and Humber/ Prison Operations Directorate</p>	<p>July 2027</p> <p>March 2027</p>



		<p>expectations will be monitored through the revised performance measure.</p> <p>Heads of Reducing Reoffending will be encouraged and supported to monitor the outcomes of building positive relationships delivery.</p> <p>HMPPS will use the learning from three grant funded projects specifically looking at the recruitment, training and support for volunteer visitors to improve diversity in representation of scheme participants.</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p>	<p>August 2026</p> <p>February 2027</p>
10.	<p>Family visits were highly valued but often had restrictive eligibility criteria. They were too short, not frequent enough and held at inconvenient times, including during school hours.</p>	<p>Prisons will be encouraged to consult with prisoners and families, including children where appropriate, on the design, environment, and objectives of family-focused activities. This collaborative approach can help ensure that events are accessible, meaningful and inclusive.</p> <p>HMPPS will work towards ensuring that a national standard for family days lasting a minimum of 4 hours and a minimum of 12 per year is achieved.</p>	<p>Prison Operations Directorate/ MoJ Families Policy Team</p> <p>Prison Operations Directorate</p>	<p>March 2027</p> <p>March 2027</p>



		<p>Guidance will be issued to remind governors that family days cannot be linked to incentives schemes.</p> <p>Prisons will be instructed via the revised Policy Framework that they must hold some family days during school holidays and also encouraged to consider including some weekends.</p>	<p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate / Prison Operations Directorate</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate / Prison Operations Directorate</p>	<p>July 2026</p> <p>August 2026</p>
11.	<p>The management and effectiveness of dedicated safety telephone lines for families varied considerably. Families could not always get through to notify prisons about concerns for a prisoner's safety or welfare.</p>	<p>In February 2026, a full test of every dedicated safety telephone line was conducted across the estate and has informed the following activity to embed improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causes of failures are being analysed to ensure corrective action can be implemented promptly • Communication with prisons will be undertaken to remind them of the importance of safety telephone lines for families to raise concerns. This will reinforce expectations around monitoring, timely response to messages, and ensuring the line is consistently staffed or supported by appropriate voicemail and call-back arrangements. 	<p>Prisons Safety Team</p>	<p>April 2027</p>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishments will be asked to verify the accuracy of published contact details. 		
12.	ROTL was not used effectively to support family ties in any of the men's prisons we visited.	<p>The ROTL Policy Framework will be updated to provide clearer national expectation on the use of ROTL including to support family ties. It will reaffirm and clarify existing expectations around the use of ROTL. It will also address location variations using a standardised approach for effective practice across the estate within the existing risk-management framework.</p> <p>Further consideration will be given to data available to evidence and monitor the use of ROTL to support family and relationship ties.</p>	<p>Release Policy Team</p> <p>HMPPS Rehabilitation and Change Directorate</p>	<p>July 2026</p> <p>November 2026</p>
13.	Care-experienced prisoners received insufficient support to develop and/or maintain ties.	A new policy framework (Supporting Prisoners with Care Experience) will be published. This framework introduces mandatory expectations for prisons and emphasises the importance of supporting the development of social and support networks for care-experienced prisoners. It will mandate contact with local authorities, where someone has care leaver entitlements, as well as highlighting the benefits of connecting people with other services such as chaplaincy, befriending and official prison visits.	HMPPS Prison Operational Policy & Delivery Group	May 2026



