# Fit for purpose or falling apart?
# A review of living conditions in prison

A key findings paper by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

October 2026

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# Introduction

The provision of decent, clean, well-maintained accommodation is a fundamental test of a prison system, but this report shows that standards fall short of acceptable in many jails in England and Wales.

The prison service continues to rely on solidly built, yet outdated 19th century prisons to house men on remand or those who have been recalled to custody, mainly because their inner-city locations means they are near to the courts. Conditions in these jails are some of the worst, with two men often crammed into tiny cells originally designed for one due to population pressures. In many cases prisoners spend up to 22 hours a day locked up in squalid conditions. Many of the communal areas in these prisons are unacceptable, with ingrained dirt, mouldy showers and endemic vermin problems.

Prison infrastructure is often in a dire state and the prison service takes far too long to fix problems. Labyrinthine procurement processes mean that it is not uncommon for it to take years for work to be completed – we found one prison relying on 'temporary' boilers for seven years at enormous annual cost.

In some of the more modern prisons the situation can be every bit as bad. Flat, leaking roofs and mechanical windows that jammed meant the workshops in one prison, built in the 1970s, regularly flooded. Degrading night sanitation continues to exist in 1960s blocks at some jails, while even some of those opened as recently as the 1990s look tired and dilapidated.

Prisons built this century have so far aged better. Time will tell whether the newest jails, which almost appear to be modelled on large 1960s and 1970s housing estates, can be adequately maintained.

This report shows the extent of the unsatisfactory buildings and accommodation in which so many prisoners are held and prison staff are expected to work.

The inability of the prison service and the Ministry of Justice to make its procurement and maintenance systems agile and effective is a source of huge frustration for governors, but this report also highlights the failure by some prisons to get the basics right – too often I have visited jails where prisoners do not have bedding, storage and somewhere to sit in their cells. Prisoners themselves are an underused resource, and only a few establishments make use of their skills to complete routine maintenance tasks.

Jails where leaders have a relentless focus on standards and where prisoners and staff are held to account for cleanliness on their wing show that it is possible, despite ageing buildings and their inherent problems, to maintain good standards. But if prisons are to be places which rehabilitate rather than just warehouse prisoners they must also be well-maintained, decent environments that provide sufficient space. This report shows there is a long way to go.

**Charlie Taylor**
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons
September 2026

# Section 1 Background

1.1 Living conditions in prisons in England and Wales are governed by statutory requirements under the Prison Act 1952, which mandate that no cell may be used for confinement unless formally certified as adequate.

1.2 The 2023 Certified Prisoner Accommodation Policy Framework[1] modernised and strengthened how prisons should meet these long-established requirements. It clarified expectations around decency, requiring prisons to maintain conditions in line with national standards. Firmer rules outline when cells must be taken out of use and all in-cell furniture is required to meet approved HM Prison and Probation Service/Ministry of Justice safety standards. The Framework requires senior leaders[2] to confirm that each cell meets basic expectations for size, heating, lighting, ventilation, sanitation and to allow for emergency communication with staff, before it can be used[3].

1.3 The Framework reflects a growing recognition that the quality of living conditions has an impact on safety, dignity, behaviour, rehabilitation and staff-prisoner relationships. It is intended to strengthen oversight and make sure that basic expectations are met consistently, regardless of the age or design of the building.

1.4 HM Inspectorate of Prisons' Expectations[4] set out our independent view of what these standards should look like in practice. Under the healthy prison test of 'Respect', we expect as a minimum that:

- Prisoners live in a clean and decent environment which is in a good state of repair and fit for purpose.
- Prisoners are appropriately and safely located in their residential units and understand the rules and routines of the prison, which encourage responsible behaviour.
- Prisoners are encouraged to keep themselves, their cells and communal areas clean.

1 Ministry of Justice (2023). 'Certified Prisoner Accommodation Framework'. Available at: Certified Prisoner Accommodation Policy Framework

2 Senior leaders are referred to as 'Authorising Directors' in the Framework and should be Prison Group Director or equivalent.

3 HM Prison and Probation Service defines the number of prisoners who can be held in a cell under normal standards as 'certified normal accommodation (CNA). It uses the term 'maximum capacity' to describe the upper limit of cell occupancy, which should only be used when the population is under pressure.

4 Expectations for treatment and conditions in men's and women's prisons are available at: Expectations – HM Inspectorate of Prisons

1.5 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) has additional indicators to help drive respectful outcomes in women's prisons. Women should not be held in overcrowded conditions and they should have their own cell or room unless they choose to share. They should have privacy keys, control over cell lighting, and fully screened toilets which are never visible from observation panels. These Expectations also emphasise staff awareness of privacy, and the need for accessible sanitary products and discreet disposal.

1.6 In 2017, HMI Prisons published 'Life in prison: Living conditions'[5], which explored the types of cells in which prisoners were living and the in-cell activities available to them. It made the following recommendations:

1. HMPPS should review all current cells to assess those which do not meet the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment's (CPT) minimum standards and provide a plan for reducing the number of prisoners in crowded cells.

2. Cells being built as part of the future prisons programme should meet the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment's (CPT) minimum standards for living space per prisoner.

3. All cells should be in good physical condition and contain appropriate facilities and equipment for day-to-day life.

4. In-cell toilets should have lids and a floor-to-ceiling partition with a closable door to protect the privacy of prisoners sharing cells and also to reduce the transmission of bacteria within cells[6].

1.7 This findings paper provides an update to that review. We reviewed 40 inspection reports published between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 and analysed prisoner survey findings for the same period. This includes statistical analysis of responses to closed questions and a thematic analysis of the comments made in open questions.

1.8 For the purposes of the analysis, residential units have been grouped by building type, reflecting the age, design and refurbishment status. These categories are drawn from inspection reports and observations and are used consistently throughout this paper[7].

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5 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2017). 'Life in Prison: Living Conditions'. Available at: Life in prison: Living conditions – HM Inspectorate of Prisons

6 Providing this meets Crown Fire Safety regulations in relation to fire detection and misting ability.

7 Appendix II sets out which prisons have been considered in each category.

| Category | Description |
|---|---|
| Legacy buildings | Historic Victorian, Edwardian and pre-1930s buildings. |
| Mid-20th century | Prisons built or substantially rebuilt between the 1930s and 1980s. |
| Early modern houseblocks | Predominantly 1990s–2010s houseblock designs, including private finance initiative (PFI) builds. |
| Large scale new builds | Large, campus-style prisons opened in the 2020s. |
| Modular/temporary buildings | Prefabricated or rapid-deployment units. |
| Refurbished wings | Older buildings that have undergone significant internal refurbishment while retaining the original structure. |

1.9 HMI Prisons uses the term 'overcrowding' to describe conditions where prisoners are held in cells, rooms or dormitories where the number of occupants exceeds the number for which it was built. HM Prison and Probation Service refers to these conditions as 'crowding' (see paragraph 2.21).

# Section 2 Our findings

## Physical condition of cells

2.1 The physical condition of cells varied considerably across the estate, creating a distinct divide between older accommodation and newer or refurbished environments. In modern and upgraded wings, cells were generally clean, well-maintained and fit for purpose; however, much of the older estate fell below acceptable standards, with structural deterioration and significant maintenance backlogs affecting day-to-day conditions. This variation is closely linked not only to the age of buildings but to the type and function of prisons. Almost half (49%) of the prisoners surveyed during the inspections lived in buildings built prior to the 1980s that had not been significantly refurbished since their construction. Older accommodation was concentrated in reception prisons and high secure prisons, while newer and refurbished units were more commonly found in category C and open establishments.

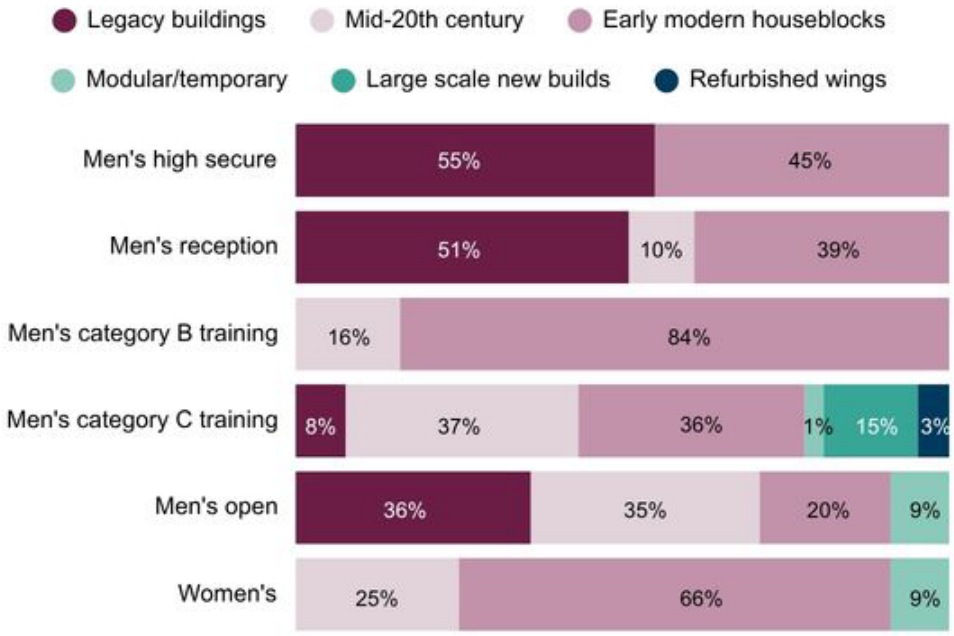


**Cells in reasonable condition at Altcourse (left) and Northumberland**

2.2 Inspectors observed that conditions were generally poorest in older prisons which grappled with population pressures and high churn. This limited opportunities to take cells or entire wings out of use for refurbishment and essential repair. In many reception prisons, cells were small, overcrowded and difficult to maintain, with ageing infrastructure exacerbating day to day deterioration. At Exeter, a reception prison with predominantly legacy accommodation, inspectors found widespread problems, including a lack of storage and extensive mould. Broken windows were increasing the risk of illicit items being delivered to cells by drone, and contributing to wider safety and security concerns. At Leeds and Leicester – also reception prisons with a high proportion of older buildings – cells commonly had damaged flooring, worn fittings and inadequate ventilation.

**Figure 1: Over half of prisoners in reception and high secure prisons were located in legacy/historic buildings**

HMI Prisons inspections of 40 adult prisons in England and Wales




Source: HMI Prisons survey data 2025–26

‘Overall, the infrastructure of the prison remained dreary, run down and in need of long-term investment. The older units, in particular, were shabby and grim.’

**Featherstone inspection report, 2025**



**Legacy residential wings at Exeter, built in 1853 (left), compared with early modern houseblocks at Bronzefield, built in 2004 (right)**



**Broken window grille at Elmley (left) and broken window on Thanet wing, Maidstone (right)**

2.3 Prisoners in older facilities frequently reported inadequate storage. Inspectors found missing or damaged cupboards at Elmley, Exeter, Leeds and Foston Hall, with some prisoners storing items in bags or on the floor; this was particularly problematic in overcrowded conditions as it further reduced space and privacy.



**Single cell at Guys Marsh with insufficient storage (left) and cramped double cell at Birmingham (right).**

2.4 The lack of secure storage limited prisoners' ability to manage their belongings safely, and was a particular problem for individuals who had been prescribed medication for in-possession use. The absence of lockable space increased the risk that highly tradeable medicine could be lost, misused or stolen. It also meant that prisoners at some jails had to queue for medicine every day, delaying the running of a daily regime.

‘Few prisoners in shared cells had lockable storage for their possessions and in some there was only one chair for the two occupants, despite most food being eaten in cells.’

**Elmley inspection report, 2025**

2.5 Inspectors found that the response to essential repairs was inconsistent and often delayed. For instance, at Birmingham, there had been lengthy delays to repairs to laundry equipment and basic in-cell fixtures such as sinks. A wing lift had remained out of service for eight months, which meant disabled prisoners were unable to access some facilities.

‘One wheelchair user told us he crawled up the stairs to use the kiosk when the machine on the ground floor was broken.’

**Birmingham inspection report, 2025**

2.6 Poor ventilation contributed to overheating in prisons such as Altcourse, Leeds and Pentonville. Much of the prison estate has not been designed to cope with sustained high temperatures, and ageing infrastructure, overcrowding and limited opportunities for prisoners to access cooler spaces can exacerbate the effects of heat. This raises concerns about the preparedness of prison infrastructure and the welfare of those living and working in prisons as climate change looks likely to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme heat events.

2.7 Conversely, during the winter unreliable heating systems left prisoners at jails such as Guys Marsh, Ranby and Lincoln cold for prolonged periods. Damp and mould were common in older wings.

‘Roofs were leaking in many buildings, including residential units, the gym and the chaplaincy. Water entry and blocked gutters had resulted in electricity outages, leaks in cells, and black mould on ceilings and walls. On Mercia unit, the roof had been leaking directly over the servery area, which was unhygienic.’

**Guys Marsh inspection report, 2025**

2.8 Where refurbishment – such as upgraded cells, new flooring and repaired windows – had been prioritised, living conditions improved markedly. At our inspections of Haverigg and Lewes, leaders had been making use of prisoners' skills in ongoing refurbishment work.

2.9 However, progress was not consistent, and several prisons continued to have large numbers of cells out of use due to disrepair or stalled renovation projects. The collapse of ISG, one of the UK's largest construction contractors, in September 2024 caused significant disruption to prison renovation and capacity programmes. During the

inspection of Birmingham in October 2025, three wings were closed for refurbishment, reducing the prison's operational capacity from 1,450 to 997. These wings had also been closed at previous inspections in 2023, 2021 and at our independent review of progress in 2019, illustrating how prolonged refurbishment projects can remove large numbers of cells from use for years.



**Building refurbishment at Birmingham (left) and ongoing building work at Liverpool (right)**

‘Work to refurbish A, B and C wings had been delayed significantly and the revised completion date was now mid-2027. This meant that the planned refurbishments to other older wings, including G and D, were also delayed.’

**Birmingham inspection report, 2025**

2.10 At several prisons, newer or modular units – often used for enhanced or incentivised regimes – provided substantially better living conditions than standard wings (see paragraph 4.4). For example, at Foston Hall the incentivised substance free living (ISFL) unit was made up of rapid deployment cells, as was accommodation for enhanced prisoners.

## Hygiene

### Toilets and night sanitation

2.11 In older buildings, access to toilet facilities was variable, and in some cases depended on access to facilities outside the cell during periods of lock up. A few prisons still relied on night sanitation – an electronic system for prisoners in cells without toilets or running water to be unlocked to access a toilet individually through the night.

2.12 Inspectors found that where such arrangements were still in place, they were often affected by wider operational pressures, including staffing and regime restrictions, which could delay access and limit prisoners' ability to use toilet facilities when needed.

'The night sanitation process meant prisoners could be left waiting to use bathroom facilities, and we were told that some resorted to using receptacles in their cells. During our inspection, the smell of urine was noticeable in several areas of the prison, which undermined decency.'

**Coldingley inspection report, 2025**

2.13 Even where toilets were located within cells, their condition was a persistent problem in many prisons, especially in older and mid-20th century buildings. Inspectors found broken or stained toilets in establishments including Bullingdon, Lewes and Isis. In several prisons, including Bullingdon, in-cell toilets also lacked lids. This was particularly unhygienic when the toilet was next to the prisoners' beds, as in many jails.

2.14 In-cell toilets commonly lacked adequate screening or privacy. Improvised sheets were frequently used where there was no proper screening, including at Birmingham, Elmley, Hewell and Leeds. Despite our specific expectations around privacy for women, toilets in women's prisons also continued to lack proper screening.



**Unscreened toilet at Low Newton (left) and partial screening at Eastwood Park (right).**

[What would you most like to see changed here?]

‘Locks on shower cubicles and better decency shower coverings (A wing) […]. New toilets for A wing (theirs don't flush properly), privacy curtain around the toilet area instead of wooden block that falls over all the time.’

**Low Newton prisoner survey, 2025**

## Showers

2.15 Shower areas were a particular concern in older wings. Only 49% of prisoners in legacy buildings described communal showers as clean, compared with 88% in modular/temporary buildings units. There were damaged cubicles, mould, poor ventilation and insufficient privacy at Bullingdon, Elmley, Guys Marsh, Liverpool and Swaleside. At Lincoln, showers were often closed due to water temperature and legionella concerns.

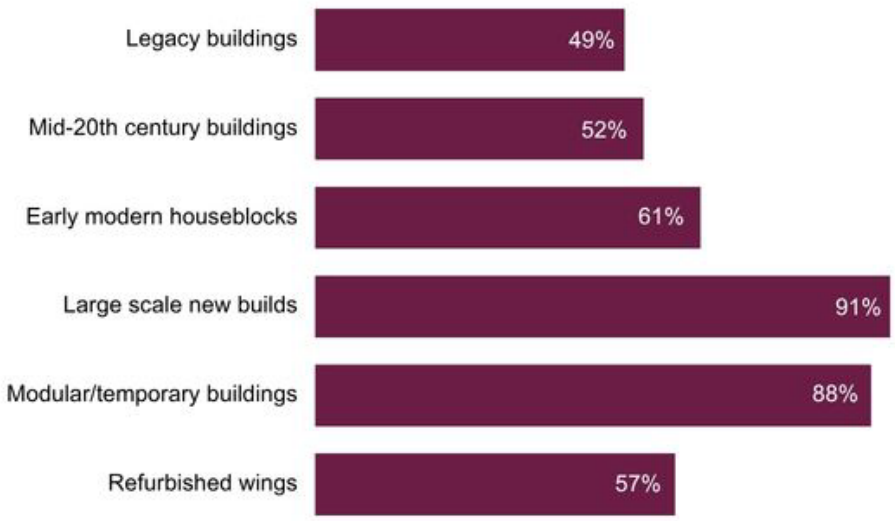


**Fungi in the showers at Bullingdon (top left), shower in poor condition at Wakefield (top right), closed showers at Lincoln (bottom left) and lack of privacy in on-wing showers at Altcourse (bottom right).**

2.16 In contrast, newer or refurbished accommodation often provided clean, modern or even in cell shower facilities – a feature highly valued by prisoners. During our inspection of Fosse Way, which opened in May 2023, we reported that all cells had in-cell toilets and showers.

**Figure 2: Survey responses found reports of shower facilities being very/quite clean varied substantially between prison builds**

HMI Prisons inspections of 40 adult prisons in England and Wales




Source: HMI Prisons survey data 2025–26

[What is the most positive thing for you at this prison?]

'Showers in cell which makes me feel safer from other prisoners.'

**Berwyn prisoner survey, 2025**

2.17 Where investment had been targeted, conditions improved markedly. Some refurbished wings, and certain women's and enhanced units, had upgraded or newly built shower facilities that met high standards of privacy and hygiene. A number of prisons, such as Altcourse, Bronzefield, Maidstone, Prescoed and Warren Hill, were actively improving or modernising their communal showers as part of broader refurbishment programmes.

## Clothing, bedding and laundry

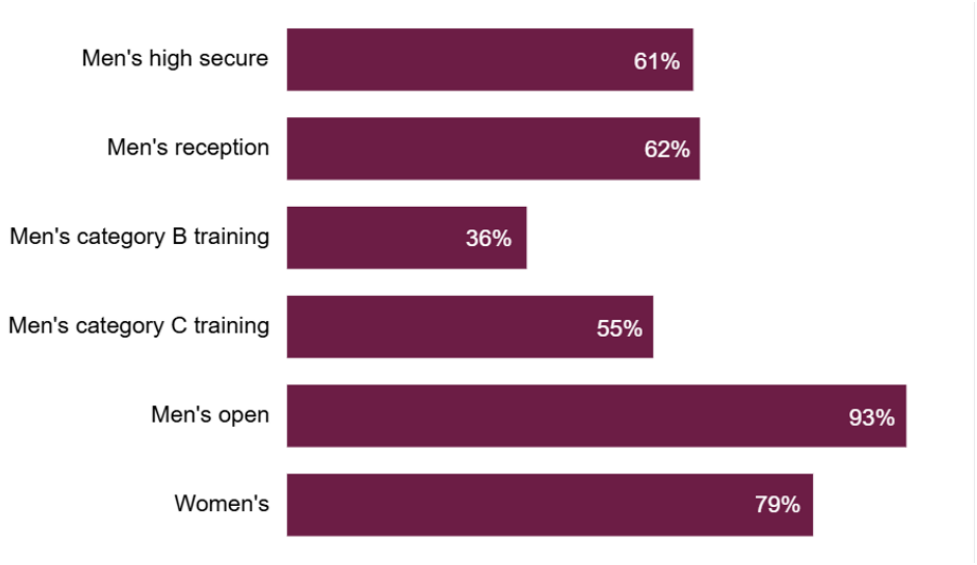
2.18 The provision of clean clothing and bedding is a basic component of decent living conditions. In a number of prisons, inspectors found that clean clothing was not always issued frequently enough, and that arrangements for exchanging or washing items were limited. Some prisoners reported wearing the same clothing for extended periods, particularly where access to laundry facilities depended on wing routines or staff availability.

2.19 Laundry facilities were not always adequate for the size of population. Inspectors noted that some prisoners had to rely on communal laundry systems with limited capacity, which could delay washing and distribution. In some establishments, particularly where washing facilities were located on residential wings, machines were often domestic-grade appliances which were not designed to cope with the

continuous use and high volumes generated by large prisoner populations. This contributed to frequent breakdowns and reduced availability. Overcrowded training prisons like Ranby and Onley frequently experienced washing machine breakdowns and delays in returning laundry to prisoners.

**Figure 3: Survey responses indicate that access to clean bedding every week varied across the estate, with more negative experiences generally associated with men's category B and C training prisons.**

HMI Prisons inspections of 40 adult prisons in England and Wales




Source: HMI Prisons survey data 2025–26

2.20 Inspections also identified issues with the quality of bedding and replacement of damaged items. In several establishments, mattresses were described as worn or damaged, and bedding was not always clean or regularly changed. This was most common in older prisons, where wider maintenance backlogs affected in-cell conditions more generally. Concerns were particularly acute in reception and early days units. At Pentonville, inspectors found that poor first night and induction arrangements meant men were held in dirty, ill-equipped cells that lacked key items including bedding and pillows. This potentially increased feelings of anxiety and vulnerability during a high-risk period of custody.

[What would you most like to see changed here?]

'Beds are uncomfortable, mattresses not suitable for the weakened bunk beds, back is damaged since sleeping on them. I'll need physio when I get out of here, beds need replacing.'

**Leeds prisoner survey, 2025**

## Sharing and overcrowding

2.21 There is an expectation that some prisoners will be required to share cells, and this can be a protective factor against isolation and self-harm. Where prisoners do share a cell there should be sufficient space and adequate facilities for each prisoner. If prisoners share cells that were designed for one person, HMPPS defines the conditions as 'crowded'. HMI Prisons uses the term 'overcrowding' to describe these conditions (see paragraph 1.9).

### Measuring overcrowding

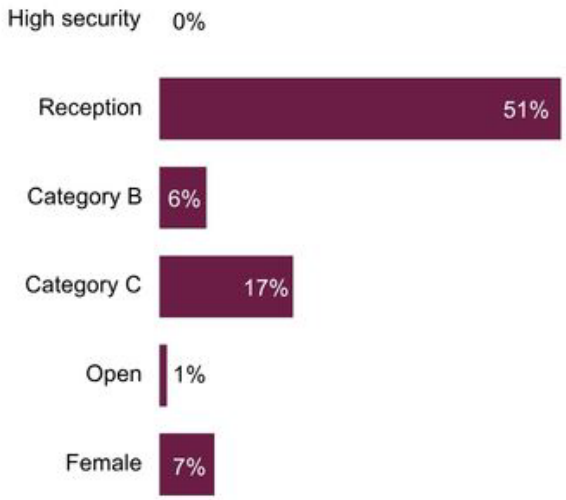
For HMPPS, ‘crowding’ is measured as the number of prisoners who, at unlock on the last day of the month, are held in a cell, cubicle or room where the number of occupants exceeds the uncrowded capacity of the space. This includes two prisoners held to a single cell, three prisoners in a cell designed for one or two and any prisoners held in crowded conditions in larger cells or dormitories.

For example, if 12 prisoners occupy a dormitory with an uncrowded capacity of 10, then HMPPS counts this as 'crowded'.

2.22 In the 12 months ending March 2026, the overcrowding rate at adult establishments across England and Wales was 24%. Over half of prisoners in reception prisons, which are under the greatest strain in the population crisis, are in overcrowded conditions, while there is no overcrowding in high secure prisons.

**Figure 4: The proportion of prisoners held in overcrowded conditions is highest in men’s reception prisons**

Overcrowding by prison function in England and Wales, 12 months ending March 2026[8]




Source: HMPPS Annual Digest 2025–26

[8] HM Prison and Probation Service Annual Digest 2024 to 2025 (July 2026). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmpps-annual-digest-april-2025-to-march-2026. Terms used for prison functions in this data match those used by HMPPS Annual digest.

2.23 Our own inspections and surveys have that found levels of cell sharing associated with overcrowding remain very high in many reception and resettlement prisons. At Lincoln we found that 87% of prisoners were sharing cells designed for one person, with similarly high levels at Exeter (84%) and Leeds (78%), and more than half the population at Hewell affected. At Guys Marsh, 130 prisoners (27% of the population at the time of the inspection) were sharing single cells, often without adequate furniture or screening.

[What would you most like to see changed here?]

'Bunkbeds gone or bigger cells more suitable for two adults, because these are not suitable.'

**Usk prisoner survey, 2025**



**Overcrowded cell at Usk (legacy building) (left), and a shared cell at Hewell (early modern houseblocks) (right)**

2.24 Overcrowding has implications for privacy, basic living conditions and sometimes safety during a potentially high-risk period of a prisoner's time in custody. Ministry of Justice analysis found that in the 12 months from January to December 2022, prisoners in overcrowded cells were 19% more likely to be involved in an assault (including prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and assaults on staff) than those in non-overcrowded cells.[9]

2.25 In some establishments, the impact of cramped conditions, poor ventilation and inadequate toilet privacy was exacerbated by long periods of lock-up. Extended confinement could increase frustration and tension and place additional strain on staff-prisoner relationships,

[9] HM Prison and Probation Service (June 2025). 'The impact of overcrowding on assaults in adult public prisons'. Available at: The impact of overcrowding on assaults in adult public prisons - GOV.UK. HM Prison and Probation Service refers to 'crowding' in these statistics; HMI Prisons uses the term 'overcrowding'.

particularly where prisoners did not experience consistent levels of care, support and respectful engagement from staff.

[What would you most like to see changed here?]

'The room is too small for two people if one of us go to the WC it's not good we don't have door at the toilet; they have to change these.'

**Elmley prisoner survey, 2025**

2.26 In contrast, we found far higher levels of single cell accommodation in open prisons, including 97% at Haverigg and 64% at Prescoed. Open and training prisons are more likely to have single occupancy modular units, which were introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic as a temporary measure to enable social distancing and manage infection risk.



**Examples of rapid deployment cells: outside the cells at Hollesley Bay, April 2024 (left) and inside the cells at Norwich, January 2026 (right)**

## Conditions on the wing

2.27 Prisoners' experiences of conditions on wings, particularly cleanliness and access to facilities, varied depending on the type of prison accommodation. Prisoners held in refurbished and newer accommodation were more likely to report via our survey that communal areas were clean and that they could access basic facilities, while those in legacy and mid-20th century buildings were less positive across these measures.

2.28 Older wings were often harder to keep clean and in good repair because of ageing infrastructure, high population turnover and limited maintenance capacity. For example, at several prisons, including Guys Marsh, Ranby and Wakefield, inspectors found wings with peeling paint, mould, damaged flooring and leaking roofs. Feltham B, Pentonville and Wormwood Scrubs had persistent rodent or pest issues, including mice, rats and cockroaches in internal or external wing areas.

[What would you most like to see changed here?]

'This place is abysmal, old, damp ran to the ground, especially when you see all the new prisons.'

**Leicester prisoner survey, 2025**

2.29 Refurbished and more modern wings were cleaner and better maintained. At Berwyn, a large new-build prison opened in 2017, structured approaches to cleaning and maintenance, including prisoner involvement through the clean, rehabilitative, enabling, decent (CRED) programme, supported more consistent standards. Facilities were generally in working order and cleaning routines were more consistently applied in these settings.

'Leaders were introducing the CRED (clean, rehabilitative, enabling, decent) programme, with prisoners working alongside maintenance staff to carry out repairs and refurbishment. They were confident that this would help to maintain good levels of cleanliness and appropriate conditions in cells.'

**Berwyn inspection report, February 2025**

2.30 In some cases, overcrowding and high prisoner turnover exacerbated deterioration, making it difficult for staff and prisoners to maintain acceptable standards. At Birmingham, the prolonged closure of several wings for refurbishment affected how the remaining accommodation was used and maintained; at the last inspection 43% of prisoners shared cells that were designed for one person, it had taken eight months to fix a lift and there were long delays in replacing facilities in cells such as sinks.

2.31 Access to cleaning materials also varied between prisons. At some establishments, including Coldingley, Hewell, Warren Hill and Thameside, staff regularly checked supplies and supervised prisoner wing cleaners. At others, including Whitemoor, Lowdham Grange, Ranby and Prescoed, inspectors found shortages of basic items such as bin bags, cloths and disinfectant.

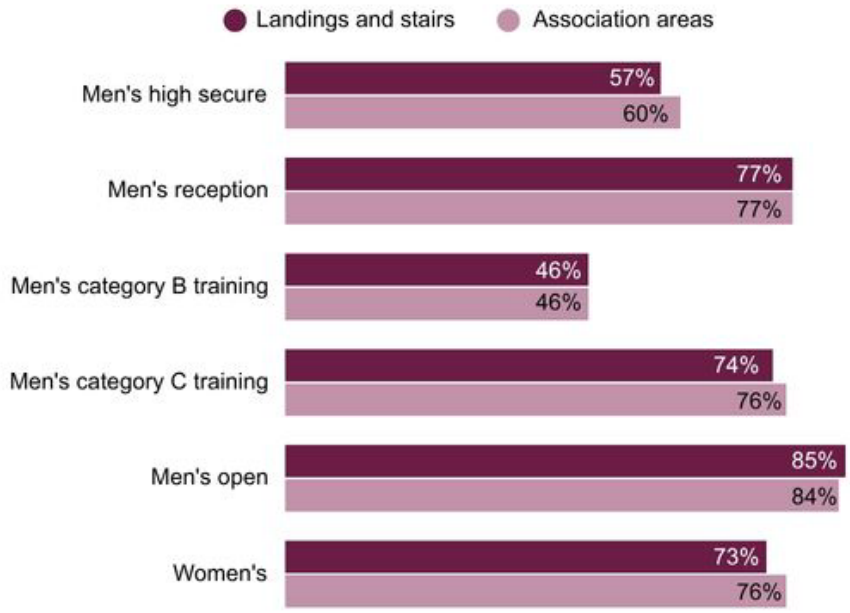
'Many of the units were rundown and dirty, and cleaning was poor. For example, the residue of eggs thrown on a window a couple of weeks before the inspection was still visible. Not enough cleaning materials were readily available, and there was a lack of staff oversight of cleaning.'

**Prescoed inspection report, May 2025**

2.33 However, survey data suggest that prison function may have a stronger relationship with perceptions of cleanliness than building age alone. Less than half (46%) of prisoners in category B training prisons reported that communal areas were clean or very clean, despite none of these prisons being legacy establishments.

**Figure 5: Prisoners in men's category B training prisons were least likely to report that communal areas were clean or very clean**

HMI Prisons inspections of 40 adult prisons in England and Wales



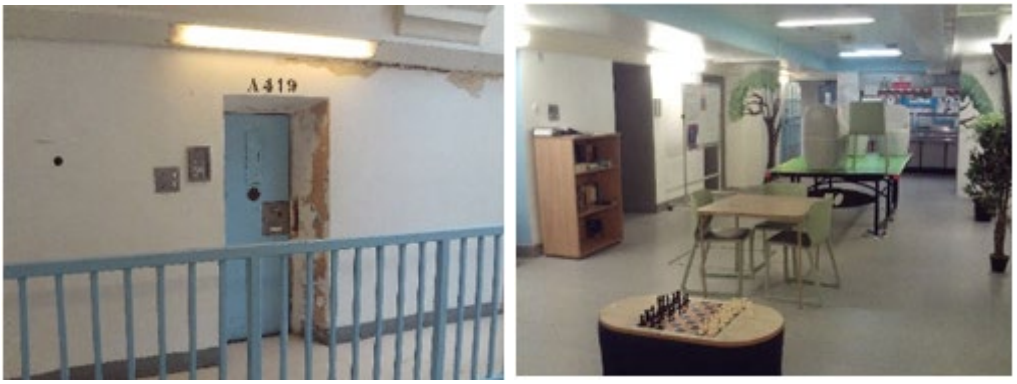

Source: HMI Prisons survey data 2025–26

2.34 Where leadership teams prioritised wing conditions, maintained effective supervision and made sure there was access to cleaning materials, standards were notably better, even in some older environments. Where oversight was weak, poor conditions were more likely to persist.

2.35 While effective leadership could not overcome the limitations of ageing infrastructure, inspectors found examples where leaders had successfully maintained decent standards despite the challenges. Routine checks, prisoner work groups supported by dedicated staff, and senior leader quality assurance all helped to make sure maintenance problems were identified and addressed promptly.

'The Lewes Assurance and Multi-Skills (LAMS) team of skilled prisoners carried out refurbishment and repairs across the prison. This was helping to maintain good standards of decency, while saving the prison considerable expense.'

**Lewes inspection report, 2025**




**Landing in need of refurbishment (left) compared with a refurbished wing (right) at Lewes**

# Appendix I Methodology

This findings paper draws on evidence from inspections published during the annual report period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, comprising 40 adult prisons, of which 35 were men's and five were women's. As part of HMI Prisons' evidence base, a representative survey of prisoners is carried out at the start of each inspection. The questionnaire includes structured questions which facilitate quantitative analysis, enabling a comparison of groups within the sample, and open questions at the end which allow prisoners to express in their own words what they find most positive and negative about the prison.

Analysis was conducted on 6,404 responses from the adult men's and women's prisons. Due to some incomplete surveys the number of responses for each question varies and may not total this number in all cases. A comparative analysis was conducted which compared the responses of prisoners who were in prisons of different functional type, buildings of different ages and their experience with living conditions. Other groups were also compared, and differences tested for statistical significance. Throughout the report we only refer to comparisons between the two groups when these are statistically significant. The significance level is set at 0.01, which means that there is only a 1% chance that the difference in results is due to chance.

Thematic analysis of the prisoner responses to the open questions at the end of the questionnaire was also conducted. All relevant comments were systematically reviewed by a researcher, and themes identified.

This project was conducted in line with HMI Prisons' ethical principles for research activities: Ethical principles for research – HM Inspectorate of Prisons

# Appendix II Table of building types

| Establishment | Prison function | Building type | Wings/units included |
|---|---|---|---|
| Altcourse | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Berwyn | Men's category C trainer | Large scale new builds | All |
| Birmingham | Men's reception | Mid-20th century | All |
| Bronzefield | Women's | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Bullingdon | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Coldingley | Men's category C trainer | Mid-20th century | A, B and D wings |
| Coldingley | Men's category C trainer | Early modern houseblocks | E wing |
| Coldingley | Men's category C trainer | Refurbished wings | B wing |
| Doncaster | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Eastwood Park | Women's | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Elmley | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Exeter | Men's reception | Legacy buildings | B and C wings |
| Exeter | Men's reception | Mid-20th century | D wing |
| Featherstone | Men's category C training and resettlement | Mid-20th century | All |
| Feltham B | Men's category C trainer | Mid-20th century | All |
| Fosse Way | Men's category C resettlement | Large scale new builds | All |
| Foston Hall | Women's | Mid-20th century | C–T wings |
| Foston Hall | Women's | Modular / temporary buildings | A and B wings |
| Guy's Marsh | Men's category C trainer | Mid-20th century | All |
| Haverigg | Men's open | Mid-20th century | R2, R3, R6 |

| Establishment | Prison function | Building type | Wings/units included |
|---|---|---|---|
| Haverigg | Men's open | Early modern houseblocks | R1 and R5 units |
| Hewell | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Isis | Men's category C trainer | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Leeds | Men's reception | Legacy buildings | A–C, E, I and H wings |
| Leeds | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | D and F wings |
| Leicester | Men's reception | Legacy buildings | All |
| Lewes | Men's reception | Legacy buildings | A–K wings |
| Lewes | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | L and M wings |
| Lincoln | Men's reception | Legacy buildings | A–C wings |
| Lincoln | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | E wing |
| Liverpool | Men's reception | Legacy buildings | All |
| Low Newton | Women's | Mid-20th century | A, B, C wings |
| Low Newton | Women's | Early modern houseblocks | E, F, I, J wings |
| Lowdham Grange | Men's category B trainer | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Maidstone | Men's category C trainer | Legacy buildings | Kent and Thanet units |
| Maidstone | Men's category C trainer | Mid-20th century | Medway unit |
| Maidstone | Men's category C trainer | Refurbished wings | Weald unit |
| Northumberland | Men's category C trainer | Mid-20th century | All |
| Northumberland | Men's category C trainer | Modular / temporary buildings | Alnwick House |
| Onley | Men's category C trainer | Mid-20th century | A–E wings |
| Onley | Men's category C trainer | Early modern houseblocks | F–L wings |
| Parc | Men's category C trainer | Early modern houseblocks | All |

| Establishment | Prison function | Building type | Wings/units included |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pentonville | Men's reception | Legacy buildings | All |
| Prescoed | Men's open | Mid-20th century | All |
| Prescoed | Men's open | Modular / temporary buildings | Pugh, Mitchell, Gates units |
| Ranby | Men's category C trainer | Mid-20th century | Houseblocks 1–3 |
| Ranby | Men's category C trainer | Early modern houseblocks | Houseblocks 4–7 |
| Send | Women's | Early modern houseblocks | A–D and J wings |
| Send | Women's | Modular / temporary buildings | E and F wings |
| Swaleside | Men's category B trainer | Mid-20th century | A–D wings |
| Swaleside | Men's category B trainer | Early modern houseblocks | E–H wings |
| Thameside | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Usk | Men's category C trainer | Legacy buildings | All |
| Wakefield | Men's high secure | Legacy buildings | All |
| Warren Hill | Men's category C trainer | Mid-20th century | Alder, Oak, Sycamore, Willow units |
| Warren Hill | Men's category C trainer | Early modern houseblocks | Elm and Maple units |
| Whitemoor | Men's high secure | Early modern houseblocks | All |
| Wormwood Scrubs | Men's reception | Legacy buildings | A–D and P–X wings |
| Wormwood Scrubs | Men's reception | Early modern houseblocks | E wing |

# Appendix III  Men's Expectations

## Living conditions

**Prisoners live in a clean and decent environment which is in a good state of repair and fit for purpose.**

The following indicators describe evidence that may show this expectation being  met, but do not exclude other ways of achieving it.

- Cells and communal areas are clean, free of graffiti/offensive displays, well lit (including adequate natural light) and well decorated.
- Accommodation meets agreed minimum standards (size, heating, ventilation) and provides adequate space for the number of prisoners held in the cell.
- As a minimum, prisoners have their own bed, chair, table and lockable cupboard and sufficient space to store personal belongings, including medication.
- All in-cell toilets have lids and are screened. In shared cells, washing facilities are screened.
- Prisoners have access to drinking water, a toilet and washing facilities at all times.
- Residential units are as quiet as possible at night with appropriate lighting to enable rest and sleep.
- Outside areas are well maintained and clean.

**Prisoners are appropriately and safely located in their residential units and understand the rules and routines of the prison, which encourage responsible behaviour.**

The following indicators describe evidence that may show this expectation being  met, but do not exclude other ways of achieving it.

- Prisoners only share cells following a suitable risk assessment process.
- Unconvicted prisoners are not required to share accommodation with sentenced prisoners.
- Young adults are not required to share cells with adults.
- Staff respond to emergency cell call bells within five minutes.
- Prisoners have a courtesy key to their cell.
- Observation panels in cell doors remain free from obstruction.
- Prisoners know the local rules and routines, which are applied openly, fairly and consistently, with no discrimination.
- When decisions are conveyed to prisoners, appeal arrangements are explained and made available.

**Prisoners are encouraged to keep themselves, their cells and communal areas clean.**

The following indicators describe evidence that may show this expectation being met, but do not exclude other ways of achieving it.

- Prisoners can shower or bathe in private every day.
- Prisoners are provided with basic hygiene items for their personal use.
- Clean bedding is provided for each new prisoner on arrival and can be replaced or laundered weekly.
- Mattresses are replaced when needed.
- Where night sanitation arrangements exist, access is prompt.
- Prisoners have access to sufficient cleaning materials to keep their cells and communal areas clean.
- There is a clear strategy that evidences how in-cell standards are assured by leaders and demonstrates actions are taken to address concerns.

# Appendix IV  Women's Expectations

## Living conditions

**Women live in a clean, decent and comfortable environment.**

The following indicators describe evidence that may show this expectation being met, but do not exclude other ways of achieving it.

- Women live in an environment that promotes their well-being and helps to reduce behaviour that is harmful to them or others.
- Women are not held in crowded conditions. They have their own cell/ room unless they wish to share, and there is enough space for the number of women held in the cell/room.
- Residential units are as quiet as possible at night with appropriate lighting for rest and sleep.
- Outside areas are well maintained and clean.
- Cells and communal areas are clean, free of graffiti and offensive displays, well lit (including by natural light), properly ventilated and in good decorative order.
- Women have the use of properly equipped areas for association and outdoor areas for daily physical activity.
- Women have privacy keys to their cells/rooms.
- Women can switch their cell/room lights on and off.
- As a minimum, women have their own chair, table and lockable cupboard and enough space to store personal belongings.
- All in-cell toilets are screened, have lids and are not, under any circumstances, in view of the observation panel.
- Women are able to personalise their cells/rooms without unnecessary restrictions.
- Women have access in their cell/rooms to drinking water, a toilet and washing facilities at all times.
- All staff recognise and adhere to the need for privacy and decency, particularly where women are using a bathroom in their cell or any other private areas.

**Women can keep themselves, their cells and communal areas clean.**

The following indicators describe evidence that may show this expectation being met, but do not exclude other ways of achieving it.

- Women can shower or bathe in private every day, immediately following physical exercise or work, and before court appearances, health care appointments or visits.
- Women are provided with enough sanitary and menstrual items without having to ask for them.
- Women have access to sanitary and washing facilities and the means of disposing of sanitary and menstrual items discretely.
- Clean bedding is provided for each woman on arrival and can be replaced or laundered weekly or whenever needed.

- Mattresses are replaced when needed.
- Women have access to sufficient cleaning materials to keep their cells and communal areas clean.

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