

Chapter 27: Prisons

The chapter provides an insight into prisons from the perspectives of the Chief Inspectorate of Prisons to those of the prisoners themselves. The Prison Service today has a settled structure and a system of accountability provided for by the Independent Monitoring Board (formally The Board of Visitors), the Prisons Ombudsman and HM Inspectorate of Prisons. The Independent Monitoring Boards are independent watchdogs drawn from the local community who are appointed by the Home Secretary to monitor the welfare of staff and prisoners and the state of the premises. Their duties are to raise prisoner and staff concerns with management, the Governor, Area Manager, Headquarters, or even Ministers and the Home Secretary. In the event of a serious incident at an establishment, a Board member must be invited to observe the way it is being handled. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman is appointed by the Home Secretary, and is an independent point of appeal for prisoners and those supervised by the Probation Service. HM Inspectorate of Prisons is independent of the Prison Service and reports directly to the Home Secretary on the treatment of prisoners, the conditions of prisons in England and Wales, and such other matters as the Home Secretary may require. The chapter goes on to look at the prison population including sex, age, category, race and disability and how the experiences of these different types of prisoner differ, how prisons are run including assessments of the new regimes of purposeful activity and the proposals in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 that will give prisoners greater contact with the outside world.