



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Katy Clark MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for West Scotland Region

18th January 2023

Keith Brown MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Justice & Veterans
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Our reference: CVFP-JR

Cornton Vale and Female Prisoners

Dear Keith,

I am writing with concern ahead of the closure of HMP & YOI Cornton Vale, Scotland's only women's prison, in the coming weeks.

My understanding is that HMP & YOI Stirling, which is being built on the same site, is now due to open until the summer of 2023. However, I am unclear what the Scottish Government's contingency plans are for the relocation of prisoners housed at HMP & YOI Cornton Vale in the interim period between the prison's closure and HMP & YOI Stirling's opening. Having asked the Scottish Prison Service directly, I have only been told that these women will be housed in two other establishments, but no further information has been forthcoming. I do know that some prisoners were transferred to HMP Polmont before the beginning of demolition work at the site in 2017, but can you clarify which other sites will be used, how many prisoners will be transferred, what assessment has been made of their capacity and what exercises have been carried out regarding the welfare of these women?

This is particularly concerning given the reports of overcrowding across the prison estate. The number of inmates in Scottish prisons who have neither been tried or sentenced has reached a record level, with Scotland's remand rate currently one of the worst in Europe. Whilst women make up a small percentage of the prison population, the Howard League presented evidence to the Criminal Justice Committee this morning that suggests remand rates for women have risen from 30% in 2021-22 to 38.68%.

At a time when our justice system has effectively ground to a halt, with prisoners being held for considerable periods of time without charge, in over-crowded conditions, and with limited access to any purposeful activity, I am deeply concerned that the closure of Cornton Vale only adds to this disastrous state of affairs.

I look forward to reading your response and eliciting some clarity.



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Yours sincerely,

Katy Clark MSP
West Scotland Region