



Prison Service
Pay Review Body

Prison Service Pay Review Body

Fourteenth Report on
Northern Ireland 2023

Chair: Tim Flesher CB



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2023

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Presented to the
Permanent Secretary, Department of Justice (Northern Ireland)
January 2024



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Prison Service Pay Review Body

Standing terms of reference

The role of the Prison Service Pay Review Body is to provide independent advice on the remuneration of governing governors and operational managers, prison officers and support grades in the England and Wales Prison Service. The Review Body will also provide independent advice on the remuneration of prison governors, prison officers and support grades in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

In reaching its recommendations the Review Body is to take into account the following:

- The need to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified staff taking into account the specific needs of the Prison Service in England and Wales and the Northern Ireland Prison Service;
- Regional/local variations in labour markets and their effects on the recruitment and retention of staff;
- Relevant legal obligations on the Prison Service in England and Wales and the Northern Ireland Prison Service, including anti-discrimination legislation regarding age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion and belief and disability;
- Government policies for improving the public services, including the requirement to meet Prison Service output targets for the delivery of services;
- The funds available to the Prison Service in England and Wales and the Northern Ireland Prison Service as set out in the Government's departmental expenditure limits; and
- The Government's inflation target.

The Review Body shall also take account of the competitiveness of the Prison Service in England and Wales with the private sector, and any differences in terms and conditions of employment between the public and private sectors taking account of the broad employment package including relative job security.

The Review Body may also be asked to consider other specific issues.

The Review Body is also required to take careful account of the economic and other evidence submitted by the Government, staff and professional representatives and others.

Reports and recommendations for the Prison Service in England and Wales should be submitted to the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. Reports and recommendations for the Northern Ireland Prison Service will be submitted to the Minister of Justice, Northern Ireland.

The members of the Review Body are:

Tim Flesher CB (*Chair*)
Mary Carter
Luke Corkill
Nigel Cotgrove
Judith Gillespie CBE
Roy Grant
Raj Jethwa

The secretariat is provided by the Office of Manpower Economics.

The International Labour Organization 336th Report of the Committee on Freedom of Association

The POAⁱ took a complaint to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in August 2004, alleging that legislation deprived Prison Officers of the right to take industrial action and that they did not enjoy adequate compensation guarantees to protect their interests in the absence of the right to strike. In its 336th Report of the Committee on Freedom of Association (March 2005) the ILO noted that the POA saw the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) as an inadequate compensatory mechanism because it had no powers to make binding recommendations, only to report and recommend, and there was no duty on the Minister to implement the award promptly or at all.

The Government stated that the establishment of the PSPRB in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland was inextricably linked to the introduction of voluntary agreements in that the Prison Service gave up the right to set pay increases in exchange for the POA's agreement not to organise industrial action. The Government stated that recommendations of the PSPRB are not binding in law, but in practice they would only be departed from in exceptional circumstances and are complied with in practice.

The Committee recommended that the Government continued to ensure that the awards of the PSPRB are binding on the parties and may be departed from only in exceptional circumstances.

ⁱ The professional trades union for prison, correctional and secure psychiatric workers.

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Glossary of Terms

ASHE	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
CJINI	Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland
CPI	Consumer Prices Index
CPO	Custody Prison Officer
FTE	full-time equivalent
HMP	His Majesty's Prison
IDR	Incomes Data Research
ILO	International Labour Organization
MGO	Main Grade Officer
NCO	Night Custody Officer
NIPS	Northern Ireland Prison Service
NIPSP	Northern Ireland Prison Service Payment
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NITA	Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance
NLW	National Living Wage
OME	Office of Manpower Economics
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OSG	Operational Support Grade
PAYE	Pay As You Earn
PCO	Prisoner Custody Officer
PECCS	Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service
PGA(NI)	Prison Governors' Association (Northern Ireland)

POA(NI)	The professional trades union for prison, correctional and secure psychiatric workers (Northern Ireland)
PPCO	Principal Prisoner Custody Officer
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PSPRB	Prison Service Pay Review Body
RLW	Living Wage Foundation's Real Living Wage
SDP	Special Duty Payment
SO	Senior Officer
SPCO	Senior Prisoner Custody Officer
SRA	Supplementary Risk Allowance

The Northern Ireland Prison Service and our remit group

The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is responsible for the operation and delivery of services within the Northern Ireland prison system. Its main statutory duties are set out in the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953. It is an Executive Agency of the Department of Justice.

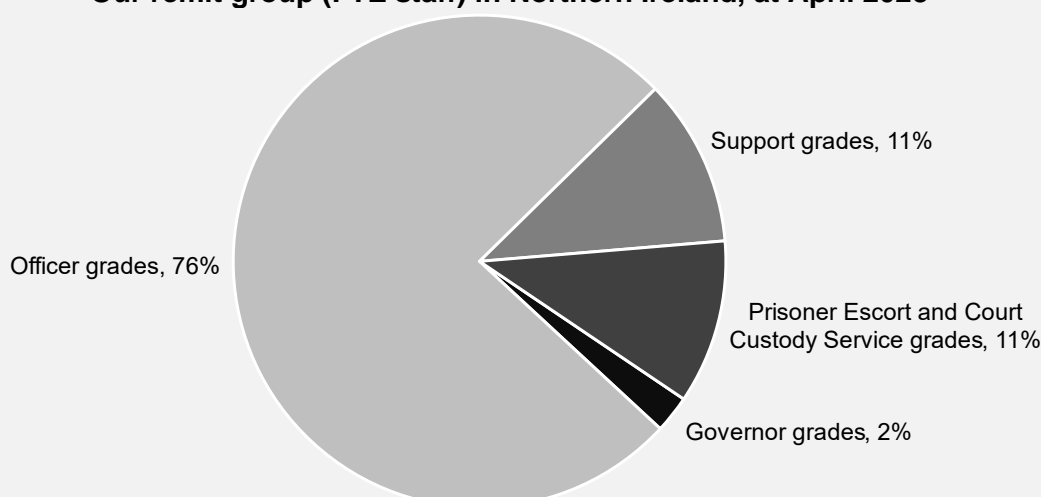
The overall aim of NIPS is to improve public safety by reducing the risk of reoffending through the management and rehabilitation of offenders in custody. The Service, through its staff, serves the community by keeping in secure, safe, and humane custody those committed by the courts and, by working with prisoners and with other organisations, seeks to reduce the risk of reoffending. In so doing it aims to protect the public and to contribute to peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

There are three operational establishments in Northern Ireland. The average daily prison population in the financial year 2022-23 was 1,685, 12.8% higher than the previous year.ⁱⁱ

NIPS paybill costs relating to the remit group in 2022-23 were approximately £64.7 million.ⁱⁱⁱ

At April 2023 there were 1,266 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in our remit group, a 2.1% increase from the previous year. The composition is below.

Our remit group (FTE staff) in Northern Ireland, at April 2023^{iv}



Grade group	Staff numbers (FTE)
Governor grades	31
Officer grades ^v	959
Support grades ^{vi}	140
Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service grades ^{vii}	136
Total	1,266

ⁱⁱ Department of Justice, (2023). *Northern Ireland Prison Population 2022-23*. (online) Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-prison-population-2022-23> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

ⁱⁱⁱ This includes employer National Insurance contributions and other pension costs. Office of Manpower Economics (OME) analysis of NIPS workforce data.

^{iv} OME analysis of NIPS workforce data.

^v Comprising Custody Prison Officers, Main Grade Officers and Senior Officers.

^{vi} Comprising Night Custody Officers and Operational Support Grades.

^{vii} Comprising Prisoner Custody Officers and Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service Managers.

Prison Service Pay Review Body 2023 report on Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

- i. This report sets out our recommendations on pay and allowances for operational prison staff in Northern Ireland. Our recommendations for 2023 are:

Recommendation 1: We recommend that with effect from 1 April 2023, pay scales are adjusted as set out in Appendix C, delivering a consolidated base pay uplift of 7% for Operational Support Grades, Night Custody Officers, Prisoner Custody Officers and 5% for Custody Prison Officers, post-2002 Main Grade Officers, Prisoner Escorting and Courts Custody Service Managers, Senior Officers and all governor grades, including the Director of Prisons.

Recommendation 2: From 1 April 2023, we recommend that pay scales remain unchanged for pre-2002 Main Grade Officers and that a non-consolidated one-off payment equivalent to 5% of base pay is made, as set out in Appendix C.

Recommendation 3: From 1 April 2023, we recommend that the lowest two points on the Custody Prison Officer pay scale are removed – shortening the scale from ten to eight points.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Supplementary Risk Allowance should, from 1 September 2023, continue to be aligned with the Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance rate.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that from 1 April 2023 the Dirty Protest payments increase from £8.00 to £10.00 for periods of up to four hours and from £16.00 to £20.00 for periods of four hours or more.

Introduction and context

- ii. Northern Ireland has been without a functioning Assembly and Executive since early 2022. This has meant that there have been limited policy decisions and planning for the longer-term has been extremely difficult. There have also been significant budgetary constraints in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the United Kingdom. In addition, there is a volatile economic context and an environment of heightened industrial action. We note that some other Pay Review Body remit

groups have taken part in strike and other industrial action, with some settlements being reached outside the normal Pay Review Body process. Our remit group is legally prohibited from taking industrial action.

iii. Following the coronavirus (Covid-19) restrictions put in place from March 2020, regimes in prisons in Northern Ireland have returned to normal. At the same time, the prison population has been increasing, necessitating old accommodation that had been planned to be demolished being brought back in to use. Staff told us that vacancies had increased and workloads had intensified. Many staff told us that they felt undervalued by the public and the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), along with feeling unrewarded in relation to pay. There continue to be high levels of sickness absence which further increases the pressure on staff who are present at work.

iv. We are again reporting late, long after the 1 April pay effective date, which has been particularly problematic for staff this year when inflation has been running at some of the highest levels seen for a long time. This is frustrating for everyone concerned and is unfair on NIPS staff. Whilst the key causes of the delay lie outside our gift, we reiterate our previous commitment to do everything in our power to work with the parties towards a timetable that gets us back to the 1 April pay effective date, even if this is done incrementally.

Our remit

v. The Permanent Secretary of the Department of Justice (Northern Ireland) wrote to our Chair on 4 April 2023 requesting the start of the 2023-24 pay round. Whilst the letter did not limit or restrict our remit it asked us to take account of three main areas: to be cognisant of the Northern Ireland pay guidance (which was then unpublished); to ensure affordability was central to our considerations; and to continue to close the pay differentials between the pre-2002 and post-2002 grades and not reopen any pay gaps.

Evidence

vi. In reaching our recommendations, we have taken account of the evidence provided by NIPS, the POA (Northern Ireland), the Prison Governors' Association (Northern Ireland), the Community union and the evidence we heard from staff in our remit group during our in-person visits in September 2023. We have analysed

evidence on recruitment and retention, motivation and morale, equality and diversity and the competitiveness of the Prison Service's employment package in Northern Ireland. We use data from a range of sources, including the Office for National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. We have also considered the wider economic and political context and the affordability of our proposals. Due to the late running of the round, in making our recommendations, we have given greater weight to economic factors at the beginning of 2023 and nearer to the pay effective date of 1 April 2023, alongside considering more recent economic information.

vii. Having requested this for several years, we were pleased that during oral evidence NIPS outlined a clear, two-stage pay strategy that the Service would work towards. We welcome this strategy and look forward to receiving updates on progress.

2023 pay award

viii. In light of the evidence, we concluded that this year it would be appropriate to recommend a greater increase for the lowest paid. Therefore, we recommend a consolidated increase of 7% for Operational Support Grades, Night Custody Officers, Prisoner Custody Officers and 5% for Custody Prison Officers (CPO), post-2002 Main Grade Officers (MGOs), Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service Managers, Senior Officers, and all governor grades including the Director of Prisons. In reaching these recommendations, we took account of a range of factors including the level of pay awards elsewhere in the public sector and in the economy generally, the relative absence of major recruitment and retention problems, other than in the lowest paid grades, and the impact of the cost of living at the time the pay award was due – April 2023.

ix. For pre-2002 MGOs, we sought to balance fairness with the policy of removing the last remaining pay differential, recognising that all members of the remit group are facing cost of living pressures. Given that NIPS has outlined a clear, long-term pay strategy that addresses the structural issues in the pay system which appears to be achievable over a sensible timeframe, we have departed from our recent practice of awarding at least some element of a consolidated award to all. Having considered the available options this year, and after much deliberation, we conclude it is appropriate to recommend a non-consolidated award only for pre-2002

MGOs. It seems to us to be the most effective way to make significant progress on closing the consolidated pay gap between the pre-2002 MGOs and CPO grades. We therefore recommend that the pre-2002 MGOs receive a non-consolidated one-off payment equivalent to 5% of base pay.

Cost of our recommendations

x. We estimate that our recommendations will result in a cost increase of approximately 5.1% (£3.3 million), excluding pay progression.^{viii,ix} This is around 2.3% higher than the estimate of the cost of NIPS's proposals.

Conclusion

xi. This year we have made recommendations that seek to make significant progress in addressing the final problematic pay differential that remains in the NIPS pay structure. All the parties and staff identified the headline pay uplift as the key priority for this year. Our headline awards for the post-2002 grades provide staff with an uplift of 5% in consolidated pay while lower paid grades receive a 7% increase. Pre-2002 grades receive a non-consolidated award equivalent to 5% of base pay. Whilst we realise that this will not give all staff a consolidated pay increase, we believe the time is right to accelerate progress towards the new pay strategy. We welcome NIPS's longer term pay strategy and we support the direction of travel.

Tim Flesher CB (*Chair*)

Mary Carter

Luke Corkill

Nigel Cotgrove

Judith Gillespie CBE

Roy Grant

Raj Jethwa

^{viii} This percentage takes account of pay rises, restructuring, oncosts, and the Supplementary Risk Allowance, but excludes any increases to other allowances (based on staff numbers as at 1 April 2023).

^{ix} We have estimated that our recommendations will result in a cost increase of 8.3% (£5.4 million) including pay progression. We note that pay progression was applied by NIPS in August 2023.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Our role

1.1 The Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) was established in 2001 under statute¹ to examine and report on matters relating to the pay and allowances to be applied in the public sector prison services in England and Wales, and in Northern Ireland. For Northern Ireland, following the devolution of justice, separate regulations were established: The Prison Service (Pay Review Body) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.²

1.2 The PSPRB was created as a compensatory mechanism for our remit group's loss of the right to take industrial action of any form. This was outlined in the 336th report³ (2005) by the International Labour Organization, in which the Government of the United Kingdom gave a clear and unequivocal commitment only to depart from the PSPRB's recommendations in "exceptional circumstances" and agreed that such recommendations would be complied with in practice. This pledge has not been rescinded. This therefore places a particular responsibility on us, and it is one that we take very seriously when formulating our recommendations. Given this context, we consider that, if any of our recommendations are rejected, the remit group should receive a full explanation detailing the "exceptional circumstances" that have led to that decision.

1.3 We also have standing terms of reference. They emphasise that we should provide independent advice based on the range of evidence available to us. There are several elements in our terms of reference which we are asked to take account of when making our recommendations, these are:

- Recruitment and retention factors. For example, whether the Service can recruit and retain the numbers of suitably able staff that it requires;
- Remit group morale;

¹ Legislation.gov.uk, (2001). *The Prison Service (Pay Review Body) Regulations 2001*. (online) Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2001/1161/contents/made> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

² Legislation.gov.uk, (2012). *The Prison Service (Pay Review Body) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012*. (online) Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2012/191/made> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

³ The International Labour Organization, (2005). *336th report of the Committee on Freedom of Association*. (online) Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604\(2005-88-series-B\).pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604(2005-88-series-B).pdf) [accessed on 22 January 2024].

- Labour market issues, including regional and local variations, and the effects on recruitment and retention;
- The legal obligations placed on the Prison Service;
- Affordability of our proposals, which includes the Government of the United Kingdom's inflation target, and the funds available to the Prison Service; and
- The economic and other evidence submitted by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) on behalf of the Government of Northern Ireland, trade unions, staff, professional associations and others.

Outcome of our last report

1.4 In our 2022 Northern Ireland report,⁴ we recommended a consolidated headline award of at least 4% for all uniformed and governor grades, except pre-2002 officer grades, where we recommended a mixture of consolidated and non-consolidated elements to reach a total award of 4%. We also recommended increasing the Supplementary Risk Allowance for all eligible staff to the 1 September 2022 level of the Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance along with increases to all three tiers of the Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service drivers' allowance. We also asked NIPS to provide a comprehensive pay strategy that addressed the structural issues in the pay system.

1.5 In response⁵ to our report the Government of Northern Ireland accepted our recommendations in full, although it made two modifications. The maximum of the Custody Prison Officer and post-2002 Main Grade Officer scales were increased from £36,791 to £37,403 and the maximum of the post-2002 Senior Officer scale from £44,406 to £44,732.

Our remit this year

1.6 The Permanent Secretary of the Department of Justice (Northern Ireland) wrote to our Chair on 4 April 2023 requesting the start of the 2023-24 pay round. The letter (transcript at Appendix A) did not limit or restrict our remit. It noted the United Kingdom Government's commitment to Parliament to place Northern Ireland's public finances on a stable footing. The letter asked us to take account of three main areas:

⁴ Prison Service Pay Review Body, (2022). *PSPRB Thirteenth report on Northern Ireland: 2022*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/psprb-thirteenth-report-on-northern-ireland-2022> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

⁵ Ibid

to be cognisant of the Northern Ireland pay guidance (which was then unpublished); to ensure affordability was central to our considerations; and to continue to close the pay differentials between the pre-2002 and post-2002 grades and not reopen any pay gaps. The Northern Ireland public sector pay policy guidance for 2023-24 was published⁶ in May 2023 and stated that the overarching approach was for awards to be affordable in each department's budget settlement as set out in the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's Written Northern Ireland Budget for 2023-24. This budget⁷ provided an allocation of £1.2 billion in funding for the Department of Justice. We received written evidence from the parties at the end of September 2023.

1.7 Northern Ireland has been without a functioning Assembly and Executive since early 2022. This has meant that there have been limited policy decisions and planning for the longer term has been extremely difficult. There have also been significant budgetary constraints in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Our timetable

1.8 In each of our recent reports we have noted that the annual pay rounds continue to run late and have done so since our 2013 report. It remains our view that changes to pay should be implemented on 1 April in the relevant pay year. We again repeat our desire for the timetable to return as soon as possible to one that sees staff receiving their pay award on time every year. We return to this matter in Chapter 4.

Our evidence base

1.9 At the end of September 2023, we received written submissions from NIPS and the POA (Northern Ireland) (POA(NI)). The Prison Governors' Association (PGA(NI)) opted again not to submit written evidence. We held oral evidence sessions with:

⁶ Department of Finance, (2023). *Public Sector Pay Policy Guidance 2023-2024 published*. (online) Available at: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/news/public-sector-pay-policy-guidance-2023-2024-published> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

⁷ UK Parliament (2023). *NI Finances 2023-24*. (online) Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-04-27/hcws748> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

- NIPS officials led by its new Director General, Beverley Wall;
- The POA(NI), represented by Ivor Dunne, Northern Ireland Area Chair, and members of the Northern Ireland Area Committee; and
- The PGA(NI), led by Richard Taylor, Northern Ireland Area Chair, and members of the Northern Ireland Area Committee.

1.10 We also received written representations from the Community trade union.

1.11 When considering our recommendations for this report, in addition to written and oral evidence from the parties, we also took account of evidence from a range of different sources. These included:

- Economic and pay data from a range of sources, including the Office for National Statistics;
- Statistical data on our remit group provided by NIPS, including background and pay information, which is shared with the parties; and
- Information gathered from our September 2023 in-person visits.

Visits

1.12 We undertake a planned programme of visits in Northern Ireland that ensures we are able to see a broad range of working environments. Visiting staff in their workplace allows us to obtain a better understanding of the concerns our remit group have and to see first-hand the working environment in which they undertake their daily duties. We would like to thank all those staff that spoke to us this year. In Chapter 2 we provide some of the key themes that staff reported to us.

Our 2023 report

1.13 In Chapter 2 we set out the economic, financial and environmental context, detailed information on our remit group, and summarise the evidence we received. Chapter 3 discusses and sets out our analysis of the evidence and our recommendations on pay and allowances for 2023. Our final chapter, Chapter 4, comments on those areas to which we believe the parties should give further attention and provide further evidence on for our 2024 report.

Chapter 2: Context and evidence

Introduction

2.1 In this chapter we set out the context for our recommendations. The chapter provides information on the economic situation and describes both the financial and environmental context in which the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) made its proposals and how these informed the recommendations we have made. This chapter presents background information and evidence on our remit group in terms of its composition, recruitment and retention, and motivation and morale. It concludes with a summary of the main points that arose from our in-person visits in September 2023 and the parties' proposals to us this year.

Economic context

2.2 We consider a range of economic evidence to inform our recommendations. Once again, the timetable ran late and we found ourselves formulating our recommendations in December 2023 for pay effective from 1 April 2023. In making our recommendations we have therefore given greater weight to economic factors at the beginning of the year alongside considering more recent economic information.

Economic growth

2.3 Over the four quarters to Q2 2023, economic growth was 1.7% in Northern Ireland and 0.4% in the UK as a whole. The Northern Ireland economy was affected slightly less by the pandemic than the UK as a whole. This is most likely due to the greater share of public services in Northern Ireland and a smaller share of private sector services. Smaller falls in economic activity during the first wave of the pandemic and stronger recovery meant that the Northern Ireland economy regained its pre-pandemic size by Q2 2021, compared to Q4 2021 for the whole UK. However, weak economic growth over the medium term, notably between 2010 to 2017, meant that it took until 2022 for the Northern Ireland economy to regain the level of economic activity seen in 2007.

Inflation

2.4 There are no official measures of either the cost of living or inflation relating to Northern Ireland alone. The UK inflation rate (Consumer Prices Index (CPI)) was 4.6% in October 2023. The Bank of England forecasted CPI inflation to average

4.6% in Q4 2023, while the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasted it to be 4.8% for the same period. Bank of England forecasts for 2024 predict steady disinflation (a fall in the rate of inflation) to 3.6% by Q2 2024 and 3.1% by Q4 2024.⁸ We note that CPI inflation was 8.7% in April 2023, which is the month from which the majority of our recommendations are due to take effect.

Labour market

2.5 Like the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland has seen strong recent growth in the number of employees. At the start of the pandemic, between March and November 2020, the number of employees in Northern Ireland fell by 2.3%, while the number of employees in the UK as a whole fell by 3.3%. The immediate recovery was stronger in Northern Ireland and the number of employees was 5.0% above pre-pandemic levels in September 2023, compared to 3.8% for all of the UK.⁹ The better performance of the Northern Ireland labour market during the pandemic is likely due to the higher proportion of jobs in the public sector and the lower proportion in the private sector. The latter, especially industries such as hospitality, arts, and recreation, were especially heavily hit by lockdown measures, although they have seen strong recovery.

2.6 Despite this stronger recent growth, employment rates in Northern Ireland remain below the rest of the UK. In the second quarter of 2023, the employment rate in Northern Ireland was 71.1%, while the UK rate was 75.5%. The unemployment rate (those looking for and available for work) was also lower in Northern Ireland – at 2.7% compared to 4.3% for the UK as a whole – but economic inactivity¹⁰ was higher – at 26.9% compared to 21.1% for the UK as a whole.¹¹

⁸ Bank of England, (2023). *Monetary Policy Report – November 2023*. (online) Available at: <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy-report/2023/november-2023> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

⁹ NISRA, (2023). *Northern Ireland Labour Market Report*. (online) Available at: <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/economy-and-labour-market/labour-market-report-october-2023.html#> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

¹⁰ People are defined as ‘economically inactive’ when they are not in employment and have not been seeking work within the last four weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next two weeks.

¹¹ NISRA, (2023). *Northern Ireland Labour Market Report*. (online) Available at: <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/economy-and-labour-market/labour-market-report-october-2023.html#> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

Earnings

2.7 Average earnings in Northern Ireland are persistently lower than in the UK as a whole, with median earnings¹² in Northern Ireland 7.4% below the UK in September 2023. This negative differential increased marginally from 7.3% for the whole of 2022. In April 2023, median earnings in Northern Ireland were 7.8% below the UK. The negative gap in mean earnings increased to 19.7% in April 2023, an increase of just over two percentage points since 2015.¹³

2.8 Median pay growth in Northern Ireland has shown a similar pattern to the whole UK since 2017, falling sharply in April and May 2020 as working hours fell at the start of the pandemic, and bouncing back a year later to reach a peak of close to 10.0%. During 2022, median pay continued to increase albeit at a slower rate and with more volatility in Northern Ireland. In the first eight months of 2023, median earnings growth averaged 7.0% in Northern Ireland, compared to 7.6% in the UK as a whole. In the year to April 2023 median earnings growth averaged 6.4% in Northern Ireland, compared to 7.3% in the UK.

2.9 Pay settlements data show a median 6.0% pay award in the three months to end of March 2023 for the UK as a whole. In the 12 months to the end of March 2023, the median award was 5.0%; over this period a quarter of pay awards were 6.6% or above and a quarter were 3.3% or below.¹⁴

2.10 The best available source on the level of public and private sector earnings in Northern Ireland is the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). The latest data are provisional and relate to the financial year 2022-23. While median annual gross earnings¹⁵ overall for that financial year were 9.5% lower in Northern Ireland than in the UK as a whole, in Northern Ireland this gap was quite different for the public and private sectors. Private sector median earnings were 14.6% lower in

¹² HMRC Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information covers all income from PAYE. This includes: bonuses; overtime; shift premium; allowances; arrears; employees on trainee or junior rates of pay; employees whose earnings were affected by absence; payrolled redundancy payments; payrolled signing-on fees; and payrolled expenses.

¹³ NISRA, (2023). *Northern Ireland Labour Market Report*. (online) Available at: <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/economy-and-labour-market/labour-market-report-october-2023.html#> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

¹⁴ Office of Manpower Economics (OME) analysis of unpublished XperthHR data. Only data for UK as a whole is available.

¹⁵ ASHE collects information on actual payments made to employees and includes bonuses and incentive payments. No headline measure is published which excludes these.

Northern Ireland than the whole UK, while Northern Ireland public sector median earnings were 0.3% higher.

National Living Wage and Real Living Wage

2.11 From 1 April 2023, the National Living Wage (NLW) for workers aged 23 and older increased by 9.7% from £9.50 an hour to £10.42 an hour.¹⁶ The Government's target is, economic conditions permitting, for the NLW to reach two-thirds of median earnings by 2024. However, in November 2021, the Northern Ireland Government announced¹⁷ that it had secured accreditation from the Living Wage Foundation as a Real Living Wage (RLW) employer and would ensure Northern Ireland Civil Service staff (including NIPS staff) were paid the RLW. At the time of writing, the Living Wage Foundation had set the rate at £12 per hour, to be implemented within six months of the October 2023 announcement. We note that the 2023 Operational Support Grade (OSG) pay scale proposed by NIPS in its evidence falls entirely below the RLW, along with some of the lower pay points for Night Custody Officer (NCO) and Prisoner Custody Officer (PCO) grades. However, NIPS's written evidence was submitted before the Living Wage Foundation's announcement was made.

Financial context

2.12 As we noted in Chapter 1, the Northern Ireland public sector pay policy for 2023-24 stated that pay awards were required to be affordable and within departmental budgets. As noted in the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's written statement¹⁸ to Parliament in April 2023 there has been some flexibility given to the Northern Ireland Government on its repayment of the £297 million overspend from the 2022-23 budget, to provide some protection from severe reductions to front line services in Northern Ireland. NIPS also noted in its written evidence that HM Treasury guidance had stated that departments needed to ensure that pay awards were affordable within their spending settlements. In oral evidence NIPS said the

¹⁶ GOV.uk, (2023). *National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

¹⁷ Department of Finance, (2021). *Workers should be paid a fair wage – Murphy*. (online) Available at: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/news/workers-should-be-paid-fair-wage-murphy> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

¹⁸ UK Parliament (2023). *NI Finances 2023-24*. (online) Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-04-27/hcws748> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive was challenging and there remained a number of pay recommendations for health service staff and the police that were outstanding. Overall, NIPS said that the financial picture in Northern Ireland was extremely challenging.

Affordability

2.13 NIPS told us in its evidence this year that it again sought to make progress in reducing the differentials between the pre-2002 Main Grade Officer (MGO) pay scale and the post-2002 MGO/Custody Prison Officer (CPO) scales. Therefore, given its limited funds, it had proposed targeting additional monies to reduce this differential as this formed part of the first element of its pay strategy. NIPS's strategy saw the gap being closed over three years and when questioned further in oral evidence, NIPS said this was at a rate that was affordable. NIPS costed its proposals for 2023-24 at approximately £1.8 million or 2.8% when excluding progression (£3.9 million or 6.0% when including progression). It stated that pay reform would take time but had to be completed within its budget. Further information on NIPS's pay strategy is set out later in this chapter.

Cost of living

2.14 While on our visits, staff again told us about the impact the continuing increase to the cost of living was having on them. Some told us that last year's pay increase of 4% was not high enough to compensate for the increased cost of living.

The composition of our remit group

2.15 At 1 April 2023 there were 1,293 staff (on a headcount basis) in our remit group, an increase of 38 staff (3%) compared to 1 April 2022. Data covering 2019 to 2023 can be seen in table 2.1. The key points are:

- Governor grades have tended to remain stable, although there has been a significant reduction (a third) in the number of Heads of Unit since 2022;
- Senior Officer numbers have seen a 14.5% increase since 2022, prior to which numbers were relatively stable;
- MGO staff numbers continue to decrease;
- The number of CPOs has increased, to the highest number since being introduced in 2012, partly due to commensurate reductions in the numbers of

MGOs and also increased recruitment as a result of prison population increases;

- NCO staff numbers have settled over the last two years, following some significant increases since 2019;
- OSG numbers remain static, but this grade has not been recruited-to for some time; and
- Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service (PECCS) numbers have fluctuated but were around 9.5% lower in April 2023 compared to the peak in 2021.

Table 2.1: Northern Ireland Prison Service staff numbers (headcount), 1 April 2018 to 2023¹⁹

Grade	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Director of Prisons / Governor in Charge / Head of Function	12	15	14	13	13
Head of Unit	22	19	23	27	18
Senior Officer	110	99	122	117	134
Main Grade Officer	287	263	245	216	204
Custody Prison Officer	565	597	620	590	633
Night Custody Officer	107	103	123	132	133
Operational Support Grade	9	8	8	8	8
Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service	149	156	166	152	150
Total	1,261	1,260	1,321	1,255	1,293

Staff characteristics

2.16 An important part of our standing terms of reference requires us to consider the legal obligations on NIPS in relation to equality and diversity. Whilst the amount of data covering equality and diversity has increased and improved, coverage remains variable, especially around data broken down by protected characteristics. We welcome NIPS's commitment to providing equality of opportunity and its aim to recruit, retain and promote the best available people to provide a high-quality service to the people of Northern Ireland.

¹⁹ OME analysis of NIPS workforce data.

2.17 On an annual basis, we monitor the diversity of our remit group using the latest available staffing data provided to us. Of the 1,293 staff at 1 April 2023, 68% were male and 32% were female. This has remained broadly stable over the last three years. Table 2.2 shows that PECCS continues to have the highest proportion of female staff whilst the most senior governor grades have the lowest proportion of females, at 15% in 2023.

Table 2.2: Staff in post by grade and gender (headcount), at 1 April 2023²⁰

Grade	Male	Female	Male (%)	Female (%)
Director of Prisons / Governor in Charge / Head of Function	11	2	85%	15%
Head of Unit	11	7	61%	39%
Senior Officer	89	45	66%	34%
Main Grade Officer	163	41	80%	20%
Custody Prison Officer	414	219	65%	35%
Night Custody Officer	99	34	74%	26%
Operational Support Grade	5	3	63%	38%
Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service	83	67	55%	45%
Total	875	418	68%	32%

2.18 The data we received on community background shows there have been limited changes in how our remit group defines itself. At 1 April 2023, those identifying themselves as coming from a Protestant community background and from a Catholic community background remained the same as the previous year. As we noted in our last report, according to the 2021 Census, 42% of the population in Northern Ireland was Catholic.²¹ Table 2.3 shows that CPOs had the highest proportion of staff who identified as Catholic at 18%, with MGOs the lowest identifying as Catholic at 8%.

²⁰ OME analysis of NIPS workforce data.

²¹ NISRA, (2022). *Census 2021 main statistics religion tables*. (online) Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-religion-tables> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

Table 2.3: Percentage of staff in post by community background, at 1 April 2023²²

Grade	Protestant	Catholic	Not Determined/ Not Known
Governor grades and Senior Officer	82%	13%	4%
Main Grade Officer	81%	8%	11%
Custody Prison Officer	69%	18%	13%
Night Custody Officer / Operational Support Grade	74%	13%	13%
Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service	74%	12%	14%
Total	74%	14%	12%

2.19 The age profile of our remit group has been largely unchanged over the last three years. Amongst the officer, support and PECCS grades the most populous age groupings on 1 April 2023 were 51-55, 31-35 and 26-30. However, this masks a number of differences between the three broad prison officer grades: all pre-2002 MGOs were over 50, all post-2002 MGOs were over 40 and most CPOs were under 40. The majority of governor grades remained in the age groups 51-55 and 56-60.

2.20 As at 1 April 2023, 86% of staff in post were 'White' an increase on last year's 79% figure. The remaining 14% of staff were categorised as 'Other/Not Known', a reduction from 21% at 1 April 2022. According to the 2021 Census, 97% of the population in Northern Ireland were 'White'.²³

2.21 Last year in oral evidence the Minister informed us that at March 2022 there was a 10.9% gap in median pay in favour of male staff compared to female staff. It was also noted that there was a 7.3% gap in median pay in favour of Protestant staff compared to Catholic staff. This year, it is positive to note that both of these gaps in median pay have fallen to 7.3% and 3.6% respectively at March 2023, although there remains more work to do to narrow the gaps further. The equivalent figures for the Northern Ireland Civil Service at March 2023 saw median pay for females being

²² OME analysis of NIPS workforce data.

²³ NISRA, (2022). *Census 2021 main statistics ethnicity tables*. (online) Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-ethnicity-tables> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

4.1% lower than the median pay for males and median pay for Catholics being 1.0% lower than for Protestants.²⁴

2.22 Following the closure of the Senior Officer pay differential last year a key part of NIPS's proposals was to work towards closing the last remaining pay differential between the pre-2002 MGO and CPO grades. NIPS noted in its grading review that CPOs and pre-2002 MGOs carry out the same role but for different levels of pay. In line with our terms of reference, we have used the data available to us this year when reaching our recommendations to identify potential effects on equality. We return to equality and diversity in Chapter 4.

Environmental context

Prison population

2.23 All the parties told us in oral evidence that the recent prison population increase was placing significant pressures on staff and the Service more widely, with some old accommodation that was due to be demolished having to be brought back into use. In the 12 months to March 2023 the average daily prison population across establishments increased by 12.8% to 1,685.²⁵ In the week ending 8 December 2023, the total prison population stood at 1,861 an increase of 7.6% on the 1,730 figure a year earlier and an increase of 10.5% on the 2022-23 average.²⁶

Prison reforms

2.24 Building on its Prisons 2020 strategy, NIPS informed us last year that it had embarked on a Prisons 25 by 25 strategy²⁷ that would run from 2022 until 2025. The strategy has five strands: Our People; Our Services; Our Infrastructure; Our Partnerships; and Our Contribution. In its written evidence NIPS stated that in year one there were 59 individual actions across 25 key areas. It said that 41 had been achieved, 16 not yet achieved and 2 not achieved.

²⁴ NISRA. (2023). *Pay In The Northern Ireland Civil Service Year Ending March 2023 – Published 30 November 2023 (Updated With 2023 ASHE Data)*. (online) Available at: [Pay in the Northern Ireland Civil Service \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/pay-in-the-northern-ireland-civil-service) [accessed on 22 January 2024].

²⁵ Department of Justice, (2023). *The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2022/23*. (online) Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/northern-ireland-prison-population-202223> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

²⁶ Department of Justice, (2023). *Weekly Situation Reports 2022/2023 – Week Ending 08 December 2023*. (online) Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/weekly-situation-reports-october-2015#toc-0> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

²⁷ Department of Justice (2022). *Prisons 25by25*. (online) Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/topics/prisons/prisons-25by25> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

2.25 Some of the key actions relating to our remit group included:

- Launch of a well-being help and support smartphone app for staff;
- Health checks at the HMP Maghaberry well-being hub;
- Resilience training provided by the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust;
- Learning needs analysis for Care and Supervision Unit staff and PECCS managers. This has now been extended to PCOs to inform recruit training;
- Work on a new online visit booking system; and
- Four X-ray body scanners installed across the prison sites.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons

2.26 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons inspected HMP Maghaberry²⁸ from 20 September to 6 October 2022 following an invitation by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland (CJINI). It was noted that Inspectors had called for urgent action to be taken by NIPS to address the outcomes affecting prisoners. The CJINI noted that the prison had declined in its performance against the healthy prison tests and there were concerns around access to drugs and improvement needed in the delivery of education, skills and work. Although the Inspectorate had noted that there had been some improvements, particularly around the use of technology to streamline processes, overall the findings were disappointing.

Assaults on staff

2.27 The number of assaults on staff varied depending on location. HMP Maghaberry, the largest establishment, has the highest number of assaults and this has been on an upward trajectory in recent years. Across the entire Service in 2022-23 there were a total of 74 assaults on staff, a slight reduction on the 77 in 2021-22. The peak was 123 assaults in 2014-15.

The security risk in Northern Ireland

2.28 In March 2022, the Northern Ireland Related Terrorism threat level was reduced to 'substantial' (an attack is likely). This was the first time in over a decade that the threat level in Northern Ireland was changed. In March 2023, however, the

²⁸ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, (2023). *Report on an unannounced inspection of Maghaberry Prison*. (online) Available at: <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2023/Apr-June/Maghaberry-Prison-Inspection> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland stated that the threat level had been raised from 'substantial' to 'severe' (an attack is highly likely). He noted that there had been an increase in the level of Northern Ireland Related Terrorism, which had targeted police officers and the lives of children and other members of the public.²⁹

2.29 Staff continue to tell us that they and their families face a very real threat because they work for the Prison Service. This affects their everyday lives from checking under vehicles, altering their routes to and from work and, in practice, being restricted in the choice of location of their homes, leisure activities and schools for their children. As in previous years, we note that PECCS staff feel particularly exposed because when escorting prisoners to and from court, and sitting in public view in courts they have a much more visible public profile. Prison staff also pointed out that the longer they stayed in the Service the harder it is for them to leave due to security considerations.

Recruitment and retention

2.30 An important part of our considerations when reaching our recommendations is the ability of NIPS to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified staff. In oral evidence NIPS informed us that it was content with the recruitment of CPOs and was expecting shortly to hit its CPO target staffing numbers. However, it acknowledged that recruitment for NCO and PCO grades was becoming more difficult. NIPS said it was also mindful that it needed to consider its staffing levels against the backdrop of an increasing prisoner population.

2.31 The Service also said that it would like to review its recruitment procedures as these had become a little too "unwieldy" and there remained issues with security clearance. We also heard from staff on visits that the time to get new staff into the Service from initial application to joining was too long. The POA (Northern Ireland) (POA(NI)) stated that the Service was no longer seen as a career but just a job, referencing that there had been 6,000 applications for CPO recruitment in 2012, but this had fallen to 700 in the latest campaign. It also considered that the appeal of the Service had fallen because of better pay increases in the private sector. The Prison Governors' Association (Northern Ireland) (PGA(NI)) also had concerns that the

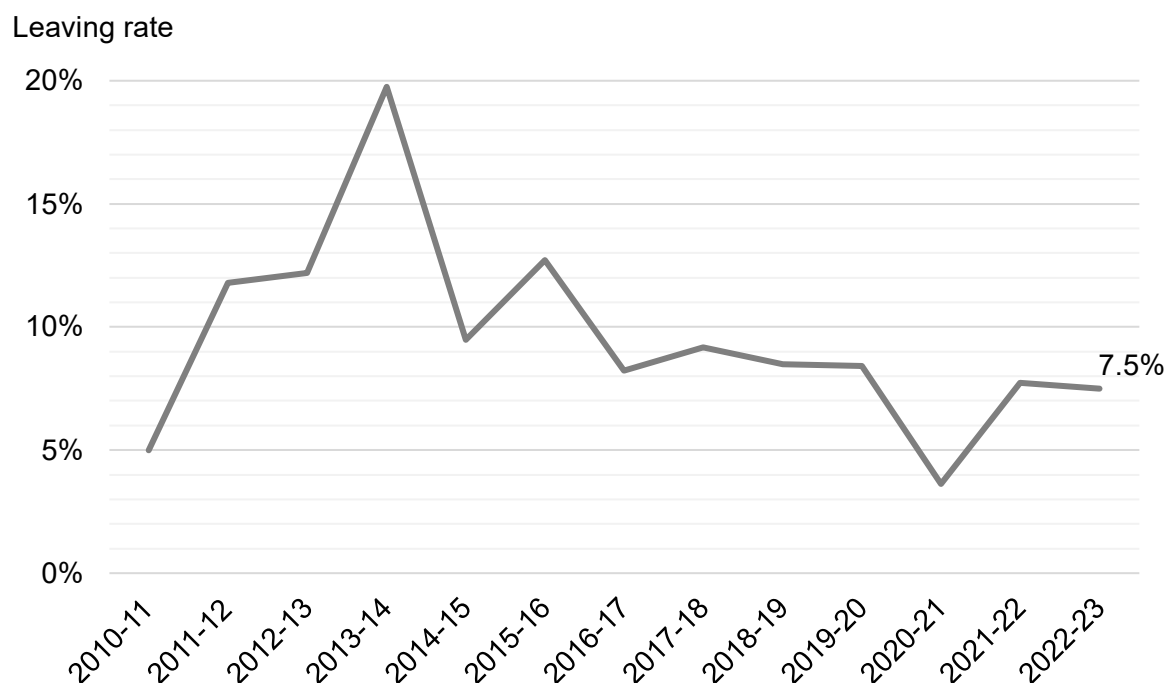
²⁹ GOV.uk, (2023). *Northern Ireland-related Terrorism threat level raised*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/northern-ireland-related-terrorism-threat-level-raised> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

recruitment process was not working as it should. It reported that for the most recent CPO recruitment campaign, only 40% of applicants had turned up for the assessment element of the process and of those only 20% were suitable. The PGA(NI) described recruitment and retention as being “dismal”.

Leaving rates

2.32 In the year to April 2023, 97 staff left the Service, equating to a leaving rate of 7.5%. Figure 2.1 shows that this was a slight decrease in the leaving rate from last year and continues the slow trend over the last five or six years, excluding 2020-21 which was likely due to Covid-19. In 2022-23 the main route to leaving was resignation (58% of leavers), followed by retirement (18%) and then medical retirement (15%). However, it should be noted that resignations increased from 43% of leavers in 2021-22 to 58% in 2022-23 whilst leavers due to retirement and medical retirement reduced. Those with 0-4 years of service were again the most numerous leavers across all grades.

Figure 2.1: Overall leaving rate of remit group staff, 2011-12 to 2022-23 (year to April)³⁰



³⁰ OME analysis of NIPS workforce data.

2.33 Table 2.4 shows the leaving rates for the most populous grades. PECCS grades had the highest leaving rates in 2022-23 at 13.3%, followed by NCOs at 10.5%. As noted, and borne out by the data, NIPS stated in oral evidence that it had become more challenging to recruit and retain NCO and PCO grades.

Table 2.4: Leaving rates by grade, 2018-19 to 2022-23 (year to April)³¹

Grade	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Main Grade Officer	7.3%	9.1%	5.7%	11.1%	5.9%
Custody Prison Officer	7.6%	6.9%	3.7%	6.9%	6.2%
Night Custody Officer	6.5%	9.7%	3.3%	6.1%	10.5%
Total officers and support grades	7.2%	8.3%	3.9%	7.5%	6.7%
Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service	17.4%	10.9%	1.2%	8.6%	13.3%
All grades	8.5%	8.4%	3.6%	7.7%	7.5%

2.34 We often hear on visits that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Border Force are seen as comparable roles for prison officers, whilst reportedly offering better levels of pay. Although we also hear, for the lower paid staff in the Service, that there are a whole host of other jobs offering similar pay but without the additional security risks. The POA(NI) noted rates of pay were not retaining staff and referenced Belfast City Council paying up to £24,000 a year for a vehicle washer.

2.35 The PGA(NI) raised again the issue of what it saw as a reluctance of Senior Officers to apply for promotion to the governor grades. It said that Senior Officers would not seek promotion as they could lose around £500 a month by not being able to work overtime. The union also had concerns around the second round of the Future Leaders Scheme, which it said had not been as successful as the first. In oral evidence, NIPS accepted this and stated that after completion of the second scheme in January 2024, it would pause and reassess what leadership programme was right for the Service.

³¹ OME analysis of NIPS workforce data.

Exit interviews

2.36 This is an issue that we have raised on a number of occasions with NIPS in recent years. In our previous reports we have highlighted the benefits of exit interviews, which provide valuable information and data on why staff are leaving and what jobs they are leaving for. We were therefore pleased to hear from the new Director General that exit interviews will be implemented over the coming year. We look forward to seeing initial information from the first sets of exit interviews. We return to this issue in Chapter 4.

Pay comparisons

2.37 In the context of relative pay comparisons, we used the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) ASHE data to assess the relative position of pay for operational staff, focusing on the most populous NIPS grades. We also conducted additional comparator analysis to compare pay for specific job roles in Northern Ireland which could be seen to be competitor roles for certain NIPS grades.³²

2.38 Our ASHE analysis is based on comparing NIPS prison officer pay (including the Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA)) with gross annual earnings across the Northern Ireland economy. At the time of writing, the latest available ASHE data was the provisional dataset for 2022-23.³³ Median gross earnings for full-time workers in Northern Ireland were £32,879 in 2022-23. Our findings from the analysis showed that:

- The pay scale maximum for Senior Officers has been located around the 75th percentile of economy-wide earnings from 2018-19 to 2022-23. Slight improvements in the relative position of the pay scale from 2014-15 to 2022-23 have, in part, been driven by increases in the SRA;
- Following restructuring in 2021-22, the new PECCS Manager pay scale maximum lies around the 70th percentile for 2022-23;
- Following restructuring of the CPO scale in 2015-16 and merging with the post-2002 MGO scale in 2021-22, the relative position of the combined pay

³² We note that, whilst the SRA is not part of base pay for the recruited-to grades, it has been included in the comparator analysis, to reflect the remuneration staff can expect to receive.

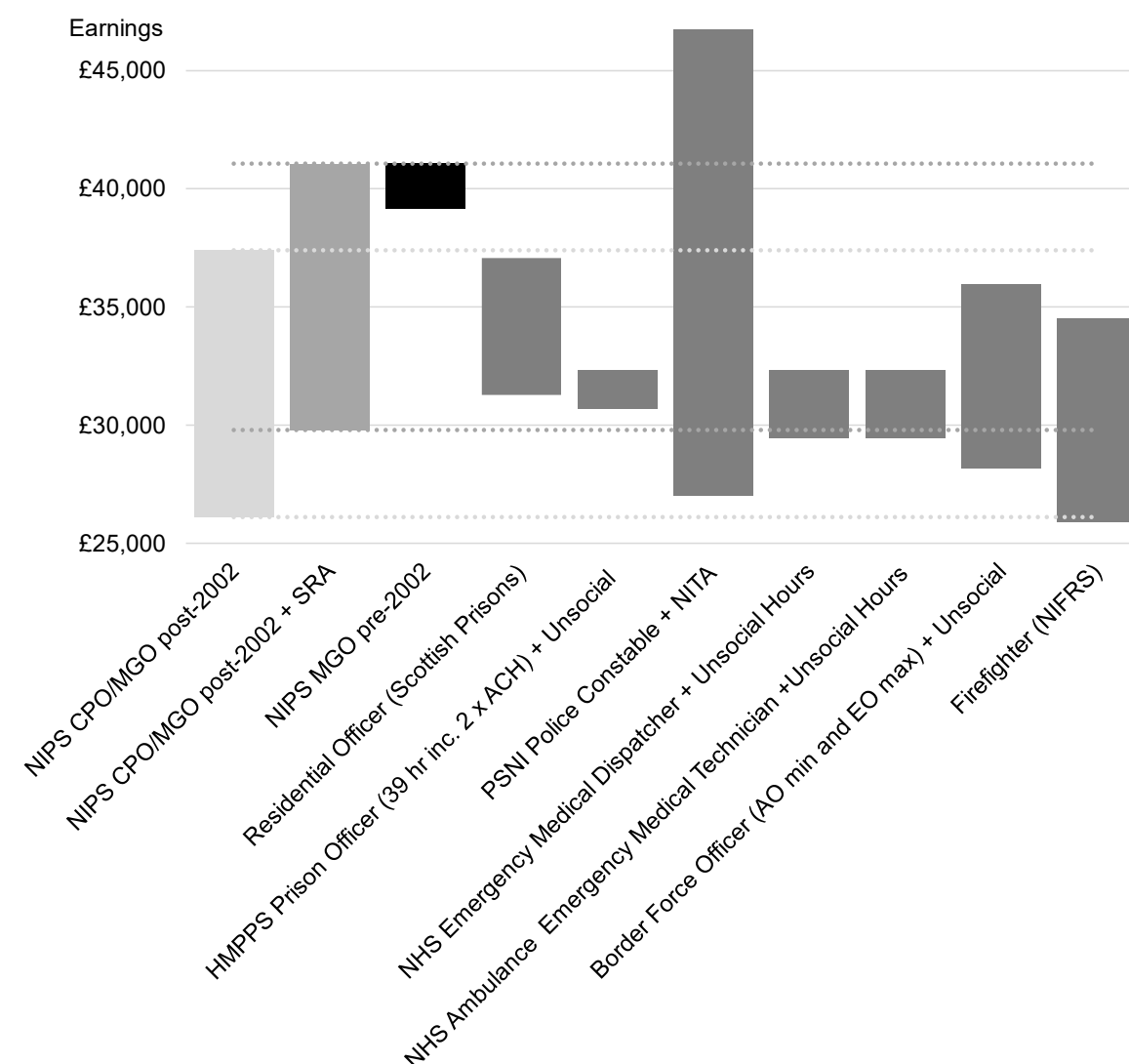
³³ ONS, (2023), *Employee earnings in the UK: 2023*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletin/s/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2023> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

scale has improved. The CPO scale maximum has moved from 7-10% above economy-wide median earnings in 2015-16 to 20% above economy-wide median earnings in 2022-23.

- The relative position of the NCO pay scale has improved since 2018-19, with the maximum increasing to the median of economy-wide earnings; and,
- PECCS PCO pay has been below median economy-wide earnings, however its relative position was improved in 2018-19, when an additional point was added to the scale. In 2022-23, the pay scale maximum was 9% below median earnings, compared to 17% in 2017-18, whilst the relative position of the minimum has increased more slowly to about 17% below median earnings.

2.39 In terms of occupational comparisons, using 2022-23 pay scales, our analysis of the most populous grades showed that the MGO and CPO grades compared favourably to their comparators. As Figure 2.2 shows, pre-2002 MGO pay exceeded that of all of the comparators examined, with the exception of police constables. The CPO scale maximum, whether including or excluding SRA, was also above those same comparator maxima. This is an improvement on 2021-22 when there were overlaps with the higher ends of the comparator ranges. The improvement is due to two additional pay points being added to the CPO maximum as part of last year's pay award to create a higher maximum. However, as at April 2023 there were no staff receiving these two top increments.

Figure 2.2: CPO and MGO pay compared to comparator pay ranges, 2022-23.^{34,35,36}



³⁴ OME analysis adapted from Incomes Data Research (IDR), (2019). *Prison Pay Comparability Study*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-pay-comparability-study> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

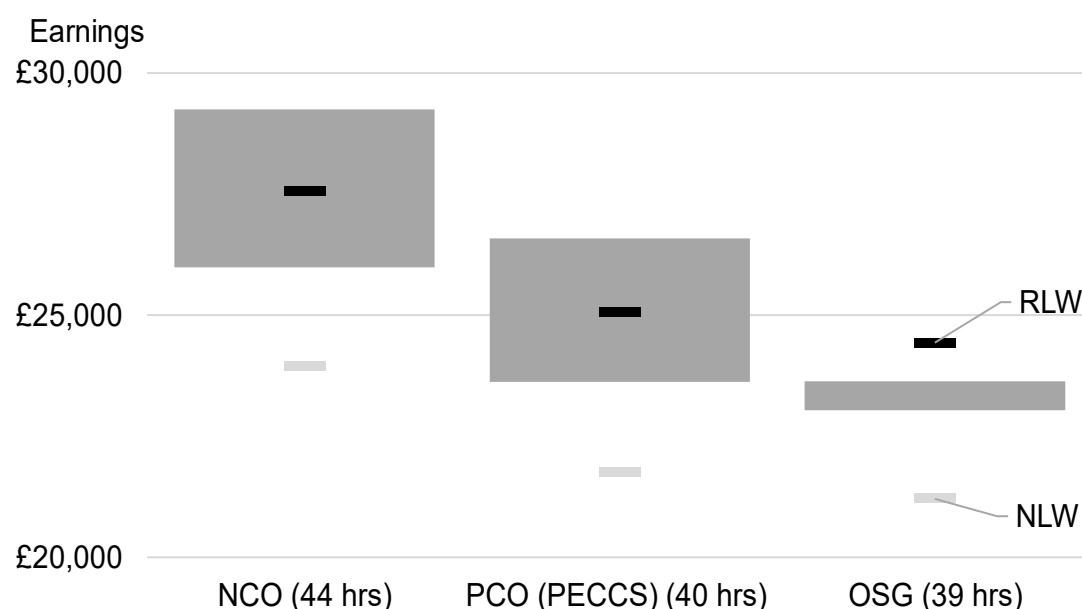
³⁵ All data relate to 2022-23. NIPS: unpublished payroll data from 1 April 2022. The SRA payment has been weighted to align with the 1 April to 31 March pay period. NIFRS: NIFRS, (2022). *Pay settlement 2022*. (online) Available at: <https://www.fbu.org.uk/pay-rates/pay-settlement-2022>. Scottish Prison Service: based on unpublished Scottish Prison Service payroll data from 1 April 2022. HMPPS: GOV.uk, (2023) *PSPRB Twenty Second report in England and Wales 2023*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/psprb-twenty-second-report-on-england-and-wales-2023>. PSNI: GOV.uk, (2023). *Police Remuneration Review Body 8th report: 2022*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-remuneration-review-body-8th-report-2022>. NHS: NHS Employers, (2022). *Pay scales for 2022/23*. (online) Available at: <https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/pay-scales-202223>. Home Office Border Force: unpublished Home Office payroll data from 1 July 2022. [all links accessed on 22 January 2024].

³⁶ The salary points for NHS and Border Force both include an estimate of unsocial hours. These estimates were based on IDR's calculations in the 2019 report.

National Living Wage and Real Living Wage comparisons

2.40 As noted earlier in this chapter, in November 2021 the Northern Ireland Government committed to pay all its Civil Service staff (including NIPS staff) at least the RLW. 2022-23 pay for all grades of prison staff at all pay points exceeded the RLW (£10.90 per hour) for that year. However, it was announced in October 2023 that the RLW would be increased to £12 per hour. The Living Wage Foundation expects employers that wish to pay the RLW to follow the uprating within six months of the announcement. The effect of this would be that all OSGs and those NCOs and PCOs who are on the two lowest pay points for their band would be paid less than the RLW if their pay was not increased. Figure 2.3 illustrates this.

Figure 2.3: Bands 1 and 2 pay scales (2022-23) compared to National Living Wage and Real Living Wage (2023-24), based on contractual hours³⁷



Motivation and morale

2.41 Staff and the trade unions continue to consider motivation and morale to be low. Staff told us on visits that the burnout from Covid-19 had been replaced by workload issues and staffing vacancies, particularly due to sickness absence. The PGA(NI) said sickness absence was putting a strain on those staff turning up to work because they could be rotated around five or six workplaces each day within the prison. The POA(NI) also noted the high levels of sickness absence and burnout

³⁷ Living Wage Foundation, (2023). *What is it?* (online) Available at: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

amongst staff. NIPS accepted the detrimental impact that high sickness absence rates were having on staff motivation and morale.

Sickness absence

2.42 The number of working days lost per member of staff per year was 27.2 in the 12 months to June 2023. While this is a small decrease on last year's figure of 28.0 working days, we still consider it too high. The most common reason in 2022-23 for absence was again 'Anxiety/Stress/Depression/Other Psychiatric Illnesses' accounting for 36.4% of absences, although this is 2.4% lower than in 2021-22 and 3.8% lower than in 2020-21. Long-term sickness absence remains an issue for the Service and all operational prison grades. In the year to June 2023 around 31.4% of staff had a long-term absence with an average duration of 59.0 working days. In total, 80.3% of all working days lost by prison grade staff was due to long-term absences.

2.43 As we have routinely noted in previous reports, high levels of sickness absence are often seen as an indicator of low motivation and morale. It also increases the burden on other staff, which is particularly pertinent when the Service sees record numbers of prisoners being held in prisons. Both unions noted that the Service was having to cope with high levels of sickness absence and this was having an adverse impact on the running of the Service. NIPS said it had made changes to sickness absence management procedures, such as reducing the burdens on Senior Officers and that it had embedded HR Business Partners in each of the prisons. However, it accepted that more needed to be done and return to work discussions with staff were not happening quickly enough.

Overtime

2.44 Since 2017-18, the level of overtime payments had been increasing gradually until last year's report when it had started to fall. We welcomed that fall in overtime, however, we note this year that overtime has started to increase again. This year we saw large increases in the share of overtime at HMP Magilligan and in PECCS, although HMP Maghaberry still accounts for 53% of the overtime used. We ask NIPS to monitor these changes to identify any developing trends.

2.45 Some staff, particularly PECCS staff, told us that there is a perceived culture of enforced overtime, which affects their home life, causing many to feel burnt-out. It

felt to us on visits that there was a heavy reliance on the use of overtime within the Service, which in turn may be linked to high absence rates. Nearly all staff said that they wanted an enhanced overtime rate to bring them into line with other public sector workers in Northern Ireland. The PGA(NI) asked in oral evidence that governor grades become eligible to claim overtime at plain time, with the POA(NI) expressing its view that overtime should be paid at an enhanced rate. In oral evidence, NIPS told us that 86% of uniformed staff had received an overtime payment in the last 12 months. NIPS also stated that it would be open to considering an enhanced overtime rate as part of stage one of its pay strategy. We return to the issue of overtime in Chapters 3 and 4.

Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service

2.46 In our last four reports we referred to our shared frustration with PECCS staff, regarding a continuing lack of opportunity for PECCS staff to transfer internally into the wider Northern Ireland Prison Service. We repeatedly get feedback from PECCS staff and their representatives that they feel that they are not fully integrated into the Service, borne out by symbolic issues such as not being invited to functions, and that these issues adversely affect their motivation and morale. We were therefore pleased to hear from the new Director General that she recognised the need to address some of these concerns felt by PECCS staff and had recently ensured that PECCS management sit on her executive board, along with representatives from the three prisons.

2.47 We were also pleased to hear that there had, after many years, been some movement on internal transfer routes for PECCS staff. In oral evidence NIPS told us that it had received 33 expressions of interest from NCOs and PCOs to apply to become CPOs, with 27 staff taking the test. NIPS said it now had a merit list of candidates. However, the POA(NI) said that low staffing levels within PECCS were preventing some staff from being released into CPO posts. While overall this is a positive development, we realise it has taken some time to get to this stage and there is likely to be some scepticism from staff that this will result in positive outcomes. We will therefore continue to monitor this issue and ask NIPS to keep us informed of developments, particularly given the current staffing levels.

Evidence from visits

2.48 As we noted in Chapter 1, we undertook in-person visits to Maghaberry and Magilligan prisons, and PECCS staff in September 2023. The main themes from our visits are outlined below.

2.49 The key pay issues raised with us on our visits were:

- The 2022-23 pay increase of 4% was not considered by staff to be high enough to compensate for the cost-of-living increases, with some calling it “derisory”. There was unhappiness about the non-consolidated element for pre-2002 staff.
- Nearly all staff said that if there were limited choices around pay then resources should be targeted at pensionable base pay. Staff gave a range of options for this year’s pay award, from 5% to £5,000, with many stating it should match or exceed inflation.
- PECCS staff felt that pay was poor and there were too many other jobs in the wider economy that paid better, but critically did not have the same security implications. PECCS said PCOs and CPOs should earn the same.
- Governor grades felt that their pay had stagnated, did not reflect higher workloads, and there needed to be a focus on these grades. The pay scale for Head of Unit did not incentivise Senior Officers to apply for promotion as they could earn more by working overtime.
- Staff also said the Service needed to stop adding and removing pay points to and from pay scales. They considered it to be inappropriate and unfair that those with, say, four years’ experience might earn the same as a new recruit. The pay scales should also all be the same length.
- There needed to be a single pay system. There were too many grades and rates of pay for the same job.

2.50 The main issues relating to allowances were:

- Most staff requested that the overtime rate should be increased to an enhanced rate. Governor grades said that they should be able to be paid overtime.

- There needed to be enhanced rates of pay for working on Bank Holidays, particularly over Christmas and the New Year period.
- The Dirty Protest allowance needed to be increased and should be at least the England and Wales rate. There was also some disquiet about recent changes to the eligibility criteria to claim the allowance.
- Most staff wanted the SRA consolidated into base pay. Some staff said the pre-2002 staff should also now be paid this.
- Staff said the governor on-call allowance should be increased to the Northern Ireland Civil Service rate. The current allowance did not take account of the amount of time spent on-call as it was a one-off daily payment.

2.51 The main issues in regard to recruitment and retention were:

- We heard on nearly all visits that the Service was reliant on overtime and there were shortages against target staffing levels.
- Staff were joining the Service but only staying for less than three years before leaving. Some said it was due to pay, others said it was the environment and others said some recruits lacked life experience. The PSNI was mentioned as a comparator and competitor for staff.
- There were suggestions that experienced officers were not applying to become Senior Officers as the extra pay was “not worth the hassle”.
- PECCS staff said staffing levels were too low and that many staff were leaving. Recruitment into these grades needed to be increased to classes of 20 rather than one or two new staff being “drip fed” into PECCS.
- Governor grades said it was becoming more difficult to encourage staff to apply for promotion into the governor grades. The Service was also struggling to fill places on the Future Leaders Scheme.

2.52 The main motivation and morale issues were:

- There was a mixed picture on morale, but most groups reported that morale was low, through a combination of feeling “burnt out” due to workload and there not being enough staff.

- Sickness absence was high and this had a knock-on effect on those in work. However, some staff said there were those who “played” the system and NIPS needed to be more robust in managing sickness absence.
- PECCS staff were still frustrated that they were not able to transfer to prison roles, although they did accept that there had been a positive recent development in that a small number of staff had been able to move internally into prison roles.
- The security risk impacted negatively on all prison based and PECCS staff in Northern Ireland.

2.53 Other issues raised on our visits were:

- Many staff noted that they did not have the right to strike unlike other workers.
- There was some unhappiness around the grading review, particularly from PECCS staff. Some staff said it was not transparent and felt opaque.
- The recent increase in the prisoner population was putting some significant pressures on the Service.
- Several discussion groups mentioned the lack of training for staff, with much being on the job.
- PECCS staff noted that prison staff were able to park for free at work, whereas court parking was not free.

The parties’ proposals

2.54 The key proposals from the parties’ written evidence are below. The parties were not able to reach an agreed position on joint submissions or areas of consensus for this report.

2.55 NIPS made the following proposals in its written evidence:

- A headline consolidated increase of 1% for governor grades (or monetary equivalent);
- A headline 1% consolidated increase for OSG, PCO, NCO, PECCS Manager and Senior Officer grades;

- A 1% non-consolidated payment for pre-2002 MGOs (or monetary equivalent) along with the option to opt in to the CPO/post-2002 MGO maximum and receive the SRA from 1 April 2023;
- Increasing the CPO/post-2002 MGO maxima by 3.3% to reduce the differential with the pre-2002 MGO maximum by a third;
- Changes to the CPO pay points to ensure equal progression of £1,390 between all pay points.
- Following implementation of the pay award, removal of the CPO minimum pay point; and
- A 7% increase to the SRA on 1 September 2023, so long as the PSNI implemented that increase. Otherwise, SRA to continue to match the Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance.

2.56 During oral evidence, the new Director General outlined a two-stage pay strategy that the Service would work towards:

- Stage one (over three years):
 - Close the base pay differential between pre-2002 MGOs and CPOs;
 - Reduce the number of CPO pay points;
 - Look to pay the SRA to pre-2002 staff when the first action above has been achieved;
 - Higher pay increases for NCO and PCO grades; and
 - An incremental approach to the introduction of enhanced overtime rates.
- Stage two (after stage one):
 - Reduce the number of officer and support grades (MGO/CPO/PCO/NCO) ideally to one main prison officer grade; and
 - Look to further reduce pay points.

2.57 The POA(NI) made the following proposals in its written evidence:

- A consolidated pay increase of £5,000 for all staff;
- The CPO and post-2002 MGO pay scale maxima increase to the pre-2002 MGO maximum;

- The CPO/post-2002 MGO pay scales should initially be set at six pay points with a view to reducing to five pay points;
- An enhanced overtime rate of time and a half and double time for Bank/Public Holidays;
- A specialism allowance of £1,000 a year for the following specialisms – Tactical Response Group, Incident Negotiator, Control and Restraint advanced trained staff, and First Aiders;
- A 12% increase to all other allowances and a reassessment every five years;
- A mechanism to compensate PECCS staff for parking charges at permanent places of work;
- SRA to be paid to pre-2002 grades; and
- A greater pay differential between Bands 3 and 4.

2.58 As in recent years, the PGA(NI) chose not to submit written proposals to us this year.

2.59 We also received written submissions from the Community union. Its key proposals are summarised below:

- A consolidated pay increase matching the rate of inflation to be applied to all pay scales and incremental points with effect from 1 April 2023, or an award that reflects that received by staff in England and Wales;
- Staff placed on pay scales to reflect their length of service in that respective grade;
- The introduction of a number of additional new allowances – night duty allowance, long day attendance allowance, 20% unsocial hours payment, Payment Plus, £1,000 a year specialism pay, and the introduction of detached duty payments;
- The SRA to be made pensionable and extended to pre-2002 staff;
- The Dirty Protest allowance to mirror the England and Wales rates;
- The PECCS drivers' allowance to be made pensionable and extended to include all PECCS driving duties;
- Increases to the boot and clothing allowances; and
- All on-call allowances to be reviewed.

2.60 We also received a number of proposals from the Community union around exit interviews, job evaluation, the 37/39 hour week and access to wider Northern Ireland Civil Service job opportunities.

2.61 We consider all of the evidence and put forward our recommendations in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Our recommendations on pay for 2023-24

Introduction

3.1 This chapter sets out our analysis of the evidence and includes our recommendations on pay and allowances for 2023-24.

3.2 As usual, in reaching our recommendations, we have taken account of the evidence provided by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), along with evidence from the POA (Northern Ireland) (POA(NI)), the Prison Governors' Association (Northern Ireland) (PGA(NI)), the Community union and the evidence we heard from staff in our remit group during our visits. In accordance with our terms of reference we have analysed evidence on recruitment and retention, motivation and morale, equality and diversity and the competitiveness of the Prison Service's employment package in Northern Ireland. We use data from a range of sources, including the Office for National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. We have also considered the wider economic and political context and the affordability of our proposals.

3.3 We note that pay progression was applied by NIPS in August 2023 based on the April 2022 pay rates and backdated to 1 April 2023.

3.4 We provide independent advice on pay and allowances for our remit group based on the relevant evidence available to us. In the 336th report (2005) by the International Labour Organization, the Government of the United Kingdom gave a clear and unequivocal commitment only to depart from our recommendations in "exceptional circumstances" and agreed that such recommendations would be complied with in practice. This is a pledge the UK Government has since reaffirmed and not rescinded. This therefore places a particular responsibility on the Prison Service Pay Review Body, and it is one that we take very seriously when assessing the evidence and formulating our recommendations, particularly bearing in mind the absence of a functioning Executive or Assembly in Northern Ireland at the time of writing this report.

Analysis

3.5 In addition to the uncertain political environment and extremely challenging budgetary position for Northern Ireland departments, there is a volatile economic context and an environment of heightened industrial action. We note that some other Pay Review Body remit groups have taken part in strike and other industrial action, with some settlements being reached outside the normal Pay Review Body process. Our remit group is legally prohibited from taking industrial action.

3.6 Following the coronavirus (Covid-19) restrictions put in place from March 2020, regimes in prisons in Northern Ireland have returned to normal. At the same time, and as mentioned in Chapter 2, the prison population has been increasing, necessitating old accommodation that had been planned to be demolished being brought back in to use. Staff told us that vacancies had increased and workloads had intensified. Many in the staffing group felt undervalued by the public and NIPS and unrewarded in terms of pay. There continued to be high levels of sickness absence which further increased the pressure on staff who were present at work. Although these factors have not yet resulted in such high leaving rates as those in England and Wales prisons, it seemed clear that staff motivation and morale had deteriorated since our 2022 report, with many staff reporting feelings of burn out and under-appreciation.

3.7 Despite some progress over the past year, staff within the Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service (PECCS) remained frustrated that they had not been able to transfer easily into mainstream prison roles, although they did accept that there had been a positive recent development in that a small number of staff had been able to transfer internally. During oral evidence, we were given confidence that the new Director General had a full appreciation of the many and varied challenges the Service was facing and was committed to addressing these.

3.8 The overall staffing picture for the Service is relatively healthy, particularly compared to England and Wales. Sickness absence rates are higher than in England and Wales, but rates of staff leaving the Service are relatively low and steady. However, there are emerging concerns over recruitment, with considerably lower numbers of applicants for roles and an unwieldy and lengthy recruitment process. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the evidence indicates that most staff are

relatively well paid against comparator roles within Northern Ireland, although staff reported that pay in both public and private sector alternative roles has been catching up.

3.9 In recent years, we have commented on our frustration with some of the pay proposals submitted by NIPS, and repeated “tinkering” with an already complicated pay system. This was compounded by what seemed to us to be a lack of clarity on the intended longer term pay strategy. Therefore, we were pleased to receive a clearer and more coherent set of proposals in written evidence from NIPS this year, albeit financially constrained. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these included limited changes to pay bands to reduce the differential between the pre-2002 Main Grade Officer (MGO) and the Custody Prison Officer (CPO) grades and to slightly shorten the CPO scale.

3.10 For several years, we have called on NIPS to present a coherent pay vision and strategy for our remit group. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the new Director General outlined a clear two-stage pay strategy during the oral evidence session. We welcome this strategy and look forward to receiving updates on progress.

Uniformed and governor grade pay award

3.11 We consider that the approach we adopted for England and Wales of targeting additional investment where we thought it was most needed – at the lowest paid operational grades, who are likely to have been most affected by the increased cost of living – is equally appropriate in the context of Northern Ireland. However, inflation is just one of a range of relevant factors that we take into account when making our recommendations. These include earnings growth and pay settlements across the economy, the relative market position of operational Prison Service pay, workforce data, including trends in recruitment and retention and affordability. We are also conscious that we formed our recommendations late in 2023 but with an effective date of 1 April 2023.

3.12 We have assessed data on staff characteristics by grade. When making our decisions we have aimed to minimise the extent to which staff with certain characteristics are affected differentially, whilst still achieving the key aim, which we share with NIPS, of making significant progress in addressing the differentials between those staff who do the same job.

3.13 NIPS submitted written evidence this year which proposed an increase of 1% for governor grades and for Bands 1, 2, 4 and 5,³⁸ while POA(NI) proposed a fixed consolidated uplift of £5,000 for all uniformed grades. In oral evidence, PGA(NI) stated that as a minimum, staff in Northern Ireland should receive the same headline pay award as staff in England and Wales. As we mention in Chapter 2, we are also placing emphasis on the economic conditions in April 2023, bearing in mind the implementation date of our recommendations. While we recognise the financial constraints that NIPS needs to operate within, we felt that its proposal to award most post-2002 grades 1% was insufficient. This is particularly so given the increased cost of living, its effect on the morale and motivation of staff, and the level of pay awards more broadly in the economy. In addition, a 1% increase would mean that some staff in Bands 1 and 2 would be paid less than the Real Living Wage (RLW).

3.14 In light of the evidence, we explored several options, considering both single and differentiated awards. We concluded that this year, it would be appropriate to recommend a differentiated award, with a greater increase for the lowest paid. Therefore, we recommend a consolidated increase of 7% for Operational Support Grades (OSGs), Night Custody Officers (NCOs) and Prisoner Custody Officers (PCOs) (Bands 1 and 2), and 5% for CPOs, post-2002 MGOs, PECCS Managers, Senior Officers, and Bands 6 to 10, i.e. all governor grades and the Director of Prisons. In reaching these recommendations, we took account of the level of pay awards elsewhere in the public sector and in the economy generally, the relative absence of major recruitment and retention problems, other than in the lowest paid grades, and the impact of inflation at the time the pay award was due.

3.15 Our recommendation for Bands 1 and 2 has the additional benefit of keeping these staff above the level of the RLW, to which the Northern Ireland Civil Service, of which NIPS is part, has subscribed, and provides additional funding for the lowest paid and some of the grades which have more difficult retention rates. We recognise that our recommendations will cost more than NIPS budgeted for in its proposals but believe our package of recommendations will better address some of the difficult issues the Service is facing.

³⁸ Band 1 – OSG, Band 2 – NCO and PCO, Band 4 – PECCS Manager, and Band 5 – Senior Officer.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that with effect from 1 April 2023, pay scales are adjusted as set out in Appendix C, delivering a consolidated base pay uplift of 7% for Operational Support Grades, Night Custody Officers, Prisoner Custody Officers and 5% for Custody Prison Officers, post-2002 Main Grade Officers, Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service Managers, Senior Officers and all governor grades, including the Director of Prisons.

Pre-2002 Main Grade Officer

3.16 This year, NIPS made proposals that aimed to eradicate the base pay differential between pre-2002 MGOs and CPOs over three years. The proposals included: a non-consolidated payment of 1% for pre-2002 MGOs, with the option for them to voluntarily transfer to the maximum of the CPO pay scale and receive the Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA) from 1 April 2023; and an increase to the CPO band maximum to reduce the adverse differential with pre-2002 MGOs by a third. We continue to agree with NIPS that steps must be taken to close the gap between the pre-2002 and post-2002 grades, not only to address the differentials in pay but also because we recognise the adverse effect differential pay has on staff morale. We are also very mindful of potential discrimination issues; how pre-2002 pay rates compare with non-NIPS comparators; and the positive impact of current pay levels on pension entitlements. However, we were not convinced that NIPS's proposals, including the 1% non-consolidated award, were the most appropriate way of achieving this. Also, as mentioned above, we considered that a non-consolidated award of 1% was insufficient. It is also important to be clear that given that the SRA is paid as a separate allowance, we do not consider it as part of base pay for comparison purposes between NIPS grades.

3.17 We therefore sought to balance fairness with the policy of removing the differential, recognising that all of the remit group are facing cost of living pressures. Last year this resulted in the compromise of pre-2002 MGOs receiving both consolidated and non-consolidated elements to their award. NIPS has now outlined a clear, long-term pay strategy that addresses the structural issues in the pay system and appears to be achievable over a sensible timetable. It is this strategy that has led us to depart from our recent practice of awarding at least some element of a consolidated award to all. Having considered the available options this year, after

much deliberation, we conclude that it is appropriate to make a recommendation for a non-consolidated award only. It seems to us to be the most effective way to make significant progress on closing the gap between the pre-2002 and post-2002 grades.

3.18 As we state, we did not believe the level of non-consolidated award proposed by NIPS was sufficient, bearing in mind the prevailing financial situation for all staff including pre-2002 MGOs. Therefore, we recommend that the pre-2002 MGOs should receive the same headline 5% award, but as a non-consolidated one-off payment. At this time, we are minded to continue with this direction of travel until the differential has been completely eroded, making it financially beneficial for pre-2002 MGOs to opt in to the CPO scale (at which point they would also be eligible to receive SRA). However, as this may take several years, we also encourage the parties to see if they can reach agreement on ways in which the differential could be eradicated more quickly or in a different way. We would be happy to consider any proposal from the parties.

Recommendation 2: From 1 April 2023, we recommend that pay scales remain unchanged for pre-2002 Main Grade Officers and that a non-consolidated one-off payment equivalent to 5% of base pay is made, as set out in Appendix C.

Pay scale changes

Custody Prison Officer

3.19 As mentioned above, we were pleased to receive only limited proposals for pay scale changes this year, following our concerns over previous changes to already complex pay scales. As a step towards the longer-term aim of shortening the CPO pay scale to five points, NIPS proposed removing the bottom pay point from the CPO scale. Shortening the scale is a strategy which we support in principle and it also aligns with advice to NIPS from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

3.20 We recognise that moving from what is a current ten point scale to a five point scale cannot, for affordability reasons, be achieved within one year, but consider that progress to a shorter scale should be made more quickly this year, in part to ensure that pay increases are focused on the lowest paid. Therefore, we recommend that the bottom two points are removed from the CPO pay scale.

3.21 We recognise that some more experienced officers may feel a sense of unfairness that new entrants and those with less experience may, as a result of this shortening of the scale, be on the same pay as them. However, we believe that this action is necessary to shorten the scale in line with NIPS's pay strategy and that it will help to address possible issues of discrimination.

3.22 NIPS also proposed evening out the cash values between each pay point on the CPO scale. However, we felt that this was much less of a priority and a potentially unhelpful feature within a pay scale over the longer term. In our view it would be better to use available funds to remove the bottom two CPO pay points, with the longer-term objective, financial considerations permitting, of further reductions in the length of the pay scale in future years.

Recommendation 3: From 1 April 2023, we recommend that the lowest two points on the Custody Prison Officer pay scale are removed – shortening the scale from ten to eight points.

Post-2002 Main Grade Officer

3.23 Prior to our last report, post-2002 MGOs were on a spot rate of pay. In its written evidence to us for the 2022 Northern Ireland report, NIPS referred to these as being on an amalgamated post-2002 MGO/CPO pay scale, with an additional two pay points above the post-2002 MGO spot rate and CPO maximum. However, in our report we decided to keep these grades separate as we had assumed that post-2002 MGOs would have been given the opportunity to opt in to the CPO scale.

3.24 We would like to see all post-2002 MGOs moved on to the CPO scale, provided that it is not financially detrimental for them to do so, therefore further simplifying the grading structure. NIPS should consult with POA(NI) to work out how to achieve this, preferably prior to our next report.

Allowances and payments

3.25 In our last report we stated that we would look to take a more systematic and regular rolling review of key allowances to ensure each was examined at least every five years, except for the SRA which we consider each year. This year we asked specifically for evidence on overtime, on-call allowances and Dirty Protest payments.

Supplementary Risk Allowance

3.26 In our previous reports we have recommended that the SRA and the Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance (NITA) should be aligned to reflect the unique and real threat that both police and prison staff face from violent dissident republican groups as a result of their jobs. NIPS proposed that the SRA should increase by 7% from £3,669 a year to £3,924 a year from 1 September. However, it said it had made that proposal based on the premise that Northern Ireland police officer pay increased by the 7% award made to police officers in England and Wales. Should the NITA increase by a lower amount, NIPS proposed that the SRA should also increase by that amount, retaining a comparable level between the two. We note that the Police Remuneration Review Body's 2023 report on Northern Ireland was not published at the time of writing this report.

3.27 Our position remains that we consider that staff in the police and prison services in Northern Ireland should be paid the same level of allowance for the security risks they face, and we have seen no evidence to change this view. Our principle remains that the SRA and the NITA should be fully aligned.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Supplementary Risk Allowance should, from 1 September 2023, continue to be aligned with the Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance rate.

3.28 In written and oral evidence, the POA(NI) and PGA(NI) requested that staff in the remit group who did not receive the SRA should now be paid it. This would apply to those in the pre-2002 MGOs and all governor grades. The PGA(NI) stated that its members were also at risk from dissident republicans and that a number of governor grades had been required to move home in recent years as a result of threats.

3.29 We note from our 2013 Supplementary Report³⁹ on Northern Ireland that pre-2002 staff and governor grades had the Northern Ireland Prison Service Payment (NIPSP) consolidated into base pay (and therefore part of pensionable pay), from 1997 for officer grades and 2006 for governor grades. As part of this Supplementary Report, all the parties confirmed that the NIPSP had already been incorporated into

³⁹ GOV.uk, (2013). *PSPRB Supplementary Report on Northern Ireland 2013*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/psprb-supplementary-report-on-northern-ireland-2013> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

base pay for those on pre-2002 pay and conditions, with the payment generally being seen to compensate staff for the difficult and dangerous environment in Northern Ireland – in effect a predecessor to the SRA. As part of the Supplementary Report, we also agreed a number of points with both the POA(NI) and the PGA(NI). One such point was that any allowance we recommended as part of that Supplementary Report should be paid at the same level to staff who did not have the pre-2002 allowance consolidated into basic pay.

3.30 We note that once the pay differential between pre-2002 MGOs and CPOs has closed, those pre-2002 MGOs will be given the option to opt in to the CPO scale, at which point they will be on a post-2002 grade and eligible to receive the SRA. We note that since 1997 pre-2002 MGOs have had the NIPSP consolidated into their salaries and therefore this element of their pay is both pensionable and has been uplifted in line with annual pay awards. However, in practice the main objective remains to move to a single pay band covering pre-2002 and post-2002 MGOs and CPOs.

3.31 This then leaves the governor grades who do not receive the SRA. As noted, governors also had the NIPSP consolidated into base pay. As a result, we do not recommend that the SRA is extended to governor grades. This year we have instead concentrated resources on the headline base pay award, a priority identified on visits.

Overtime

3.32 As part of our rolling review, we asked the parties to provide us with evidence around overtime, because this issue is often raised on visits and by the trade unions. Many staff tell us that there should be an enhanced overtime rate and consider that they are one of the few public sector groups not to have this. The POA(NI) this year proposed an overtime rate of time and a half for weekdays and double time at weekends and Public Holidays. The union said the Service was being run on overtime and an enhanced rate would help compensate for the adverse impact that working additional hours had on staff's family life. The PGA(NI) also asked us to consider an overtime rate for governor grades set at plain time, although both the unions also said that the higher priority this year was a consolidated base pay award.

3.33 In addition, we have not received any detailed breakdown of the numbers of individual staff claiming overtime by grade, broken down further by function and location. We also do not have any evidence to show that there is a lack of volunteers to work overtime. The lack of evidence, including numerical data, on these issues has made it very difficult for us to make recommendations.

3.34 NIPS said in oral evidence that it would consider an incremental approach to the introduction of enhanced overtime rates as part of stage one of its pay strategy. However, this would come after the final pay differential between the pre-2002 MGOs and CPOs had been closed, thereby not exacerbating or introducing new pay inequalities. NIPS said it also wanted more time to consider enhanced overtime rates so it could engage with the POA(NI) on what the rate should be. It also accepted our criticism last year that the overtime system was still paper based and accepted that it would need to look at its payroll system and how it could manage any changes.

3.35 This year we have decided not to recommend enhanced overtime rates and have instead focused our attention on the headline award. We agree with NIPS that an incremental approach should be taken as part of a broader overall pay strategy. We also want to see a more robust, fit for purpose system to record and manage overtime and from which granular data and trends can be readily drawn. This would then, among other things, provide a reliable source of evidence on which to make future proposals and recommendations on enhanced overtime. We would therefore encourage NIPS and both the POA(NI) and PGA(NI) to enter into discussions on what enhanced overtime rates might be appropriate and which grades would be eligible to receive them. We also encourage the parties in making their proposals to support them with relevant data and evidence.

On-call allowances

3.36 This year we also committed to considering on-call allowances. The parties referred in their evidence to two on-call allowances, the trades on-call allowance and the governor on-call allowance. The former was replaced with the Special Duty Payment (SDP) in 2002. We noted in our first Northern Ireland report the following:

“There are also allowances outside our remit. Officer grade staff with a specific rostered commitment to remain available for work outside office hours receive on call and special duty payments. These are not specific Prison Service payments

and their rates and increases are negotiated and applied across the wider Northern Ireland Civil Service and Northern Ireland Office. As a result, we are not asked to make any recommendations in relation to them.”

3.37 We therefore make no recommendation in relation to the SDP.

3.38 The governor on-call allowance rates were introduced as part of NIPS’s 2017-18 pay award and have generally been uprated by agreement between NIPS and the PGA(NI) since then. In oral evidence the PGA(NI) noted that prison officers claiming the SDP were also able to claim overtime or Time Off In Lieu when they attended the prison, something governor grades were not able to do. The union wanted to see the weekend and privilege holiday rate increased to that of the SDP, around £30. However, we note the governor on-call weekday rate is higher than the SDP equivalent. The union also said it wanted parity with the on-call rates paid to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), which are £20 per 24 hour period on weekdays and weekends, and £30 per 24 hour period for Bank/Public Holidays. However, we also note that these allowances are not paid to all ranks in the PSNI. The £20 allowance is paid up to Chief Superintendent level and the £30 allowance only up to Chief Inspector level. There have also been proposals put forward to limit the £30 rate for the police to just two Bank/Public Holidays – St Patrick’s Day and 12 July.

3.39 We considered the governor on-call allowance rates, which have been uprated since their introduction in 2017-18 by agreement between NIPS and the PGA(NI), most recently in 2020. We note that the governor on-call rates lie at a level between the SDP and the PSNI on-call rates. Overall, we therefore saw no need to increase the governor on-call rates at this time. However, we ask that NIPS and PGA(NI) discuss this allowance and present us with an agreed proposal, supported by data and evidence, for our next report.

Dirty Protest

3.40 As part of our rolling review of allowances we committed to looking at the Dirty Protest allowance this year. “Dirty Protest” by prisoners includes smearing excrement on the walls and doors of their cells and themselves or throwing urine and excrement out of their cells onto the landing. These duties probably involve some of the most unpleasant conditions in which staff are required to work.

3.41 The level of this allowance has not been increased in Northern Ireland since we looked at the issue outside of our 2012 report round, recommending an increase in a letter to the Justice Minister in November 2011. The Dirty Protest payment was increased from £5 to £8 for under four hours per day and from £10 to £16 for over four hours per day. Those changes brought the payments into line with the England and Wales rates as they stood at that time. The England and Wales rates were increased in our 2016 report to £10 for under four hours a day and £20 for over four hours a day and have remained at that level since then. We have, however, committed to considering the England and Wales allowance for our 2024 England and Wales report.

3.42 In evidence, NIPS stated that the Dirty Protest payments had not been a significant issue for the POA(NI) in its discussions, but accepted the rate was lower than in England and Wales. NIPS's main concerns were issues around the claiming of the allowance, and who was eligible for it. The POA(NI) asked us to increase the Dirty Protest rates by 12% and the PGA(NI) said it should increase by inflation.

3.43 We concluded that, given the working conditions are equally unpleasant for staff in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland, we would increase the Dirty Protest payment to the rates that are currently paid in England and Wales. We will also revisit these rates next year based on what evidence we receive and what decisions we make as part of our review of Dirty Protest payments for our 2024 England and Wales report.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that from 1 April 2023 the Dirty Protest payments increase from £8.00 to £10.00 for periods of up to four hours and from £16.00 to £20.00 for periods of four hours or more.

Other allowances and payments

3.44 Some of the parties again made proposals for increases to all existing allowances, along with the introduction of several new allowances, such as for additional specialisms and for the reimbursement of parking charges for PECCS staff. We considered these, but ultimately concluded that it was preferable to invest resources this year primarily in the headline pay award. We therefore do not recommend changes to any other allowance and payments this year. Instead, we

return to the matter of allowances in Chapter 4 where we ask for further information from the parties.

Cost of our recommendations

3.45 We note that staff progressed up their respective 2022-23 pay scales in August 2023, as part of their contractual progression arrangements. We estimate that our recommendations will result in a cost increase of approximately 5.1% (£3.3 million), excluding pay progression.^{40,41} This is around 2.3% higher than our estimate of the cost of NIPS's proposals. Overall, the cost increase is equivalent to around 2.7% of NIPS's total opening budget of £122.1 million for 2023-24.⁴²

3.46 We have sought to achieve this year a base pay increase that reflects awards elsewhere in the public sector and in the economy generally, focusing on investing in the lowest paid and addressing long-standing pay differentials whilst being mindful of the challenging political and economic context in Northern Ireland.

⁴⁰ This percentages takes account of pay increases, restructuring, oncosts, and the SRA, but excludes any increases to other allowances (based on staff numbers as at 1 April 2023).

⁴¹ We have estimated that our recommendations will result in a cost increase of 8.2% (£5.3 million) including pay progression.

⁴² Department of Justice, (2023). *NI Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23*. (online) Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/ni-prison-service-annual-report-and-accounts-2022-23> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

Chapter 4: Looking ahead

Introduction

4.1 In this chapter, we raise our sights to the longer term, considering a range of topics and issues, offering comments and making requests for information. We are an independent, evidence-based body so information and reliable data are vital for us to perform our functions and to identify trends and themes that will shape and inform our future reports and recommendations.

Pay strategy

4.2 We welcome the pay strategy from the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) which seeks to address a range of issues over the next three years and beyond. We note that the first priority is to close the pay differential between pre-2002 Main Grade Officers and Custody Prison Officers (CPOs). This is an objective we also share, although we ask NIPS and the POA (Northern Ireland) to consider jointly if there is a way of closing the pay differential more quickly or in a different manner, and to bring any proposals, ideally joint proposals, to us for our next report.

4.3 Under stage one of NIPS's pay strategy, there are also several other areas it wishes to consider over the next three years. Some of these, such as reducing the number of CPO pay points and making higher awards for Night Custody Officers (NCOs) and Prisoner Custody Officers (PCOs), are covered in our recommendations this year. We encourage the parties to discuss the NIPS pay strategy and find where there can be areas of agreement. Therefore, for our next report, we would like to receive further information from NIPS and the trade unions on the following:

- CPO pay points – we would like to more fully understand how NIPS envisages achieving its preferred five pay points, for example what does its ideal CPO pay scale look like, what is its preferred starting pay and how the certificate of competence fits in with progression;
- NCOs and PCOs – we would welcome further details and clarity on NIPS's intent for these grades including respective reward structures;
- Overtime rates of pay – firstly we would welcome more information regarding NIPS's plans for moving away from the current paper-based system to a new digitalised overtime system, allowing data and trends to be drawn out. If the data support proposals for changing the overtime rate, we would then like to

hear about discussions with the unions, along with NIPS's incremental plans for the introduction of different overtime rates, including the related issue of possible additional payments for weekends and Bank Holidays as part of normal rosters; and

- Single prison officer grade – both NIPS and the unions have indicated that, in the longer-term, moving to a single prison officer grade would be desirable. We would like to hear from the parties about how this would be achieved in practice.

Internal movement routes for existing staff

4.4 In recent reports we expressed our concern that the Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service (PECCS) and other grades have not been able to apply, or to apply easily, for other positions in NIPS as internal applicants. We are pleased to hear that there has been some progress on this over the past year, although there seems to be some way to go to achieve a smooth process. For the next pay round we would like to receive updated information from the parties on how the process for internal transfers in both directions is progressing and the details of the numbers and types of these staff movements.

Equality and diversity

4.5 A major part of NIPS's shorter-term pay strategy is to close the differential between the pre-2002 and post-2002 grade groups, which it envisages will take around three years to complete. Our recommendations this year support this transition which, when completed, will produce a more rational and equal pay structure.

4.6 Our terms of reference require us to consider the relevant legal obligations regarding equality and diversity. Therefore, as a matter of routine we ask NIPS to provide data, including pay gap data, broken down by grade, on all protected characteristics so that we can discharge our statutory duties, use these data in our deliberations and reference them in our reports. In Chapter 2 we reported a change in the reported ethnicity figures. We queried this change with NIPS and, given the importance of accurate baseline data from which to measure progress over time, we continue to encourage NIPS to garner as accurate information as possible in this area.

4.7 In addition, as we noted last year, we would be interested to hear from NIPS on the outcome of any affirmative action initiatives it has undertaken and/or has planned that seek to increase the recruitment, retention, development, and promotion of all staff from under-represented groups in the Service. In particular, we encourage NIPS to maximise the opportunities in recruitment campaigns to ensure the service is more representative of the community it serves. We would also welcome comment on such affirmative plans from the trade unions.

Allowances

4.8 We note that there are seven broad allowances in our remit for Northern Ireland, some of which have not been considered or increased for some time. Therefore, for our next report, we would like information from NIPS that outlines what each allowance is for, who receives it, whether it still serves its purpose, and views, if any, as to changes to the amounts of these allowances. We would like to receive this information for the following allowances in Appendix E:

- dog grooming allowance;
- boot allowance;
- clothing allowance;
- Dirty Protest payments;
- governor on-call allowance; and
- PECCS drivers' allowance.

4.9 We would also welcome input from the trade unions, including any areas of agreement they may have with NIPS on future rates. We will not be considering the remaining specialist allowances as these are closed and paid to very few staff.

4.10 Following receipt of this information we will then be in a better position to fully consider the review intervals for each allowance and what, if anything, should happen to those allowances in the intervening period between reviews. As we indicated in Chapter 3, we will look at the Dirty Protest payments again next year following our considerations around this allowance for the 2024 England and Wales report. We will continue to review the Supplementary Risk Allowance each year, although it remains our view that this should continue to be set at the same level as the Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance.

Our timetable

4.11 We find ourselves again reporting late, long after the 1 April pay effective date, which has been particularly problematic for staff this year at a time when inflation has been running at some of the highest levels seen for a long time. This is frustrating for everyone concerned and is simply not fair on NIPS staff. Whilst the key causes of the delay in activation letter, and in submission and approval of evidence lie outside our gift, we reiterate our previous commitment to do everything in our power to work with the parties towards a timetable that gets us back to the 1 April pay effective date, even if this is done incrementally over a number of years. It is the very least we can do for key frontline workers who perform such an important function on behalf of Northern Ireland society.

Further evidence requests

4.12 There are several other areas that have an effect on our remit that we would find it useful to receive data on. They include:

- Exit interviews – this year we were pleased to hear in oral evidence from the new Director General her firm commitment to introducing exit interviews, recognising the value that these can have. We were also interested to hear that NIPS Headquarters is working on introducing these at the beginning of 2024. Whilst we appreciate it is likely to be too early for a timeline for us to receive fully considered data, we nevertheless would like to hear for our next report what some of the main reasons are for staff leaving the Service and what jobs and types of jobs, they are moving to.
- Sickness absence – we have had concerns around the level of sickness absence in the Service for several years, not least because of the pressure it places on those staff who remain present in work. NIPS has said this is a key priority and we note that it told us that there has been a refreshed approach to the management of sickness absence since October 2022. We would therefore like to understand the impact of this new approach and the plans for reducing both short- and long-term sickness absence rates, along with any identifiable trends.

- Staff survey – NIPS said it was developing its own bespoke staff survey in consultation with the unions for staff to complete, the results of which would be published. We welcome this as we have previously commented about the lack of a staff survey for prison staff. We therefore look forward to receiving the results in time for our next report, along with an analysis of the main themes and trends identified by staff.

Conclusion

4.13 This year we have made recommendations that seek to make significant progress in addressing the final problematic pay differential that remains in the NIPS pay structure. All the parties and staff identified the headline pay uplift as the key priority for this year. Our headline awards for the post-2002 grades provide staff with an uplift of 5% in consolidated pay while lower paid grades receive a 7% increase. Pre-2002 grades receive a non-consolidated award equivalent to 5% of base pay. Whilst we realise that this will not give all staff a consolidated pay increase, we believe the time is right to accelerate progress towards the new pay strategy. As we have stated, we welcome NIPS's longer term pay strategy and we support the direction of travel.

Appendix A: Transcript of Permanent Secretary's 2023 activation letter⁴³

Dear Tim

THE NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE 2023/24 PAY ROUND

I would like to thank the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSRPB) for their continued hard work and dedication to the pay of operational prison grades within the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Substantial progress was made to pay structures as a result of the 2022 round, and I am pleased we were able to accept all your recommendations and obtain the additional resources required to fund them.

I am now writing to request the engagement of the Prison Service Pay Review Body to provide a Report and recommendations in respect of 2023 pay.

You will be aware that the Secretary of State, Chris Heaton-Harris, made a Parliamentary statement on 24 November 2022 in which he explained the need for action to put Northern Ireland public finances on a sustainable footing. In the absence of an Executive, he confirmed he would consider wide-ranging options for revenue raising and a review of all spending for 2023/24. It is against this backdrop that we are asking the Pay Review Body to make recommendations for 2023. In making your recommendations you must:

- be cognisant of Northern Ireland Public Sector Pay guidance (when published);
- ensure that affordability is central to your recommendations, especially in light of the 2022 proposals which went beyond our funded proposals. Any such recommendations in 2023 would have to be considered within the budgetary context outlined above; and
- continue to close existing differentials between pre 2002 and post 2002 grades and avoid the re-opening of any pay gaps.

This activation letter is being issued now to allow for time-tabling of evidence and reporting. I would also ask you to note that this letter is issued subject to the views of an incoming Minister of Justice.

Colleagues here will liaise with the Secretariat in respect of dates for written and oral evidence, and share any political developments that occur which would have a bearing on this process.

I am copying this letter to Ronnie Armour for information.

Yours sincerely

RICHARD PENGELLY CB

⁴³ GOV.uk, (2023). *Activation letter to the PSRPB 2023 Northern Ireland pay round*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/activation-letter-to-the-psprb-2023-northern-ireland-pay-round> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

Appendix B: Transcript of the PSPRB Chair's response to the Permanent Secretary's 2023 activation letter⁴⁴

Dear Richard,

PRISON SERVICE PAY REVIEW BODY 2023 NORTHERN IRELAND REPORT

We have concluded oral evidence with all of the parties for the 2023-24 Northern Ireland pay round. Could you please pass on our thanks to Beverley Wall and her team for providing evidence to the Prison Service Pay Review Body on the pay and remuneration for operational prison staff on Thursday 9 November.

Following oral evidence, I can confirm that the Review Body is working towards submitting our 2023 Northern Ireland report to the Government at the end of January 2024. I should, nevertheless, place on record how profoundly unsatisfactory it is for us to be reporting in January 2024 for a pay award which was due in April 2023. I appreciate the circumstances which have led to this situation but I am sure you will agree that it is extremely unfair to the staff who form our remit group.

I am copying this letter to the Director General at the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Yours sincerely

Tim Flesher
Chair, Prison Service Pay Review Body

⁴⁴ GOV.uk, (2023). *PSPRB response to the 2023 Northern Ireland round activation letter*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/psprb-response-to-the-2023-northern-ireland-round-activation-letter> [accessed on 22 January 2024].

Appendix C: Current and recommended pay levels

Governor grades

Current and recommended pay (£ per annum) from 1 April 2023.

Band 10 – Director of Prisons

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
91,075	95,629
90,025	94,526

Band 9 – Governor in Charge (Maghaberry)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
87,830	92,222
87,184	91,543
85,766	90,054
84,342	88,559
82,924	87,070

Band 8 – Governor in Charge (other posts)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
82,021	86,122
80,597	84,627
79,175	83,134
77,746	81,633
76,323	80,139

Band 7 – Governor Head of Function

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
64,249	67,461
63,276	66,440
62,310	65,426
61,339	64,406
60,367	63,385

Band 6 – Governor Head of Unit

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
57,483	60,357
56,638	59,470
55,798	58,588
54,957	57,705
54,117	56,823

Officer, support and PECCS grades⁴⁵

Current and recommended pay (£ per annum) from 1 April 2023.

Band 5 – Senior Officer⁴⁶

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
44,732	46,969
43,436	45,608
42,488	44,612
41,539	43,616
40,591	42,621

Band 4 – PECCS Manager (40 hours)⁴⁷

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
37,758	39,646
36,958	38,806
36,158	37,966
35,358	37,126
34,558	36,286

Band 3 – pre-2002 Main Grade Officer⁴⁸

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023	Non-consolidated payment from 1 April 2023
41,072	41,072	2,054
40,289	40,289	2,014
39,906	39,906	1,995
39,524	39,524	1,976
39,146	39,146	1,957

Band 3 – post-2002 Main Grade Officer

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
37,403	39,273
35,363	37,131
33,935	35,632

⁴⁵ All rates shown for officer and support grades are based on a 39 hour working week, unless otherwise in brackets.

⁴⁶ Following publication of the 2022 Northern Ireland Report all pre-2002 Senior Officers opted into the post-2002 Senior Officer scale. Therefore, the pre-2002 Senior Officer scale has been removed from this report and the post-2002 Senior Officer scale renamed Senior Officer.

⁴⁷ The PECCS Manager grade replaced Principal Prisoner Custody Officer (PPCO) and Senior Prisoner Custody Officer (SPCO) pay scales from 1 April 2022. Subsequently, all PPCO and SPCO staff were given the option to opt in to the new PECCS Manager grade. All staff opted in and therefore, the PPCO and SPCO pay scales have been removed from this report.

⁴⁸ We note that all pre-2002 Main Grade Officers are currently on the pay scale maximum.

Band 3 – Custody Prison Officer

Any Custody Prison Officer who has not completed their Certificate of Competence by the time they have progressed to point three of the pay scale will be held on that point until the Certificate of Competence is successfully attained.

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
37,403	39,273
35,363	37,131
33,935	35,632
32,819	34,460
31,703	33,288
30,587	32,116
29,471	30,945
28,355	29,773
27,239	Point removed
26,123	Point removed

Band 2 – Night Custody Officer (44 hours)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
29,248	31,295
28,454	30,446
27,632	29,566
26,811	28,688
25,990	27,809

Band 2 – Prisoner Custody Officer (40 hours)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
26,589	28,450
25,867	27,678
25,121	26,879
24,374	26,080
23,627	25,281

Band 2 – Prisoner Custody Officer (35 hours)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
23,266	24,895
22,634	24,218
21,981	23,520
21,328	22,821
20,674	22,121

Band 2 – Prisoner Custody Officer (30 hours)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
19,942	21,338
19,400	20,759
18,841	20,159
18,281	19,560
17,720	18,961

Band 2 – Prisoner Custody Officer (20 hours)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
13,295	14,226
12,934	13,839
12,561	13,440
12,187	13,040
11,814	12,641

Band 1 – Operational Support Grade

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2023
23,637	25,292
23,336	24,970
23,035	24,647

Appendix D: Current and recommended allowances and payments

We make two recommendations this year on allowances: an increase to the Supplementary Risk Allowance to match that of the Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance (NITA) and an increase to both Dirty Protest rates.

Supplementary Risk Allowance⁴⁹

Current level a year	Recommended a year from 1 September 2023
3,669	NITA rate ⁵⁰

Specialist allowances^{51,52}

Allowance	Current level per year	Recommended level per year from 1 April 2023
Dog Handler	723	723
Physical Education Instructor	723	723
Works Officer	949	949
Instructor	1,490	1,490

Other allowances⁵³

Allowance	Current level per year	Recommended level per year from 1 April 2023
Dog grooming allowance	4,526	4,526
Boot allowance	92.80	92.80
Clothing allowance	603.65	603.65

Dirty Protest payments

Period	Current level per day	Recommended level per day from 1 April 2023
Of up to 4 hours	8.00	10.00
Of 4 hours or more	16.00	20.00

⁴⁹ The Supplementary Risk Allowance is paid to all officer, support and PECCS grades, except for pre-2002 Main Grade Officers, who already had a previous historical equivalent risk allowance consolidated into base pay. This allowance is non-pensionable.

⁵⁰ This will be the level of the NITA as at 1 September 2023.

⁵¹ Specialist allowances are not paid to new staff entering these specialisms. Those in receipt of allowances continue to receive them on a protected basis while they remain in their specialism. These allowances are pensionable.

⁵² Laundry Officer allowance has now been removed as there are no staff in receipt of this allowance.

⁵³ Paid to all officer grade staff who meet the criteria for payment. These allowances are non-pensionable.

Governor grade on-call allowance⁵⁴

Period	Current level per day	Recommended level per day from 1 April 2023
Weekdays	15.00	15.00
Weekends and Privilege Holidays	21.00	21.00
Public and Bank Holidays	40.00	40.00

Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service drivers' allowance⁵⁵

Tier	Current level per day	Recommended level per day from 1 April 2023
Tier 1: 1 to 4 cell vehicles	5.00	5.00
Tier 2: 6 and 8 cell vehicles	10.00	10.00
Tier 3: 12 cell vehicles	15.00	15.00

⁵⁴ Paid for on-call continuously from the end of one shift to the start of the next. This allowance is pensionable.

⁵⁵ The PECCS drivers' allowance is only payable when a period of driving has been undertaken on that day. This allowance is non-pensionable.

Appendix E: Summary of recommendations from the 2022 Northern Ireland report

- A consolidated uplift of at least 4% for all staff, except pre-2002 grades.
- A £1,000 consolidated award for pre-2002 grades, with a further non-consolidated £500 for pre-2002 Main Grade Officers and £650 for pre-2002 Senior Officers.
- The Northern Ireland Prison Service to present for the 2023 report a comprehensive pay strategy to address the structural issues in the pay system.
- The Supplementary Risk Allowance to be aligned from 1 September 2022 to the Police Service of Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance rate.
- The three tier Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service drivers' allowance to increase: Tier 1 from £4 to £5 a day; Tier 2 from £6 to £10 a day; and Tier 3 from £8 to £15 a day.

Appendix F: Summary of pay awards from 2013 to 2021

- **2021** – *NIPS award* – a consolidated 1% increase for all grades except pre-2002 staff, who received non-consolidated awards of £400 for pre-2002 Main Grade Officer (MGO) and £436 for pre-2002 Senior Officer (SO). Changes to Prisoner Custody Officer (PCO), Night Custody Officer (NCO), Custody Prison Officer (CPO), Senior Prisoner Custody Officer (SPCO) and post-2002 SO pay scales. The Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA) increased by 1% from £3,456 to £3,492 a year.
- **2020** – *Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB)* – a consolidated 2% increase for all grades. Changes to all governor grade pay scales. Introduction of the Director of Prisons grade into the PSPRB remit. The SRA increased to the level of the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Transitional Allowance (NITA). Increase to the weekend and privilege holiday governor on-call rate.
- **2019** – *PSPRB* – a consolidated £500 increase to all uniformed grades and a 2% increase to all governor grades from 1 April. SRA increased to the level of the NITA and aligned from 1 September. Increases to all governor on-call rates.
- **2018** – *PSPRB* – a consolidate pay increase of at least 2%. Changes to NCO, CPO, Governor in Charge (other posts) and Governor in Charge (Maghaberry) pay scales. SRA increased by £250 a year, increases to all governor on-call rates and the introduction of a Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service drivers' allowance. NIPS reduced the 2% consolidated pay increase to 1.5% consolidated for pre-2002 MGO and pre-2002 SO grades.
- **2017** – *NIPS award* – a 1% non-consolidated payment for all staff on pay maxima. Changes to PCO, SPCO, CPO, post-2002 SO, Head of Unit and Governor in Charge (other posts) pay scales. SRA increased by £240 a year and introduction of Governor on-call allowance rates.
- **2016** – *NIPS award* – a 1% non-consolidated payment for all grades. SRA increased by £460 a year.
- **2015** – *joint agreement* – a 1 % consolidated award to all grades. Changes to the CPO pay scale and introduction of Governor in Charge (Maghaberry) pay scale to replace the Governor 1 pay scale. No increase to the SRA.

- **2014 – *joint agreement*** – a 1% consolidated pay increase to all uniformed grades, along with changes to the CPO and post-2002 SO pay scales. A consolidated 1% pay increase to the Governor 1 pay scale. Introduction of Governor in Charge (other posts), Governor Head of Function and Governor Head of Unit pay scales to replace the Governor 2 to 5 and pre- and post-2002 Principal Officer grades. Prison Officer Offender Supervisor grade abolished. SRA increased by £680 a year.
- **2013 Supplementary – *PSPRB*** – introduction of the SRA set at £1,320 a year for those staff without a previously consolidated environmental risk allowance.
- **2013 – *PSPRB*** – a 1% consolidated increase to post-2002 SO and Principal Prisoner Custody Officer grades. A consolidated £0.09 per hour increase to the PCO hourly rate and £0.10 per hour increase to the SPCO hourly rate. All staff at maxima of all other grades received a 1% non-consolidated payment. Introduction of the CPO and Prison Officer Offender Supervisor pay scales.