



Home Office

Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate Annual Report 2022/23

September 2024



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Introduction by the Chief Inspector Peter Holland CBE QFSM FIFireE (Life)

I am pleased to present my Annual Report on the work of the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate (CPFSI) during the period April 2022 to March 2023.

On behalf of the Government, the Inspectorate's role is to ensure that people are safe from fire in Crown Premises in England. They are government buildings, Parliament, Crown Estates, Royal Palaces, and all premises which are either owned by or contracted directly by the Crown for occupation by itself or others. We undertake this important public safety role through a statutory duty under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO). It is achieved by inspecting to check on levels of compliance and by taking the necessary action to ensure non-compliance is addressed efficiently and effectively. Employees and members of the public who resort into buildings under our regulatory responsibility have the right to expect to be safe from fire. The Responsible Person for a premises is clearly defined in the FSO and therefore they have the statutory responsibility to protect the occupiers of their buildings from fire. They must have a Fire Risk Assessment carried out by a competent person which is suitable and sufficient for the premises and occupants to enable them to escape safely from a fire.

During this year, the Inspectorate resumed the regular programmed inspections at all Crown Premises to normal levels post-Covid. The routine Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) started with outstanding follow-up inspections.

We continued to work closely with His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and the private providers of prisons to drive down the fire risk to as low a level as is reasonably practicable. Whilst steps have been taken to successfully improve fire safety, injuries are of serious concern. Therefore, even more concerted action is necessary to reduce the numbers and impacts of fires and further improve compliance with the FSO.

HMPPS continued to strive to deliver against their fire safety improvement plan against a backdrop of ever tighter financial challenges. This had been enhanced with funding in the previous financial year to generally improve fire safety and specifically to address the shortfall in much needed automatic fire detection in cells.¹

Our Management Information System (MIS), 'THEMIS', has developed well since it was introduced 4 years ago and provides up to date information on a wide range of key indicators of risk. This data improves assessment of fire risk across the portfolio. It has already improved our ability to capture more accurate fire safety management information,

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prisons-receive-156-million-maintenance-boost>

not only on the premises but also on external contractors, and enables deployment of Inspectors more effectively and efficiently. The monitoring and data collation functionality of THEMIS is more effective, allowing for more enhanced reporting which is reflected in this report.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team for their continued hard work, dedication, and professionalism.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter Holland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

1. Context and role of the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate

1.1 The CPFSI, despite being based in the Home Office, operates independently under a signed protocol. It is the regulatory body which ensures compliance with the FSO in government buildings, Parliament, and Royal Palaces, as well as in all premises which are either owned by or contracted directly by the Crown for occupation by itself or others. The Inspectorate is responsible for ensuring that fire safety standards are provided and maintained by regulating compliance with the FSO in over 10,000 Crown Premises. These are made up of over 16,000 buildings, as there are many premises or sites that are comprised of multiple buildings. Local fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) are the enforcing authority for most premises to which the FSO applies. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) have their own fire safety Inspectors within their Defence Fire Safety Regulator, which sits within the Defence Safety Authority.

1.2 The annual budget for CPFSI was £1,010,000. The team consisted of 11 Inspectors, the Team Leader, and the Chief Inspector, supported by a Chief of Staff and an Executive Officer. The Inspectors and Team Leader are contracted home workers, as their work takes them all around England. Although based in the Home Office, the Inspectors work independently with no interference in the way they carry out their inspections and write their reports, other than for normal management supervision.

1.3 Fire safety is a devolved matter in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, so they have their own arrangements to meet their statutory obligations for Crown Premises. Liaison takes place with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, as they inspect Crown Premises. Occasional assistance is given on request to the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspector in Wales, as well as sharing professional learning and development. Regular meetings take place with Fire and Rescue Services' (FRS) fire safety enforcement Inspectors, and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to share learning and best practice.

1.4 The inspection regime is based on risk of fire and injury, with the highest risk premises being prisons and other custodial secure premises. Inspectors liaise with a variety of stakeholders, including Fire and Rescue Services, and other enforcing authorities and statutory bodies, to promote consistency, share advice and guidance, as well as identify and highlight increased risk. This includes providing advice on proposed building work in Crown Premises to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations in relation to fire safety.

1.5 The inspection process for prisons is both lengthy (involving four Inspectors on site for up to three days) and complex in comparison with other inspections. It is an extensive task to inspect the numerous buildings at a prison, and Inspectors must work within detailed custodial protocols both for their personal safety and as part of ensuring that the prison continues to operate effectively during the inspection. It also reflects the complexity of the fire risk and control measures in prisons, where neither the staff nor the prisoners

can escape from fire as easily as in other types of buildings. Thus, they demand a more detailed and rigorous approach in comparison to other Crown Premises.

1.6 When initial advice and Action Plans are not put in place following our inspections, we take appropriate enforcement action, urgently where necessary, in accordance with our [Enforcement Policy](#) and follow the principles of good enforcement set out in the [Regulators' Code](#). Crown Immunity from prosecution exists for Crown bodies in accordance with Section 49 of the FSO, but CPFSI has full statutory enforcement powers in relation to non-Crown bodies working in or on Crown Premises.

2. The scale of the risk: number of fires and injuries in Crown Premises

2.1 Data sources:

The Home Office Incident Recording System (IRS)² is used by the Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and requires completion of an online incident form for every emergency incident attended, be it a fire or an unwanted fire alarm.

2.2 Fire statistics in prisons are also collected by HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) staff using an online system. These statistics include **all** fires in prisons, those attended by the FRS and fires that prison staff deem to be so small and under the full control of prison staff. For these fires, no call is then made to the FRS. Therefore, IRS and HMPPS statistics are not directly comparable, with the IRS only capturing the most serious fires that require further assistance to control. HMPPS fire statistics are thus used in relation to prisons for greater accuracy and as an indication of risk status. It is worth noting that even very small fires can be an important indicator of risk, as fire setting behaviour generally starts with such fires.

2.3 Using HMPPS fire statistics³, there were 1,423 prison fires in 2022/23 (up 27.2% compared with 1,119 prison fires in 2021/22). There are 115 prisons in England.

2.4 Only a very small number of fires attended by the FRS (according to the IRS statistics) happened in other Crown Premises (Central Government offices and law courts) – 12 in 2021/22 and 18 in 2022/23⁴. There are 9,885 other Crown Premises sites regulated by the CPFSL.

2.5 As can be seen, the rate of fires in prisons continues to be very high compared with other Crown Premises. Indeed, it is higher than for any other type of building.

2.6 It should be noted that the proportion of deliberate to accidental fires in Crown Premises is very different to that in other occupancies. IRS statistics for 2022/23 show that only 20% of other building fires (excluding prisons and young offender units) were deliberate, but that figure was 94% in prisons and young offender units.⁵ For further information on the distinction between deliberate and accidental fires, please read the [Fire Statistics Definitions Guidance](#).

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-protection-and-privacy-notice/fire-and-rescue-service-incident-recording-system-privacy-information-notice>

³ HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data – unpublished.

⁴ Source – [Fires in Crown Premises attended by fire and rescue services and non-fatal casualties and fire-related fatalities in those fires, England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64be67e8d4051a00145a91a2/other-building-fires-dataset-270723.ods>, based on the “ACCIDENTAL OR DELIBERATE” field

2.7 Therefore, the overwhelming cause of fires in prisons is deliberate ignition. This is driven by a range of factors e.g., starting fires to challenge the prison regime, and self-harming – the latter being much more prevalent in prisons than in the general population. Most of these fires were started with misuse of vapes as a source of ignition.

Figure 1: HMPPS data on fires in all Crown Premises, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23

SOURCE: HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data for prison fires, and the Home Office IRS data for other Crown Premises fires.

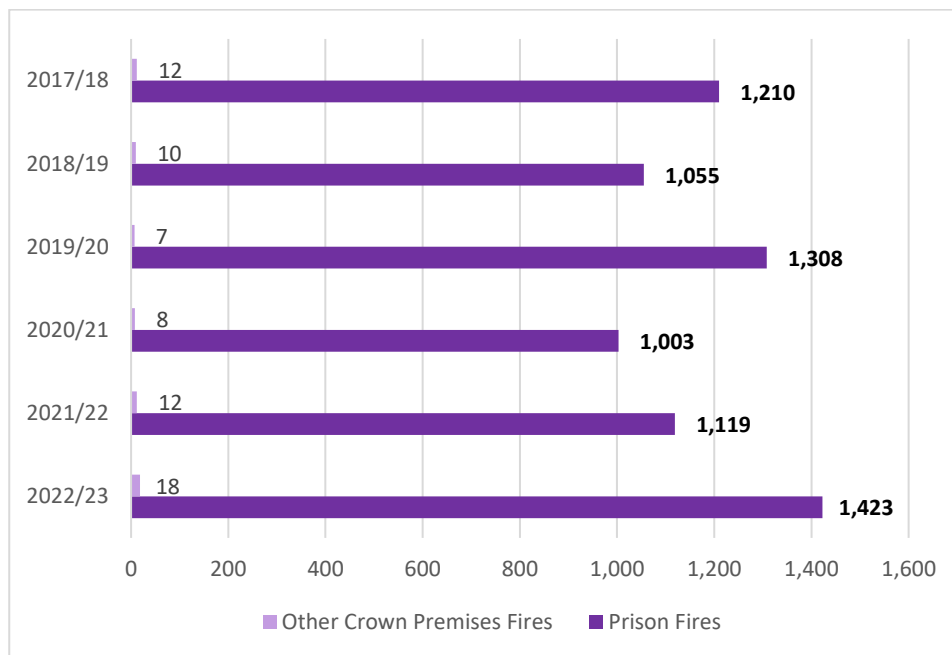
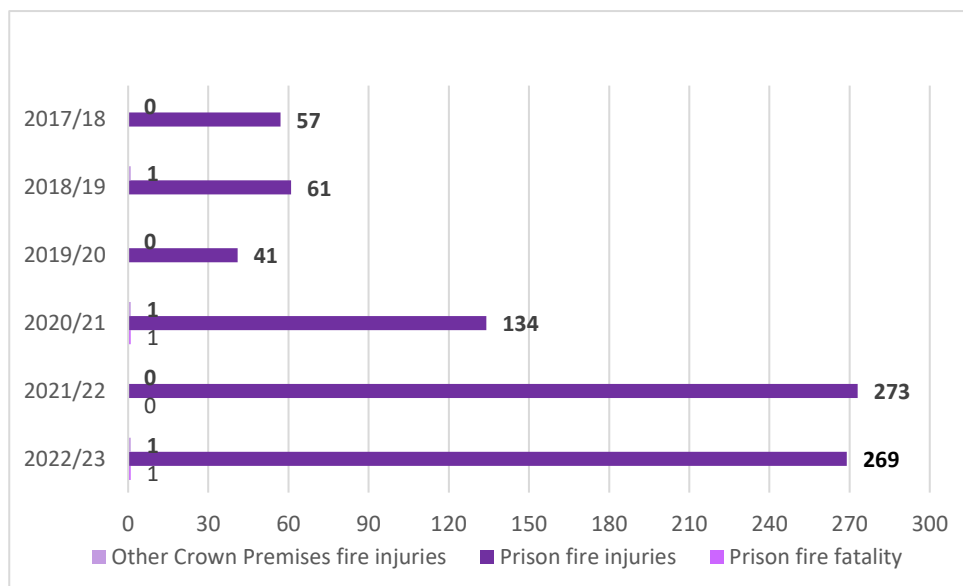


Figure 2: Fire injuries in all Crown Premises, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23

SOURCE: HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data for prison fires, and the Home Office IRS data for other Crown Premises fires.



2.8 While Figure 1 shows that there has been an increase of 27.4% in the percentage of fires in all Crown Premises from 2021/22 to 2022/23, Figure 2 shows that there has been a decrease of 1.1% in the number of fire injuries in all Crown Premises during the same period. This indicates that improvements in fire safety and management are reducing the number of injuries reported, as they are lower pro rata compared to the number of fires.

2.9 As can be seen in Figure 2, the number of injuries in other Crown Premises is very low, i.e., 1 in 2022/23 and averaging 0.5 per annum over the 6-year period on display.⁶

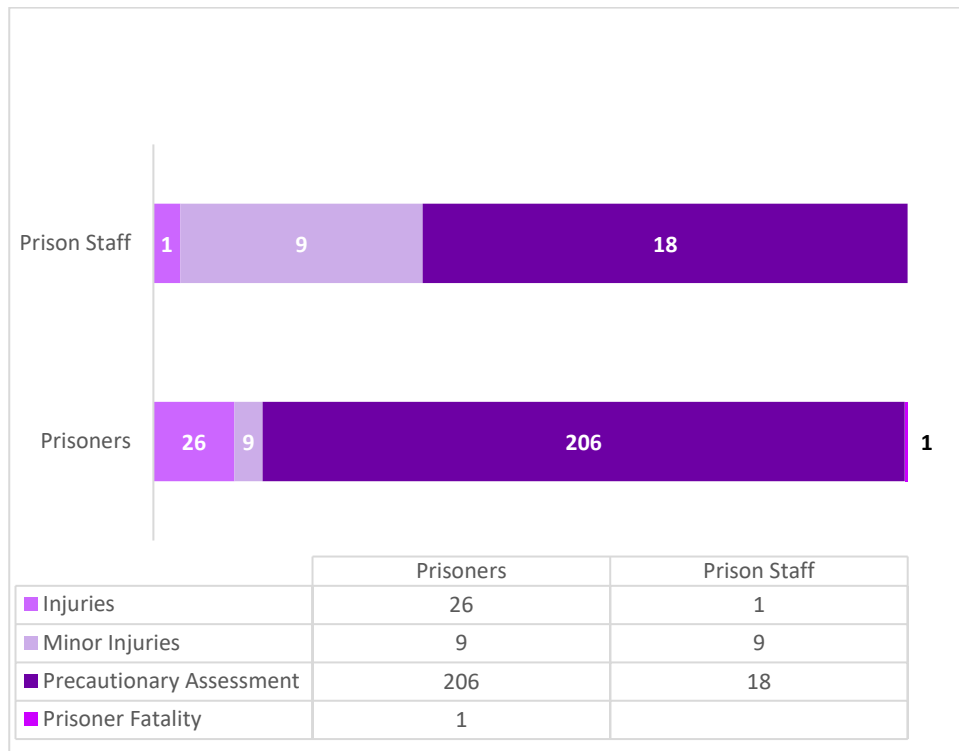
2.10 The likelihood of injuries is far higher for fires that are started in a cell from which the occupant cannot self-evacuate to protect themselves. All deaths and injuries are investigated by CPFSI to check whether there have been any statutory breaches of the FSO and to ensure lessons are learned to avoid similar occurrences.

NB The large increase shown in Figure 2 of reported injuries from 2019/20 onwards is due to the addition of 'Precautionary Assessments', which were only included in HMPPS's data from 2020. Previously, they weren't reported.

⁶ Source – Other Crown Premises fire injuries – [Fires in Crown Premises attended by fire and rescue services and non-fatal casualties and fire-related fatalities in those fires, England – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fires-in-crown-premises-attended-by-fire-and-rescue-services-and-non-fatal-casualties-and-fire-related-fatalities-in-those-fires-england)

Figure 3: Breakdown of injuries in prisons, 2022/23

SOURCE: HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data for prison fires.



Unpublished reporting guidance from HMPPS reporting system sets out the injury categorisation as follows:

- Injuries (significant and requiring treatment), e.g., serious burns, smoke inhalation.
- Injuries (requiring minor first aid treatment), e.g., small cuts and abrasions, blisters, minor burns/scalds.

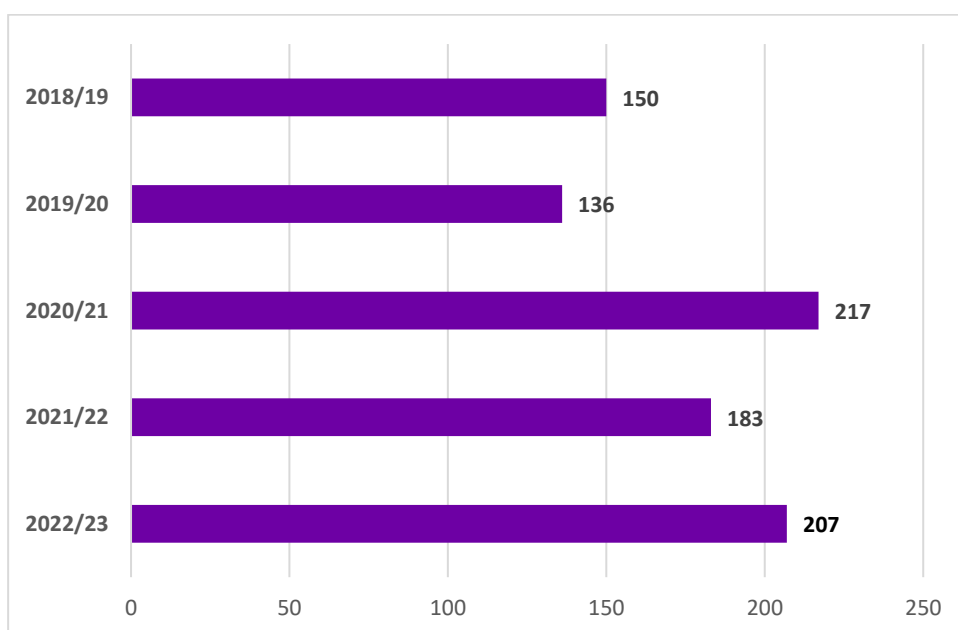
NB The precautionary assessments are conducted by prison medical staff. No injuries were reported, but the precautionary checks were carried out for assurance.

3. Report on inspection activity during the year

3.1 The team returned to normal levels of the Risk Based Inspection Programme with a full complement of Inspectors. The result was that overall inspection numbers grew due to the higher number of Inspectors being available and an increase in the number of fires requiring investigations across the prison estate. The inspections took place in a wide range of premises, which were predominantly high-risk buildings. These consisted of onsite inspections, fire investigations, and follow-up checks.

Figure 4: Total number of inspections of all Crown Premises, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, and 2022/23

SOURCE: THEMIS – Management Information System

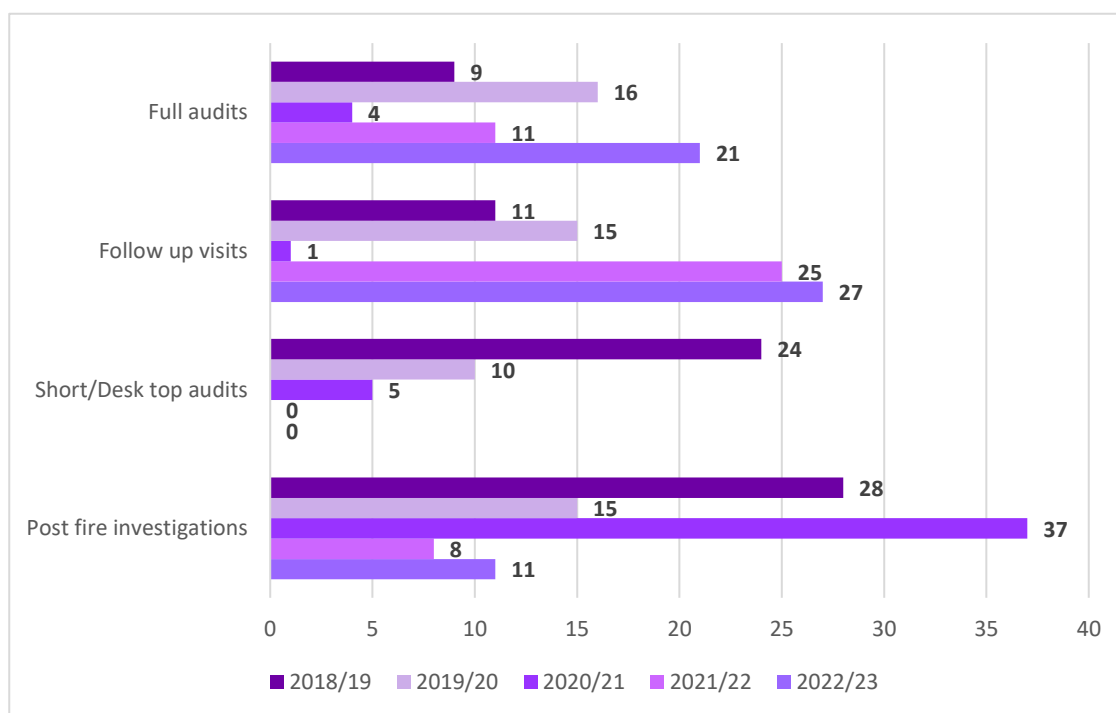


3.2 An increased total of 207 inspections were carried out in 2022/23, due to the higher number of Inspectors available. The breakdown was as follows:

- 59 prison inspections (21 full audits, 27 follow-up inspections post-initial audits, and 11 post-fire investigations on site).
- 148 inspections were in other Crown Premises (135 full audits, 12 follow-up inspections post-initial audits, and 1 post-fire investigation on site).

Figure 5: Total number of inspections in prisons, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23

SOURCE: *THEMIS - Management Information System*



3.3 Once again, fires started deliberately in cells were the single largest cause of fires in prison. Where injuries resulted from those fires, the main contributing factor beyond the ignition itself is attributed to the extent of the delays in detecting the fires. The cause of these delays is a shortfall in suitable in-cell automatic fire detection, which continues to be a problem in parts of the prison estate. In the short term, it remains imperative that appropriate automatic fire detection is installed in every cell to ensure that prison staff are rapidly alerted to fires. HMPPS have taken steps to address the problem by providing more capital to meet the full costs of installing automatic fire detection for those prisons that still need it. There are currently 42 prisons that are waiting for this to be installed.

3.4 The critical success factor in the event of cell fires is having early fire detection, supported by fast responding fire suppression, respiratory protective equipment, staff instructions, training, and smoke control. After factoring in the shortfall in automatic fire detection, the next most serious risk in prisons related to the inadequacy of smoke control systems. These are needed to protect both staff and prisoners from the effects of smoke spread. However, this risk was primarily concentrated at a few prisons.

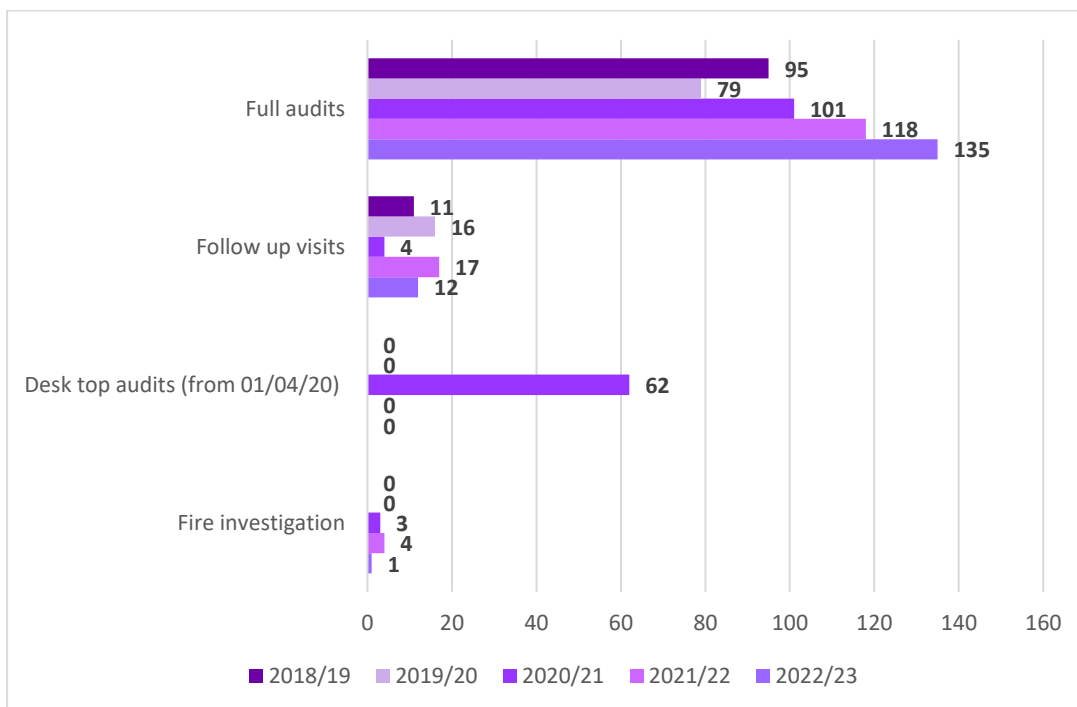
3.5 Finally, the inspection programme identified additional concerns around inadequate emergency lighting and fire-fighting equipment for staff when dealing with cell fires. In all cases of non-compliance, either Action Plan notices or Enforcement Notices were served on the relevant Governors.

3.6 There were 148 inspections of other Crown Premises in 2022/23, compared with 139 in 2021/22. These were either full audits or follow-up visits to check progress on non-compliances. The breakdown was as follows:

- 135 full audits
- 12 follow-up inspections post-initial audits
- 1 post-fire investigation

Figure 6: Inspections of other Crown Premises, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 and 2022/23

SOURCE: *THEMIS - Management Information System*



3.7 Across other types of Crown Premises, the most serious risks were visible as a general lack of preparedness to manage fire risk. This was due to inadequate staff training together with not using fire drills to test the emergency procedures to identify and address shortfalls. Disturbingly, some of our inspections also found evidence that people would not always be able to escape from a fire quickly and safely, often due to inappropriate security fastenings on doors and the poor state of fire-resisting fittings, including fire doors. In those cases of non-compliance, the Responsible Persons received formal notification via Enforcement Notices advising them of what they needed to do to comply with the FSO.

3.8 Across the entire Crown portfolio, those risks had clear and repeating links with specific failures of fire safety management, principally poor day-to-day management of fire safety, poor fire risk assessments and fire risk assessment Action Plans that would not achieve the level of safety required for compliance even if implemented. Alongside this, we commonly discovered inadequate arrangements for occupiers to act as effective clients

when monitoring the performance of the facilities' management contractors who maintain the fire safety measures.

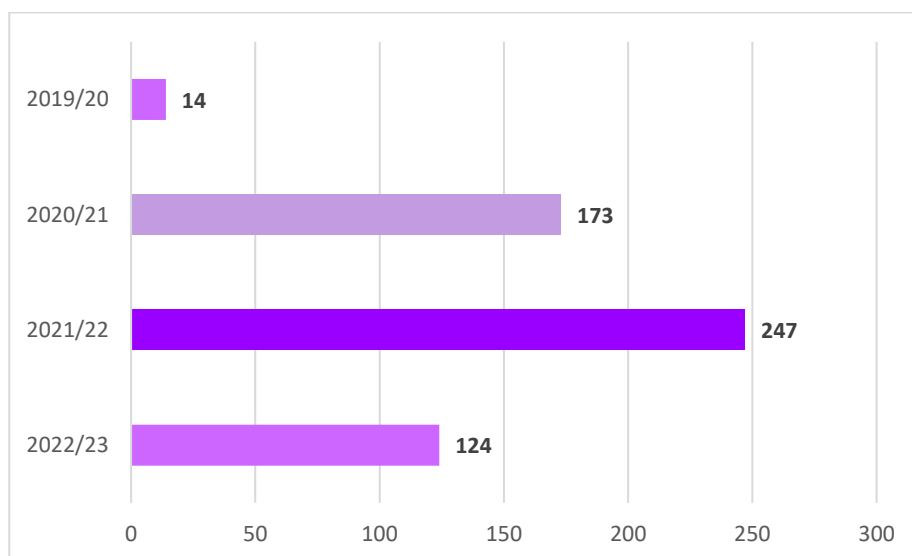
3.9 Building Regulations consultations

The Inspectorate receives Building Regulations consultations from privately appointed Approved Inspectors or Local Authority Building Control departments in relation to proposed building works on both existing and new buildings that meet requirements of Part B of the Building Regulations. As a consultee, the Inspectorate's role is to review consultations and provide observations on the fire safety elements of the proposals, to ensure that when occupiers take over the building, it should comply with the FSO.

3.91 The number of Building Regulations consultations has decreased by just under 50%, following a sharp rise after lockdown. The Inspectorate received and processed 124 consultations in 2022/23.

Figure 7: Building Regulations consultations for all Crown Premises, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23

SOURCE: *THEMIS - Management Information System*



4. Compliance/non-compliance

Table 1: Details of Informal and Formal Notifications

Informal Notifications	
Notice of Deficiencies	These are issued if minor deficiencies are identified in the fire safety measures or management and the Responsible Person can resolve the deficiencies without further oversight.
Action Plan	These are issued if significant deficiencies are identified in the fire safety measures or management and the Responsible Person can resolve the deficiencies with oversight by CPFSI if it is necessary.

Formal Notifications	
Alterations notice	These are served if CPFSI is of the opinion that there are serious or potentially serious fire safety risks that are required to be managed by the Responsible Person under the oversight of CPFSI.
Enforcement Notices (Article 30 of FSO)	These are served if CPFSI is of the opinion that there are significant risks that require the direct intervention of CPFSI.
Prohibition Notices (Article 31 of FSO)	These are served on the Responsible Person or any other person, if the enforcing authority is of the opinion that the use of the premises involves, or will involve, an immediate or foreseeable risk to relevant persons so serious that use of the premises ought to be prohibited or restricted.

4.1 Outcomes from the 21 full audits of prisons resulted in the following:

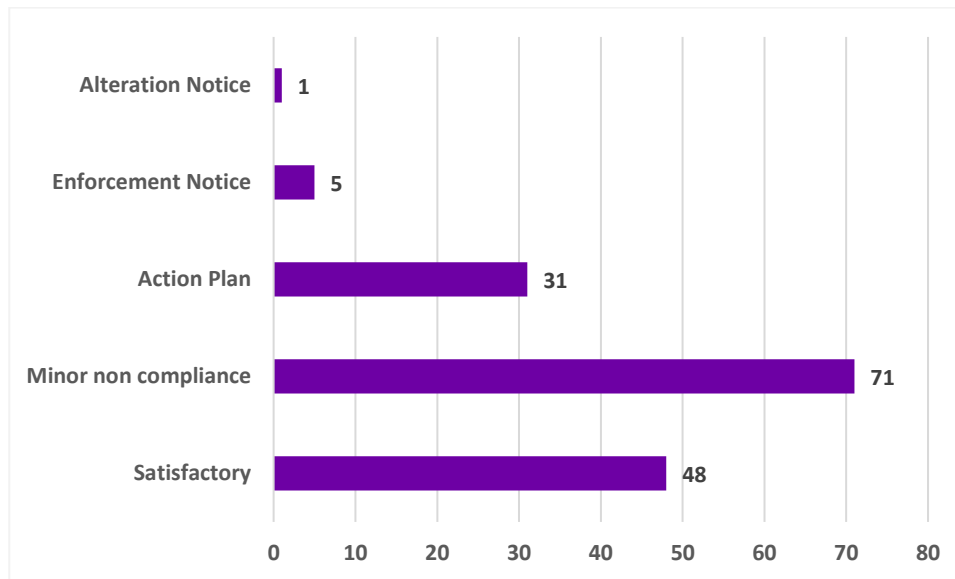
- 1 Alterations Notice
- 4 Enforcement Notices
- 8 Action Plans required to be produced within 28 days
- 8 minor non-compliance issues to address

4.2 In other Crown Premises, outcomes from the 135 full audits resulted in the following:

- 1 Enforcement Notice
- 23 Action Plans required to be produced within 28 days
- 63 minor non-compliance issues to address
- 48 notified as satisfactory

Figure 8: The outcomes following all full audits, 2022/23

SOURCE: *THEMIS - Management Information System*



4.3 Action Plan notices are used to direct the Responsible Person to set out an acceptable plan within 28 days for rectifying the issues that were identified during the inspection.

4.4 Follow-up inspections are carried out several weeks (and in some cases months) after the premises have either been served with an Enforcement Notice or an Action Plan.

In those prisons, which had to respond to formal enforcement action:

- 3 further Enforcement Notices were issued
- 3 Action Plans were required
- 12 minor non-compliances were addressed
- 9 prisons were deemed satisfactory

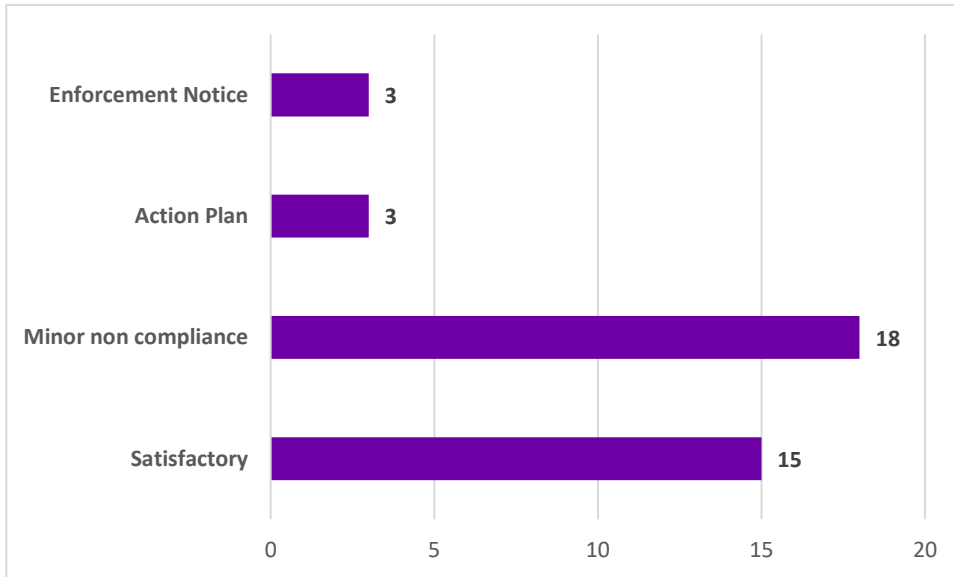
4.5 In other Crown Premises, only a small number of follow-up visits were undertaken, due to the relatively low risk from fire found at most premises.

In those 12 instances:

- 6 minor non-compliances were addressed
- 6 were deemed satisfactory

Figure 9: Outcomes after follow-up inspections of all Crown Premises, 2022/23

SOURCE: THEMIS - Management Information System



4.6 HMPPS needs to ensure that the officers making up the collective 'Responsible Person' under the FSO are aware of and appropriately accountable for meeting their statutory responsibilities. We have noted that the Governor in charge of a prison doesn't always have the full control required to be able to act as the sole Responsible Person under the FSO. They do not have the financial authority to take all necessary steps for compliance, notably where major expenditure is required.

5. Summary of overall picture

5.1 Overall, the risk from fire is generally low in the majority of Crown Premises, even though in many government buildings, there are large numbers of persons present. However, the highest risk is concentrated in the prison estate where most fires occur. The number of fires in prisons rose by 27.2% from the previous year. However, injuries remained at a similar level – in fact, they decreased slightly by 1.47%. This could be indicating that improvements in fire safety and management are driving down injuries, as they are lower pro rata to the number of fires. Hopefully, the reduction pro rata to fires will become a trend.

5.2 Since the smoking ban was introduced in prisons, sources of ignition shifted from the traditional use of smoking materials. Prisoners are using vapes as a source of ignition, which has negatively and significantly altered the nature of fire risk.

5.3 There continues to be a shortfall of suitable automatic fire detection in cells. However, that number is reducing as HMPPS's Fire Safety Improvement Plan progresses more widely on the estate. It is critical that the alarm is raised as soon as possible after an outbreak of fire, especially in a cell where the occupant cannot escape unaided without a fast response from prison staff. The increased number of automatic fire detection in cells will create better outcomes, i.e., reduced numbers of injuries to both staff and prisoners. HMPPS are aware of the problem, and they are taking steps to address this problem.⁷

5.4 In the remainder of the Crown sector, whilst the number of fires is thankfully small, there are many buildings with high occupancy levels. Ineffective fire safety management is a common theme, which is always addressed post-CPFSI inspections, but this needs addressing without intervention from the Inspectorate.

⁷ The foreword to this document makes additional references to the MoJ's planned investment in prison fire safety measures including automatic fire detection.

6. Plans going forward: 2022/23 and beyond

6.1 Utilise Management Information System (THEMIS):

The aim of the CPFSI is to build its capability to utilise THEMIS - the Management Information System (MIS) - more effectively. This will facilitate the collection of more accurate and up to date risk information, enabling Inspectors to be deployed to premises with the highest risk when a significant increase in fire risk has been identified.

6.2 Professional accreditation:

Whilst all Inspectors are qualified to the current required standard, additional demonstration of competence, and a requirement to maintain it, are needed in the aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy and the subsequent Public Inquiry. It is ongoing for all Inspectors to be professionally registered as Fire Risk Auditors.

6.3 Increase in inspections of high-risk premises:

The levels of inspections of high-risk premises returned to pre-Covid levels early in the year. A keen focus was maintained on continuing to ensure that the highest-risk premises were targeted. These are predominantly prisons, where inspections are used to drive down risk by improving compliance with the FSO.