



Home Office

Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate Annual Report. 2023/24



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

I am pleased to present my Annual Report, which provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate, (CPFSI) during April 2023 to March 2024.

On behalf of the government, the Inspectorate endeavours to ensure the safety of people in Crown Premises in England from fire. Crown Premises are government buildings: Parliament, Crown estates, Royal Palaces and all premises which are either owned or contracted directly by the Crown for occupation by itself or others. CPFSI undertakes this important public safety role, under a statutory duty - the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, (FSO). Safety from fire is achieved by inspecting levels of compliance and adopting appropriate measures to combat non-compliance promptly, effectively and efficiently. Employees and members of the public who utilise buildings under our regulatory responsibility have the right to expect to be safe from fire. The Responsible Person is defined clearly in the FSO and bears the statutory responsibility to protect their building's occupants from fire. A competent person must undertake a Fire Risk Assessment, which is both suitable and sufficient for the premises and enables the occupants to escape safely from a fire.

As reported in previous Annual Reports, custodial premises are the highest risk buildings from fire. The CPFSI have therefore continued to work closely with His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, (HMPPS), the Ministry of Justice, (MoJ) and private providers of prisons, in striving to reduce the risk of fire to as low a level as is reasonably practicable. Although steps have been taken to successfully improve fire safety in prisons, fire-related injuries remain of serious concern.

In 2022/23¹, there were 269 fire-related injuries in prisons, increasing to 594 injuries in 2023/24. This increase in the number of fire-related injuries, is attributable to the number of prison fires rising from 1,423 in 2022/23 to 2,477 in 2023/24.²

The significant increase in the number of prison fires is mainly due to the misuse of both vapes and electrical equipment by prison inmates. These are the two most common ignition sources for fires in custodial settings - vapes were responsible for causing 67% of prison fires, whilst the mishandling of non-faulty electrical wiring caused 12% of prison fires.³ The rise in the number of fire-related injuries in prisons, demonstrates the need for improved compliance with the FSO and further concerted action to reduce the frequency and impact of fires.

¹ HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data – unpublished

² HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data – unpublished

³ HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data – unpublished

Despite financial challenges, HMPPS has continued to deliver their fire safety improvement plan. In response to these challenges, HMPPS received government funding to improve general fire safety in prisons in 2021/22. Specifically, this funding addressed the lack of vital automatic fire detection, (AFD) in cells.⁴ However, financial pressures faced by HMPPS persisted in 2023/24.

Introduced in 2019, our Management Information Systems, (THEMIS) continues to provide up-to-date information on a wide range of key indicators of fire risk across all Crown Premises. THEMIS has improved our ability to capture accurate fire safety management information. This has led to more effective and efficient deployment of Inspectors - THEMIS generates a risk score based on both the frequency of fires and fire safety issues which are reported at any given Crown Premise. Consequently, by utilising and monitoring the potential increase of a risk score, Inspectors can target promptly, those premises which are at the highest risk of fire. The monitoring and data collation functionality of THEMIS enables an efficient and effective assessment of the risk of fire across all Crown Premises.

I wish to express my gratitude to the team of Inspectors for their continued perseverance, dedication and professionalism.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Holland', is positioned on the left side of the page.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prisons-receive-156-million-maintenance-boost>

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

- 1.1 The CPFSI is a regulatory body providing fire safety standards to over 10,000 Crown premises, (which are comprised of multiple buildings) and ensures their compliance with the FSO. Local Fire and Rescue Authorities, (FRAs) are the enforcing authorities for most other premises to which the FSO applies. The Ministry of Defence, (MoD) have their own Fire Safety Inspectors – the Defence Fire Safety Regulator, which sits within the Defence Safety Authority.
- 1.2 In 2023/24, the annual budget for CPFSI was £1,127,500.00. The team was comprised of 7 Inspectors, 3 Team Leaders and the Deputy, who was supported by a Chief of Staff and Executive Officer. Both the Inspectors and Team Leaders are contractual home workers as their work entails regular travel around England. Despite being based in the Home Office, the Inspectors work independently when undertaking their investigations and writing their reports.
- 1.3 Fire safety is a devolved matter in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; therefore, they have their own arrangements to meet their statutory obligations for Crown Premises. CPFSI liaise with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspector in Wales, to share best practice and professional learning and development. Regular meetings with the Fire and Rescue Services', (FRSs), the National Fire Chiefs Council, (NFCC) and fire safety enforcement Inspectors further the sharing of learning and best practice.
- 1.4 The inspection regime is designed to reduce the risk of fire and fire-related injuries. Inspectors liaise with a wide range of stakeholders, including FRSs, enforcing authorities and statutory bodies in seeking to promote consistency, sharing of advice and guidance and identifying and highlighting increased risk. This also includes providing advice, to ensure that proposed building work in Crown Premises comply with fire safety Building Regulations.
- 1.5 The inspection process of prisons is complex, (involving 4 Inspectors on site for up to 3 days). CPFSI inspects numerous prison buildings, working within detailed custodial protocols to ensure both their personal safety and the prison's continual effective operation during the inspection. The inspection process is unique and reflects the complexity of the fire risk and control measures in prisons, as neither staff or prisoners can escape from fire as easily as in other types of buildings. Thus, prison inspections demand a more detailed and rigorous approach in comparison to other Crown Premises.
- 1.6 Following inspections, CPFSI monitor whether initial advice is followed, and action plans are implemented. When this is not found to be the case, we take appropriate and urgent enforcement action, adhering to our [Enforcement Policy](#) and following the

principles of good enforcement, detailed in the [Regulators' Code](#). Crown immunity from prosecution exists for Crown bodies in accordance with Section 49 of the FSO, however CPFSI has the full range of statutory enforcement powers in relation to non-Crown bodies working in or on Crown Premises.

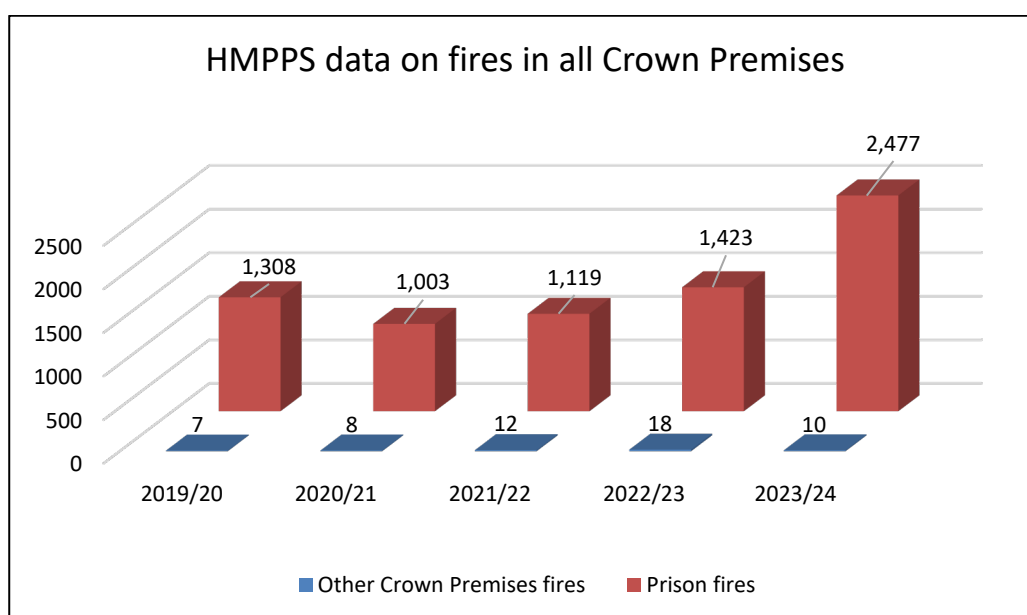
2. The scale of the risk: The number of fires and injuries in Crown Premises

2.1 The Home Office's Incident Recording System, (IRS) is used by the Fire and Rescue Services, (FRSs) to record every incident attended. This includes a fire and false alarms⁵.

2.2 Fire statistics in prisons are also collated by HMPPS staff using an online Fire Incident Reporting System. These statistics include *all* fires in prisons, including those deemed to be so small and under the full control of prison staff, that FRS attendance was not required. Consequently, as IRS only captures the more serious fires which require further assistance, IRS and HMPPS statistics are not directly compatible. Thus, HMPPS fire statistics are used to analyse both the accuracy and risk status of prison fires. Notably, even very small fires can be an important indicator of risk, as they are indicative of more serious fire setting behaviour.

Figure 1: Fires in all Crown Premises, 2019/20 – 2023/24

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



2.3 Prison Fires

According to 2022/23 HMPPS fire statistics, 1,423 fires were recorded. This rose by 74% in 2023/24, in which 2,477 fires were recorded. Since 2019/20, the number of prison fires has increased by 89%. Thus, the frequency of prison fires continues to be very high compared to other Crown Premises.

⁵ [Fires in Crown Premises attended by fire and rescue services and non-fatal casualties and fire-related fatalities in those fires, England - GOV.UK](#)

2.4 There are 115 prisons in England. As explained in the introduction, the spike in the frequency of prison fires is largely attributable to the two most common sources of ignitions in custodial settings – the misuse of vapes and electrical equipment, by inmates.

2.5 Custodial settings also include Young Offenders Units, for which there are far fewer than prisons in England. In 2023/24, there were four Young Offenders Units: Cookham Wood, Feltham, Werrington, and Wetherby.⁶

2.6 Similar to prison fires, HMPPS reported an increased frequency of fire incidents at Young Offenders Units. 16 fire incidents were reported in 2021/22, increasing to 37 incidents in 2022/23 and 61 incidents in 2023/24.⁷

2.7 Other Crown Premises Fires

The CPFSI regulates 9,885 other Crown Premises sites. According to the Home Office's IRS statistics, typically only a very small number of fire incidents are attended by the FRS in other Crown premises. The FRS attended 12 fires in 2021/22, rising to 18 in 2022/23 and decreasing to 10 in 2023/24.⁸ During 2019/20 to 2023/24 an average of 11 fires in other Crown Premises were reported to the FRS per annum.

2.8 Deliberate and Accidental Fires

The number of deliberate fires increases in custodial settings. In 2023/24, IRS statistics revealed that 95% of fires in prisons and Young Offender Units were started deliberately. In contrast, IRS found that only 20% of fires in other Crown Premises were started deliberately.⁹ For further information on the distinction between deliberate and accidental fires, please read the **Fire Statistics Definitions Guidance**

⁶ HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data – unpublished

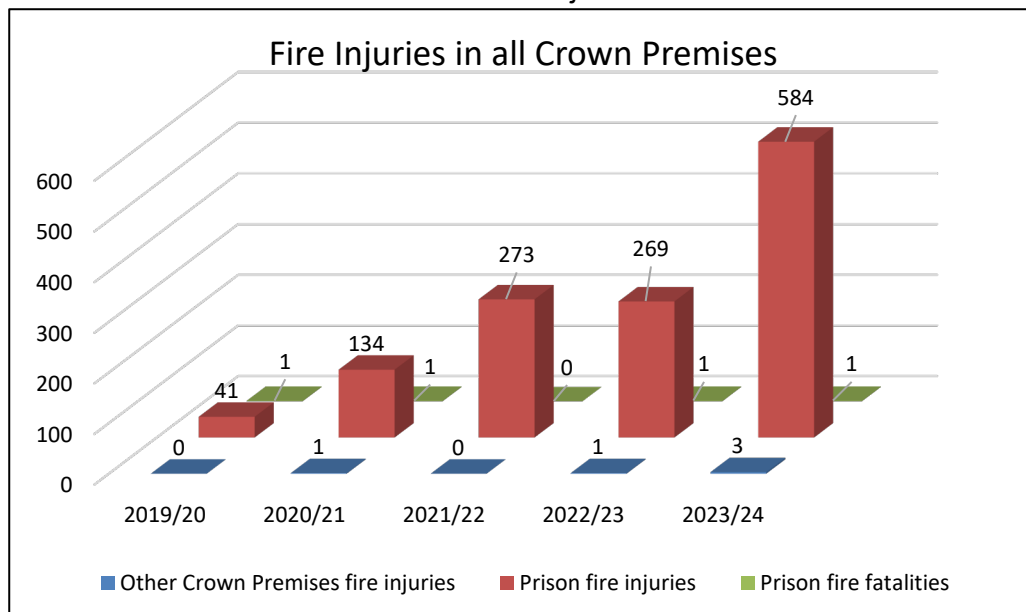
⁷ HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data – unpublished

⁸ Fires in Crown Premises attended by fire and rescue services and non-fatal casualties and fire-related fatalities in those fires, England - GOV.UK

⁹ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64be67e8d4051a00145a91a2/other-building-fires-dataset-270723.ods>, based on the "ACCIDENTAL OR DELIBERATE" field

Figure 2: Fire injuries in all Crown Premises, 2019/20 – 2023/24

SOURCE: HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data for prison fire injuries and fatalities, and the Home Office IRS data for other Crown Premises fire injuries



2.9 Figure 2 reveals a significant increase in the number of fire-related injuries from 2019/20 to 2023/24. However, this increase is largely attributable to the recording of Precautionary Assessments, which were not recorded as injuries prior to 2019.

2.10 In 2022/23, 268 fire-related injuries across prisons were reported. This rose in 2023/24 by 117%, in which 584 fire-related injuries were reported. This increase in fire-related injuries rose at a similar rate to the number of prison fires. In 2022/23, there were 1,423 prison fires, rising by 74% in 2023/24 in which there were 2,477 prison fires.

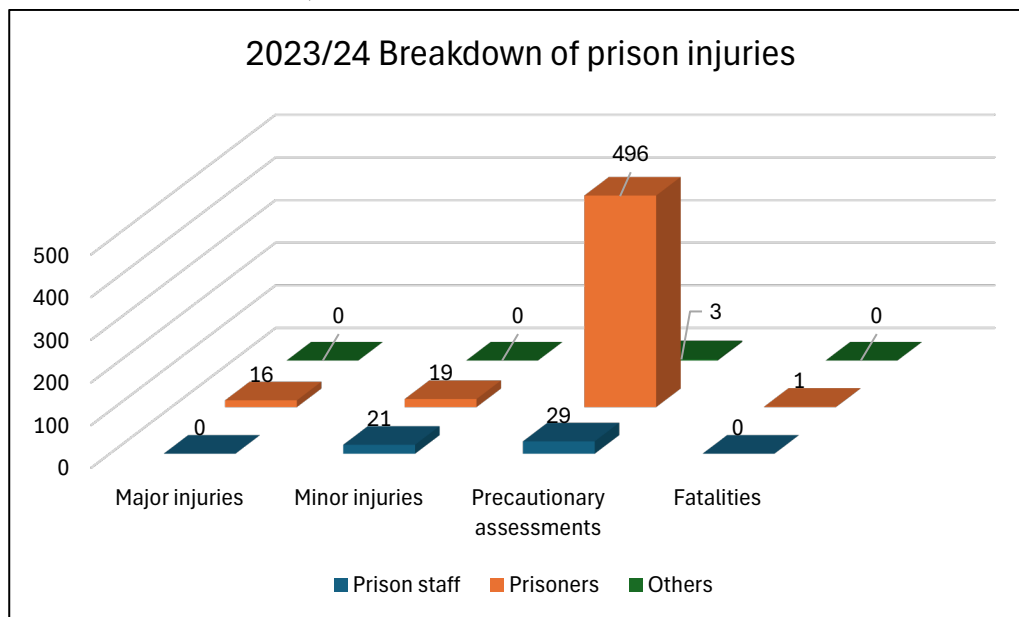
2.11 The risk of injury by fire is more likely in a cell, as the occupant cannot self-evacuate and it takes time to open the cell door securely and tackle the fire. The CPFSI investigate all injuries and deaths, checking for statutory breaches of the FSO and ensuring measures are implemented to prevent similar occurrences.

Figure 3: Breakdown of injuries in prisons, 2023/24

SOURCE: HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System data for prison fire injuries

2.12 Unpublished reporting guidance from HMPPS Fire Incident Reporting System, records injury categorisation as:

- Significant injuries are those which require treatment, e.g., serious burns and severe smoke inhalation
- Minor injuries are those which only require basic first aid treatment, e.g., small cuts and abrasions, blisters and minor burns and scalds



2.13 Precautionary Assessments are conducted by medical staff. In these instances, no injuries have occurred, but checks are undertaken following an individual's involvement with fire.

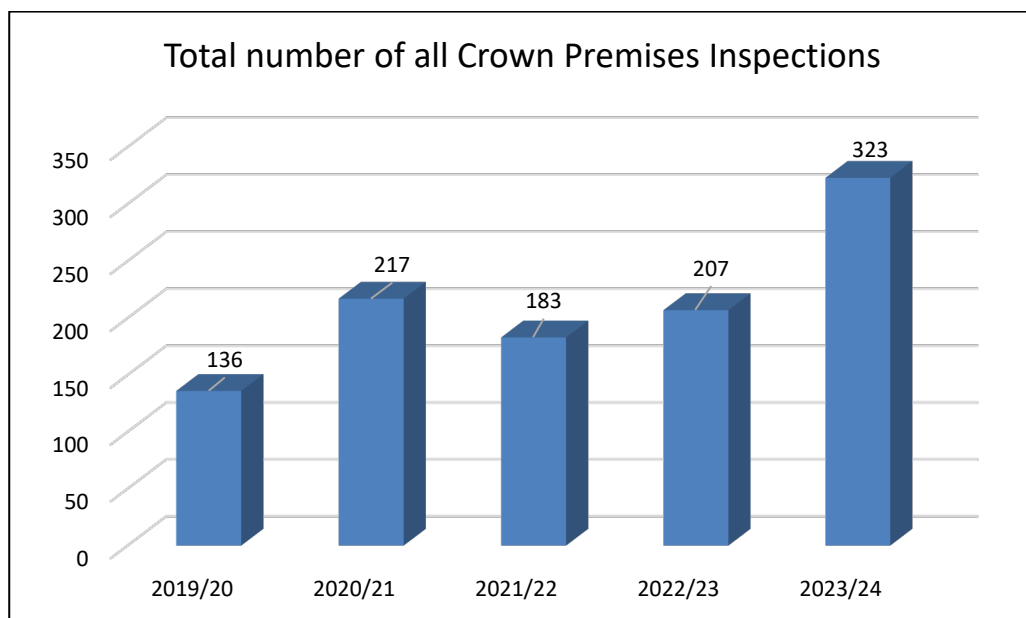
3. Report on inspection activity during the year

3.1 The breakdown of inspections of all Crown Premises is as follows:

- 39 prison inspections (21 full audits, 13 follow-up inspections post-initial audits, and 5 post-fire investigations on site)
- 284 inspections of other Crown Premises (241 full audits, 33 follow-up inspections post-initial audits, and 10 post-fire investigations on site)

Figure 4: 2019/20 – 2023/24, Total number of inspections of all Crown Premises

SOURCE: THEMIS – Management Information System



3.2 Figure 4 reveals that overall inspection numbers rose from 207 in 2022/23, by 56% to 323 in 2023/24.

3.3 Annually, CPFSI inspects approximately 20% of prisons in England. As prisons are at a higher risk to fire than other Crown Premises, they require a more frequent rate of inspection when compared to any other type of building. However, far more inspections are undertaken in the 9,885 Crown Premises, as there are far more buildings than the 115 prisons.

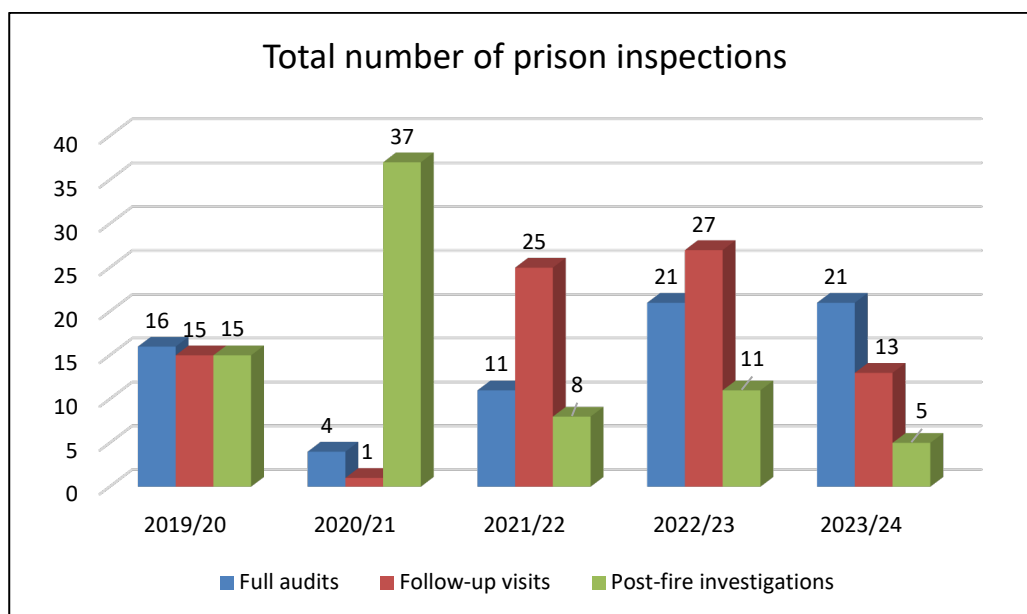
3.4 The Inspectorate must commit to an inspection programme of all sectors of the Crown portfolio, as increasing the inspection window increases the likelihood of a fire. The purpose of inspections is to improve fire safety management and reduce the risk of fire across all Crown premises. Presently, due to the large number of premises belonging to the Crown portfolio and the need to utilise CPFSI resources effectively, only a relatively small number of premises within each sector are scheduled for an annual inspection.

3.5 Investigations consist of on-site inspections and either remote or on-site investigations are conducted following every fire.

3.6 The increasing trend of the number of inspections has continued throughout this year, reaching a peak of 323.

Figure 5: Total number of prison inspections, 2019/20 – 2023/24

SOURCE: THEMIS – Management Information System



3.7 CPFSI investigations of prison estate, revealed that 95% fires were started deliberately. The main cause of fire-related injuries was due to delays in fire detection. Delays were caused by a continuing shortfall in the number of suitable in-cell AFDs.

3.8 It is imperative that appropriate AFDs are installed in all prison cells, thus ensuring that staff are alerted immediately to fires. HMPPS have provided further funding to install suitable in-cell AFDs for prisons, however 49 prisons were awaiting installation of AFDs in 2023/24. Although some of these prison wings were fitted with in-cell AFDs, other wings were not in possession of in-cell AFDs or contained a very limited supply.

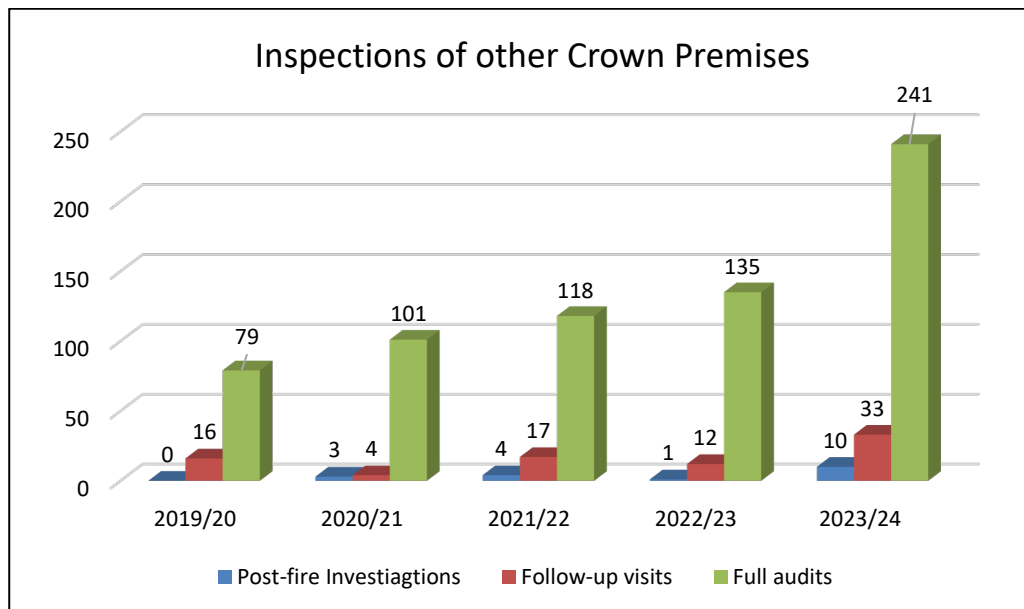
3.9 Effective early fire detection is critical to successfully protect both inmates and staff from fire and prevent damage. Success by early detection is also supported through: prompt response fire suppression, respiratory protective equipment, clear staff instructions, effective training and smoke control. The second most serious risk is from inadequate smoke control systems, which are required to protect both staff and prisoners from the effects of smoke spread.

3.10 Finally, the inspection programme identified further concerns surrounding inadequate fire-fighting equipment for staff to use when tackling cell fires and poor emergency lighting.

In all cases of non-compliance, either Action Plan or Enforcement Notices were served to the relevant Responsible Persons.

Figure 6: 2019/20 – 2023/24, Inspections of other Crown Premises

SOURCE: THEMIS – Management Information System



3.11 A general lack of being prepared, was highlighted as the most serious risk across other types of Crown Premises. Such risks include inadequate staff training and a lack of effective fire drills to test emergency procedures. Effective preparation and required procedures would identify potential problems and help staff to address them.

3.12 Furthermore, several inspections revealed that people may struggle to escape quickly and safely. This was often caused by the poor state of fire-resisting doors. In such cases of non-compliance, the Responsible Persons received formal notification via Enforcement Notices, advising of FSO measures with which they must comply.

3.13 Across the entire Crown portfolio, those risks had clear and recurrent 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.

3.14 Building Regulations consultations

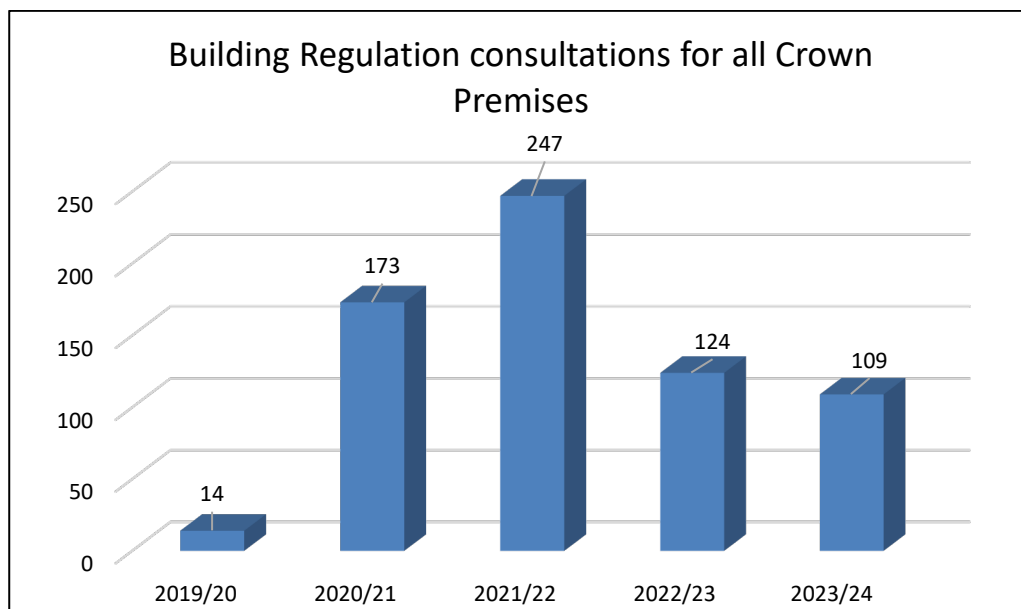
The Inspectorate received Building Regulations consultations from privately Appointed Inspectors or Local Authority Building Control departments. These consultations relate to proposed building works for both existing and new buildings, to enable them to meet the requirements of Part B of the Building Regulations.

3.15 The Inspectorate's scope also includes reviewing consultations and providing observations on the fire safety elements of the proposals, to ensure that when occupiers take over the building, the proposals comply with the FSO.

3.16 The increased number of consultations following Covid lockdowns has fallen to 109 in 2023/24. Consultations are demand led and CPFSI have only 20 working days to respond.

Figure 7: Building Regulations consultations for all Crown Premises, 2019/20 – 2023/24

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. The Responsible Person is expected to set out an acceptable plan within 28 days for rectifying the issues that were identified during the inspection.

Formal Notifications	
Alterations Notices	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 of 21 full audits of prisons:

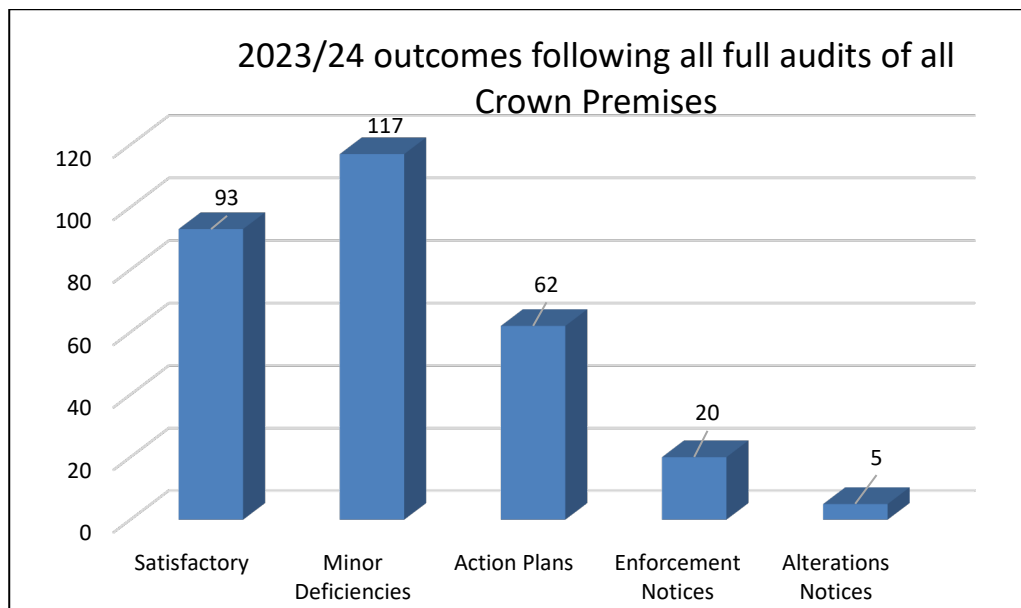
- 5 Alterations Notices
- 19 Enforcement Notices
- 15 Action Plans
- 17 minor non-compliance issues to address

4.2 Outcomes of 241 full audits of other Crown Premises:

- 1 Enforcement Notice
- 47 Action Plans
- 100 minor non-compliance issues to address
- 93 premises notified as satisfactory

Figure 8: The outcomes following all full audits, 2023/24

SOURCE: THEMIS – Management Information System



4.3 Follow-up inspections

Follow up inspections are undertaken several weeks, (and occasionally months) after the premises have been served with either an Enforcement Notice or an Action Plan.

In those prisons that received follow-up inspections:

- 4 further Enforcement Notices were issued
- 2 Action Plans were required
- 2 minor non-compliance issues were addressed
- 4 prisons were deemed satisfactory

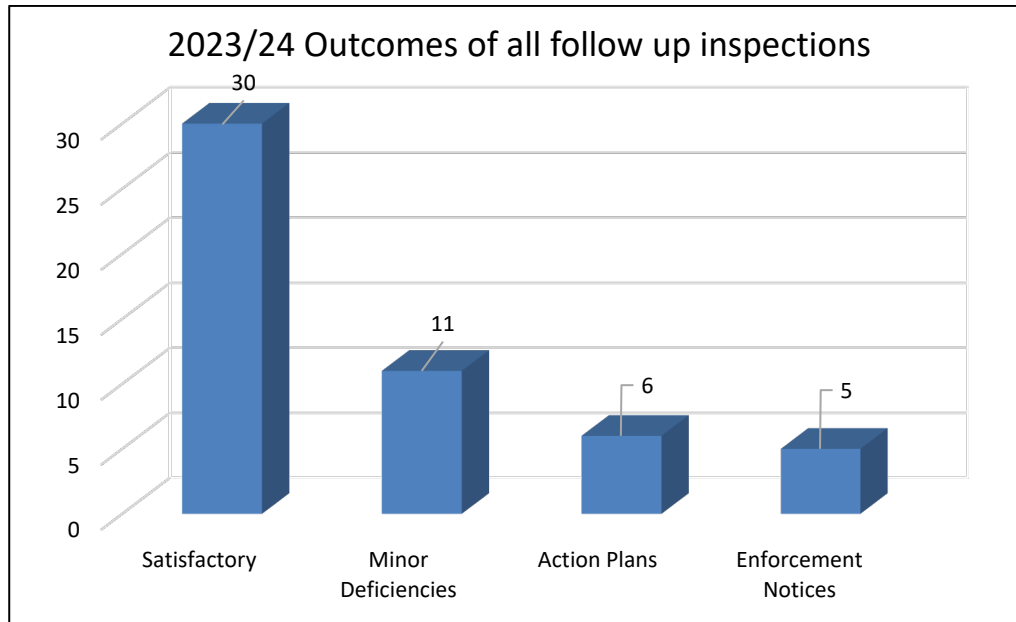
4.4 In those other Crown Premises where follow-up visits were undertaken:

- 1 Enforcement Notice was issued
- 4 Action Plans were required
- 9 minor non-compliance issues were addressed

- 26 premises were deemed satisfactory

Figure 9: The outcomes of all follow-up inspections, 2023/24

SOURCE: THEMIS – Management Information System



4.5 HMPPS must ensure that all officers comprising the collective Responsible Person, are aware of and are appropriately accountable for meeting their statutory responsibilities. CPFSI are aware that prison governors do not always exercise the full control, which a Responsible Person needs under the FSO. Furthermore, governors may not have the financial authority to take all necessary steps to ensure compliance, particularly where major expenditure is required.

5. Summary of overall picture

5.1 The risk to life from fire remains generally low in most Crown Premises, (even government buildings which are occupied by large numbers of people). In contrast, the frequency of fires within prison estates has risen significantly.

5.2 In 2022/23, there were 1,423 prison fires and 269 fire-related injuries sustained by prisoners. These figures rose in 2023/24, to 2,477 fires and 584 fire-related injuries to prisoners. The Inspectorate continues to work closely with HMPPS to reduce effectively, the numbers of prison fires.

5.3 The significant increase in the rate of prison fires, is largely caused by the misuse of both vapes and electrical equipment by inmates. In 2023/24, 95% of custodial fires were started deliberately.¹⁰ Inmates start fires for numerous reasons: challenging prison regimes, conflicts with other prisoners and staff, and to inflict harm. Despite this, the rate of fire fatalities has remained stable since 2019.

5.4 Delays in the detection of fires in prison, increase the risk of both prisoners and staff sustaining a fire-related injury. Delays are largely caused by a shortfall in suitable in-cell AFD – this is a persistent problem in parts of the prison estate. To further reduce the risk from fire in some establishments, improvements must be made to smoke control systems to protect prison occupants from the effects of smoke spread and inhalation.

5.5 There continues to be a small number of fires in the remainder of the Crown sector. Nevertheless, ineffective fire safety management is a common theme identified during on-site inspections.

¹⁰ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64be67e8d4051a00145a91a2/other-building-fires-dataset-270723.ods>, based on the “ACCIDENTAL OR DELIBERATE” field

6. Plans going forward: 2023/24 and beyond

6.1 **Utilise Management Information System (THEMIS):**

CPFSI aims to utilise THEMIS more effectively. By analysing the data in greater detail this will provide more accurate and current risk information, to enable the risk-based inspection programme to be more effectively targeted. Therefore, premises which are at the greatest risk from fire will be identified. Thus, Inspectors will be more effectively deployed to those high-risk premises.

6.2 **Professional accreditation:**

All Inspectors were qualified to the National Fire Chiefs Council, (NFCC) standard for fire safety enforcement officers. However, this standard changed, therefore additional training and education programmes will be sourced to ensure currency of competence.

6.3 **Increase in inspections of high-risk premises:**

CPFSI's primary focus is the continuation of targeting high-risk premises, namely prisons. By dynamically utilising THEMIS to ensure that inspections are undertaken, the risk to life from fire is reduced.