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Press release

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Significant spending on prisons has improved conditions but not alleviated overcrowding

Almost £300 million has been spent over the past six years on improving conditions in Scotland's prisons but the number of places has stayed the same.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *Managing increasing prisoner numbers in Scotland*, confirms that prisoner numbers reached a record high of about 7,700 in April 2008. Because the number of places has remained largely unchanged in recent years 11 of Scotland's 14 prisons are overcrowded and more than one-fifth of prisoners are sharing cells designed for one person.

Between 2000/01 and 2006/07 the average number of prisoners in Scotland increased by 20%, and the number is expected to rise by the same level again by 2016/17. Plans to increase prison capacity, including building three new prisons, may not be enough to accommodate these numbers if present trends continue.

Overcrowding restricts prisoners' access to rehabilitation activities which aim to cut re-offending. Currently about 65% of prisoners are reconvicted within two years of release.

Rising prisoner numbers can also lead to different categories of prisoner sharing accommodation and put pressure on services such as family visits and healthcare.

The growth in prisoner numbers has caused higher costs associated with admitting, accommodating and transferring people. However, the Scottish Prison Service has managed a significantly increased prisoner population with no real increase in running costs.

Auditor General for Scotland Robert Black said: "Significant amounts of money have been spent improving the conditions inside Scotland's prisons, but more than one in five prisoners are still sharing cells designed for one person. With the current projections indicating that the prison population could rise as much by 2016 as it has done since 2001, it will be important to improve access to programmes that help to reduce reoffending as well as ensuring an adequate number of prison places."

The report also looks at community sentences, which may be used as alternatives to prison. Since 2000/01, the use of community sentences has gone up by more than a half and spending has increased significantly. However, their use may still be restricted by availability of places and delays in starting community sentences, and more research is needed on their effectiveness.

For further information please contact Simon Ebbett on 0131 625 1652 or Fiona Deans on 0131 625 1651

Notes to editors

1. The figure above of 7,700 prisoners was correct at the time that Audit Scotland's report went to print. However, prisoner numbers change daily and the most up-to-date figures are available [here](#) on the Scottish Prison Service's website.
2. Audit Scotland has also prepared a paper on international comparisons in managing prisoner numbers. Please contact the press office on the numbers above for copies. It will also be available on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk from Thursday 8 May.
3. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website.

4. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland.
5. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Executive and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.