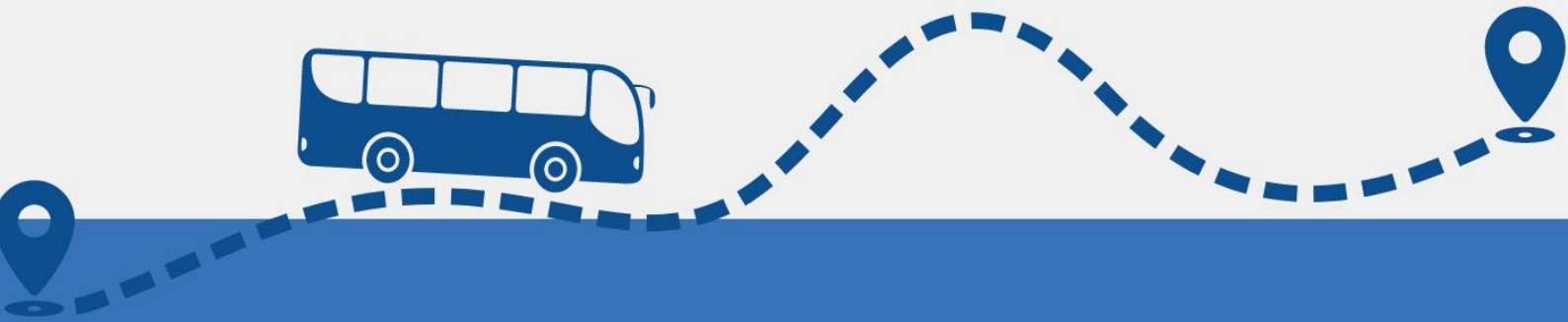


No Easy Journey



The Costs & Barriers to Visiting Prison for Families



Families continue to pay the price for imprisonment. Despite numerous reports and recommendations, the same barriers and challenges remain year on year.

Families Outside has prepared this paper based on recent evidence to further highlight the need for action in this area.

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Key Points:

- Imprisonment creates, sustains, and deepens poverty amongst children and families. Single women on low incomes overwhelmingly bear the costs of prison with significant negative effects for their physical and mental health. The impact on families is considerable: food and fuel poverty, and an inability to socialise and engage in activities that cost money, results in living in a form of permanent lockdown and leading to isolation.
- Travel costs, geographical challenges, personal circumstances, and limitations in terms of local travel options are some of the many reasons families affected by imprisonment face significant challenges when trying to maintain effective contact with a person in prison.
- Meaningful connection between children and families with the person in prison, where appropriate, can support the health and wellbeing of all involved. However, the *Paying the Price Report (2023)* found that this comes at a significant cost to families, and more needs to be done to recognise and support this.
- The Help with Prison Visits Scheme is the only current financial support available to families, and it only reaches some families who qualify for it, meaning many are not supported who need it. We have found the scheme doesn't reach everyone who needs it, there is a lack of awareness and promotion of the scheme, and it has limitations in meeting the needs of people in Scotland, especially those living in more rural areas.

Families Outside

Families Outside is the only national charity in Scotland working solely on behalf of families affected by imprisonment. Our purpose is to improve outcomes for children and families, creating and promoting opportunities for families to uphold and defend their rights. We offer a range of services including a national helpline, local 1 to 1 and group support, and training for professionals; whilst also working to raise awareness of the issues facing families affected by imprisonment, influencing policy and practice to bring about longer-term change.

Introduction

The issue of travel has been a growing area of concern for Families Outside and others for many years. Previous reports into this issue, such as *Do not pass go.....Travel Links to Scottish Prisons (2007)*¹ and *Travel, Transport and Visiting Report (2019)*², raised the same concerns we still see today.

Travel costs, geographical challenges, personal circumstances, and limitations in terms of local travel options are some of the many reasons families affected by imprisonment face significant challenges when trying to maintain effective contact with a person in prison.

Families Outside's *Paying the Price Report (2023)*³ also illustrates the numerous costs falling to families when supporting someone in prison.

¹ <https://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/content/uploads/2011/02/do-not-pass-go.pdf>

² <https://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/12/Maya-Cohen-Travel-Report.pdf>

³ <https://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/content/uploads/2023/03/MASTER-COPY-Financial-Impact-Report.pdf>

Overcoming the costs, challenges, and barriers associated with families being able to maintain effective and consistent contact with the person in prison is a key priority for Families Outside. We welcome any further thoughts or solutions as to what can be done to improve this situation. This paper details some of the current context, challenges, and potential solutions that need more consideration.

Families Affected by Imprisonment

The role families play in supporting desistance from offending is commonly lauded. The Social Exclusion Unit in 2002 reported that people in prison are up to six times less likely to reoffend if they maintain family contact during imprisonment⁴, and Lord Farmer's Review described families as the 'golden thread' that should run through the prison system, highlighting that relationships are fundamental if people are to change⁵.

Meaningful connection between children and families with the person in prison, where appropriate, can support the health and wellbeing of all involved. However, the *Paying the Price* report (2023) found that this comes at a significant cost to families, and more needs to be done to recognise and support this.

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) acknowledges this on their website, stating that:

SPS recognise the absolutely negative impact that imprisonment can have on family life. That is why supporting and maintaining family links and promoting positive relationships generally while the family member is in prison is one of the SPS' key priorities going forward.

We recognise that such positive relationships can make a valuable contribution in supporting offenders to desist from further offending.

We are committed to working with partners to maximise what we can do.

According to the most recent Scottish Prisoner Survey in 2019, 61% of people held in prison reported having a child. The most common forms of contact with family were telephone (58%), letter (57%), and visits (43%). Over half reported their visitors having problems when visiting them. The most common issue was around the distance to the prison (72%), lack of transport (65%), and the costs involved (57%).⁶

The last SPS Visitor Survey was conducted in 2018 and identified that a third of visitors (34%) reported experiencing 'visit problems.' The problem reported most frequently by visitors was the distance of the prison from their home (53%), followed by the cost involved in getting to the prison (44%) and time limits (41%). Around one-quarter of those reporting problems referred to a 'lack of transport', 'staff attitudes' and 'refreshment facilities' (28%, 28%, and 26% respectively).⁷

We know that visit numbers are decreasing, and we also know that there are clear links between deprivation and imprisonment. 35% of all arrivals in prison come from the 10% of Scotland's most deprived areas, and 8.5% are registered as no fixed abode.⁸ People in prison and their families, who are already struggling, are being squeezed financially to the point of being crushed. Many families who are already struggling simply cannot afford the extra costs to maintain effective contact with the person in prison, and the current systems set up to support them are not working.

⁴ <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/poverty/downloads/keyofficialdocuments/Reducing%20Reoffending.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-review-places-family-ties-at-the-heart-of-prison-reform>

⁶ [17th Prisoner Survey 2019 \(sps.gov.uk\)](https://www.sps.gov.uk/17th-prisoner-survey-2019)

⁷ [Visitors Survey 2018 \(sps.gov.uk\)](https://www.sps.gov.uk/visitors-survey-2018)

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-prison-population-statistics-2020-21/>

Current Barriers and Challenges

- The only financial support available for families is the Help with Prison Visits scheme⁹. We found that this scheme only reaches a small number of families who qualify for it, awareness of its existence is low, and many barriers exist in claiming it.
- Those who can claim back travel expenses through the Help with Prison Visits scheme often find the process for claiming can take too long, leaving families out of pocket.
- The Help with Prison Visits scheme does not consider many specific and unique situations facing families, for example, those living in rural areas, those with issues that prevent them from travel by public transport, those unable to pay out the money in advance, and those claiming mileage: the scheme only pays 13 pence per mile, which often doesn't cover the costs incurred.
- Families living in rural areas who are not eligible for the Help with Prison Visits scheme are racking up credit card debts and unable to pay other bills in order to visit their loved one in prison. The scheme not 'Island Proofed'.
- Visit times are often not coordinated effectively to take into account local travel options, leaving families walking miles, cutting visits short, and having to take taxis, leaving them even further out of pocket.
- Family members are moving area and giving up their homes to be closer to the prison where their loved one is placed.
- Local travel services do not effectively and fairly service all prisons.

More detailed information on the current barriers and challenges is available in *Prison Visitor Centres Travelling for Visits Feedback* (Appendix 1) and *Family Feedback on Help with Prison Visits Scheme* (Appendix 2).

The Impact on Families

Despite recognition from Scottish Government and from SPS that family contact is vital, we still see too many barriers and too little support for families to facilitate effective contact, which we know is so vitally important for all involved, as well as being rights-respecting.

Below are some recent, real-life examples of the issues families are facing today. Many of these are being missed in the planning and delivery of services and policies across the justice system and beyond. Again, more detail is available in *Prison Visitor Centres Travelling for Visits Feedback* (Appendix 1) and *Family Feedback on Help with Prison Visits Scheme* (Appendix 2)

HMP Shotts

- ❖ Instances of families with toddlers walking, in winter, on dark country roads with small pavements to get to and from the train station.
- ❖ Due to no transport link, an elderly man walked from the train station to the prison (40-45 minute walk) in hot weather, and on arriving at the prison, collapsed in the vestibule area.
- ❖ A woman in an electric wheelchair (paralysed from chest down) travelling from Kilmarnock, got to the train station where no taxis were available to accommodate those with mobility issues such as wheelchairs. She ended up traveling to and from the train station in her wheelchair.
- ❖ A family with a 2-year-old child walked to the train station after a night visit, in the dark on a country road, due to no taxis being available.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-prison-visits>

HMP Kilmarnock

- ❖ Visitors from Glasgow frequently say that the time taken using public transport and the connections are a deciding factor with regard to attending visits, as they often have to get 3 or 4 buses each way. One visitor described how they have to leave the house at 0630 in the morning to make the 1000 visit, and then they don't get back home until 1800, thereby one visit takes up an entire day.

HMP Addiewell

- ❖ There is an issue, particularly for families with children, during the winter months with evening visits finishing at 8pm and families having to walk to, and wait at, a remote train station.

HMP Grampian

- ❖ It is becoming too expensive for families to increase the number of visits, so video calls are slowly replacing physical visits, which shouldn't be the case. There needs to be some kind of alternative to cover the needs of families visiting prisons located in a remote area.

Policy Context

- Scotland's Second National Human Rights Action Plan 2023-2030 (SNAP 2)¹⁰ specifically identifies "families of accused persons and people in custody" as a group whose rights are most at risk. The plan requires people whose rights are most at risk to be identified and prioritised by delivery stakeholders. SNAP 2 identifies the protection of private and family life as a priority area and specifically highlights that "infringements of the right to private and family life of the children and families of accused persons and prisoners occur at many points in the criminal justice process" and notes that "coordinated action is needed to ensure all stakeholders understand the right and apply a rights-based approach". As an action, SNAP 2 sets forth the following: "Explore how best to promote and uphold the right to private and family life of the children and families of accused persons and prisoners at each stage of the criminal justice system." Supporting and facilitating meaningful contact and thereby addressing the barriers to travel is obviously central to this.
- The Scottish Government's Vision for Justice in Scotland (2022)¹¹ makes a number of commitments in relation to families, including that "individuals and their families will be involved in decisions which affect them". In relation to the aim to "support rehabilitation, use custody only where there is no alternative and work to reduce reoffending and re-victimisation", the Vision for Justice notes the impacts of imprisonment on children and families, including financial impacts, and highlights the importance of continuing relationships between children and parents/carers in prison noting that "good-quality" contact is crucial for children. It also notes the importance of strong family relationships as a protective factor against reoffending and the need to support the maintenance and enhancement of links with families. The Vision for Justice further states, "we will have achieved our aim to support rehabilitation, use custody only where there is no alternative and work to reduce reoffending and re-victimisation when people who have offended are supported to maintain and enhance their social networks and links with their families... and those with a family member in prison are protected from the negative impacts." Again, action to remove barriers in terms of travel to support meaningful contact will be required if Scottish Government is going to achieve the commitments set out above.

¹⁰ <https://www.snaprights.info/snap-2>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/vision-justice-scotland/>

- The recently published UNCRC Concluding Observations (2023)¹² from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child included a number of recommendations relating to children with a parent in prison, including specifically: “Ensure that children of incarcerated parents can maintain personal relations with their parents and have access to adequate services, accessible information and appropriate support, including by a social worker and financial support for visits and remote contact”. The Scottish Government will have to take action to address the barriers to travel to ensure compliance with this recommendation.
- Reducing inequalities is one of the priorities of the National Transport Strategy (2020)¹³, which states that Scotland’s transport system will “provide fair access to services we need”. The strategy notes the “duty to reduce inequalities and advance equality of opportunity and outcome, including the protected characteristics” and states “we will ensure that our disadvantaged communities and individuals have fair access to the transport services they need. The transport system will enable everyone to access a wide range of services and to realise their human rights.” Whilst families affected by imprisonment do not fall within the protected characteristics, as noted above, they are recognised as a group whose rights are most at risk within SNAP 2. Action addressing the travel issues facing families by imprisonment is therefore required to ensure fair access to prisons for families to ensure their rights to maintain contact are being upheld.

Recommendations & Suggestions for Improvements

What	Who	Progress
1. Review the Help with Prison Visits scheme (HWPV) and its application in Scotland including specific consideration given to those visiting from the Highlands and Islands. Consideration should be given to the National Transport Strategy’s Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)	SPS and HMPPS	SPS representatives are liaising with HMPPS regarding review of the Help with Prison Visits scheme. This includes the financial amounts awarded as well as a review of support for those travelling from the highlands and islands.
2. Promote and raise awareness of the Help with Prison Visits scheme and supports available for help with applying. There is a need to find a way to ensure that every family is fully aware of the scheme and the eligibility required to make a claim.	SPS staff should be aware of the scheme and promote it to visitors as well as those in custody so that they can make their visitors aware of the scheme. Promotion of the scheme should take place within prisons through radio, TV, posters, and leaflets as well as staff awareness sessions. The scheme could also be promoted through Prisoner Inductions.	Prison Visitors’ Centres proactively raise awareness of the scheme through posters, various media and staff support visitors applications. Families Outside regional and Helpline staff raise awareness and support applications with those they work alongside as well as external agencies through awareness raising events and various media.

¹² https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGBR%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en

¹³ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/national-transport-strategy-2/>

	<p>Key Stakeholders including Prison Visitor Centres and Families Outside should actively promote the scheme, including to those not already visiting the prison, through various forms of media and awareness raising events.</p> <p>Community Organisations – such as Citizens Advice Bureau, DWP, Courts, and the staff within should be aware of the scheme and raise awareness of it through various media.</p>	<p>Themed Months, a collaborative partnership project between Prison Visitor Centres, SPS, and Families Outside. Five months of awareness raising activities have been planned, and the First themed month is on Travel. (Help With Prison Visits and its promotion.)</p>
<p>3. SPS to explore the option of the prison cashier being able to give travel expenses to families claiming via the Help with Prison Visits scheme at local establishments rather than having to wait for weeks.</p> <p>For example, this could be considered even for minimal amounts and larger amounts dealt with via the established process.</p>	<p>SPS/HMPPS</p>	
<p>4. The Scottish Government to ensure that accessibility for prisons is added to any future national transport policy, including expanding the free bus pass scheme to include families affected by imprisonment who need it.</p>	<p>Scottish Government/Transport Scotland</p>	<p>Current SG Prison Policy officials will look to develop links with Transport colleagues with a view to raising awareness of issues relating to families affected by imprisonment and links with poverty, accessibility, and inclusion.</p>
<p>5. Community Justice Partnerships to add transport issues and accessibility to prisons to their agenda and plans. This should include partnership working with transport and planning departments from their member Local Authorities, prisons in the area, and any other agencies who can assist.</p>	<p>Community Justice Scotland - Liaise with Community Justice Scotland and Community Justice Strategy team around current issues for Community Justice Partnerships and potential to raise with CJP chairs / coordinators.</p>	<p>CJS – “aim to work closely with our partners to develop new ways of supporting people who have committed a crime, their families and the various agencies that help to break the cycle of reoffending, allowing people to make a positive contribution to society”.</p> <p>Appendix A within <i>Do Not Pass Go...Travel Links to Scottish Prisons</i> provides a template on how the issues could be introduced into CJ Partnership plans</p>
<p>6. Investigate opportunities with Community Transport to prisons. For example, The Community</p>	<p>Community Justice Scotland/Community Justice Partnerships</p>	

Transport Association who have links with members providing transport links such as Dial a Journey and local arrangements such as discounted rates with taxi firms.		
7. Expand Sacro prison visiting travel service	Scottish Government/Local Authorities/SPS	
8. Local Prison staff should consider public transport arrangements in relation to visits, informed by regular reviews, in partnership with Prison Visitor Centres and partner organisations to ensure it meets the needs of those sentenced, on remand, and for Children's Visits in line with travel options and the needs of families.	SPS/Prison Visitors Centres (PVCs)/partner organisations	<p>Within the PVC Service Level Agreement, it is an obligation of the establishment to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consult with the visitors' centre before making substantial changes to the visits timetables. - The visitor centre manager will convene a steering group for the service and invite the establishment to have a representative on this group.
9. Feedback from visitors should be sought by conducting a visitor survey to determine and respond to families' needs both nationally and locally on a yearly basis, ensuring transport and accessibility of the prison is a question asked.	SPS/Prison Visitor Centres	
10. The public transport provisions in place should be made available by individual establishments both locally and nationally online.	SPS	
11. Transport issues for visitors should be considered during prison inspections. These inspections should highlight good practice as well as problems.	HMPIS/Scottish Government	Scottish Government representatives have stated they will consider role of HMIPS.
12. Convene and continue a national travel group in relation to travel to Scottish Prisons to support the recommendations from this paper and past reports.	Scottish Government /SPS	
13. Monitor and comply with the Prison Rules requiring people to be placed in prisons close to their homes (Prison Allocation System).	Scottish Government /SPS	

14. Require an assessment of the potential impact on family contact before a person is transferred to another prison for administrative reasons (e.g. to complete a course)	Scottish Government /SPS	
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Appendix 1: Prison Visitor Centres Travelling for Visits Feedback

The National Lead for Prison Visitors' Centres engaged the managers of the 12 Prison Visitors Centres in Scotland, asking the following:

Barriers to Visiting Prisons (especially from rural/remote locations)

Families Outside is looking at the barriers to visiting prison, with a focus on rural/remote communities (but not exclusively so). We are needing real life examples/ideas about this, so that we have genuine experiences to inform our viewpoint.

Please illustrate experiences you and/or the families you are supporting have in relation to visiting prison.

What's working?

What are the challenges?

Suggestions of improvements?

All Prison Visitor Centres (PVCs except Edinburgh (Barnardo's), Glenochil, and Stirling (Forth Valley Inclusion) responded, and their feedback is below in unedited form. Some have drifted from talking specifically about barriers to visiting the prison, however, the additional information and examples are helpful in providing a context to the challenges that may impact travel.

HMP Addiewell

What's working?

The fact that the train station isn't too far a walk from the prison.

What are the challenges?

Although Addiewell isn't in a remote location, the biggest issue is where it lies geographically. The train is hourly weekdays and then 2 hourly on a Sunday. It is also on a different train line for some families who come in from areas across north Lanarkshire. For instance we have 1 family who attend Addiewell from Airdrie, if driving this is only 20 minutes or so away. However the train from Airdrie comes into Bathgate and then there is an additional 1 hour bus trip to get to Addiewell. This family travel by taxi from the train station as this allows them to shorten their travel time to the prison.

The prison are helpful for those who do travel in this way but visit times aren't in line with the train times so families either have a long wait before their visit or afterwards. If the visit starts late then the knock on effect is that the family don't have the full hour visit as they need to leave for the train.

Another issue is when it is an evening visit and it is in the winter months, finishing at 8pm and then having families walk to a remote train station to wait isn't ideal, especially for those who have children.

Suggestions of improvements:

Unsure how this can be improved other than when someone is sentenced that geographical advice is given in regards to where their loved one is placed.

The prison ensure that the visits run in a timely manner to support those who are travelling by public transport.

HMP Barlinnie

What's working?

Seems to work for those travelling a longer distance due to a higher sum of money impacting on their weekly budget.

What are the challenges?

For those travelling a shorter distance the process is cumbersome and time consuming. For some there are IT issues, and most families feel it is not worth the hassle applying for their travel expenses.

Suggestions of improvements:

More awareness raising sessions.

HMP Inverness

What's working?

Close to the main bus and train links, then centre is a good place for access to information. Access to food bank, warm boxes etc

What are the challenges?

Visiting times are in the times, when children are finishing school, only one children visit a week, makes it hard to build relationships with family member.

Suggestions of improvements:

More child friendly visits

HMP Grampian

What's working?

Communication and relationship between the front staff members (A/E managers and FCOs) and families has improved.

What are the challenges?

Public Transport, Transport fees, posting property, visits entitlements per month, children's visits times.

Suggestions of improvements:

In terms of transport, there need to be some kind of alternative to cover needs of families visiting prisons located in a remote area. It is becoming too expensive for families to increase number of visits and video calls are slowly replacing physical visits, which shouldn't be the case.

HMP Kilmarnock

What's working?

Visitors have commented that since the Foundations Hub opened here at HMPK, it has made a positive impact to their experience visiting the prison. They said the environment within the VC is much more welcoming and makes them more inclined to visit with their other family members, including children. One visitor commented that their family member who gives them a lift to visits and used to wait in the car for them, now comes into the visitor centre to wait and have a cup of tea and a chat. "Its made such a difference to our visits being able to do that, much less stressful".

What are the challenges?

Financial impact of travelling to prison visits are a huge challenge for a lot of our visitors. Our visitors come from all over Scotland not just East Ayrshire. We have regular visitors from Glasgow, Central Scotland, Dumfries & Galloway, Edinburgh. There have also been visitors from Ireland and England. The cost of fuel in the car, public transport and money for refreshments for the journey and during the visit all add to this impact.

Public Transport

Poor public transport service to the prison is a major factor. The only form of public transport to get to the prison is by bus. There is no train service nearby.

Bus times are not conducive to the visit times in that one service will get them there too early or the next service gets them there too late. Visitors have mentioned that being early was not an issue for them but before the Foundations Hub arrived at the Visitors Centre there were instances where, if they were early for a visit they were denied access or discouraged from waiting inside the VC by prison staff. This has since been addressed and the situation no longer occurs. However, the bus times still impact on contributing to the stress of getting to the prison and the visit experience.

Some visitors describe having to wait 40-60 minutes in the freezing cold often with children for a bus after a visit due to the bus times. They also comment that the distance from the bus stop to the VC, approximately ½ a mile, can be difficult to negotiate, especially in bad weather as it is a walk along an open, exposed driveway. Several of our visitors have mobility and sensory impairment and having to navigate this adds to the stress of the visit.

Visitors coming by bus have to cross the busy A76 which is the main arterial route south from Ayrshire to Dumfries and Galloway and carries a large amount of haulage freight as well as domestic traffic. There are no

pedestrian crossings and there is an acceleration lane on the southbound carriageway alongside both bus stops which effectively means pedestrians have to cross 3 lines of traffic on this road when using the bus service.

There is unfortunately only one bus company that runs a bus service in the area, that passes the prison and gives access to Kilmarnock. Only one bus company currently operates all services from Kilmarnock Bus station, north and southbound.

The nearest train station to the prison is in Kilmarnock but due to times and costs, most people use the bus. The train from Kilmarnock to Glasgow takes the same length of time as the direct bus service to Glasgow so most people feel the bus is a better option and children can now travel free on the buses.

The length of time it takes also to get connecting public transport was raised and the impact this has on a daily basis, especially when the children are in school.

Visitors from Glasgow frequently say that the time taken using public transport and the connections are a deciding factor with regards to attending visits, as they often have to get 3 or 4 buses each way. One visitor described how they have to leave the house at 0630 in the morning to make the 1000 visit and then they don't get back home until 1800. There by one visit takes up an entire day.

One visitor travels from Girvan to the prison. This is a journey of 33.4 miles, which takes 52 minutes by car but 2 hours 38 minutes each way using public transport combination of rail and buses. They said that this takes up most of their day. Their partner was on remand at the time and they were making this journey 3-4 times a week.

These issues using public transport are potentially impacting on the Saturday morning children's visit which is 0930-1030 and the Sunday breakfast club 1030-11.30. . The bus services are less frequent on Saturdays and Sundays. Given the early time on the Saturday and the length of time a journey by bus takes, this may be affecting the uptake.

Taxi

The cost of a taxi journey to Kilmarnock bus station from the prison is approximately £20 one way and the same from the prison to the bus station.

One visitor described how they had paid £54 for a taxi each visit from Ardrossan to the prison whilst their partner was on remand. This journey takes approximately 27 minutes in a car (17 miles) but the same journey by bus would take them 2 hours 30 minutes each way. When visitors are scheduling visits and managing work and children this can be a vital consideration.

Most of the visitors said that the cost of using taxis for their journey was unaffordable and unsustainable.

Assisted Prison Visits Scheme

There are many visitors who are unaware of this scheme until we arrived at the visitors centre. We encourage people who are eligible to submit a claim, and assist many on a weekly basis to submit a claim. Feedback from visitors regarding the scheme is mixed. Several visitors although they are eligible and we offer to help, say "its not worth the hassle", "I need the money now, not in a few weeks time", "I'm still having to pay this out", "You don't get the full amount".

At present all information regarding travel to and from prison, bus timetables, assistance with prison visits scheme are provided by ourselves to visitors and families.

Suggestions of improvements:

If certain bus services came into the grounds and did a stop at visitors centre and back out. This would not take them off their route. (We did discuss the potential "stigma" of this as in other passengers knowing where people are going. Visitors pointed out that due to the semi rural location that other passengers are currently aware of this when they are travelling by bus so that would not make them less likely to use a bus service that came into the prison grounds.)

Times of Remand Visits

At HMPK there are no evening remand visits. Two days a week there is a 1600-1645 visit. Visitors have mentioned that this is not helpful for people who work. They said an evening visit 18.30-1930, like those for convicted prisoners, would be helpful to them.

HMP Low Moss

What's working?

Children visits are definitely working, we have seen children become more at ease and comfortable in the visiting hall during these visits and their parents have told us that they feel more at ease at these visits as their child/ren is less anxious.

The FVC and tea bar area works well and helps to develop a positive relationship between staff at the FVC and the visitors, which provides the families visiting our setting with a more positive outcome and experience.

What are the challenges?

Recently, we have come across challenges with children and adults, who have ASN, visiting our setting who struggle with the process and procedures of being physically searched and loud waiting rooms. We have found that there seems to be no adaptation for these individuals.

Another challenge that visitors have approached us about, is the length of visit times, as some visitors are travelling a lengthy journey, for a 45 minute visit. Other prisons have access to 2 hours visits for visitors that are travelling as well as 2 hour visits for families with children, to really benefit from the visits and activities we can provide to maintain relationships.

Suggestions of improvements:

Adapting security/regulations and visits for children and adults who have ASN, to ensure their experience is as positive as possible, without causing any harm or trauma.

Providing longer visits, where able, to facilitate for visitors who have travelled a long journey and/or families/children, to ensure they are benefiting most from their visits. The timetable seems to be developed around SPS rather than children and families. This is understandable due to staffing issues at present, but perhaps looking more holistically at the families and their needs would be more beneficial.

Another suggestion we have, is creating a video of the process of visiting a prison that we can provide to families or visitors attending, before they come, or that is accessible online. As right now, the support and advice is only accessible, once they are here and visiting. A video could show them what to expect and lessen some nerves and anxiousness. Something like a walk through from the carpark/bus stop and what to expect when you enter the atrium and the processes for security and the FVC etc.

HMP Perth

What's working?

Quality visits/especially family visits. Food being offered. Getting help to apply for help with visits. Visits which coincide with public transport.

What are the challenges?

Cost to get here, if they don't meet the criteria for help with visits, Timing of trains buses, stresses with remembering change/money for the vending machines & the cost of this. Timetable not easy to follow for the visits.

Suggestions of improvements:

Length of visit, help with visits should look into low income. Having the prison cashier able to give money back once a month rather than waiting weeks for a minimal amount. (for example, less than £30). Keeping larger amounts for the Birmingham office to deal with.

HMP Polmont

What's working?

Virtual Visits make a difference for those from a distance.

What are the challenges?

Childrens visits at 11.15am Mon-Fri means if travelling from eg Highlands leaving really early with very young child/ren.

Distance generally as Polmont is a national facility.

Cost- many not entitled to Help with Prison Visits.

Evening visit 7.45-8.30pm very late if relying on public transport- less frequent, longer waits, home later.

Suggestions of improvements:

Evening visit time earlier.

Childrens Visits times more varied options through week to suit different timetables of families.

HMP Shotts

What's working?

Still looking into means to improve transport for those families visiting the prison.

What are the challenges?

Transport getting to and from prison and train station.

Suggestions of improvements:

Having transport provided to pick up and drop off from train station.

Real situations

- Toddlers walking in winter on dark country roads with small pavement to get to and from the train station.
- Elderly man walked from train station to prison (40-45 minute walk) in heat, got to the prison and collapsed in vestibule area due to no transport link.
- Woman in electric wheelchair (paralysed from chest down) travelling from Kilmarnock, got to train station and no taxis in Shotts that accommodate those with mobility issues such as wheel chairs. Lady ended up traveling to and from station in wheelchair.
- Family with 2 year old walked to train station after night visit in dark on country road due to no taxis available.

Families Outside Report_September 2023

As a response to discussions and aims of the Families Outside Travel Action Group – members embarked on gathering feedback on experiences from family members in engaging with the Help With Prison Visits Scheme.

We asked three key questions:

- (i) What works?
- (ii) What are the challenges?
- (iii) What are the suggested improvements?
- (iv) Any examples of travel journeys/experiences of applying or receiving the benefit

The group engaged with:

- Families who are currently being supported by Families Outside
- Families Outside staff
- Families Outside Support and Information Team who provide advice and support to families and professionals via helpline, email, text, and webchat
- National prison visitor centre staff and families

**Not directly related to influencing the Help with Prison Visits Scheme but came through in the feedback*

Family Experiences

Not covering costs – families who need the benefit still out of pocket:

Family travelling 187 miles one way to HMP Grampian, at 13p per mile they could claim back £24.31. The cost to for a friend to drive her is 20 pence per mile (2L diesel car), which would cost £37.40 one way. So, the total cost for a visit for that family to get a lift is £74.80.

The family can claim back £24.31 each way at 13 pence per mile – so in total £48.62 - and is still £26.18 out of pocket for each visit. For a family who meets the criteria they set to be eligible to claim, £26.18 is a lot of money to spend on travel for one visit.

Examples of journeys:

“Most time we need to leave Anderston Area at 9.30 walk to Queen Street train station wait on train get off at Alloa then need to get bus to Tullibody we then walk 4 miles to prison, and we don’t get back home till about 6/7pm.”

“Early family visit we need to leave the house at 6am in morning get taxi to train station get off at Stirling get taxi, which is £15 there and back, we sometimes get bus from Stirling then walk 4 miles and we don’t get home till about 5pm.”



“Travel journey from Newmilns in East Ayrshire to HMP Edinburgh discussed with client on 5/7/23

- 08.30 am bus from Newmilns to Kilmarnock bus station – approx. 20 mins
- 20 min wait then a bus to Glasgow – approx 45 mins
- Get to Queen Street Train station.
- Train from Queen Street station to Haymarket Edinburgh – approx. 1hr 40 mins.
- At Haymarket get Number 25 bus to just outside HMP Edinburgh. Approx. 20 min on bus.
- Arrived at 1.45. Instructions are that family’s must be in the Prison before 2pm for a visit at 2.30.

All in, around a 5 hour 15 min journey – 8.30 am to 13.45 one way

- 30-minute visit with daughter
- Leave at 3pm to do the return journey.
- However, once back at Glasgow bus station, the buses only run hourly to get back to Kilmarnock. Unfortunately missed the 19.30 so had to wait and get the 20.30
- Bus from Kilmarnock to Newmilns and arrived home at 21.20.

6 hour 20 min journey return from 3pm to 21.20 “



Racking up debt:

- Families living in rural areas who are not eligible for the Help With Prison Visits scheme are racking up credit card debts and unable to pay other bills in order to visit their loved one in prison.

Moving house:

- Family members are moving area and giving up their homes to be closer to the prison where their loved one is placed.

Children’s Visits – age restriction impact on families:

A mother of 2 children (aged 14 + 18), with her partner in HMP Grampian, is having to choose between her children each week who gets to see their dad, as the 18-year old isn’t eligible to attend the children’s visit with their younger sibling. The family is limited in how many visits they can have due to the limitations on how often someone can apply to the benefit. They can’t afford to pay for additional visits out their own pocket. This is having a direct detrimental impact on the relationship between the children and their father, and on their overall family dynamic.

What Works

- Help With Prison Visit payments straight to bank accounts.
- You can apply for HWPV on paper and online.

Challenges

Awareness:

- Awareness – most families do not know the scheme exists.

Accessibility & Process:

- Difficult to apply – complicated and exclusionary process.
- People with additional needs/literacy issues cannot access the scheme without support.
- Process can be long, and it takes a while to hear back – a lot of chasing for families.
- Claim unsuccessful – no reason given – previously applied circumstances unchanged?
- Process is strict and often not needs led – for e.g., cannot claim back for more than a month but can take longer than that to sign up.
- Families that are low income but not eligible – huge gap.

Barriers:

- Not able to claim mileage in advance so those needing to use cars further disadvantaged.
- Local travel services do not effectively and fairly service all prisons.*
- Need to wait on the SPS to sign off discretionary payments for families travelling and needing extra support like accommodation etc. – no official process/guidance in place for this.
- Not classified as an official UK or Scottish benefit, therefore not subject to the same process in terms of appeals or complaints.
- No guidance around what the scheme means in relation to exceptional circumstances. This often requires a support worker or advocate to chase. No clear process or guidance.
- Issues arise in relation to who qualifies for the HWPV support. For example, if you are not immediate family, you can only access support if you are that person's 'sole visitor'. This can create issues especially for care experienced people, who might receive visits from close friends or those they have a 'sibling-like' relationship with.
- Families must pay for medical certificates to 'prove' they need to get a taxi rather than walk etc – these certificates often cost money, with no certainty that this will qualify them.
- Families are asked to renew documents every 3 months, which creates further barriers.

Not covering costs:

- No support for court visits.
- 13pence per mile – not covering costs for mileage for many families.

Incompatible with Scotland:

- Benefit not 'island proofed'.
- Families are required to fill out an 'NHS Scotland HC1 form' which is commonly used in Scotland to test eligibility for free dentistry for instance. This process is time consuming and labour intensive, and it seems a strange step in the process to prove eligibility for the HWPV scheme.

Suggested Improvements

Increase Awareness:

- Promote the Help with Prison Visits scheme and how to access it.

- Training and capacity building with staff and awareness raising within the prison to promote the Help with Prison Visits scheme.

Improve Accessibility:

- Increase supports in place to help people apply for the scheme.
- Improve analysis and oversight of the benefit scheme (for example, in line with Scottish Government benefit take-up and also the data required to inform future planning, needs, and improvements).
- Review the scheme and make it fit for purpose in Scotland (including comparing costs from SPS to HMPPS to administer).
- **Having the prison cashier able to give money back once a month rather than waiting weeks for a minimal amount (for example, less than £30), keeping larger amounts for the Birmingham office to deal with.**

Ensure it meets the needs for people in Scotland:

- Need to Rural/island proof the Help with Prison Visit scheme.
- If a person is already eligible for a qualifying benefit, ensure systems coordinate to cut down paperwork and processes for families.
- Allow advanced booking of visits, which would mean advanced travel booking of tickets which will cut costs for train tickets etc.
- Increase the mileage amount paid to families, ideally up to the HMRC rate of 45p per mile (which has not increased since 2012).
- Be able to claim in advance both for public transport and mileage and make this more accessible to do.
- Ensure all Scottish Government impact assessments have been applied to the scheme.

***General suggestions for improvement relating to travel in general:**

- Ensure people are put in prisons nearest family as much as possible.*
- Improve access to community transport (e.g., widen Sacro volunteer driver scheme) *
- Raise minimum income threshold to reflect the cost of living.*
- More control/opportunities to request specific visits or double visits.*
- Prisons should provide information on how to travel to families.*
- Increase the ages for Children's Visits.*
- Ensure visits are planned with local travel options in mind as well as the needs of families.

Appendix 3: Prison Visitors Centres - Children's Visits Report

Current Children's Visit Provision across the prison estate – December 2023

Prison	Children's visits
Grampian	Wednesday 13:45 – 15:15 Saturday 09:30 – 11:00
Barlinnie	Each week in the month has a different Children's Visit allocation in terms of day and time. 17:15 – 18:00 – alternates between weekdays throughout the month – 1 block per visit 18:30 – 19:15 - alternates between weekdays throughout the month – 1 block per visit 15:15 – 15:45 – alternates between a Friday, Saturday and Sunday throughout the month – 1 block per visit
Edinburgh	Monday, Tuesday, Friday – sessions are from 10:30 till 11:30 – 4 families on sessions Saturday & Sunday – 09:30 till 10:15 & 10:45 till 11:30 – 4 families on both sessions Wednesday & Thursday are Early years Scotland sessions.
Addiewell	Saturday and Sunday 10:00 – 12:00
Perth	Monday – Friday 16:15 – 17:25 Alternate Saturday (mainstream population) 14:10 – 15:50 Alternate Sunday (protection population) 14:10 – 15:50
Low Moss	Wednesday 16:00 – 16:45 Friday 19:30 – 20:15 Sunday 14:00 – 14:45
Polmont	Monday - Friday 11:15 - 12:30 Sunday - 14:00 - 14:45 (only if FCO on shift)
Stirling	n/a
Inverness	Saturday 15:15 pm-16:00 pm
Glenochil	Weekend visits take place fortnightly Harviestoun Hall Tuesday 13:15 -15:15 Saturday 14:15 - 16:15

	<p>Sunday 10:00am -12:00 am</p> <p>Abercrombie Hall Saturday 10:00 - 12:00 Sunday 14:15 - 16:15</p>
Kilmarnock	Saturday 09:30 -10:30
Shotts	<p>Monday 19:00 – 20:30 Friday 09:30 – 11:30 Saturday 9:30 - 11.30 Sunday 09:30 – 11:30</p>
Greenock	Saturday 13:45 – 14:45
Dumfries	Saturday and Sunday 09:15 -10:15 and 11:30 – 12:30