



H.M Prison Service – Saint Helena Island

Briefing Paper - 2023

Executive Summary

HMP Jamestown, the Category B local prison on Saint Helena Island, plays a crucial role in maintaining public safety and promoting rehabilitation for its diverse prisoner population. The prison's primary objective is to hold those committed by the courts while treating them humanely and guiding them towards law-abiding lives, both during their custody and after their release. As part of the Safety, Security, and Home Affairs portfolio, the prison now operates independently from the Saint Helena Police Service, with a strategic development plan in place for the next five years. Despite facing challenges due to its age and limited resources, the prison is committed to continuous improvement and modernisation, aiming to transition into a bespoke facility accommodating up to 60 prisoners.

Introduction

HMP Jamestown stands as the sole correctional facility on Saint Helena Island, serving the court jurisdictions of Tristan De Cuna and Ascension Islands. As the island's only prison, its role extends beyond confinement to encompass the humane treatment of prisoners and their successful reintegration into society upon release. This briefing paper gives an overview of the HM Prison Service on Saint Helena Island, highlighting its structure, operations, challenges, and strategic initiatives.

The prison service operates under the leadership of the Superintendent of Prisons, who oversees the Saint Helena Prison Service Development Plan 2022, outlining strategic objectives and milestones for the coming years. As imprisonment rates rise, the prison faces overcrowding and limited resources, necessitating innovative measures such as exploring electronic monitoring (tagging) feasibility and expanding the current prison footprint to accommodate more prisoners.

A significant challenge for the prison is its age, with the current building dating back to 1826, and despite its declared unsuitability for further use in the 1850s, it remains operational. Reports have highlighted poor living and working conditions, prompting initiatives to address health, safety, and fire risks, as well as renovations to improve the female unit and overall locking schedule.

In terms of prisoner accommodations, the facility houses males, females, juvenile, and young offenders, necessitating separate holding to ensure safeguarding. Prisoner classification into security categories B, C, and D allows for tailored treatment, including Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) for well-behaved inmates.

The prison places significant emphasis on staff-prisoner relationships as a key aspect of rehabilitation, particularly in the absence of formal offending behaviour courses. Instead, the prison leverages technology, such as Skype, to provide services like counselling not available on the island.

Prisoners engage in purposeful activities throughout their sentences, including educational, employment-related, and rehabilitation programs. The prison actively collaborates with probation services to address offending behaviour and ensure a smooth transition upon release.

Health provision is provided through the Health Directorate, with a visiting nurse attending the prison three days a week or upon request, ensuring prisoners receive appropriate medical attention.

The Prison Visiting Committee (PVC) serves as an independent body, performing welfare checks, observations, and reporting concerns or best practices to the Superintendent or HE the Governor.

Despite the challenges, the prison management team, key stakeholders, and the government are committed to running a safe, secure, and decent regime. Continuous improvements, based on inspection reports and feedback, are being pursued, but the urgent need for a new, fit-for-purpose prison remains a priority for Superintendent, Safety Director, Visiting Committee, Government, and Governor.

In conclusion, HMP Jamestown on Saint Helena Island stands as a critical institution, dedicated to the rehabilitation and well-being of prisoners while facing unique challenges due to its isolation, aging infrastructure and continued rising imprisonment rates. Through strategic development initiatives and collaboration with key stakeholders, the prison is actively working towards ensuring a safer and more effective correctional system for the community it serves.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/portfolios/safety-security-and-home-affairs/hm-prison/>

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