# Prison Officers warn UK jails face unprecedented violence and security failures



The national chairman of the Prison Officers' Association (POA), Mark Fairhurst, has expressed grave concerns regarding safety and security in UK prisons. Speaking to The Times, he asserted that the current security measures in place at prisons are inferior compared to those during public events such as football matches and concerts. He highlighted a pervasive issue of overcrowding and increased violence, claiming, "I've never seen it so overcrowded and I've never seen it so violent."

Fairhurst voiced particular frustration over the lack of body scanners in prisons, akin to those used at airports. He questioned, "Why on earth we haven’t got body scanners at the gate to randomly put people through... I’ve seen better security at concerts and football matches than I have going into prisons." His comments further underscored the prevalence of illicit items—including drugs, weapons, and mobile phones—within prison facilities, which he attributes to insufficient management willingness to lock down areas for effective searches.

The issue is compounded by reports of drones delivering contraband during the night, intensifying fears that firearms could soon be smuggled into the facilities. Current prison management practices are under scrutiny, with Fairhurst suggesting that frontline staff are willing to implement lockdowns to mitigate the issues but are often hampered by decision-makers. "There’s a lot of people getting appeased because the people in charge of our prisons are not up for the fight," he noted.

These concerns come against a backdrop of alarming statistics regarding violence in prisons. In 2024, the number of assaults on staff in adult prisons in England and Wales rose to its highest level in a decade, with 10,605 reported assaults, a steep increase from 9,204 the previous year. The data indicates a rate of 122 assaults for every 1,000 prisoners, markedly higher than just a decade prior. Moreover, the number of serious assaults on staff also escalated to 974 last year, which is also a record high.

Recent incidents have only exacerbated fears regarding staff safety. Notable occurrences include the attack on four officers at HMP Frankland by Hashem Abedi, a participant in the Manchester Arena bombing, using hot oil and makeshift weapons. Additionally, the death of convicted killer John Mansfield, following a head injury at HMP Whitemoor, has raised further alarm, with another inmate arrested on suspicion of murder.

The Ministry of Justice has responded to these issues, acknowledging the challenges facing the prison system. A spokesperson stated, "This Government inherited prisons in crisis—overcrowded, with drugs and violence rife—but we are gripping the situation and taking action." They outlined plans to construct 14,000 new prison places by 2031 and to reform sentencing practices to prevent future overcrowding. The spokesperson also mentioned efforts to enhance security and improve vetting processes to prevent contraband from entering prisons and to ensure that all staff meet high standards.

As the call for improved security measures continues, the situation within UK prisons remains a critical concern, reflecting broader challenges related to public safety, resource allocation, and prison management strategies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/22/drones-guns-into-prisons-england-wales-watchdog-fears> - This source supports the concern regarding drones potentially delivering firearms into prisons, as expressed by watchdogs.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/anti-drone-no-fly-zones-to-combat-prison-smuggling> - This press release details the introduction of 400-meter 'no-fly zones' around prisons to combat drone smuggling, aligning with the article's mention of such measures.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-prison-smuggling-attempts-thwarted> - This announcement highlights the thwarting of thousands of smuggling attempts, including those involving drones, supporting the article's discussion on increased contraband smuggling.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmpps-annual-digest-2023-to-2024> - This official report provides statistics on prison overcrowding and violence, corroborating the article's claims about these issues.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-prison-no-fly-zones-for-drug-delivering-drones> - This source discusses the implementation of new 'no-fly zones' to prevent drone deliveries of contraband into prisons, supporting the article's mention of such security measures.
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