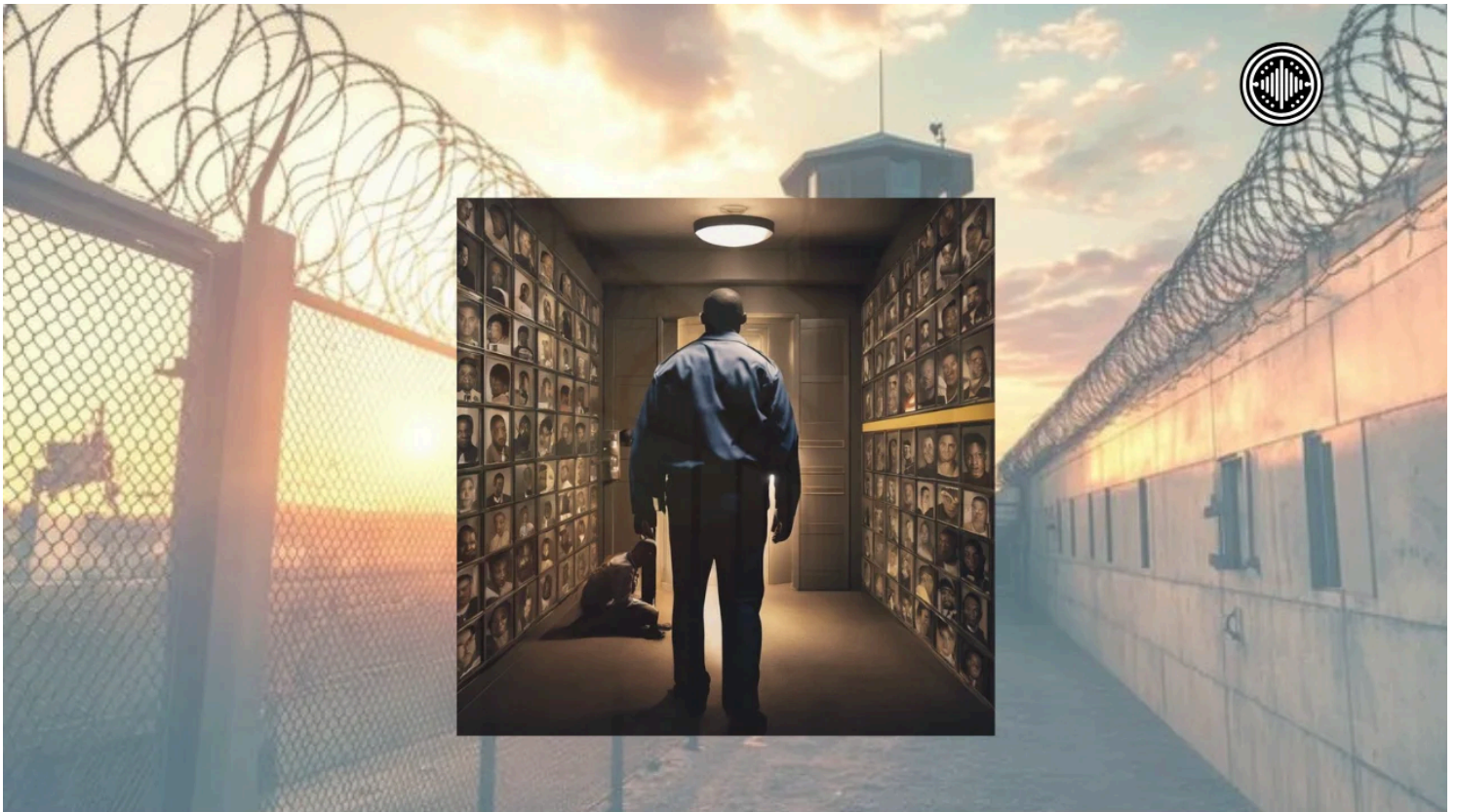


Watchdog Warns Drug Smuggling is Undermining UK Prison Stability

July 8, 2025

— Categories: General News



London, 8 July 2025 – A hard-hitting new report from the chief inspector of prisons has revealed that widespread drug smuggling is “destabilising” prisons across England and Wales, fuelling criminality and obstructing rehabilitation efforts.

The annual report by Chief Inspector Charlie Taylor paints a stark picture of a prison system increasingly overwhelmed by organised crime, rampant drug use, and overstretched staff. Gangs are using drones to deliver contraband directly into prison yards, while staff shortages and overcrowding have created conditions ripe for disorder and exploitation.

Mr Taylor warned that in many jails, criminality is running unchecked. “Inexperienced and hard-pressed staff are unable to contain escalating levels of illicit activity,” he wrote. Particularly concerning were the findings at high-security facilities such as HMP Manchester and Long Lartin, where even national security is at stake. These prisons house some of the UK’s most dangerous inmates, including organised crime bosses and terrorists.

The watchdog also highlighted inadequate physical security measures and failures in staff training, noting that at HMP Manchester, inexperienced officers were being “manipulated or simply ignored” by inmates.

The figures reinforce the crisis. Of the 5,431 prisoners surveyed, 39% said drugs were easy to access. A staggering 30% of random drug tests across the system returned positive results, with HMP Hindley recording nearly double that average. Meanwhile, some prisons, such as HMP Bedford, had gone a full year without conducting a single drug test despite clear evidence of ongoing smuggling.

According to Mr Taylor, the implications reach beyond prison walls. “The challenge for the prison service must be to work in conjunction with the police and security services to manage prisoners associated with

organised crime. This is a threat that needs to be taken seriously at the highest levels of government,” he said.

Prisons Minister Lord Timpson acknowledged the scale of the problem, blaming it on the “crisis we inherited.” He stated that the government is investing £40 million into bolstering prison security, including upgraded CCTV, lighting, and body scanners. Additionally, 14,000 new prison places are being constructed to tackle chronic overcrowding, with 2,400 already completed.

Despite ongoing reforms, the fundamental issue remains as long as demand for drugs persists inside prisons, those intent on making money will find ways to supply them. The report concludes that without serious, coordinated intervention, the cycle of addiction, violence, and reoffending will continue to plague Britain’s already strained justice system.