



# Safety in Custody Statistics Bulletin, England and Wales, Deaths in prison custody to December 2016, Assaults and Self-Harm to September 2016

## Key Findings

**Deaths up 38% overall, self-inflicted up 32%**



2016 has seen a record level of 354 deaths in prison custody, up 97 from the previous year. Three of these were homicides, down from 8. There was a record high of 119 self-inflicted deaths, up 29, 12 of which were in the female estate. The rate of self-inflicted deaths has doubled since 2012. The likelihood of death in custody is 1.7 times higher than in the general population, while self-inflicted death is 8.6 times more likely.

**Self-harm incidents up 23%**



Self-harm reached a record high of 37,784 incidents, up 6,967 from the previous year. Female establishments saw a small fall of 2%. There was also a slight fall in incidents requiring hospital attendance in the most recent quarter.

**Assault incidents up 31%**



Assaults have continued to increase, reaching a record high of 25,049 assault incidents in the 12 months to September 2016, up 5,995 from the previous year. 3,372 of these were serious assaults, up 28% from the previous year. The most recent quarter and 12 months were the highest on record for all types of assault.

**Prisoner on prisoner assaults up 28%**



There were 18,510 prisoner on prisoner assaults, up 4,097 from the previous year, of which 2,644 were serious, up 30% from the previous year.

**Assaults on staff up 40%**



There were 6,430 assaults on staff, up 1,833 from the previous year. Serious assaults on staff have trebled since 2012, reaching 761 in the most recent year.

Safety in custody statistics cover deaths, self-harm and assaults in prison custody in England and Wales, with figures in quarterly summary tables presented on a 12 month rolling basis over a 10 year time-series. Supplementary annual tables, providing more in depth statistics on deaths, self-harm and assaults on a calendar year basis, underlying data files with pivot tables providing lower level granularity, and a guidance technical document are also available alongside this bulletin, and can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>

We are changing how our quarterly bulletins look, and would welcome any feedback to [commentary.champions@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:commentary.champions@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

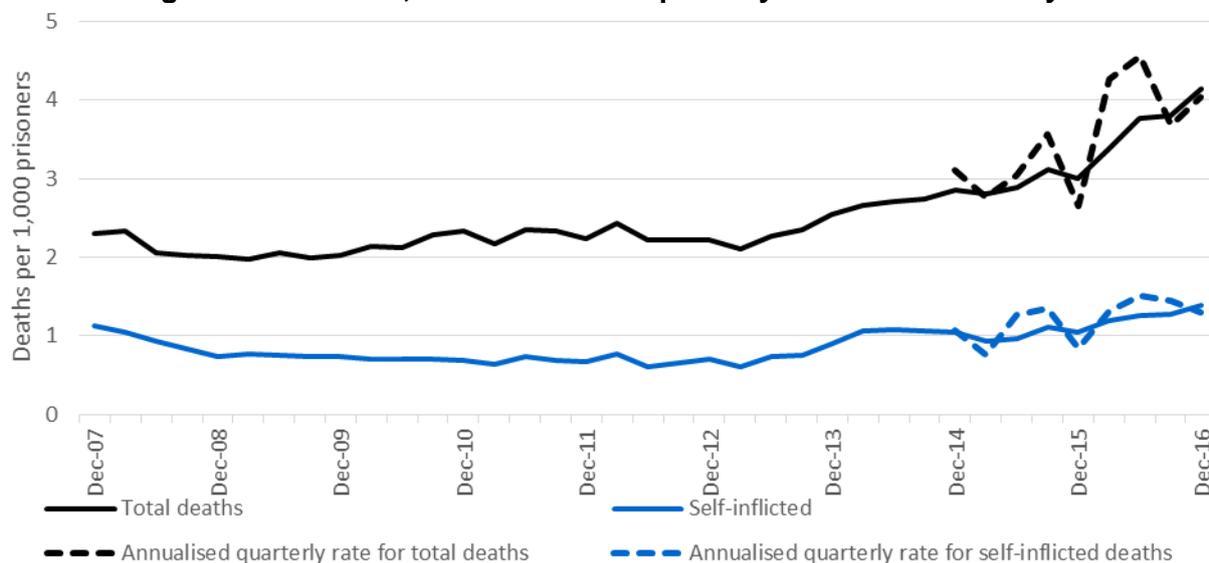
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# 1 Deaths

## Deaths up 38% overall, self-inflicted up 32%

2016 has seen a record level of 354 deaths in prison custody, up 97 from the previous year. There was a record high of 119 self-inflicted deaths, up 29 from the previous year.

**Figure 1: Rate of deaths per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending December 2007 to 12 months ending December 2016, with annualised quarterly rates for the last 2 years**



In 2016 there were **354** deaths in prison custody, an increase of 38% compared to the previous year. This is both the highest number of deaths in the time series and the highest rate, at **4.1** deaths per 1,000 prisoners. The most recent quarter is not as high as the first two quarters of 2016, but is the third highest quarter on record, and is an increase on the previous quarter. Quarterly death figures should be considered with caution, due to greater volatility and the potential for seasonal effects. Long term trends and more detail are presented in annual tables<sup>1</sup>.

There were **119** apparent self-inflicted deaths, up 32% on the previous year, the highest on record. On a rate basis this is **1.4** per 1,000 prisoners, the highest in recent years, and double the rate in 2012, but at a similar level to the previous peak during 2002 and 2003. Within the female estate there were 12 self-inflicted deaths, the highest on record. This compares to 5 in 2015.

There were **3** apparent homicides in 2016, down from the record high of 8 in the previous year. Homicides in prison custody remain relatively rare, accounting for around 1% of all deaths over the last ten years.

There were **196** deaths due to natural causes, up 33% from the previous year. This is the highest in the time series. Natural cause deaths were at a rate of **2.3** per 1,000 prisoners, up from 1.7 per 1,000 in the previous year. This increase in natural cause deaths is largely explained by the ageing prison population, and is responsible for half of the year-on-year rise in deaths overall.

In 2016, **36** 'other' deaths occurred, **28** of which are 'awaiting further information' prior to being classified. These deaths were either inconclusive after toxicology and post-mortem, meaning classification cannot be arrived at until inquest (which can be a considerable time after the death), while others remain awaiting results at the time of publication. There has been a particularly high number of deaths awaiting further classification in this period, and as such, the number of 'other' deaths is not directly comparable with earlier years, and it is likely the number of deaths of the remaining classifications will be revised upwards once classifications have been made.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/562902/safety-in-custody-deaths-dec-15-final.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/562902/safety-in-custody-deaths-dec-15-final.xls)

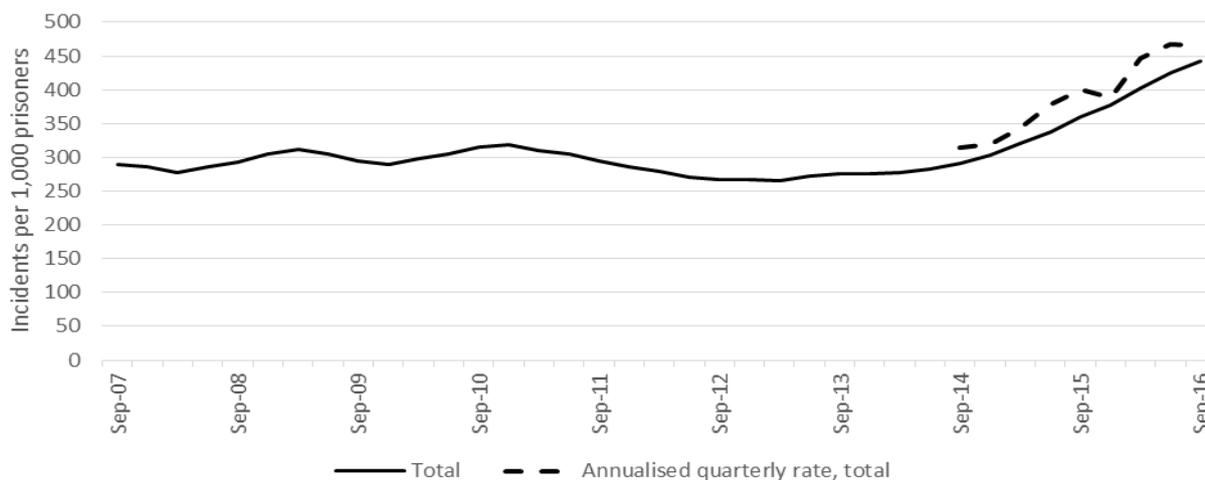
## 2 Self-harm

### Self-harm incidents up 23%

Self-harm continued to increase, reaching a record high of 37,784 incidents of self-harm, up 6,967 from the previous year. Female establishments saw a small fall of 2% in self-harm.

Although the most recent quarter had the highest self-harm levels on record, this coincided with a slight fall in incidents requiring hospital attendance.

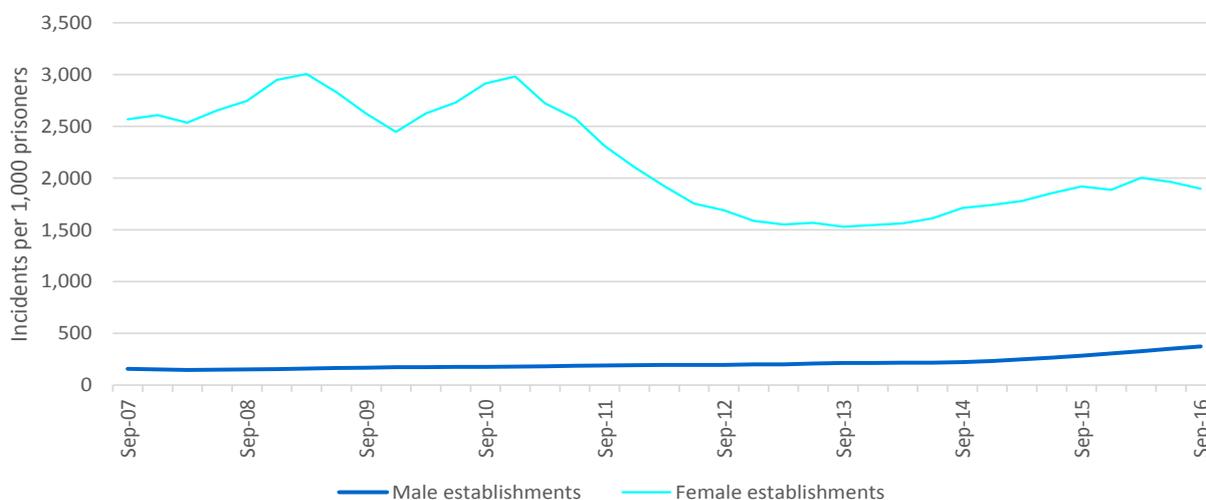
**Figure 2: Rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending September 2007 to 12 months ending September 2016, with annualised quarterly rates for the last 2 years**



In the 12 months to September 2016 there were **37,784** reported incidents of self-harm (a rate of **443** per 1,000), up 23% on the previous year. This is the highest number of self-harm incidents in the time series, and the most recent quarter was the highest quarter on record. Of all self-harm incidents in the 12 month period, **2,583** incidents required hospital attendance, up 25% on the previous year.

**10,761** prisoners self-harmed (a rate of **126** prisoners per 1,000), up 19% from the previous year. Those that self-harmed did so, on average, 3.5 times. Greater detail on self-harm is presented in the annual self-harm tables<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 3: Rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners by gender of establishment, 12 months ending September 2007 to 12 months ending September 2016**



<sup>2</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/519429/safety-in-custody-self-harm-to-2015.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/519429/safety-in-custody-self-harm-to-2015.xls)

Self-harm trends differ considerably by gender, with a rate of **374** incidents per 1,000 in male establishments (with incidents up 31% on the previous year) compared to a rate of **1,898** per 1,000 in female establishments (a 2% reduction from the number of incidents in the previous year). Overall there was little change in how prolific self-harmers were in both male and female establishments, with an average of **3.2** incidents per self-harming individual in male establishments, up slightly from 3.0 in the previous year, and an average of **6.3** incidents per self-harming individual in female establishments, compared to 6.4 in the previous year.

While self-harmers in female establishments were twice as prolific as those in male establishments, self-harmers in male establishments had more than four times the proportion of self-harm incidents that require hospitalisation (8.0% in male establishments compared to 1.8% in female establishments).

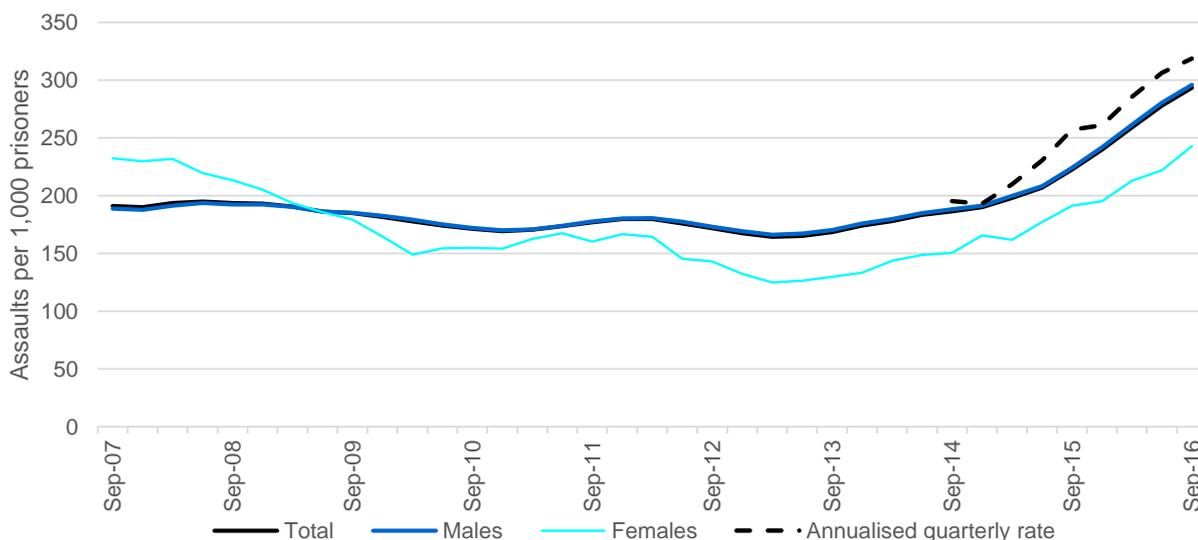
Although the most recent quarter, from July to September 2016, had the highest self-harm levels on record, with **9,995** incidents of self-harm, this coincided with a slight fall in incidents requiring hospital attendance (**625** incidents requiring hospital attendance, 6.3% of all self-harm incidents).

### 3 Assaults

#### Assault incidents up 31%; prisoner on prisoner assaults up 28%; assaults on staff up 40%

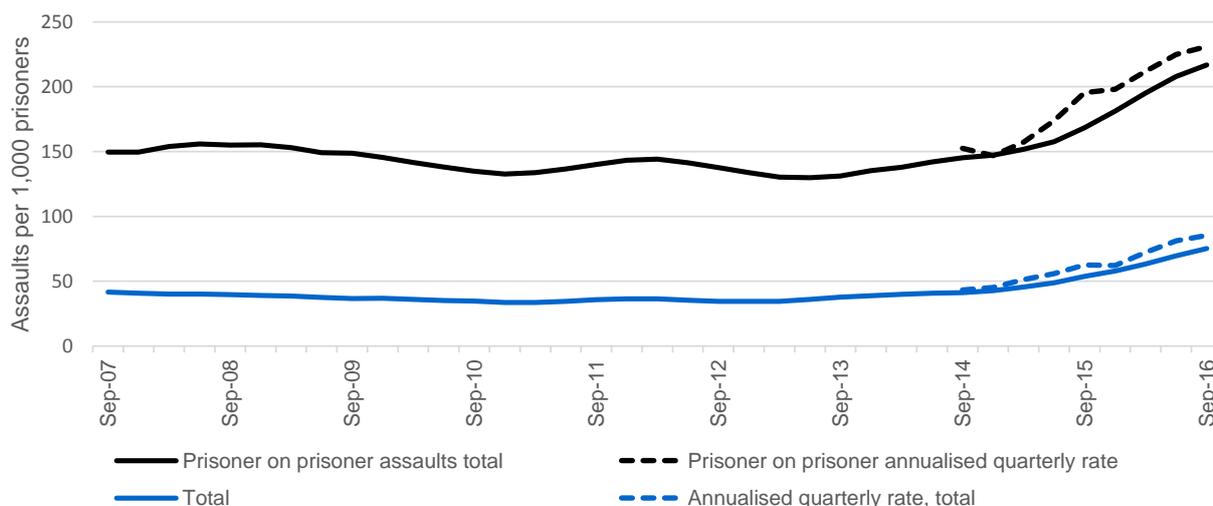
Assaults have continued to increase, reaching a record high of 25,049 assault incidents in the 12 months to September 2016, up 5,995 from the previous year. 3,372 of these were serious assaults, up 28% from the previous year. The most recent quarter was the highest on record.

**Figure 4: Rate of assaults overall per 1,000 prisoners by gender of establishment, 12 months ending September 2007 to 12 months ending September 2016, with annualised quarterly rates for the last 2 years**



In the 12 months to September 2016 there were **25,049** assault incidents (a rate of **293** incidents per 1,000 prisoners), an increase of 31% on the previous year, and is the highest in the time series. Of these, **3,372** were serious assaults, up 28% on the previous year. Since 2012, serious assaults have more than doubled (2.6 times higher).

**Figure 5: Rate of prisoner on prisoner assaults and assaults on staff, 12 months ending September 2007 to 12 months ending September 2016, with annualised quarterly rates for the last 2 years**



There were **18,510** prisoner on prisoner assaults in the 12 months to September 2016 (a rate of **217** per 1,000 prisoners), up 28% on previous year. Of these, **2,644** were serious prisoner on prisoner assaults, up 30% on the previous year.

There were **6,430** assaults on staff in the 12 months to September 2016 (a rate of **75** per 1,000 prisoners), up 40% on the previous year. Of these, **761** were serious assaults on staff, up 26% on the previous year.

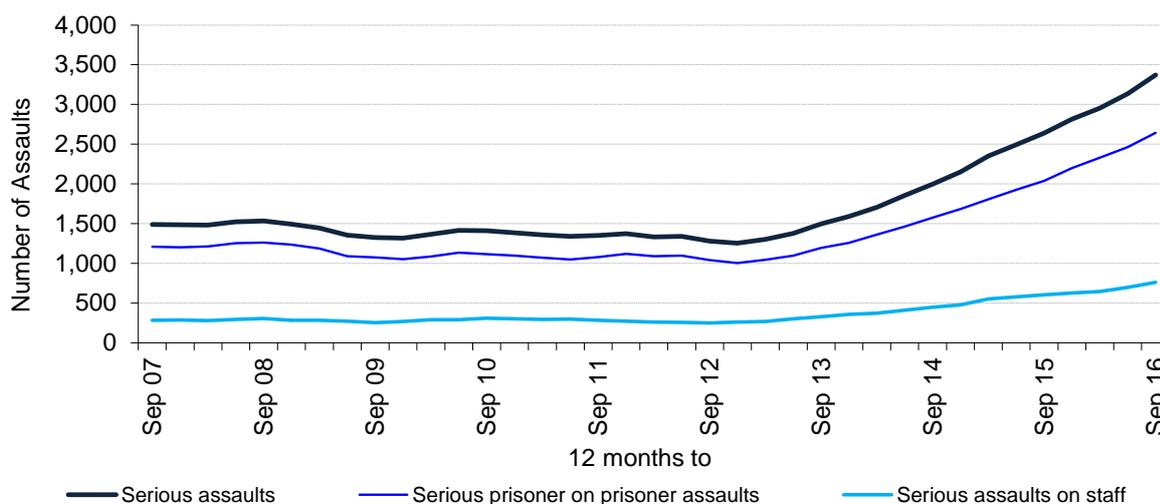
The most recent quarter was the highest quarter on record for all types of assault, with 6,837 assaults, 957 of which were serious, occurring in the three month period from July to September 2016. Greater detail on assaults is presented in the annual assaults tables<sup>3</sup>.

The rise in assaults since 2012 has coincided with major changes to the regime, operating arrangements and culture in public sector prisons. For example, restructuring of the prison estate including staff reductions, which have reduced overall running costs, and an increasing awareness of gang culture and illicit psychoactive drugs in prisons. As well as the dangers to both physical and mental health, trading in these illicit drugs can lead to debt, violence and intimidation.

### 3.1 Serious assaults

Serious assaults are those which involve one or more of: a sexual assault, detention in outside hospital as an in-patient; requires medical treatment for concussion or internal injuries; or incurs any of the following injuries: a fracture, scald or burn, stabbing, crushing, extensive or multiple bruising, black eye, broken nose, lost or broken tooth, cuts requiring suturing, bites temporary or permanent blindness.

**Figure 6: Number of serious assaults total, serious prisoner on prisoner assaults, and serious assaults on staff, 12 months ending September 2007 to 12 months ending September 2016**



After a prolonged period of stability in the time series of serious assault incidents of all types, there has been a clear quarter on quarter upward trend since December 2012 in serious assaults, serious prisoner on prisoner assaults and serious assaults on staff. Since 2012, the number of serious assaults of all types has more than doubled, and serious assaults on staff have trebled.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/519430/safety-in-custody-assaults-to-2015.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/519430/safety-in-custody-assaults-to-2015.xls)

## Further Information

### Accompanying files

As well as this bulletin, the following products are published as part of this release:

- A technical guide providing further information on how the data is collected and processed, as well as information on the revisions policy and legislation relevant to sentencing trends and background on the functioning of the criminal justice system.
- A set of summary tables for the latest quarter, and annual tables for the latest calendar year.
- Underlying data files with pivot tables, giving lower level granularity.

### National Statistics status

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.



All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

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**URL:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>

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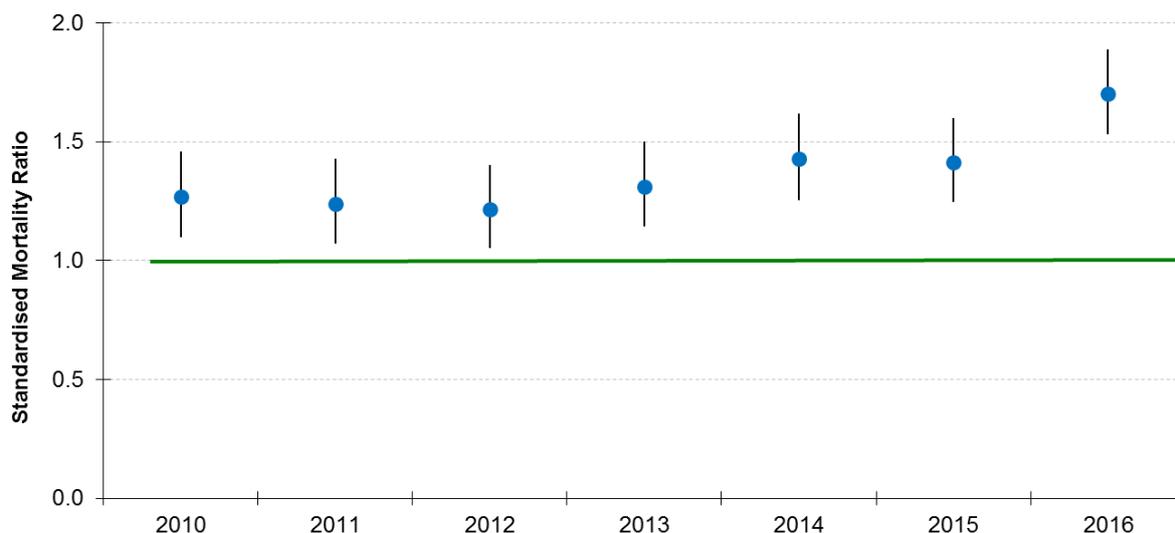
## Annex A - Comparison of deaths in custody with the general population

Annex A is updated annually on a calendar year basis when the underlying general population data<sup>4</sup> become available from the Office of National Statistics, coinciding with the annual release of deaths in custody data.

The prison population is very different from the general population: around 95% of the prison population are male, there are no prisoners aged under 15, and relatively few are over 60, relative to the general population. As a result, rates of deaths in prison custody cannot be compared directly with those for the general population. One technique used for comparing mortality rates for different populations is known as the Standardised Mortality Ratio (SMR).

The SMR provides a means of making like for like comparisons of the death rate in prison custody to that of the general population of England and Wales, by adjusting for age distribution and gender. Figure A1 below presents the SMR of the prison population, compared to the expected level from the general population. Where the likelihood of death is the same as would be expected based on the general population, the SMR would have a value of 1 (depicted by the green line - a ratio of 1:1). Due to the adjustments, there is a margin of error around the SMR estimates, depicted on the graph as the range of values, within which there is 95% confidence the true value falls, by lines around the point estimates.

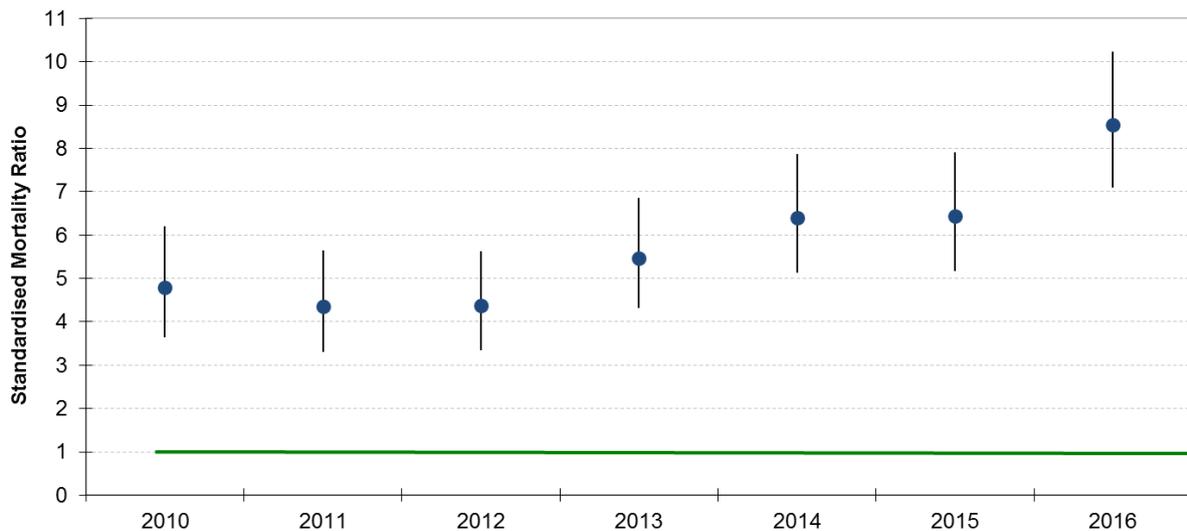
**Figure A1: Annual Standardised Mortality Ratio (SMR) for prison population, relative to general population (adjusted for age and gender), 2010 to 2016, England and Wales**



In 2016, the likelihood of prison mortality was 1.7 times greater than in the general population (there is a margin of error around this estimate, with 95% confidence, the true figure lies within a range of 1.5 times as likely to 1.9 times as likely). Across the time series, the likelihood of prison mortality has been significantly higher than in the general population, but in 2016 the ratio has increased to be significantly higher than those between 2010 and 2013 in the presented time series.

<sup>4</sup> Death figures for the general population, as used in SMR calculations, are derived from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Mortality Statistics at the following link <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/death-reg-sum-tables/2014/sb-deaths-first-release--2014.html> and national population figures come from the Population Projections Statistics at the following link: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/npp/national-population-projections/2014-based-projections/index.html>

**Figure A2: Annual Standardised Mortality Ratio (SMR) for self-inflicted deaths in the prison population relative to suicide in the general population (adjusted for age and gender), 2010 to 2016, England and Wales**



The Standardised Mortality Ratio in figure A2 above compares the rate of self-inflicted deaths in prison custody with the rate of suicide in the general population<sup>5</sup>, adjusting for age and gender. This ratio gives an indication how much greater the likelihood is of this kind of death in prison custody, compared to the wider population, on a more comparable basis. NOMS does not attribute intent behind self-inflicted deaths, and as such custody figures may include unintended deaths at one’s own hand in addition to suicides. These cannot be isolated from suicides. However, the ONS definition of suicide, as used for general population figures, includes “injury/poisoning of undetermined intent”. As such, the definitions are closely aligned.

Across the time series, there has been a considerably higher likelihood of self-inflicted death in prison in relation to the likelihood of suicide in the general population. Since 2012 the ratio has been widening in the likelihood of self-inflicted death of offenders in custody and the likelihood of suicide among the general population. This rose considerably in 2016, with the likelihood of self-inflicted death being 8.6 times greater (there is a margin of error around this estimate, with 95% confidence, the true figure falls within a range of 7.1 times as likely to 10.2 times as likely), which is significantly higher than the ratio seen in 2013 and prior years in the presented time series.

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicideintheunitedkingdom/previousReleases>