



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP DUMFRIES

Year (1 April – 31 March):
2025 – 2026



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	51	59	45
	Total number of missed weeks:	2	8	17
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	43	42	46
	Total number of IPM hours:	184	126	128

Executive Summary

Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) during the reporting year found that HMP Dumfries provided a calm, respectful, and well managed environment. Across the year, IPMs observed positive staff–prisoner relationships, good standards of cleanliness and a culture that emphasised dignity and constructive engagement. In several areas, particularly decency, respect, and day-to-day interactions, the prison was good throughout the year. This was despite national and local pressures, including population levels, staffing constraints, and progression delays.

Accommodation areas, communal spaces, and external grounds were routinely observed to be clean and living accommodation was warm and well maintained despite the age of the buildings. Food provision was generally viewed positively, with prisoners frequently expressing satisfaction with quality and choice. The prison gardens made a modest contribution to catering and offered activities and practical skills to those who worked there.

IPMs noted increasing pressure on prisoners' ability to meet day-to-day personal needs through the prison canteen, over and above the basics provided by the prison. Prisoners frequently raised concerns about the affordability of items, against a backdrop of rising living costs. This was compounded by static prisoner earnings and weekly canteen spend limits which remain unchanged, alongside delays to an announced SPS prisoner wage review. While canteen provision itself was not found to be deficient, affordability has become a growing issue with implications for perceptions of decency and fairness.

Staff were observed to engage with prisoners in a courteous, compassionate, and skilled manner. Examples included emotional support for distressed prisoners; respectful handling of new admissions and those leaving the prison temporarily under escort; positive interaction during visits with family and friends; and the calm management of potentially challenging situations. All this underpinned safety and the positive perceptions of prisoners.

Purposeful activity was a notable strength, particularly in physical activity, outdoor work, education, and creative arts. High participation in gym activity, parkrun events, garden work, and education courses was observed across the year. The range and reliability of vocational and workshop activity was constrained by staffing shortages, with some work parties and programmes unavailable at times. While prisoners generally continued to receive time out of cell, these disruptions reduced the breadth of opportunities available. Provision for remand prisoners was more limited.

The most persistent concerns identified were largely systemic and national in nature. These included population pressures requiring the use of single cells for two prisoners, staffing shortfalls affecting operational resilience, and delays in access to key progression mechanisms such as the Self Change Programme and Generic Programme Assessments (GPAs). IPMs noted repeated prisoner frustration regarding progression, with clear evidence that waiting lists were affecting

sentence management and transition planning. In some cases, delays in accessing accredited programmes meant prisoners serving determinate sentences were released directly from Dumfries at sentence expiry without a managed period of transition, such as moving to a lower-security placement, limiting their preparation for release.

Health and wellbeing provision was generally viewed positively. Healthcare and addictions accommodation and services were observed to be clean, respectful, and supportive, with individual prisoners praising the responsiveness and competence of NHS staff.

The prison has remained stable since the previous reporting period. Positive relationships, decency, and purposeful activity have been maintained, with some areas of improvement noted, including dementia-friendly adaptations and access to education. Key concerns around issues such as population pressures, staffing, and progression delays, remained unresolved and continue to limit the prison's ability to deliver everything it should for prisoners. At the time of writing, the prison population was further increasing, with more single cells being used to hold two prisoners, placing additional pressure on the activities and services available.

The IPM team at Dumfries did not undertake all their weekly visits during the reporting period because of reduced numbers. This resulted in gaps in monitoring coverage, but the time spent in the prison overall was as high as in the previous year and the continued scrutiny has resulted in the findings given here. The team has since recruited additional members and has resumed weekly visits.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Direct monitoring activity relating to lawful and transparent custody was intermittent during the year but where IPMs observed relevant processes, they reported seeing these managed calmly. Transfers were carried out well. Reception staff, including less experienced officers, interacted with prisoners confidently and diligently.

Peer mentor involvement during induction was observed and described positively by IPMs, with senior staff reporting that this initiative supported new admissions and helped to support early adjustment to custody.

No systemic concerns were identified by IPMs during the year in relation to reception and induction processes.

Standard 2: Decency

Standards of decency were strong. Cleanliness, accommodation temperature, bedding, and food provision were generally good. The primary concern remained the accommodation of two prisoners in cells designed for one.

Throughout the reporting year, IPMs observed clean and well-maintained accommodation across halls, communal areas, and external spaces. Living accommodation was warm. Cells were tidy, bedding was regularly laundered, and prisoners had access to clean clothing. Shower facilities, including in the basement area, were assessed as adequate when checked.

Food provision was a recurrent positive feature. IPMs observed clean dining areas, appropriate food portions, and hot, well-presented meals. The option of communal dining in the dining hall for most prisoners was a positive, allowing prisoners to interact with each other in a relaxed environment. Prisoners frequently reported satisfaction with food quality, although isolated complaints were made. The use of garden produce to supplement meals was observed.

IPMs noted growing and repeated concerns from prisoners regarding the affordability of items available through the prison canteen. Across the reporting year, prisoners increasingly described difficulty meeting basic personal needs within their available means. This was observed in the context of wider increases in the cost of living, alongside prisoner wage rates and weekly canteen spend limits which have remained unchanged for years. While IPMs did not identify deficiencies in the range or operation of the canteen itself, the interaction between static earnings, fixed spending limits and rising costs was repeatedly raised by prisoners as unfair. IPMs consider that this issue affects decency standards negatively, particularly for prisoners with limited or no external financial support.

Decency-related concerns remained focused on overcrowding. Single cells converted to shared use were too small for two prisoners offering very limited personal space and reduced privacy, despite efforts by staff to manage allocations sensitively. This issue persisted throughout the year and, with the rising prison population, is only likely to be exacerbated in the coming year.

Positive adaptations were observed for older and disabled prisoners, including dementia-friendly visual signs in B1, developed following consultation with Alzheimer Scotland. While these mitigations and adjustments were positive, HMIPS continues to question the appropriateness of imprisoning individuals who have experienced such significant cognitive decline that they do not know they are in prison.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

HMP Dumfries was observed to be calm, orderly, and safe. Incidents of violence were rare, managed appropriately, and did not indicate wider safety concerns.

Prisoners were observed interacting well with one another, and no atmosphere of tension or intimidation was noted during visits.

One assault involving prisoners with a known history of conflict outside custody was reported. IPMs considered this was handled satisfactorily by the prison. Violence was otherwise low. IPMs observed that staff awareness of prisoner dynamics appeared good, contributing to effective risk management. The isolated nature of this incident supports the overall assessment of a safe and stable environment.

Some concerns relating to substance misuse support were raised by prisoners, specifically in relation to changes in Pregabalin prescribing. While this issue is explored primarily under health and wellbeing, it also touched on perceptions of support for prisoners experiencing addiction.

Overall, there was no evidence of systemic risks to personal safety, and the environment remained stable throughout the year.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

Staff were observed by IPMs to use authority in a calm, understanding, and proportionate manner.

Over the year, IPMs observed multiple examples of authority being exercised appropriately and humanely. Staff explanations of procedures, including isolation and onward movement, were clear. Where prisoners required separation, staff demonstrated an intention to return individuals back into the normal regime at the earliest suitable opportunity.

Visits to prisoners held under Rule 95 indicated acceptable conditions, with no complaints raised by prisoners about treatment or environment. In instances where prisoners were accommodated in the basement, staff described the purpose of the area as providing a space for reflection and de-escalation, and this was framed as rehabilitative rather than punitive. This was borne out by IPM observations.

IPMs noted that the role and purpose of the basement area was not always fully understood by some prisoners. While no inappropriate use was evidenced, repeated references by prisoners indicated this was an area where transparency and clarity could be strengthened.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

Staff–prisoner relationships were positive. Prisoners generally felt able to raise concerns, though some expressed caution about submitting complaints.

Throughout the year, IPMs observed respectful, friendly, and skilled interactions between staff and prisoners. Officers engaged openly with prisoners, providing emotional support and demonstrating compassion in challenging situations. Senior managers were visible and well known to prisoners, contributing to a sense of approachability.

Processes around complaints and prisoner requests were generally followed appropriately. IPMs noted that complaints were acknowledged and responses provided, with some cases escalated appropriately to senior management. IPM involvement in following up complaints was encouraged by the prison.

Despite this, some prisoners reported hesitation about raising concerns formally, expressing a belief that they were better off in Dumfries than in other establishments and did not wish to risk

transfer, based on that perception. While this perception was reported rather than observed, it suggests a need for continued reassurance around safe and open complaint mechanisms through clear communication and consistent application of complaints processes. IPMs found no evidence of negative outcomes for prisoners who did complain, and complaints were submitted by prisoners from across all areas of the prison. However, the onus is on the prison to ensure individuals feel able to access the complaints process freely and without fear of repercussion.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Purposeful activity was a strength, though staffing levels intermittently restricted the range of activity available. Those on remand also had slightly less access to activities.

IPMs observed a wide range of purposeful activities, including education, creative arts, physical exercise, garden work, and workshops. Education provision was positively reported, with a good variety of courses, no waiting lists when checked at various points during the year, and tailored opportunities for prisoners with differing needs. Prisoners undertaking Open University courses reported feeling supported. Activity for the mainstream and remand populations was somewhat more limited due to the size of this population.

Physical activity was particularly strong, with high participation in gym sessions, parkruns, football, and outdoor work. The parkrun initiative in particular was of real benefit to all those involved and helped create a sense of community and an opportunity for relationship building. This initiative has influenced similar initiatives in other prisons following the success at Dumfries. The gardens were frequently active and involved a substantial proportion of the prison population at times.

Staffing shortages sometimes affected access. On several occasions, workshops, work parties, and education sessions were unavailable due to staff absence. While prisoners continued to receive time out of cell, these fluctuations limited the breadth of opportunities and were a recurrent theme. This highlighted the limited resilience within current staffing levels to cover staff absence, including leave, maternity leave, and sickness.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Progression was a persistent concern, with national delays to programmes and failure to complete GPAs significantly affecting prisoners.

Access to progression pathways was the most significant recurring concern identified, and is a theme replicated across all prisons. Prisoners repeatedly reported delays in accessing required programmes such as the Self Change Programme, and lengthy waiting lists for GPAs. IPMs confirmed that a considerable number of prisoners remained on GPA waiting lists, with limited prospect of short-term resolution.

While staff demonstrated encouragement and discussed training and employment with prisoners, the significant delays constrained progression. IPMs continued to hear considerable concerns from prisoners about limited opportunities for progression. Delays in accessing accredited programmes had a direct effect on individual's sentence planning and preparation for release. In some cases, the absence of a programme meant that prisoners serving determinate sentences were unable to meet progression criteria and were consequently liberated from Dumfries at sentence expiry, without a staged transition to less restrictive prisons. This situation both exacerbated existing capacity pressures and limited the individual's ability to prepare for release. Delays in programme access is affecting timely progression and supported returns to the community.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

Leadership and staff commitment were strong, but overall staffing levels affected delivery of services and activities for prisoners.

IPMs commented on committed leadership and staff who demonstrated understanding of their roles and the prison's aims. Relationships between staff and IPMs were open and constructive. However, staffing shortages were repeatedly reported, affecting escort provision, activity delivery, and the general flexibility needed to run prisons.

The small size of the prison was both a strength and a vulnerability, providing familiarity and trust but limiting capacity to absorb absences. Staffing resilience remains a key factor in the consistent delivery of the regime and adequate cover is needed to cover staff absences through annual leave, maternity leave, or sickness.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Healthcare provision was generally positive, though access and communication issues were reported.

Healthcare environments were clean and welcoming, with staff providing respectful and attentive care. Individual prisoners praised NHS staff for timely diagnosis and treatment, and addictions services were observed to be supportive and professional.

Concerns were reported around access to optician services and changes to Pregabalin prescribing. While staff provided explanations and alternative supports were described, prisoners expressed frustration with prescribing decisions.