



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP GREENOCK

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



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	55	60	57
	Total number of missed weeks:	5	7	2
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	22	22	35
	Total number of IPM hours:	190	159	280

Executive Summary

This Annual Monitoring Report sets out the findings of Independent Prison Monitoring at HMP Greenock over the reporting year, drawing on evidence from routine monitoring visits and prisoner engagement. The IPM team visited the prison on 57 occasions during the year, nearly doubling the amount of time spent monitoring compared to the previous year and reducing the number of weeks in which monitoring visits did not occur.

Overall, Greenock remains a safe, well-run, and orderly prison. Monitoring evidence across the year indicated a broadly stable operating environment, with some steady improvements from previous annual reports. In several key areas of concern reported below, monitoring evidence suggested that the prison had exhausted the reasonable steps available to it within existing national policy and resource constraints.

IPMs were saddened to learn about the deaths of two prisoners during the year. IPMs recorded these events with sympathy and acknowledged their profound impact on the families of those affected, staff and prisoners.

Across the year, residential areas were usually observed to be clean and well maintained, despite the age of the buildings and the related maintenance issues. Prisoners were regularly seen engaging in education, wellbeing and recreational activity when the regime allowed, which was not consistent across the reporting year. Developments to accommodation, including the reopening of Bute House and the continued use of enhanced independent living units, were associated with improved living conditions for some prisoners. At the end of the reporting year the use of Arran House was changed in response to population pressures across the wider prison estate. Purposeful activity, particularly education, creative work, fitness and wellbeing provision, was often observed to be positive and well received.

Three persistent and interconnected concerns were evident throughout the year: regime disruption, progression delays, and the impact of population pressures. Staffing shortages and sickness absence frequently disrupted the regime, resulting in cancellations of work parties and wellbeing sessions. Prisoners across several halls consistently reported spending extended periods locked in their cells, often being required to choose between core entitlements such as exercise, education, association and healthcare appointments. These restrictions were a recurring feature of monitoring evidence.

Progression remained a prominent and unresolved concern. Prisoners described delays in accessing offence-related programmes, psychology input, social work reports and Risk Management Team decisions, notably following transfers from other establishments. Some improvement was noted later in the year, where the prison took proactive steps to manage issues within their control including more regular Risk Management Team meetings and increased movement for some National Top End prisoners. However, delays, uncertainty and frustration persisted, which was described by staff as arising from estate-wide shortages of programme

places, a lack of psychologists to complete risk assessments and a mismatch in risk assessment criteria that needs to be applied in the National Top End compared with closed estate practice. All this contributed to delay and uncertainty for prisoners.

Confidence in complaint handling was another unresolved issue. Prisoners in the National Top End reported fear of negative consequences if they raised complaints and expressed perceptions that complaints were discouraged, resolved informally without outcome, or failed to result in meaningful change. The pervasive view amongst the prison population that complaining could result in an individual being returned to closed conditions was investigated and checked by monitors. We were satisfied this did not happen. Nonetheless, this erroneous view persists, and work is needed to dispel this view amongst the population and reassure prisoners they can complain without adverse consequences. There is a lack of trust in the complaints system. Prisoners need to be assured that their voice is listened to and that authorities are accountable when things go wrong. Despite the process appearing robust when complaints were received, more effort should be made to provide prisoners with confidence in the process.

Cost-of-living concerns were a recurring theme throughout the reporting year. Prisoners across different populations reported that wages and allowances had not increased in line with rising prices, reducing purchasing power and limiting access to food, toiletries and other essentials. While these pressures were not unique to HMP Greenock, reflecting the absence of a change to prisoners' wages nationally, they affected prisoners' sense of autonomy, equality and dignity.

Healthcare services were often observed to be professional, responsive and supportive. Nonetheless, prisoners reported delays in access to specialist appointments and mental health support, and monitors were informed by staff of ongoing capacity pressures within mental health provision.

In summary, HMP Greenock provided a generally safe and respectful environment, with many examples of committed staff practice. However, the cumulative impact of regime disruption, progression delays and population pressures, issues that appeared throughout the reporting year, undermined the good work of the prison.

General Observation

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Reception processes and admissions were conducted respectfully and professionally. Induction arrangements improved during the year, although some inconsistencies were noted, and some prisoners reported delays or lack of clarity in understanding processes affecting their custody, particularly progression and decision-making.

Throughout the reporting year, IPMs consistently observed respectful practice in reception and admissions areas. Staff engagement with newly arrived prisoners was generally calm, skilled and courteous. In several visits, monitors observed induction sessions taking place, and these were described as informative and well delivered when they occurred.

Earlier in the year, however, gaps in induction delivery were identified. Some prisoners reported not receiving a local induction, and being unsure about prison rules, progression pathways and available support. These concerns were particularly evident during periods of staffing shortages, when national or local induction sessions were cancelled or delayed.

Overall, while improvements were observed during the year, induction processes were not delivered reliably, particularly during periods of staffing pressure.

Standard 2: Decency

Living conditions were generally acceptable, with many areas observed to be clean and orderly. The ageing fabric of the building continued to present challenges, including leaks, damp and mould. Food provision and access to basic goods attracted mixed feedback, with repeated prisoner concerns.

IPMs observed residential areas to be clean and well maintained, with prisoners actively engaged in cleaning and upkeep. Staff oversight of cleanliness was effective, and most internal areas appeared bright and well organised. Newer or refurbished areas, including enhanced accommodation, were reported about positively by prisoners.

Nevertheless, the condition of the older estate remained as a long-standing concern. IPMs repeatedly observed, and were told about by staff and prisoners, leaks, water ingress, damp and mould in parts of Ailsa and Darrach Halls, particularly during periods of wet weather. Temporary mitigation measures, such as buckets and partial repairs, were commonly noted, but underlying causes were not resolved.

Direct observation of meals showed hot food of good quality being served, with IPMs regularly tasting it. Prisoners across multiple populations repeatedly reported dissatisfaction with portion sizes, menu variety and perceived inconsistency, particularly among protection prisoners. Cost-of-living pressures compounded these concerns, with prisoners reporting difficulty meeting basic needs through existing allowances. This issue has been raised consistently across multiple establishments over several years, with no evidence of resolution.

Access to toiletries and cosmetics, particularly for women and transgender prisoners, was also raised during the year. While staff described systems intended to address these issues, and there was clear management focus on understanding and addressing issues, delays and inconsistency were reported. A new system was introduced at the very end of the reporting year.

Overall, decency was largely maintained through staff effort and daily practice but was undermined by the longstanding building fabric issues and the concerns around cost of living

previously reported on.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

HMP Greenock was generally found to be a safe and stable environment. However, as highlighted in last year's report, concerns continued to be raised throughout the year relating to the experiences of protection prisoners being housed on halls alongside mainstream prisoners.

Throughout the reporting year, many prisoners described HMP Greenock as a safe place to live, and IPMs observed calm and orderly conditions in residential areas on most visits. Staff were frequently described as managing incidents appropriately, and safety processes such as observation levels were in operation when required.

The two deaths in custody during the year had a significant impact on prisoners and staff. IPMs observed that responses included engagement with external organisations such as the Samaritans, and provision of Listener support.

Protection prisoners raised recurring concerns about their safety and treatment. Issues reported included perceived unequal access to services, anxiety about interactions with mainstream prisoners, and fears that raising concerns might lead to negative consequences. While staff provided explanations regarding operational constraints, these concerns were repeated to IPMs across several monitoring visits.

Access to Listener support was generally viewed positively, but some prisoners reported barriers to engaging with the scheme, including perceptions from protection prisoners that Listeners were not representative of all populations. These reports suggested uneven confidence in peer support arrangements.

Overall, the prison operated as a generally safe environment where prisoners did not routinely report fears for their safety or express concerns about drug use or levels of violence. The previously noted concerns about the challenges of housing offence protection and mainstream prisoners on the same residential areas remain and are a consequence of the overcrowding and complexity of the national prisoner population.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

Staff were generally observed to exercise authority in a calm and professional manner. However, concerns were raised about transparency of decision-making, access to information, and the perceived impact of security processes on fairness and trust.

Across the year, IPMs frequently observed respectful and professional interactions between staff and prisoners. In most areas, authority was exercised calmly, and staff were willing to engage with monitors to explain procedures and decisions. Orderly room hearings observed by IPMs were conducted in a measured and humane manner, with appropriate consideration of individual circumstances.

Despite this, prisoners occasionally reported concerns about fairness and transparency in the application of authority. These included uncertainty about decisions taken under Rule 95 due to a limited understanding of intelligence-led decisions, and difficulties accessing written information such as prison rules. While staff explained the constraints associated with protecting sensitive information, prisoners commonly reported feeling excluded from understanding or challenging decisions affecting them.

Concerns were also raised about Mandatory Drug Testing and body-scanner processes. Some prisoners reported fear of false positives and perceived inconsistency in how results were

interpreted and acted upon. Although management provided explanations and reassurance about procedures, which IPMs felt to be fair, reasonable and proportionate, these concerns persisted across the reporting period and appeared to impact prisoners' stated willingness to engage in activities outside the prison. Monitors found no evidence to support these concerns, and decision making appeared robust and defensible.

Overall, while authority was usually exercised courteously and without excessive force, transparency and prisoner understanding were not consistently achieved. This is an area the prison is aware of and working to address.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

Across the reporting year, IPMs frequently observed positive staff–prisoner relationships. Interactions in education, wellbeing and residential areas were generally calm, courteous and respectful. Many prisoners spoke positively about individual officers, describing them as supportive and approachable, and staff were often described as committed and engaged in their roles.

Despite this, a recurring concern was prisoners' confidence in their ability to exercise autonomy, particularly in relation to complaints and advocacy. Prisoners across multiple halls, including Ailsa, Chriswell and Darroch, reported fear that raising complaints or challenging decisions could result in negative repercussions, such as being downgraded, labelled a "troublemaker" or deemed unsuitable for progression. These concerns were reported repeatedly and independently by different prisoners across the year.

IPMs noted that senior managers described steps taken to encourage engagement, welcome complaints and monitor responses, including management presence on the halls and oversight of complaint handling. However, the consistency and recurrence of prisoner perceptions suggested that reassurance at a senior level had not yet translated into widespread confidence at a prisoner level. Complaints were submitted by prisoners across all areas of the prison, responses checked were appropriate, and there was no evidence of any negative outcomes for prisoners who exercised their rights to complain. Prison management was proactive in dealing with issues raised by the Independent Prison Monitors, and acted in an open and transparent way, demonstrating a commitment to the value of responding to complaints to improve the prison.

Concerns were raised about prisoners' input into decisions affecting communal resources, such as the Common Goods Fund, with some prisoners reporting limited involvement or understanding of how decisions were made. Cost-of-living pressures, stagnant wages and restrictions on purchases further limited prisoners' sense of autonomy.

Overall, prisoners' reported fear of asserting their opinions represented an issue requiring further attention to allay these perceptions and build on the otherwise very positive staff-prisoner relationships reported.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Purposeful activity at HMP Greenock was varied and often of good quality when available. However, staffing shortages and regime constraints limited consistency, access and prisoner choice.

Throughout the reporting year, IPMs observed a wide range of purposeful activity, including education, creative arts, fitness, work parties, wellbeing programmes and peer-led initiatives. Education and wellbeing provision were frequently described positively by prisoners, with strong engagement observed in art, communication skills, numeracy, fitness and recovery-focused

activities. The wellbeing hub continued to be a valued resource, offering structured group work and third-sector input.

The gym was well used, and IPMs observed positive prisoner engagement and expert supervision during fitness sessions. Work parties, including labelling, pantry work, laundry and hairdressing, were observed to be productive and supportive environments when operational.

Access to purposeful activity was too often constrained by staffing shortages and regime limitations. IPMs repeatedly observed or were informed of cancelled classes, closed workshops, reduced gym access and limited library availability due to staff absence or redeployment. Prisoners on Ailsa Hall in particular, frequently reported spending 20 or more hours per day locked in their cells and being required to choose between core activities, such as gym, education, fresh air or wellbeing sessions. This reflected a wider pattern observed across the prison, where staffing shortages affected multiple aspects of regime delivery.

These limitations were reported across different populations, including prisoners on protection, women and long-term prisoners in enhanced or transitional units. While staff explained the operational pressures driving these restrictions, their cumulative effect reduced prisoners' ability to engage regularly in purposeful activity. Delivery of a full and consistent regime remained dependent on staffing and resource levels that were not consistently available.

Overall, purposeful activity provision was a clear strength when delivered, but its inconsistent availability was and is a significant failing.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Transition and progression arrangements remained a significant source of frustration for many prisoners. Although some improvement was observed over the reporting year, delays, administrative barriers and a lack of clarity continued to hinder prisoners' ability to progress and prepare effectively for return to the community.

Progression and preparation for liberation were among the most frequently raised concerns during the reporting period. Prisoners across a range of populations consistently reported delays in accessing offence-related programmes, psychological assessments, social work input and Risk Management Team (RMT) decisions. As noted elsewhere in this report, these delays were closely linked to wider regime and resource constraints and were not confined to progression processes alone.

These delays were particularly pronounced for prisoners transferred to HMP Greenock from other establishments. Many prisoners reported that risk assessments and associated paperwork were reviewed following transfer, contributing to further delays. Prisoners also described limited understanding of why decisions affecting them were delayed, what criteria were applied, and the expected timescales for progression.

While staff explained to IPMs the complexity of risk management processes and the role of external dependencies, prisoners often felt unable to influence or meaningfully engage with decisions affecting their progression. The differing requirements for risk assessments within the closed estate and National Top End created a sense of frustration amongst prisoners. Monitoring evidence suggested that current arrangements may contribute to duplication and delay, which in turn adds pressure to receiving establishments and increased frustration for prisoners.

IPMs observed several initiatives aimed at addressing these challenges. These included an increased frequency of RMT meetings and management efforts to improve progression throughput, particularly for National Top End prisoners in Chriswell House. The prison had increased the numbers progressing from closed conditions to the National Top End and then on to the Open Estate. In the reporting period 25 people had moved to the Open Estate, and 25 had

progressed to community work placements. Fifty-eight prisoners had also been received into the National Top End from closed conditions.

These developments represent a positive shift for some individuals and an improved situation for several prisoners. Despite these improvements, prisoners continued to report frustrations, compounded by communication to prisoners from sending establishments prior to arrival at the National Top End, where they were given unrealistic expectations of the process, and the need for the risk assessment to be reviewed once they arrived. Reviewing risk assessments prior to transfer might offer a better experience for prisoners on arrival.

Support for release planning was variable. In some cases, prisoners reported positive engagement with third sector organisations, employability services and social work. In others, there was limited awareness of available support or incomplete engagement prior to release.

Overall, while there was clear evidence of staff effort and some improvement in progression outcomes, transitions from custody into the community were not reliably effective or timely. National constraints, particularly in relation to programme availability, continued to affect prisoners' progression.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

The prison continues to be well-led and staff have a clear understanding of their objectives. Leadership engagement with IPMs was constructive and open. However, staffing shortages and resource constraints significantly affected the prison's ability to deliver the regime consistently.

Senior managers, First Line Managers and officers were generally open and engaged with IPMs throughout the year. IPMs attended meetings with managers and observed a willingness to discuss pressures, constraints and areas for improvement. Managers provided explanations for decision-making and were receptive to issues raised by monitors.

Despite this, organisational effectiveness was significantly constrained by staffing shortages and high levels of staff absence. These pressures were consistently reported by staff and were evident in practice, particularly through the frequent cancellation of activities and work parties and underpinned many of the issues identified across other standards, including regime delivery, access to activity, and progression. Staff described frustration at being unable to deliver the regime as intended, with officers redeployed from core duties to provide escorts or cover absences.

Overall, leadership was visible and engaged, but organisational effectiveness continued to be undermined by sustained resourcing issues.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Healthcare staff were qualified, responsive and patient-focused. Prisoners reported delays in accessing specialist care and mental health services, and capacity pressures were evident.

Across the year, IPMs regularly observed healthcare services operating in a competent and supportive manner. Health Centre staff engaged positively with IPMs, responded promptly to issues raised and demonstrated commitment to addressing prisoners' needs. Preventive healthcare, including vaccinations and harm-reduction initiatives such as naloxone training, was delivered consistently.

Despite these strengths, prisoners reported ongoing difficulties accessing specialist appointments, including ophthalmology and surgery, with delays sometimes linked to transport issues or external healthcare waiting lists. Mental health provision was a particular concern. Prisoners reported long

waits for mental health support, and IPMs noted opinions from both prison and frontline NHS staff that mental health nursing capacity was too limited to meet the need.

Some prisoners with long-term or complex health needs reported uncertainty about eligibility for adjustments to diet, work or regime, and reliance on individual advocacy to resolve issues. While staff often intervened when concerns were raised, these cases highlighted potential gaps in communication and coordination.

Overall, healthcare delivery was generally effective on a day-to-day basis, but continued to be affected by capacity constraints, particularly in mental health provision.