



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP Inverness

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



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	64	61	65
	Total number of missed weeks:	0	1	0
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	13	8	25
	Total number of IPM hours:	199	157	207

Executive Summary

During the reporting year, Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) observed HMP Inverness, as a small, local prison, operating consistently above its design capacity, with a complex mix of prisoners on protection, remand and sentenced and sustained pressure on staff and physical space. Despite these challenges, the prison demonstrated notable strengths in staff-prisoner relationships, personal safety arrangements, healthcare engagement, and day-to-day delivery of the regimes.

Lawful and transparent custody processes were strong. Reception, admission and risk assessment procedures, were observed to be well understood and consistently applied. However, pressures arising from overcrowding and the increasing number of prisoners on protection resulted in unavoidable compromises, including mixing of remand and convicted prisoners and notable levels of cell sharing, including double occupancy in cells designed for one person, raising concerns about privacy, dignity, and long-term sustainability.

Conditions under the Decency standard were broadly satisfactory. Cells, communal areas and showers were consistently clean and well maintained. Food provision was consistently praised by prisoners and IPMs alike. Cost-of-living pressures were a recurring theme, particularly in relation to rising canteen prices, static prison wages, and spend limits not keeping pace with inflation.

Personal safety was a clear strength. IPMs repeatedly observed effective management of suicide and self-harm risk through the SPS Talk-to-Me (TTM) Strategy, confident handling of bullying concerns, and a generally calm and supportive prison atmosphere. The death of a prisoner in custody during the reporting year was met with sensitivity and visible support for staff and prisoners, which IPMs regarded as significant and appropriate.

Staff authority was exercised in a calm, proportionate, and humane manner. Prisoners consistently described staff as approachable, patient, and caring, with orderly room proceedings observed to be fair and procedurally sound. Respectful treatment was the norm, although mixed feedback emerged around the consistency of personal officer support.

Purposeful activity was generally adequate, with good access to recreation, gym, visits, library services, and some education and work opportunities. However, the small size of the establishment constrained the breadth of activities available in comparison to other prisons. Delays to accumulated visit transfers was a source of frustration for prisoners and raised issues around compliance with Prison Rules.

Findings from looking at transitions from custody into the community were inconsistent. While liberation processes, and some throughcare supports were observed to function well, access to (nationally coordinated) offending behaviour programmes and progression resources remained limited, contributing to prisoner anxiety about parole and release.

Organisationally, staff morale was generally positive given the context of overcrowding, with visible leadership and strong informal support offsetting staffing shortages and experience gaps. Health

and wellbeing services were widely praised, with good access to mental health and addiction support, though delays in flu vaccination for older prisoners gave rise to concerns about equivalence of care (compared with elderly people in the community).

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Across the reporting year, IPMs consistently observed that reception and admission processes were orderly, respectful, and procedurally robust. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of warrants and release date calculation, TTM screening, and cell-sharing risk assessments. Prisoners were routinely informed of their legal status and key entitlements, and records examined by IPMs were generally accurate and up to date.

However, sustained population pressures had operational consequences. The increasing number of prisoners on protection resulted in unavoidable mixing of remand and convicted populations, resulting in acknowledged breaches of Rule 16 (separation of convicted and remand prisoners “so far as is reasonably practicable”), albeit with assurances to IPMs that the practice was fully risk assessed. IPMs noted this as an ongoing, Prison Service wide risk.

Within the Separation and Reintegration Unit, use of Prison Rules (Rules 41, 95 and 114) was generally appropriate, with reintegration plans in place. There were isolated cases regarding transition between rules, specifically transition from Rule 114 to 95, whereby a prisoner would be held in isolation longer than three days without ministerial approval.

Standard 2: Decency

IPMs observed residential halls, cells, showers, and sanitation facilities to be clean and orderly. Systems for requesting replacement bedding, cleaning materials, and hygiene items were appropriate. Food provision was repeatedly described by prisoners as good, with portion size, quality, and menu variety viewed positively, including during the Christmas period.

The prisoner population regularly exceeded design capacity, resulting in extensive double occupancy of single cells. IPMs expressed concern that sustained cell sharing undermined privacy and decency. This was recognised by prison managers as a known and actively managed risk and reported to SPS Headquarters routinely. Managers assured IPMs that cell sharing risk assessments were in place.

Cost-of-living pressures were a persistent theme. Prisoners raised concerns about rising canteen prices, limited spend allowances, unchanged wages, and the impact on purchasing power. Nationally set prisoner wages had not been increased for well over a decade. These issues were raised consistently by IPMs across the reporting period and were recognised as national rather than local policy matters.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

IPMs repeatedly observed effective use of the TTM Strategy, with well-completed documentation, sensitive case conferences, and multi-disciplinary involvement. Prisoners at risk were monitored appropriately, and IPMs noted additional protective measures such as extra phone credit to increase family contact.

Bullying and violence were described as low-level and well managed. Prisoners reported feeling safe and able to raise concerns directly with staff. Staff expressed confidence in intelligence-led approaches to risk management, and separation of prisoners was used where necessary.

Following the death of a prisoner in custody during the reporting year, IPMs observed a compassionate response, with visible management support for staff and acknowledgement of shared grief. This was regarded as important for maintaining stability and morale.

Drug misuse was reported as proportionately low in comparison to other prisons. While staff expressed concern about future risks associated with emerging substances, they had a focus on illicit drugs access and clearly worked well with external agencies in this regard. During the reporting period additional staff were given training on how to operate drug testing procedures.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

IPMs consistently observed respectful, patient, and calm staff-prisoner interactions. Prisoners regularly commented positively on staff attitudes, describing officers as supportive and caring. Orderly room hearings observed by IPMs were well-structured and transparent, ensuring prisoners were given the opportunity to take part. The outcomes and punishments were deemed to be fair.

Within the SRU, prisoners retained core entitlements, including time outside in the fresh air, exercise, hygiene, contact with healthcare, and access to education and reading materials. Authority was exercised proportionately, including during disciplinary measures.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

The complaints system was accessible to prisoners, with complaints forms available in the halls. IPMs noted that the complaints system had recently undergone internal audit and deemed to be suitable, though IPMs noted the absence of 'complaints receipts', recognised as a recurrent estate-wide issue.

Prisoners were enabled to discuss their views on prison processes at Prisoner Information and Advice Committee meetings (PIACs). Minutes of these meetings were generally available and posted on noticeboards, though at times these were out of date. One issue that IPMs identified was that, due to the relatively transient nature of the population at Inverness, PIAC prisoner representatives tended to change, resulting in a lack of follow up on prisoners' suggestions.

Feedback from prisoners on personal officer support was mixed. While caseloads were relatively small and relationships often positive, some prisoners expressed a lack of confidence in the system.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Prisoners reported being mostly satisfied with the range of purposeful activity available at the prison, and IPMs observed good access to recreation, gym sessions, library services and visits. Prisoners also had regular access to fresh air, with those wishing for the full hour being accommodated. Although demand for work exceeded availability of places (it being a small prison and overcrowded), those who could access work seemed to be engaged in it.

IPMs observed visits to be well organised and welcomed by all as an efficient system. Visitors generally thought that conditions were okay, with most staff being efficient and courteous. Prisoners were also complimentary saying that they were offered more than the minimum number of visits required under Prison Rules. The relatively small size of the visit room was an issue (as reported in previous years). Some families reported there not being enough space for private conversation. Concern was also raised that visits involving children could sometimes share the visit room with visits involving offence protection prisoners.

Delays to accumulated visit transfers at Inverness presented as an issue, reportedly exceeding statutory timescales in some cases, due to wider prison estate capacity constraints.

As experienced across the prison estate, the change of education provider during the reporting period brought some technical issues (for example IT access and delays in acquiring certification to award qualifications). These issues were ultimately resolved, and education opportunities proved popular with the prisoners.

Despite the limitations noted above, IPMs were pleased to note innovative partnerships and family-focused initiatives, employer-led programmes and supportive visit arrangements. IPMs also reported that all prisoner categories were afforded commensurate purposeful activity opportunities.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

The 'Compass Project' for assessing new prisoners was consistently praised by both staff and prisoners. The allocation of dedicated prison officers for individual support reportedly worked well, ensuring tailored assistance for reintegration needs.

However, there was wider concern among prisoners regarding waiting times for access to programmes and having to transfer to other establishments to access these. Prisoners were concerned that a lack of progression opportunities would have an impact on progression and access to parole. IPMs felt this raised a significant human rights concern, with delays resulting in prisoners having to spend longer in prison than would otherwise be necessary. IPMs did however recognise that this was a national issue rather than being specific to HMP Inverness.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

IPMs consistently noted strong leadership, committed staff, and generally positive morale despite staffing shortages and the pressures from a rising prisoner population. Training access was described as adequate, though some staff raised concern about the lack of experience among new staff, and future workforce readiness for the new prison, HMP Highland. Management explained however that they were running a mentoring and staff development project.

Overcrowding remained the dominant operational risk, with staff and managers alike acknowledging its impact while maintaining safe and humane regimes. IPMs reported the overall impression that the staff at Inverness were thoroughly skilled and very clearly cared deeply about their jobs and the prisoners in their care.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

IPMs were pleased to hear from NHS staff that mental health service provision at the prison was deemed to be more accessible than in the community. Addictions services were also viewed positively. Prisoners arriving at HMP Inverness underwent thorough medical risk assessment including careful investigation of substance use and withdrawal. There was plenty of information available in Reception about what to do in the event of overdose. This was provided in a 'welcome pack' provided to all new prisoners. The pack also contained some useful telephone numbers for suicide prevention including The Samaritans, as well as clear instructions about drug awareness and the availability of treatment.

Delays in flu vaccination for over-65s raised concerns in terms of equivalence of care with that provided in the community. While vaccines ultimately became available, the delay was viewed as significant. IPMs asked prisoners if they had been offered a flu vaccine, and the response was mixed, drawing the conclusion that the sharing of information around this could have been more thorough.

IPMs were satisfied that those that required urgent medical attention would receive it. The health centre had the ability to request urgent medical intervention either from the out of hours GP service or NHS 24.