



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP Low Moss

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



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	80	59	58
	Total number of missed weeks:	0	6	9
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	162	124	165
	Total number of IPM hours:	302	194	252

Executive Summary

During the reporting year, Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) recorded that HMP Low Moss operated in a generally stable and orderly manner, supported by consistent staff engagement and largely calm residential environments. Across the nine HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) Inspection Standards, performance was mixed, with some standards largely aligned with expectations and others only partially met due to persistent structural and resourcing pressures.

Strengths were most evident in environmental decency, staff competence in routine interactions, and the availability of purposeful activity where regime delivery permitted. Halls and communal spaces were consistently observed to be clean, supported by prisoner work parties. Positive examples were also identified of tailored support for prisoners with additional needs.

However, recurring concerns affected overall performance. These included weaknesses in complaints handling, prolonged stays for some prisoners in the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) without clearly articulated management or reintegration plans, and sustained staffing shortages that disrupted regimes. Issues with social work capacity also continued to affect the parole process, contributing to prisoner anxiety.

Personal safety arrangements were generally strong, with evidence of structured violence-reduction activity and improved accountability. Nonetheless, ongoing access to illicit substances and increasing requests by prisoners for protection were concerning for IPMs.

Healthcare provision was accessible at the point of admission, with positive observation of screening and triage processes. Sickness absence among NHS staff was significant and affected prisoner's access to health services.

Cost-of-living pressures were evident throughout the year. Prisoners reported difficulty managing canteen costs within unchanged wage levels and spending limits, particularly when work opportunities were unavailable to them, and for prisoners without access to external financial support.

Overall, while good engagement between staff and prisoners and local good practices were evident, systemic constraints continued to limit the establishment's ability to meet HMIPS Standards consistently.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

The reception area was clean and tidy, with no confidential information visible. Record keeping appeared in order. Information materials were available in multiple languages and translation services through a telephone link. New arrivals received a 15 to 20-minute assessment interview and a risk assessment at reception. A medical examination with a nurse occurred within 24 hours of arrival. Listeners were present in reception to support new arrivals.

However, reported information from prisoners indicated variable experiences of induction. Some prisoners described receiving insufficient explanation of daily routines, expectations, and available services, relying instead on peers for information. IPMs also observed inconsistency in staff communication at reception, contributing to perceptions of uncertainty.

Standard 2: Decency

IPMs repeatedly observed high standards of cleanliness across residential halls and communal areas, supported by effective prisoner work parties. Cells observed, including safer and accessible cells, were generally clean and maintained in reasonable condition. A particularly positive example was observed of tailored accommodation and support for a prisoner with significant mobility needs.

Prisoners raised concerns regarding delays in mattress replacement, at times having to wait some weeks before receiving a new one. Management did however confirm that the prison had replaced over 495 mattresses in the last financial year in line with their mattress replacement programme and retained a stock of mattresses for changes as required outwith the programme.

There were ongoing shortages of towels, which staff attributed to hoarding, failure to return towels for laundering, and the absence of a formal tracking system. Cell sharing continued despite a lower population earlier in the reporting period, contributing to pressure on prisoners' personal space. IPMs did however confirm that an effective cell-sharing risk assessment process was in place.

Passmen confirmed to IPMs that they had access to sufficient cleaning products to clean their cells as well as other cleaning duties. Biohazard appropriate safety training was provided. Prisoners confirmed to IPMs that they had access to sufficient soap, shower gel and shaving products to maintain an acceptable standard of personal hygiene.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

IPMs observed structured approaches to personal safety, including vulnerability screening at reception, access to the Listener scheme, and routine de-escalation by staff. Staff reported reductions in violent incidents and staff injuries, supported by enhanced investigation and accountability processes. Staff also received training

Despite these strengths, prisoners and staff reported ongoing access to illicit substances, including one case of rapid post-admission drug access. This was described as an issue across the prison estate, but one which had attracted significant investment in prevention methods, such as window grills and drug detection equipment, which would take time to implement.

Increasing numbers of prisoners seeking protection suggested continuing threats of violence, however prison managers assured IPMs that staff were using effective interventions to keep prisoners protected, for example in relation to gang culture.

Staff highlighted ongoing issues of insufficient staffing, limited resources, and population pressures, which they felt were likely to affect personal safety, particularly in relation to participation and support for vulnerable or marginalised prisoners, or those with protected characteristics.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

Orderly Rooms were consistently conducted in line with established procedures, with prisoners informed of charges, decisions explained, and support options identified. Hearings were observed to be conducted competently, with respectful engagement and procedural clarity. Prisoners were informed of charges, decisions explained, and support options identified.

IPMs observed several Orderly Room hearings. Staff behaviour towards prisoners was respectful. Prisoners were offered support, including addiction and mental health options. Prisoners were informed of their rights, and decisions were explained clearly, including the reasons for those decisions. The appeals process was explained in every case, and copies of the Prison Rules were available for consultation if necessary.

In the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU), staff frequently demonstrated care and initiative in supporting vulnerable prisoners, including creative responses to people with paranoia and distress. However, IPMs observed and reported prolonged stays for some prisoners in the SRU and in a few cases there was an absence of clear management or reintegration plans, including at least one example where the plan was simply to move the prisoner on to another prison when a space was available.

IPMs spoke to several prisoners about officers' use of disciplinary processes. They described what they felt was a disproportionate response by staff which had a knock-on effect leading to prisoners getting moved to a different section, losing a valued job or being put on closed visits. On the other hand, IPMs were made aware that staff were under a lot of pressure for a number of reasons (low staffing numbers, increasing and more complex population, etc.) and needed to ensure that their authority was not undermined in any way, therefore having to be assertive to maintain control over their section.

IPMs received a few requests from prisoners who were struggling to get updates about access to refunds for lost property and/or getting money. IPMs felt that the process seemed to be rather convoluted and that prisoners did not understand it, and that more transparency would go a long way in helping prisoners.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

There was some knowledge among staff about the role of the IPMs and how the service can be contacted. A comparatively large number of prisoner requests to speak to an IPM (in comparison to other establishments) indicated that the system for allowing prisoners to contact IPMs, in both halls as well as the SRU, worked reasonably well.

Prisoners generally had access to the complaints system and forms, and staff demonstrated an understanding of how to support prisoners in using the SPS complaints system (albeit with varying degrees of knowledge about the timescales). There was a process for recording complaints, however where staff sought to resolve complaints at the lowest escalation level, i.e. verbally, no recording seemed to take place. Some prisoners expressed dissatisfaction with this. IPMs believe all complaints received should be recorded, irrespective of how they are dealt with.

IPMs expressed concern about Risk Management Team meetings (RMTs) not taking place in a timely manner, and similarly for Internal Complaints Committee hearings (ICCs). Management assured them that plans were in place to improve this.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

IPMs saw plenty of evidence of prisoners accessing time outside in the fresh air, various work opportunities, library services and education classes. Prisoner engagement and staff enthusiasm were evident. Positive adaptations were also observed for prisoners with additional needs.

However, staffing issues, overcrowding and complex regime pressures led to workshed closures and periods of extended cellular confinement, thereby limiting regular access to purposeful activity. IPMs understood that this was done to protect safety and order in the halls, given the staff shortages, and prison managers said that since the changes made to the regime on 1 February 2026 there had been no work shed closures and no restriction to access to the gymnasium.

IPMs saw evidence that prisoners in the SRU were afforded their various rights and access to purposeful activity, visits, exercise and time in the fresh air.

The Life Skills section was deemed by IPMs to be a credit to the establishment and of benefit to the prisoners who engaged with it.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

IPMs heard of a number of instances where delayed social work reports had adversely affected the parole process, and ultimately the time prisoners spent in prison prior to release. The social work related delays were reported to be in no small part due to the increasing numbers of prisoners requiring detailed risk assessment work due to the nature of their crime, requiring far more social work input, without any matching increase in social workers. Latterly SPS held discussions with the Scottish Government with a view to securing more resources to address the situation.

IPMs were pleased to hear about the prison's approach to improving prisoners' employability prospects, including training and qualification programmes, which was well received by prisoners.

Programmes delivered by the Psychology Unit received encouraging feedback and were deemed effective in achieving meaningful change.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

IPMs observed committed leadership and staff expertise. However, staffing shortages led to frequent redeployment, cancelled activities, and restricted regimes (as reported under purposeful activity above).

IPMs saw good evidence of the efforts made by staff to go above and beyond normal processes to improve the outcomes for prisoners with additional needs. In one example, staff put additional supports in place to help a prisoner with their communication, to have more regular contact with their family.

IPMs attended a Death In Prison Learning and Review (DIPLAR) meeting, following the unfortunate death of a prisoner. IPMs found this process to be well run by an experienced Chairperson, and valuable in identifying where working practices could be improved, but also where there were examples of good practice that could be shared.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

IPMs confirmed there was a robust admission screening/triage process which referred new prisoners to relevant healthcare services depending on individual needs. This included referrals to mental health services. Specialist provision for neurodiverse prisoners was available.

Access to mental health treatment was reported as being far better than in the community. Prisoners were generally able to be seen by a member of the mental health team within 24 hours, compared with an apparent two-year waiting list outside.

There was no designated person for health complaints, therefore nurses spent a lot of time dealing with administration matters.

It was reported to IPMs that NHS staff had high levels of sickness absence due to the demands of job, that recruitment could be difficult, but that staff retention was good.