



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP & YOI Grampian

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



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	105	109	83
	Total number of missed weeks:	0	0	0
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	153	237	194
	Total number of IPM hours:	624	605	578

Executive Summary

This report presents a summary of Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) findings at HMP & YOI Grampian over the reporting year, drawing on IPMS' direct observations, and reported information from prisoners and staff.

Overall, the prison was characterised by generally positive staff–prisoner interactions, effective case management in specific contexts (including Rule 41 processes and reintegration activity), and a range of constructive initiatives. These included the further development of Cruden Hall as a first night-in-custody place for newly arriving prisoners in addition to the enhanced wing there, peer mentoring initiatives, expansion of education provision under a new provider, and collaborative work supporting progression and release. Healthcare systems showed evidence of procedural improvement in areas such as self-referral acknowledgement and medication review processes.

However, monitoring also identified recurrent concerns across some of the HMIPS Standards. These included inconsistencies in the provision of basic items such as clothing and towels, and reported limitations in access to complaint forms. Concerns were also raised regarding bullying, particularly related to medication, alongside delays in meeting specific accessibility needs (e.g. appropriate accommodation for disabled prisoners). Staffing pressures were noted at points during the year, affecting regime delivery and operational consistency.

Issues relating to escorts provided by GEOAmev emerged as a significant and recurring concern. Evidence indicated long and longer than necessary journeys, poor hygiene in vehicles, and the use of urine bags which were reported as unsuitable, particularly for female prisoners. These matters raised broader concerns about dignity and treatment during escort.

In relation to progression and transitions, some individuals reported being reluctant to move to other prisons to engage in progression activity due to concerns about losing placements within preferred environments (halls, work, etc.) on return to Grampian. Nevertheless, support from external partners and throughcare services was described positively.

Cost of living pressures were increasingly evident. Monitoring highlighted rising canteen prices alongside static wages, contributing to perceptions of unfairness and financial strain. Concerns were expressed about the potential impact on families supporting those in custody.

These events were treated seriously, sensitively, and by convening formal reviews. The impact of such events on staff and prisoners was evident, and contributions to review processes were conducted in a structured and supportive manner.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Across the reporting year, IPMs observed consistent efforts to ensure lawful admission, induction, and management of prisoners. Reception processes were described as thorough, with documentation checked appropriately and welfare prioritised, including screening for self-harm/suicide risk and allocation of first night support arrangements. The development of Cruden 1 as a space for first night in custody was good, with evidence of enhanced support, structured engagement, and improved access to services at an early stage.

Induction processes were observed to be clear and informative, with follow-up procedures aiding understanding and reinforcing key information. Foreign nationals were supported appropriately, including access to translators and assistance with communication needs.

Positive examples of compassionate decision-making were also noted, including the facilitation of compassionate attendance at family funerals following appropriate risk assessment.

However, concerns regarding escort arrangements represented a persistent issue. IPMs received both direct evidence and reported accounts highlighting poor conditions within escort vehicles, including lack of hygiene, extended journey times, and difficulties accessing toilet facilities. The use of urine bags, particularly in the case of female prisoners, was considered problematic in terms of practical use and dignity. IPMs recognised these issues were not directly within the control of HMP & YOI Grampian staff and managers.

Standard 2: Decency

Monitoring identified a mixed picture regarding decency. In several areas, practice met expected standards. Food provision was generally good, with temperature checks undertaken and no widespread concerns regarding quality. Cleanliness across halls was typically maintained, and some improvements in mattress replacement schedules were noted.

However, repeated concerns arose regarding inconsistent provision of basic items. Admission packs were sometimes incomplete, with reported instances of prisoners lacking essential items such as towels or duvets on transfer to their permanent hall. Subsequent monitoring confirmed ongoing shortages of clothing across reception and residential areas, with both staff and prisoners corroborating these difficulties. Management stated their intention to resolve this problem by having all prisoners issued with and to be responsible for, two sets of kit each.

Affordability of canteen items was a concern, with static wage levels (not increased since 2012) competing with rising canteen prices due to inflation. Prisoners highlighted perceived disparities in pay relative to work undertaken, however IPMs ascertained that wages paid were in line with national SPS policy.

Discussion with various prisoners about the food provision resulted in the general view that it was acceptable, with varied menu choices and provision for various specialist diets, including faith-based diets. Additional measures were in place for prisoners celebrating Ramadan, including provision of special meals outwith normal eating times for prisoners observing the fast. Staff and prisoners were described as supportive of those fasting. Consultation with prisoners regarding new menu choices was viewed as positive. Training and consistency in food handling practices in residential areas varied, with evidence suggesting that standards applied in the kitchen were not always replicated in the halls. Problems arose due to prisoners being trained and then transferred to another prison, but IPMs were advised that this had been resolved and Introduction to Food Hygiene Training was provided.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

Monitoring indicated that prisoner safety was managed, including structured risk assessments and individual care planning. Staff demonstrated awareness of risk factors and applied personalised approaches, particularly for vulnerable prisoners and those requiring protection.

IPMs checked relevant paperwork for prisoners being managed under the SPS suicide prevention strategy - Talk-To-Me and found records to be in order. However, IPMs found significant gaps in the recording of scheduled observations of prisoners who were suspected of being under the influence of drugs (Management of Offender at Risk Due to any Substance – MORS). Although staff assured IPMs that the relevant checks had in fact been done, these were not recorded in accordance with the MORS protocol.

Bullying was identified by the Health Centre as a significant issue within some areas, particularly linked to access to medication. While formal systems existed for managing bullying incidents, information available to prisoners seemed limited initially, however management took significant steps to improve this over the course of the reporting period.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

Staff interactions with prisoners were frequently described as respectful, with evidence of clear communication and efforts to ensure prisoners understood decisions affecting them. This was particularly evident in formal processes such as prisoner case conferences to consider application of Rule 41 (segregation on medical grounds), where prisoners were informed of decisions, reasons, and available support in a clear and supportive manner.

While some prisoners reported confusion regarding the reasons for cell searches, the searches observed by IPMs were conducted with appropriate explanation, respect for personal property, and sensitivity to confidentiality, including legal and religious materials. Similarly, drug testing procedures were described as structured and proportionate, with clear criteria for testing and efforts made to minimise disruption to prisoners' daily activities.

IPMs dealt with several prisoner requests where their property had not followed them to Grampian, following their transfer from another establishment. Some prisoners reported having waited for weeks, if not months, with their property still not having arrived. Staff demonstrated strong efforts to help prisoners retrieve their property in these instances, however IPMs concluded that the issue was more a national one needing to be addressed.

Reintegration work, particularly involving outreach services and the management of prisoners within the SRU, demonstrated a structured and collaborative approach aimed at gradual progression back into mainstream conditions.

Staff demonstrated an ability to manage challenging behaviour constructively, using de-escalation techniques and relationship-building approaches. Consistent staff engagement contributed to stability in the management of prisoners with complex needs.

IPMs observed formal disciplinary proceedings such as Orderly Room hearings and reported that these were followed in accordance with the rules, and prisoners had the opportunity to engage and represent their views. Staff conducting these proceedings were always courteous, checking the prisoner's understanding of the procedure and allowing them the opportunity to ask questions.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

Co-production meetings provided a forum for prisoner engagement, with participants able to raise issues across the full spectrum of prison life and contribute to discussions on how to make improvements. There were however times where there was irregular scheduling of meetings, and

lack of accessible records or minutes. This improved towards the end of the reporting period. Peer mentoring support was also available at the prison including the Listener service.

Prisoners generally had access to the SPS complaints system, although IPMs identified gaps in the availability of complaint forms in residential areas. Where forms were not readily accessible these had to be requested from staff. IPMs considered that this could deter prisoners from raising concerns, particularly where complaints related to staff conduct or required confidentiality. There was a process for recording complaints, but where staff sought to resolve complaints at the lowest escalation level, i.e. verbally, no recording seemed to take place, and prisoners expressed dissatisfaction with this. The absence of an acknowledgement of receipt of complaints created potential barriers to accountability and trust in the system, and IPMs recommend all complaints received should be recorded, irrespective of how they were dealt with.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Across the reporting period, IPMs observed a diverse programme of purposeful activity. Education provision underwent transition to a new provider, with evidence of expanded support for literacy, numeracy, and learning difficulties.

Prisoners were afforded their right to regular time outside in the fresh air.

Work-based activities provided opportunities for skill development, including accredited training in areas such as industrial cleaning and forklift operation. Some of these qualifications and opportunities had direct links to employment opportunities post-release, for example the Greene King initiative. Community-facing projects, such as the production of planters and other items, demonstrated constructive engagement beyond the establishment. There was also evidence that structured environments such as work parties facilitated stronger staff–prisoner relationships, with prisoners reporting greater contact and support in these settings. Some remand prisoners complained about a lack of work opportunities, however IPMs recognised that such opportunities were limited, and the prison rules did not require remand prisoners to work nor the establishment to provide them with employment.

Health-focused initiatives were prominent, including organised mental health events and support programmes addressing issues such as parenting and recovery. Library services supported both educational and practical needs, including resources in foreign languages for foreign nationals for which the library received the national award of Library Team of the Year.

The different prisoner categories had access to visits, both physical and virtual, as well as provision for family visits. Staff demonstrated a willingness to consider changes to visit timetables to accommodate demand. There was little by way of complaints by prisoners with regards to visits, and the family members who IPMs spoke to said they were happy with the arrangements.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Monitoring identified a number of strengths in relation to preparation for release. External partnerships, including Housing First, Jobcentre Plus support, and third sector organisations, contributed positively to pre-release planning. These services provided assistance with accommodation, employment, and practical reintegration issues. Structured throughcare initiatives, including Upside throughcare support, were described as effective, with prisoners receiving assistance prior to and following release.

Programmes addressing recovery and life skills were also in place, including courses delivered by organisations with lived experience, which were positively received by participants. Evidence suggested that such interventions supported reflection and preparation for life in the community.

However, access to formal offending behaviour programmes remained a significant issue.

Prisoners complained about waiting times to access programmes (a national issue rather than a

local one). Prisoners also reported a reluctance to transfer to other establishments to access programmes, due to concerns about losing their place within preferred environments, such as Cruden 3. This tension between maintaining stability and progressing through sentence planning was a recurring theme across the reporting period. Communication regarding progression pathways was not always clear, with some prisoners reporting uncertainty about these processes.

However, positive examples of progression environments were noted, including in Aberlour and Cruden 3, where prisoners reported supportive relationships with staff and opportunities to engage in structured activity linked to release preparation.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

IPMs observed a range of structured management practices, including regular senior management meetings, operational briefings, and effective use of data to monitor population, risks, and operational pressures. Systems such as handover books and structured meetings supported communication within teams and contributed to continuity of operations.

Recruitment activity was noted as a positive development, with local involvement in recruitment processes contributing to improved staffing levels over time.

Despite these strengths, staffing shortages were reported at various points during the reporting period, affecting delivery of the regime and contributing to operational pressures. Some staff described difficulties in maintaining expected standards due to reduced staffing levels, although others reported that adjustments to working patterns had improved.

Operational challenges associated with escort arrangements were of concern with staff covering for escort GEOAmey was unable to fulfil affecting other activities.

Overcrowding continued to be an issue throughout the reporting period with the prison population nationally reaching record levels. Transfers between establishments, to alleviate such issues, continued to affect both staff and on prisoners, the latter particularly as they were expected to transfer to other prisons at short notice, causing disruption to their own lives but also to their families, with prisoners often transferring some distance away from family support.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Monitoring indicated that healthcare services were generally delivered within structured systems, with evidence of improvements in responsiveness and communication. The introduction of acknowledgement systems for self-referrals and structured medication review processes contributed positively to clarity and continuity of care. Access to dental services improved during the reporting period, with waiting lists reducing.

Staffing within the Health Centre was reported as variable, with periods of reduced staffing affecting service delivery, with problems arising where staff called in sick. Whilst in general IPMs witnessed an improvement in the overall staffing levels over the reporting period, problems of this nature continued to occur and were evident towards the end of the reporting period, with reports of staff working extra hours to combat shortages.

IPMs confirmed that healthcare provision which prisoners had access to prior to coming into prison continued to be made available at HMP & YOI Grampian. Prisoners raised concerns that some medication they had been prescribed in the community was no longer available to them in prison.

Positive practice was observed in the delivery of care, including patient engagement, handling of complex cases, and support for prisoners experiencing distress or bereavement. With the increasing age of the population, end-of-life care and palliative care initiatives were also noted as areas of developing practice.

IPMs had major concerns around instances where prisoners were given the wrong medication or the wrong dosage. Concerns were also raised regarding substance use, including instances of prescribed medication misuse associated with attempts to avoid transfer to other prisons. This highlighted the interaction between healthcare provision and broader operational pressures.

Information sharing between prisons and external agencies for the best care of a person arriving in custody is an ongoing challenge and a recommendation for improvement from the Fatal Accident Enquiry into the deaths of William Lindsay Brown and Katie Allan at HMP & YOI Polmont. IPMs were therefore concerned when medical staff reported unnecessary delays in their ability to prescribe medication when prisoners arrived from court, when assessments recommending medication were agreed earlier in the custody chain but did not arrive with the person who needed it. For example, psychiatric assessments completed and recommending medication to manage symptoms, were not automatically made available to the NHS. This caused unnecessary delays, possibly with the need for duplicate assessments, before appropriate medication could be issued. Currently prison-based psychiatrists needed to apply to the court for release of such documents, wasting valuable treatment and support opportunities.

Prisoners reported that sleep medication was often administered at around 3pm, which they felt was too early. Senior staff confirmed that early administration of evening medication had resulted from staffing shortages and efforts were put in place to ensure consistent evening coverage.