



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
BELLA CENTRE

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



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	51	54	51
	Total number of missed weeks:	2	0	2
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	0	2	0
	Total number of IPM hours:	102	118	99

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) at the Bella Centre between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. Monitoring activity was undertaken through regular visits and engagement with prisoners, staff, and external partners, providing a rounded assessment of the experience lived within the establishment.

Overall, the Bella Centre was observed to be a stable, well-functioning, and progressive environment, operating in line with the ethos of a community custody unit. Evidence from monitoring consistently indicated that prisoners felt safe, respected, and supported, with strong and constructive relationships between staff and prisoners underpinning day-to-day life. These relationships were central to the calm and positive culture observed throughout the reporting year.

The physical environment was consistently maintained to a high standard and was conducive to promoting independence and personal responsibility. The regime offered a broad and evolving range of purposeful activities, including education, creative programmes, recovery support, and wellbeing initiatives. These were well attended and valued by prisoners, with evidence that they contributed to developing confidence, practical skills, and readiness for accessing the community and release.

A key strength of the Bella Centre was its person-centred and rehabilitative approach to progression and transition. Women were supported through structured opportunities to build independence, including community access such as work placements, home leave, and, towards the latter part of the year, weekly food shopping in the community. Partnership working with external agencies was well embedded and supported continuity of care and preparation for release. Health and wellbeing provision was similarly responsive and accessible, with consistently positive feedback regarding healthcare and mental health support.

While the overall picture was positive, some challenges were identified. These included delays in implementing the introduction of community-based food shopping and the transition of canteen provision from HMP & YOI Stirling. The compressed timescales with early release decisions affected planning and clarity for both prisoners and staff. However, these issues were generally outwith the direct control of the establishment and were mitigated in practice through proactive, flexible and supportive staff responses.

In summary, monitoring evidence throughout the year demonstrated that the Bella Centre continued to deliver a high-quality, person-centred model of custody. Its strengths lie in this and its focus on promoting independence and rehabilitation and its effective partnership working.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Monitoring across the reporting year found well-established processes and outcomes.

Induction was consistently described as positive, with prisoners reporting that they felt welcomed, supported, and treated with dignity on arrival. Information about rights, rules, and entitlements was accessible within communal areas. While experiences on arrival were positive, some gaps in pre-transfer information from other establishments were identified. Prisoners occasionally reported confusion around the application of the prison rules and progression pathways; however, IPMs observed staff engaging openly and regularly to increase understanding.

Liberation arrangements were well supported when planning for release, including with travel and engagement with community-based services. Staff were described as proactive and person-centred in their approach, supporting informed decision-making and providing additional support. Individuals affected by the Early Release Scheme reported being kept informed as information became available, and communication was generally clear and timely within the constraints of national decisions.

Overall, there was a transparent and supportive approach, with minor areas identified where clearer advance information from other establishments could further strengthen practice.

Standard 2: Decency

Standards of decency were consistently high. The environment was clean, and prisoners took pride in keeping their living spaces tidy. Facilities were well maintained and accommodation supported independent living, with access to shared and private spaces.

Food provision arrangements functioned reliably overall. Prisoners were responsible for managing their own food budgets, shopping, and cooking, which supported independence and developed life skills. Staff provided support to assist with budgeting and meal planning. Newly admitted women received a food package on arrival. Direct IPM observation of hub cooking sessions, including those linked to the Cook It programme, had positive engagement and developed practical life skills. Resources such as cookbooks and recipe cards were accessible and well-used. At the end of October 2025 weekly food shopping was expanded to introduce physical visits to shops in the community. This was a positive development aligned with a 2024 HMIPS inspection recommendation.

There was good access to laundry provisions and personal hygiene items. Prisoners were also able to purchase items from the canteen product sheet, and permitted items during periods of community access, and they received items handed in to the Bella Centre by family or friends.

Overall, the standards of decency supported independence and personal responsibility.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

Prisoners consistently reported feeling safe and expressed confidence in being able to approach staff with any concerns or uncertainties. Relationships were respectful and supportive, contributing to a calm and stable living environment.

There were no reports of use of force or restrictive interventions. Staff described a preventive, relationship-based approach to managing any emerging tensions. There was an emphasis on communication, personal accountability, and early resolution. Where issues did arise, these were managed on a case-by-case, person-centred basis.

Health and fire safety arrangements were appropriately maintained. Safety equipment, including fire extinguishers, fire blankets, and signage, was observed to be in place and accessible. Staff

demonstrated awareness of fire safety procedures, including alarm testing, assembly points and routine checks conducted and recorded.

Overall, the evidence indicated that Bella Centre provided a physically and emotionally safe and supportive environment. It was, however, noteworthy that despite its use not being required, the safer cell intended to be used in the event of an individual requiring to be removed from the main houses for her safety or the safety of others, had not been approved for use since the Bella Centre opened in August 2022.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

No concerns were reported or observed related to discipline, use of force, physical restraints, or property during the year.

Management of any issues was consistently described as respectful and proportionate, with a strong emphasis on dialogue, understanding, and de-escalation. Both prisoners and staff described a culture where issues were managed through conversation and individual engagement wherever possible. Where challenges could not be resolved informally, staff described a clear, evidence-based approach to decision-making, including consideration of individual circumstances and welfare to inform next steps and any required escalation such as a return to closed conditions.

Search and property processes were reported to be conducted with sensitivity and fairness. Prisoners described being treated respectfully during searches, including consideration of identity and dignity. Some women raised concerns regarding property items that had been permitted at other establishments but not at Bella; these were acknowledged by staff and addressed through explanation, alignment with national policy, and efforts to resolve individual issues.

Overall, monitors found no evidence of disproportionate or inappropriate use of force, and staff practice supported fairness, dignity, and clear communication.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

Prisoners frequently reported positive experiences with staff, with Personal Officer relationships highlighted as a key strength. Several prisoners described feeling listened to, supported, and advocated for, including in relation to service referrals and settling-in difficulties. Prisoners felt able to approach staff and trusted them to act appropriately. Social relationships between prisoners were also largely positive though some tensions were reported arising from personal differences which were worked through either with each other or with assistance, such as mediation.

Prisoners generally spoke positively about their transition and the level of autonomy afforded to them, noting that the regime encouraged personal responsibility, independence, and self-reflection. While the increased personal responsibility was initially challenging for some new arrivals, women reported that they were supported to help them settle into the different environment and valued the quieter, more trusting conditions. The regime was widely seen as supportive of recovery, family relationships, and preparation for life in the community.

Changes to staff rosters, implemented from February 2026, were not reported to have had any obvious negative effect on the general day-to-day routine. The change was mainly for operations staff who did speak about potential concerns, especially around resilience and continuity should there be periods of reduced staffing. However, whilst the implementation was in its infancy, by the end of March, no such concerns had materialised.

Opportunities to hear prisoners' voices were evident, with regular meetings and open communication. At times, the sharing of minutes and clarity around follow-up actions or communication of changes were delayed, and the timeliness and consistency of communication could be improved.

Overall, a strong culture of respect and autonomy was evident, with minor improvements required in the consistency of communication. The day-to-day routine was less predictable than closed

prison establishments, in line with the ethos of the community custody units and informed by strengthened relationships and regular communications.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

There was a wide and evolving range of purposeful activities which were generally well attended and positively received, including education, creative arts, recovery-focused programmes, physical activity, and group-based wellbeing initiatives. Most prisoners consistently reported feeling engaged, motivated, and supported to develop new skills and interests.

Creative and vocational opportunities were prominent, including jewellery-making, sewing, baking, music, writing, and visual arts. Partnerships with external organisations such as Vox Liminis, Hillcrest Futures, People Plus, and colleges supported meaningful participation and visible achievement. Prisoners demonstrated pride in their work, including items made for community groups, exhibitions, fundraising events, and family occasions. Recovery-focused activities, including Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART) and peer-led courses, were well attended and beneficial. Gym activities and physical sessions were popular and contributed to both physical health and social cohesion.

Visits, including family and virtual visits, were flexible and supportive of maintaining relationships. Prisoners valued the more relaxed visiting environment, particularly for children and families travelling long distances. Some intermittent issues were reported with virtual visit reliability, phone costs, and the loss of the outdoor children's play area; however, alternative arrangements were made and staff had an awareness of the impact of these limitations.

Throughout the year several prisoners accessed activity in the community, including escorted attendances, and participated in creative, recovery, and wellbeing groups, and recovery events. Community work placements are covered separately under standard 7.

Overall, IPM monitoring observations showed that purposeful activity was varied, engaging, and well-aligned with rehabilitative and reintegration goals, with ongoing improvements strengthening opportunities throughout the year. There were minor issues such as consistency of the delivery of education, which took time to settle, and occasional technical issues affecting virtual visits.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Transition and release planning was person-centred and supported by staff engagement and partnership working. Prisoners felt listened to and supported in preparation for release, parole, or progression-related community access, including home leave and work placements. Engagement was proactive, responsive, and tailored to individual circumstances.

The Risk Management Team operated regularly and took informed decisions regarding progression and Integrated Case Management (ICM) meetings were described positively, with involvement from family members and community partners where appropriate. The level and type of community access was determined based on the individual and sentence stage and supported through escorted and unescorted activities including community placements and weekly food shopping in the community towards the end of 2025. This supported the development of confidence, independence, and valuable opportunities to practice everyday life skills including budgeting, travel, and community interaction.

Partnerships with third-sector organisations such as Upside and rehabilitation providers supported continuity beyond custody. Where required, a visit to potential rehabilitation placements before release, supported individuals' confidence and enabled informed decision-making. Those who transferred directly to residential rehabilitation services were reported by staff to have been well prepared, and feedback from rehabilitation providers was positive.

Communication around early release processes were generally clear, and prisoners understood the steps involved and provisional timelines. However, both prisoners and staff raised some

uncertainty due to compressed time limits once national early release decisions were announced, which limited preparation time. Staff were consistently described as proactive, creative, and supportive in attempting to resolve any issues.

While progression varied according to risk management and stage of sentence, evidence indicated consistent, fair, and supportive practice. Overall, transition planning at Bella was purposeful, coordinated, and rehabilitative, supported by external partnership working.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

Monitoring evidence across the reporting year indicated that the Bella Centre operated as a stable and generally well-managed establishment. Governance arrangements supported consistent delivery, with clear leadership presence and regular engagement between operational managers, staff, and IPMs.

Staff were confident in their roles and supported to deliver a flexible, person-centred approach. Training and development supported effective delivery of the wide range of responsibilities required in a small custodial setting. Officers described having autonomy to initiate and lead activities aligned with prisoners' needs and their own skills, which supported flexible and responsive practice.

Delays in implementing planned operational changes, notably the introduction of the canteen to the Bella Centre, were bothersome to prisoners. While explanations were provided, repeated delays meant the changes were not made as originally communicated.

The Bella Centre's organisational effectiveness was strong, with effective leadership and partnership working supporting the delivery of priorities and positive outcomes for prisoners.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Monitoring evidence across the reporting year indicated that health and wellbeing provision at the Bella Centre was accessible and responsive. Prisoners consistently reported positive experiences of healthcare access, including timely support for primary care, dental treatment, mental health needs, and substance-use services.

Health information and self-referral options were clearly displayed and accessible within communal areas, supporting awareness and autonomy. Healthcare staff were approachable and supportive. Preventative health activity was evident, including vaccination planning and wellbeing information covering physical, mental, and emotional health.

A wide range of wellbeing activities contributed positively to quality of life. These included group-based initiatives focused on mental health awareness, recovery support, physical activity, mindfulness, and social connection. Activities delivered in partnership with NHS services and third-sector organisations were well attended and positively received. Prisoners highlighted the value of creative and movement-based activities in supporting mood, motivation, and overall wellbeing.

Overall, the Bella Centre supported health and wellbeing in a holistic and person-centred manner, contributing positively to stability and preparation for liberation.