



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP Dumfries

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2023 – 2024

By Chris Collins



Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 51



Total number of missed weeks: 2



Total number of prisoner requests received: 43



Total number of IPM hours: 184

Executive Summary

IPMs continued to report positively across all standards in HMP Dumfries. The Monitoring Team's strong impression is of a safe, functioning prison with a strong culture of care for prisoners, and a staff group who take pride in their work. IPMs welcomed the open dialogue available with staff, management and prisoners and where issues arise for prisoners, there was a clear pathway for IPMs to raise with staff. Staff/prisoners relationships were noted to be very good across all areas of the establishment which created an environment for innovative rehabilitative work to be tested, where appropriate. Monitors have reported negatively on cancellation of external appointments by GEOAmev and the impact on all aspects of life for affected prisoners, and have some minor concerns around occasional closure of work parties where staffing pressures were high.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs have visited reception and noted the process for admissions continues to be well-run and thorough. IPMs have spoken to new admissions and prisoners due to be liberated this month. Both groups comment on a safe prison where basic entitlements were met and where they felt safe.

IPMs have welcomed the plans to take the multiple occupancy cells out of commission at HMP Dumfries during this reporting period.

Throughout the year all IPMs have spoken with prisoners in the Basement who had previously been to Orderly Rooms for their conduct. Monitors confirmed all reasonable entitlements were in place for these prisoners and that they were given opportunities to express themselves in the orderly room process. There were plans in place for them to return to mainstream.

Standard 2: Decency

● Overall RAG rating: Green

On all visits this year monitors have reported on HMP Dumfries as clean and well maintained. Basic supplies were available for prisoners to live in a tidy and hygienic manner. Despite being an older building, the prison caters for the needs of all prisoners and IPMs welcomed the refurbishment of the gymnasium this year, as noted below. Prisoners were afforded all basic entitlements and opportunities for fresh air and showers. Some areas of the prison were decorated around Christmas time. The Wellbeing Gardens were an excellent addition to rehabilitative

provision in the prison, and IPMs commended all of the prisoners and staff who worked to create this. More opportunities for time in greenspace and fresh air had been welcomed by prisoners who have spoken with IPMs.

IPMs also welcomed the return to communal dining at HMP Dumfries and noted that most prisoners spoken to appeared to be in favour of this. However, monitors also met with prisoners who would prefer to dine in their cell due to anxiety or other issues. These issues were managed individually and sensitively by prison management. Some prisoners approached independent prison monitors about quality and quantity of food in the establishment, which prompted some IPM visits to the kitchen. Although quite subjective, monitors reported back on good quality provision and a varied menu. In the second half of the year, prisoner requests to IPMs about food were noticeably much lower.

IPMs were pleased to note that one matter relating to a prisoners access to appropriately prepared Kosher food had been resolved satisfactorily. Prisoners have been observed on all visits taking time in recreation and also time outside in the fresh air.

Prisoners have regularly approached IPMs about increasing cost of canteen prices and monitors noted the feedback provided to all prisoners on this issue by management earlier in 2024.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Monitors continued to report on good levels of safety in the prison, with good order observed in the establishment on all visits. Staff were professional and courteous on all observed interactions with prisoners, in work parties, route movement and in the residential areas.

Overall, IPMs reported that management and staff took a preventative approach to personal safety in all areas of work. There was a strong culture of respect for others from the Governor and staff actively took pride in their work at HMP Dumfries. These respectful relationships underpin the overarching feeling of a calm, orderly prison where prisoners can serve their sentence free from bullying or intimidation. Where challenging or difficult situations do arise with individuals or groups of prisoners, SPS processes were adhered to with orderly rooms, complaints processes and ICCs all held where necessary. IPMs welcomed senior managements dialogue at quarterly meetings and their response to a handful of prisoners views that these meetings could feel pre-determined. IPMs then observed some of these forums, reporting back that processes were followed, prisoners were given adequate opportunity to speak and in general decisions were made in a transparent and even handed manner.

IPMs were updated on any significant incidents and were aware of the challenges of illicit substances coming into the establishment, however are pleased to report that this was managed proactively and rarely on a significant scale in the past twelve months.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

● Overall RAG rating: Green

All IPMs have spoken with prisoners in the Basement who had previously been to orderly rooms for their conduct. Monitors confirmed all reasonable entitlements were in place for these prisoners and that they were given opportunities to express themselves in the orderly room process. There were plans in place for them to return to mainstream.

Where prisoners had been removed from mainstream, every effort was made at reintegration and IPMs saw first-hand the compassionate approach of officers in challenging circumstances.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

● Overall RAG rating: Green

At the beginning of the reporting year, IPMs commented on their interactions with newly appointed staff in the prison. All officers have commented positively on their initial experiences in HMP Dumfries and monitors have noted a high level of enthusiasm and satisfaction with their early weeks and months in post. The prison has several forums for prisoner interaction including PIACs and Equality and Diversity Meetings. Monitors were pleased to note a food focused PIAC had been set up this year also.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs have continued to monitor the impact of the gym refurbishment on prisoners access to PT throughout the year. Feedback from prisoners, staff and management has overall been good, with attendance at sessions in the halls remaining high and prisoners referring to different and more flexible classes on offer. There was some suggestion that some who may not have participated in gym-based activity are now becoming involved in the PT schedule in the residential areas. Monitors noted regular activity in the Visits Room, the Education Centre and in the Wellbeing Gardens. Monitors have observed education sessions taking place in B1 where several prisoners have limited mobility, demonstrating education outreach in practice. IPMs were also pleased to visit the Life Skills area and observe prisoners receiving work preparation training with courses on hospitality among other things. Chaplains were visible and available in the establishment and faith-based services provision was good.

The processing of friends and family for visits session was excellent. IPMs have observed members of the public welcomed at the front gate and taken through security and in a friendly but secure manner. Staff in the Visits Room were reported to be attentive but inobtrusive and the area itself was bright and welcoming.

In general, IPMs comment on good levels of activity in the prison. In particular, activity in the Links Centre had been noted along with usual provision in work parties and education. On occasion monitors commented that the prison could seem quiet with the arrangements for work and education. Management reassure monitors that they were continually looking at regime planning to optimise time out of cell. IPMs noted that throughout the year staffing levels had resulted in some areas of the prison not fully functioning in order to secure safe ratios in the residential areas.

As noted above, the gardens were a hive of activity and the developments in the Wellbeing area were impressive. There has been minimal purposeful activity on Friday afternoons in HMP Dumfries this year. On speaking with management the monitoring team are satisfied that ample opportunity for time out of cell and purposeful activity exists for all prisoners during the week and at weekends in HMP Dumfries.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs have spent some time in the Links Centre and noted the presence of community-based organisations and statutory services. IPMs have spoken with the officers responsible for facilitating the Recovery Sessions in the Centre and welcomed this important work in assisting prisoners with their transitions from custody to the community. The Monitoring Team reported on an innovative approach within HMP Dumfries when it comes to engaging with the local community and various partnerships that has been developed in the past year, notably in the Wellbeing Gardens and elsewhere. Where IPMs have spoken with prisoners due for liberation they have praised the level of attention that has gone into their release.

IPMs are sharply aware of the impact on prisoners of the escort contract with GeoAmey which has not functioned adequately throughout the year. This has impacted on Special Escorted Leave and prisoner progression. While IPMs welcome the mitigations that HMP Dumfries have attempted to put in place, these do not offset the problems associated with so many missed external appointments. Monitors have been advised of a slowly improving picture in second half of this year.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs noted that HMP Dumfries continues to run with good order and flexibility, with creative use of resources to ensure good opportunities for all categories of prisoner.

IPMs have taken a number of prisoner requests during this year with no obvious patterns or themes. These have ranged from food, access to visits, orderly room and punishment processes. Staff have been helpful in assisting IPMs to progress these requests where appropriate.

Staff go about their responsibilities with a clear sense of purpose, conducting their duties with civility. Senior management were visible and promoted a culture of care and togetherness in HMP Dumfries. Monitors were made aware of management changes throughout the course of the year and look forward to observing similar approaches and leadership.

Effective and timeous communication of alterations to prison regime or prison rules helped settle any anxieties among prisoners. Separate functions in the prison had a good understanding of others and there was strong support as seen in the willingness of staff to cover around the prison. Good practice and levels of service were consistently recognised by management in HMP Dumfries.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs have continually reported on good levels of healthcare and adequate provision of staff for the needs of the population at HMP Dumfries. Monitors have taken the occasional request throughout the year, generally relating to prescribing decisions which are outwith the parameters of the IPM role. Waiting times do not appear unduly lengthy and it is very infrequent for IPMs to be approached with dissatisfaction about standards of healthcare in HMP Dumfries.

RAG (Red, Amber, Green) status key:

● (Red) Some serious concerns

- (Amber) Some slight concerns
- (Green) No concerns / good practice

RAG rating: where IPMs felt each standard would be rated given their experience - not a complete analysis but based on the judgement of the IPM team.



Key Issues

1. GeoAmey and cancelled external appointments
2. Gym refurbishment and purposeful activity
3. Canteen prices / cost of living



Encouraging Observations

Strong identity and culture of improvement in the prison, promoted from senior management throughout all staff in the establishment. Innovative approaches to health, wellbeing and recovery. Excellent partnerships and interface with local community.



Conclusion

Overall IPMs impression remain of a safe, orderly and well run prison at HMP Dumfries. There are many individual examples of good practice highlighted by the Monitoring Team and the relationship between staff and prisoners were clearly very good, judging by the interactions observed by IPMs on a weekly basis. IPMs will continue to monitor against the key issues highlighted in the section above in the coming year.