



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP Glenochil

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2023 – 2024

By Christopher Johnston

Prison Monitoring Coordinator, Region 1



Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 61



Total number of missed weeks: 1



Total number of prisoner requests received: 69



Total number of IPM hours: 193

Executive Summary

2023-24 was a busy year for the Independent Prison Monitoring Team, with an average five to six new prisoner requests received each month, in addition to carrying out their duties in monitoring the nine HMIPS standards. The Team started off the year as a relatively small unit of four IPMs and welcomed a further two IPMs towards the end of the financial year. This increased capacity was most welcome.

This annual report highlights the key findings that the HMP Glenochil IPM Team made during the year, along with the average rating for each standard. The report also sets out what the IPMs felt were the key issues, as well as highlighting areas of good practice.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs discussed the reception and induction processes with prisoners and concluded that they worked well.

IPMs confirmed that cell sharing risk assessments were conducted and that rapid action was taken as soon as any risk became evident that had not been foreseen.

Staff reassured IPMs that prisoners were given information on key dates, for example court dates and liberation dates. Prisoners confirmed to IPMs that this was the case, and that they understood the implications of these dates.

Standard 2: Decency

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Prisoners were provided with prison-issue toiletries and could also choose to purchase brand-name items on the canteen list. Clean clothing and bedding was available at an acceptable frequency.

A group of prisoners approached IPMs to complain about having to share a single cell. IPMs looked into this and determined that the cells were in fact what were referred to by staff as 'small doubles'. IPMs measured the size of these cells and concluded that they were within EU regulation size for shared cells.

IPMs monitored the kitchen and concluded that it seemed like a positive environment. IPMs did not have any concerns about the food preparation or distribution. Budget constraints and external

factors such as supply chain issues appeared to be a factor, however the staff seemed well able to adapt to any issues accordingly.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

● Overall RAG rating: Green

The IPMs' general sense was of a calm and orderly prison with no sense of undue tension. Staff handling of and response to prisoners was measured in all halls. IPMs looked at how the prison managed the safety of prisoners, including observing route movements, prisoners out of cell in the halls, exercise, and cell-sharing risk assessments. The overall conclusion was that personal safety was a high priority for management, for staff and prisoners, and that this was cascaded down well to all staff.

IPMs recognised the potential for bullying by prisoners when cells were opened and at exercise, but noted also that staff awareness of the risk of bullying was good, and such risks were mitigated as far as possible by a continual staff presence. IPMs monitored the SPS Anti-Bullying Strategy. Posters advising prisoners what to do if they felt bullied were not visible in a number of flats. Staff confirmed that it was rare for prisoners to raise bullying concerns with them and suggested it was due to fear of reprisal or being labelled a 'grass', however they did confirm that they would deal with bullying behaviour as and when they spotted it. All-in-all, IPMs felt that while prisoners appeared to report very little by way of bullying, the process was in place and there to be used. IPMs felt there was little else that could be done in addition to what was already in place.

IPMs raised a concern to management that there was a potential slight safety concern associated with staff not having a clear line-of-sight, from the officer's desk in Abercrombie 2 to the area behind the foot of the stairs at Abercrombie 1. IPMs recommended that staff explore further mitigations beyond reliance on the mirrors and consider how regularly they should patrol the hidden area when prisoners are out of cell. Management agreed to make some changes to improve the situation, including new mirrors, more CCTV coverage, and increased staff presence. IPMs welcomed the response.

Application of the Talk-To-Me Strategy appeared to be carried out robustly at the prison. IPMs also observed clear arrangements for ensuring protection prisoners and mainstream prisoners did not mix. IPMs were also satisfied that arrangements were in place to protect female staff from prisoners with a 'no lone female' flag, including Health Centre staff.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs were informed about staff shortages at weekends which resulted in prisoners being in their cells longer than normal. IPMs looked at plans and paperwork associated with this and concluded that it was well handled, with good communication with prisoners, and a focus on prisoner care in difficult circumstances (22 hours per day lock up). Staff shortages did however provide for some concern. Management reassured IPMs that it would only be for a short period of time, and the situation appeared to ease as the year went on.

Conditions in the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) were deemed by IPMs to be good. Staff were seen to be fair to prisoners and able to develop relationships. There was a sense of a caring atmosphere and staff were realistic about the challenges that could be forthcoming.

IPMs concluded that prisoners were held there in accordance with prison rules, all had reintegration plans and were treated well. However there were concerns from staff about the pressure on SRU spaces across the estate, along with frustration among staff and some SRU prisoners about them being reintegrated less quickly than they otherwise might be.

IPMs concluded that prisoners held in confinement for health reasons (including drug use) were held fairly in accordance with the prison rules. Appropriate cells were used, prisoners had access to showers, and healthcare staff advised on the appropriate frequency of observations. IPMs observed staff responding promptly and fairly to these prisoners' requests.

IPMs reviewed a number of instances where Rule 95 was used to temporarily confine prisoners to their cell and concluded that the use of rule was carried out fairly.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

IPMs observed prisoners working in the gardens under low supervision. Prisoners were working quite a reasonable distance away from where the officers were. This demonstrated to IPMs that trusting relationships had been developed between staff and prisoners.

IPMs did some focussed monitoring on Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) Hearings and concluded that generally a sound approach was taken to all ICCs, with genuine efforts made to ensure a fair hearing. There were some cases where the presumption of 'innocent unless proven otherwise' may have been difficult to apply rigorously. For example, where a weapon was found in a cell and the occupant claimed he did not know it was there and that it must have been left by a previous occupant. IPMs also noted that SPS seemed always to use a committee of three members despite this being only the minimum number set in the Prison Rules. Management said that staffing resource constraints were a factor.

The arrangements for managing Transgender prisoners appeared to work well, and officers demonstrated respect for chosen genders.

Prisoners reported to IPMs that they felt the Prisoner Council meetings were useful. IPMs welcomed this as evidence that prisoners' voices were being heard in bringing about meaningful change. IPMs spoke with a prisoner on the Council who confirmed that, while frustrating at times, it provided a helpful channel for communication with management.

Prisoners confirmed to IPMs that staff tried to offer an individualised approach to care, but that the support offered by Personal Officers was mixed. The general impression that IPMs formed from talking with staff, was of real efforts being made to offer individualised support where prisoners asked for it, but with a risk that prisoners who 'keep themselves to themselves' may need more proactive support from their Personal Officers than was offered.

The IPM Team suggested more could be done to ensure that prisoners were aware of who their personal officer was, and the role they can play in helping prisoners with issues they faced. IPMs further suggested a more evidence-based approach to routine interaction between personal officers and their allocated prisoners.

IPMs monitored the complaints handling process, spoke with prisoners and staff, and drew the following conclusions:

- Time limits specified in the Prison Rules were not always met. IPMs saw evidence where staff, including senior staff, responded to complaints far out with the timescales set out in the prison rules.
- A number of prisoners intimated that PCF1 forms may sometimes "get lost", the implication being that staff did not process submitted complaints. It was difficult for IPMs to verify this.
- The volume of formal complaints was huge, and the system may have been overburdened.
- Too many complaints were poorly written and supported by little to no evidence, which may have prompted frontline staff to discourage complaints where they did not think it was appropriate.

Senior management at the prison were made aware of these concerns, and discussions were ongoing at the time of writing this report.

There were quite a few examples of out-of-date information on the noticeboards and doors in each hall. IPMs were concerned that the information may not have been reviewed to ensure that it was 'current'. Some posters referred to events that had happened months ago. Others were signed and dated at least three or four years ago.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Generally, access to purposeful activity was deemed to be good, albeit with limited access at the weekend, at times, due to staffing shortages. Facilities were generally adequate. Work was generally available for those prisoners who wanted it. The majority of prisoners who worked came from Abercrombie Hall and had been the case for years, although work was offered to prisoners residing in Harviestoun.

IPMs checked provision of outdoor exercise and concluded that the majority of the time prisoners were afforded the statutory minimum of 60 minutes per day. Prisoners also confirmed this to IPMs. IPMs saw evidence of considerable evening activity opportunities for prisoners.

There were some instances where there was more limited access to purposeful activity. Access to indoor recreation was at times variable and was a subject of some irritation for prisoners. The source of this appeared to be related to last minute changes to the regime due to staff shortages. Some prisoners did not get week day indoor recreation time as they were at work.

IPMs were concerned about a small number of non-offence protection prisoners in Harviestoun Hall who appeared to have limited access to purposeful activity, particularly mixing socially with others on their landing. IPMs did recognise that this was for their own safety, however there was a concern that a lack of social interaction may have an impact on their mental health.

The visiting system worked well, supported by the Family Centre who operated a thoughtful programme of discussion groups ("Dad's groups") for both Abercrombie and Harviestoun prisoners, as a key element for some prisoners in ensuring a smooth transition back into family life. IPMs also spoke with family members visiting the prison, and they expressed satisfaction with the visiting system.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

IPMs monitored this standard during the first half of the year, speaking with prisoners as well as Link Centre Staff, and concluded that there was a good range of services offered for preparing prisoners for release, including access to housing, addiction services, a Jobcentre plus interview, a bank account and benefits.

Towards the year-end, some prisoners complained to IPMs about lack of progression courses and lack of access to social work resources, which delayed progression paperwork etc. IPMs were aware that there were issues in accessing progression courses across the prison estate, with a national waiting list, and were concerned that this would risk the delay of parole, affect rehabilitation, and impact negatively on prisoner morale. HMIPS completed a thematic review on progression, and it published on 14 June.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

Prisoners were required to have a restricted regime during some weekends due to staff shortages, with a very limited amount of time out of cell. There were also a few instances where these staff shortages resulted in staff having to be reallocated from purposeful activities to residential areas, thereby disrupting prisoners' access to purposeful activity. This issue appeared to ease as the year progressed, and new recruits arrived at the prison in December '23, which IPMs welcomed.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Red

IPMs found no major issues with the delivery of healthcare at the prison by NHS Forth Valley. However, there was major concern with the poor performance of GEOAmey, who failed on many occasions to transport prisoners to hospital appointments, in breach of prisoners' rights to access healthcare. This issue was prevalent over a considerable portion of the year and remained an issue at the year-end.

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's long running failure to transport a number of prisoners to hospital appointments, in breach of their right to healthcare.
2. SPS staff shortages resulted in prisoners' access to the regime being adversely affected, as well as prisoners being kept in their cells for long periods of time.
3. A lack of opportunity for prisoners to access progression courses, recognised as a national issue rather than specific to HMP Glenochil' s performance.



Encouraging Observations

Throughout the course of the year staff displayed a willingness to treat prisoners with dignity and respect. IPMs observed instances where staff maintained their professionalism despite being under pressure working with problematic prisoners in stressful situations. This was despite the added pressure placed on staff during periods of low staff numbers.

As reported in previous years, the prison's approach to caring for elderly prisoners and those with additional support needs was exemplary.



Conclusion

IPMs found the prison to generally work well, with five of the nine HMIPS standards being rated 'Green' (No concerns / good practice).

Where standards were rated 'Amber' (Some slight concerns), this tended to be due to staff shortages causing a small amount of disruption. For example, prisoners being kept in their cells for long periods during some weekends and disruptions to prisoners' access to work. In addition, shortages in the Social Work staffing complement were cited as the reason for delays in completing progression paperwork. While these staffing issues gave IPMs some cause for concern it was recognised that they were beyond the direct control of the Governor and prison staff (for example SPS staff recruitment is managed centrally).

Perhaps the biggest concern, rated 'Red' ('Some serious concerns') was the consistent failure by GEOAmey to take prisoners to hospital appointments. This resulted in a large number of instances where prisoners were not able to access their right to healthcare. This again was recognised by IPMs as being out with the control of prison management but was nonetheless concerning. IPMs welcomed the fact that prison staff on occasion were able to take prisoners to external appointments, albeit with the risk that it would create a staff shortage elsewhere in the prison.

Despite these concerns, IPMs found many examples of good work throughout the year.