



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP Low Moss

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2023 – 2024

By Chris Collins



Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 80



Total number of missed weeks: 0



Total number of prisoner requests received: 162



Total number of IPM hours: 302

Executive Summary

The IPM Team continue to report on a busy, dynamic establishment functioning well on a daily basis while facing some difficult and unique challenges. There was a clear commitment from management to address issues of violence reduction and personal safety, and IPMs welcomed the range of measures in place to do this. Different domains of the prison worked well together to ensure good order, basic entitlements and opportunities for recreation and rehabilitation for all prisoners. The continuous rise in population presents a significant challenge in maintaining some of the improvements that have been made this year. IPMs have welcomed the support and open communication from senior management for their work in the establishment.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs have monitored this standard throughout the year, visiting reception, the SRU and receiving detailed updates and briefings from senior management. HMP Low Moss status as a receiving prison ensures a continual flow of admissions, liberations and transfers and these were managed carefully with due consideration for individuals circumstances.

The disciplinary systems in HMP Low Moss were used appropriately and there were clear processes in place for ensuring lawful and transparent custody. Where queries around processes or decision making have been raised, management have engaged with transparency and offered reasoned explanations to the IPM Team.

IPMs visited the SR U in Lomond on various occasions and found an orderly unit with careful management plans for those in care in this area of the prison. It is noted this had been a particularly challenging area of the establishment to work in and staff have frequently given updates and assurances to IPMs on their visits, offering evidence of a compassionate approach in difficult circumstances. Where complaints and allegations have been made in HMP Low Moss of mistreatment, management have been swift to act appropriately.

IPMs, staff and prisoners have all commented on good visibility of senior managers around the prison.

Standard 2: Decency

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Throughout the year monitors noted the prison to be clean on all visits and observed passmen and the industrial cleaning work party carrying out their duties across the establishment. All categories of prisoner were regularly observed taking exercise and time in the fresh air. The establishment population presents challenges to meet the needs of all groups, which staff and management are sharply aware of and aim to manage on a day to day basis. The kitchens had been visited and noted to be functioning well with a good quality of food. On occasion IPMs have taken prisoner requests about provision of bedding and have requested information on how the stock is managed and issued. There was adequate provision in the halls for prisoners to request necessary items for day to day living.

New IPMs have commented on the standard of prisoner art work approaching Central Street and the well maintained areas of the prison. While a rising population has presented challenges for staff, on the whole relationships between prisoners and staff in the work parties and residential areas appear to be respectful and humane.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

IPMs were informed of some instances of violence at various times during the year, especially May and June which at times impacted on the availability of the regime. There were a high number of prisoners on MORS for a period also. IPMs have received detailed updates on levels of drug use and violence in the prison throughout the year, and noted the pressures of a rising population in maintaining staff and prisoner safety. This continues to be a challenge for management at HMP Low Moss. IPMs were advised that various measures were in place to control and monitor this, including a Violence Reduction Strategy, a Violence Reduction Action Plan and Working Group which IPMs were invited to attend. IPMs noted there were currently 50-60 orderly rooms taking place per week in HMP Low Moss, many of which related to low level violence and drug finds.

IPMs have been briefed on the challenges of any forthcoming increase in population and the associated challenges for prisoner and staff safety.

Monitors have visited the SRU on almost every visit and note a well-run unit with difficult challenges. All prisoners looked after in SRU have a management plan with appropriate reviews built in.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

Monitors have visited the SRU frequently and note a well-run unit with difficult challenges. All prisoners looked after in the SRU had a management plan with appropriate reviews built in. IPMs comment on a prison with a strong focus on maintaining security with staff demonstrating a high awareness and diligence in all areas of the prison. Processes for keeping population groups and individuals separate appear to be adhered to and cell searches, management of the route and mandatory drug testing were key features of the prison officers day to day work. In the latter part of this reporting year, increased population in the establishment led to higher numbers of prisoners on a Rule 95 in the residential areas. IPMs will continue to monitor for assurance that basic needs of these prisoners are met amidst a difficult logistical challenge.

Management have been open about the challenges of Use of Force within the establishment and instigated a range of measures from training through to disciplinary action, to minimise

staff/prisoner conflict during disputes. IPMs are pleased to note this appears to have lessened the number of staff and prisoner injuries sustained during restraints.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

● Overall RAG rating: Green

HMP Low Moss had a wide variety of prisoner groups with complex and layered issues. As such, IPMs received a large amount of requests on a weekly basis, ranging from minor grievances to allegations of failure to follow processes. The IPM Team understands that the prisons complaints system is similarly busy. Where IPMs have investigated matters raised by prisoners they have noted that there was in almost all cases, a genuine desire to follow processes by staff and on the odd occasion where decision making could perhaps be open to a different judgement, management have readily explained the context for decisions. Various mechanisms exist in the prison to ensure protection against mistreatment and monitors have attended PIACs and ICCs throughout the year.

While the IPM Team are aware and informed of the level of incidents in the prison, many caused by use of illicit substances, the team's general observations were that the prison is for the most part calm and order is maintained the majority of the time. IPMs have occasionally taken requests about mistreatment from officers this year, but report this is on a considerable downward trajectory from previous years. It is clear that efforts are being made across all areas of the establishment to maintain a respectful atmosphere with a solution-focused approach to issues as they arise.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs have reported on a busy, dynamic prison with functioning work parties and daily schedules of events, activities and programmes. Monitors have observed ongoing work in all the essential work parties, with good supervision from officers and allocation of tasks. IPMs have also spoken with Chaplaincy and observed faith-based services available for prisoners. Programme work is ongoing, though occasionally suspended as cover in residential areas is required. While IPMs have not observed these due to confidentiality they have received detailed updates from officers involved in the facilitation. Mindfulness and meditation activities continue to take place in the Education Centre. The gymnasium continues to be one of the best used facilities in the prison with good provision for all categories of prisoner.

On most visits, monitors noted staff observing and supervising, but not in an intrusive way, allowing prisoners to get on with their duties. At times throughout this period the work sheds were not always operating at full capacity due to staff being deployed elsewhere in the establishment. IPMs have not looked into statistical numbers of those attending education but have been informed there were potentially timetabling clashes with other elements of the regime which have been resolved. Monitors have also been updated by senior management and lead officers on the work in the Life Skills project, which the IPM Team welcomes.

IPMs consistently reported on a welcoming visits room, conducive to good levels of contact and connection for families and friends. Officers on visits sessions maintain high levels of environmental awareness while continuing to offer privacy for prisoners and loved ones.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs have commented on the functioning Links Centre in HMP Low Moss and the range of appointments and community-based services available to prisoners. Various events have been

held throughout the year for the prison to maintain links with community organisations, for the benefit of prisoners, including a well-attended employability event with dozens of Scottish businesses represented. A reasonable timetable of support groups and preventative addiction and wellbeing services are on offer in the prison. The facilitation of various programmes is ongoing in HMP Low Moss and occasionally prisoners have given positive feedback on their experiences to IPMs. On many occasions IPMs have also heard from prisoners who do not have access to programmes yet and this is a source of frustration.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

IPMs recognise a significant amount of work this year in role clarification and communicating strategies and expectations throughout the establishment. IPMs noted some new processes have become firmly embedded in daily practice, but that the nature of the prison and its population means that different challenges arise. In IPMs view, managements response to these has continued to be agile and prompt.

IPMs were advised that staff training in the new Control and Restraint procedures had a knock on effect on the prison regime and as such prisoners were locked up from 1830hrs, earlier than previously. IPMs noted that HMP Low Moss continued to run with good order and flexibility.

IPMs were sharply aware of the impact on prisoners of the escort contract with GeoAmey which had not functioned adequately throughout the year. This had impacted on Special Escorted Leave and prisoner progression. While IPMs welcomed the mitigations that HMP Low Moss 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 the second half of this year.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs have met with NHS staff and management and been informed of an increase in staffing. Monitors noted that health staff continued to cope well with many of the challenges they faced in the course of their duties. Monitors noted the daily pressures on NHS staff to meet the needs of a large and diverse group of individuals. There appears to be positive and respectful relationship between NHS and SPS staff. IPMs commented positively on signage and awareness of mental health week across the establishment during this period.

Monitors still take a reasonably high amount of requests relating to prescribing practices and dispensation of medications, which is outwith the parameters of the IPM system.

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. Population increases
2. Personal safety and illicit substances
3. Cancellations of external appointments



Encouraging Observations

New improvements to Life Skills area, Control and Restraint 2 training rolled out across the establishment with encouraging early signs for minimisation of injuries during restraints for prisoners and staff, pilot use of body worn cameras.



Conclusion

Overall IPMs impression remain of a busy, functioning prison at HMP Low Moss. There were many individual examples of good practice highlighted by the Monitoring Team, particularly when noted against the rising population and challenges of a diverse number of categories of prisoners. Monitors welcome many innovations and flexible responses to issues arising in the prison on a day to day basis.

IPMs will continue to monitor against the key issues highlighted in the section above in the coming months, particularly personal safety.