



# Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

**Prison:**

**HMP Perth**

**Year (1 April – 31 March):**

**2023 – 2024**

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# Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 55



Total number of missed weeks: 0



Total number of prisoner requests received: 75



Total number of IPM hours: 275

## Executive Summary

2023-24 was a busy year for the Independent Prison Monitoring Team, with an average six new prisoner requests received each month, in addition to carrying out their duties in monitoring the nine HMIPS standards. The complexity of some prisoner requests, along with the volume of them, did at times require IPMs to focus more on prisoner requests than monitoring the range of HMIPS standards. However the Team benefitted from having a good sized complement of IPMs, ending the year as a team of nine.

This annual report highlights the key findings that the HMP Perth 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 observed the prisoner admissions process and concluded that it seemed to be well ordered and efficient. Prisoners were given relevant information and seemed content with the process, including being searched appropriately by staff.

### Standard 2: Decency

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs observed meals being served, noting that portion sizes seemed sufficient, and most prisoners appeared to be happy with the food. IPMs were concerned that the evening meal was served at 3:45 pm which was considered too early, particularly for those prisoners who did not have the financial means to supplement their food intake with food from the canteen, for example remand prisoners who did not receive a cell wage. However, it is worth noting that prisoners themselves did not identify this as an issue for them.

IPMs were made aware of an issue while monitoring C Hall level 2, whereby new admission prisoners were not provided with certain items such as cups, bowls, toiletries, bedding and towels etc, essential under the decency standard. Staff confirmed this, adding that sometimes when prisoners were moved to a different flat or hall they took these items with them, which created a

potential short-fall in the flat they were vacating. IPMs raised this with management who undertook to address the matter and it appeared to improve as the year progressed.

The prison was observed by IPMs to be clean and tidy throughout. IPMs observed a deep clean of the showers being carried out by the Industrial Cleaning Party and were pleased to note that this happened on a quarterly basis.

### **Standard 3: Personal Safety**

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

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As reported in previous annual reports, substance misuse continued to be a prevalent problem. Prisoners taking unknown substances presented with unpredictable and violent behaviour, which staff had to deal with.

IPMs were told by staff that random drug tests no longer took place. It was suggested that this was because of staff shortages, as well as the limited usefulness of the tests as synthetic drugs were not picked up by traditional tests. Prisoners were tested if they were about to undertake progression or where Health Centre staff had concerns related to medication and taking harmful substances.

IPMs observed a good example of a prisoner being managed under the Talk-To-Me (TTM) process. Staff ensured that the prisoner was aware of why he was on TTM, and the circumstances that would be required for him to come off the process. IPMs felt this example was indicative of how well staff ran the TTM process. There were also examples throughout the year where HMIPS staff submitted External Electronic Concern forms to the prison with concern for prisoners' wellbeing, based primarily on information received in messages left on the HMIPS Prisoner Freephone number or from concerned parents. In all cases staff responded meaningfully and reported back to HMIPS that staff had sought to discuss these concerns with the prisoner in question.

### **Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority**

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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IPM heard that a prisoner had been required to be forcibly removed from their cell to the SRU. IPMs checked to ensure that the appropriate process was followed and discussed this with staff. IPMs were satisfied that the appropriate use of force had been applied and accompanying paperwork was in order.

### **Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection**

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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IPMs were very impressed at the approach the prison took in providing the Personal Officer function. Each staff member designated as a Personal Officer was required to meet with the prisoners in their charge at least once per month. This was monitored by senior management, and at times expected interactions were measured as high as 95%. Once this had bedded in, management then introduced quality control methodology by checking PR2 records of Personal Officer reports to ensure that discussions with prisoners were of significantly high quality. IPMs identified this as an example of good practice.

### **Standard 6: Purposeful Activity**

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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IPMs saw plenty evidence of a range of purposeful activity taking place throughout the prison, including cleaning the halls, education and outdoor exercise/time in the fresh air. This involved a range of different prisoner categories, including protection prisoners and remands, as well as those being housed in the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU).

IPMs were impressed with the new work shed that teaches prisoners construction skills, whereby they build a house in the work shed over a 12 week period. IPMs recognised the real benefits of increased potential for employment upon release.

With the remand population having continued to increase, IPMs were pleased to see that remand prisoners had access to education courses, and that they received an attendance payment for this. This helped with the previously reported issue of remand prisoners not receiving a cell wage.

There were some instances where there had been cancellation of some purposeful activities due to a lack of staff and staff absences required activities staff to cover residential duties.

## **Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community**

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

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IPMs reviewed arrangements for prisoners' release and concluded that it was a good service, if the prisoner was proactive. Arrangements were in place for accommodation on release, as well as access to benefits. Prisoners being released who did not have any clothes could get second hand clothes from the prison. However, IPMs did learn that prisoners were often released on a Friday, despite the recognition nationally that this was not good practice and the availability for prisons to release earlier.

Progression presented as a big issue amongst prisoners, mainly with regards to delays in receiving a Generic Programme Assessment. Some reasons for this were offered by staff; transferred prisoners, of which there have been many, go back down the waiting list; unavailability of staff due to being moved from progression duties to cover residential duties; a general lack of trained psychologists across the prison estate. In addition, IPMs heard allegations from both prisoners and staff of progression paperwork having 'gone missing'.

Related to the progression issue, IPMs learned that due to the length of time that some prisoners had been on remand, when they were eventually convicted some were right at their critical date, meaning they had to 'leapfrog' other prisoners on the SPS programmes waiting list. HMIPS progression review will publish on June 14<sup>th</sup> 2024.

## **Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness**

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

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IPMs noted that staff were often drafted in from elsewhere to cover staff shortages and sickness absence. Staff shortages are recognised as a national rather than local issue, and IPMs felt that the prison did well to redistribute the staff it had to priority areas. Nonetheless staff shortages presented as a significant issue.

Problems with GEOAmev continued throughout the year. In addition to impacting upon healthcare, see standard 9 below, examples included a prisoner whose transport to his father's funeral was cancelled at very short notice. IPMs welcomed the fact that prison staff took him, and there were many examples of staff taking prisoners to appointments when GEOAmev failed. Again staff should be congratulated for ensuring prisoners received their right to healthcare, but this came with possible detriment to other areas where staff were taken off duties.

## Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Red

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The waiting time to see a GP had improved considerably in comparison to last year's report, coming down to around four weeks. NHS Tayside was managing to keep this target using locum GPs, some of whom were regular visitors, allowing for a degree of continuity.

The waiting time for mental health services was by contrast believed by IPMs to be very high, at times greater than 32 weeks. It was suggested to IPMs that this was due to recruitment problems.

IPMs also learned that access to dental services had been reduced from three to two days and was only available for emergencies, which was unfortunate. There was a considerable waiting list. It was suggested to IPMs that this was because there was only one dentist available.

There was major concern with the poor performance of GEOAmev, 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.

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### 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.*

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## Key Issues

1. GEOAmev's long running failure to transport a number of prisoners to hospital appointments, in breach of their right to healthcare.
2. SPS staff shortages had an adverse effect on various areas of the prison, as detailed above.
3. A lack of opportunity for prisoners to access progression courses, recognised as a national issue rather than specific to HMP Perth's performance.



## Encouraging Observations

HMP Perth's approach and ability to provide an effective Personal Officer function was deemed by IPMs to be very good practice, and should be promoted throughout the prison estate.



## Conclusion

Staffing shortages affected the efficient running of a number of areas in the prison, as detailed above. It was recognised that recruitment is coordinated nationally and therefore out with the control of prison management. IPMs felt that staff did well to minimise any potential disruption. The prison population was a challenge, with a high number of remands, non-offence protection and offence protection regimes requiring to be housed across the three halls. Having varied regimes within each hall will have been a challenge for staff, and again, it was believed that staff did well to manage this. There were also challenges in the form of substance misuse.

Perhaps the biggest concern, rated 'Red' ('Some serious concerns') was the consistent failure by GEOAmev 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.

The overall conclusion is that while the staff at HMP Perth faced considerable challenges over the year, they did well in the face of this to minimise disruption and offer a relatively stable regime for prisoners.