



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP SHOTTS

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2023 – 2024

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Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 61



Total number of missed weeks: 0



Total number of prisoner requests received: 69



Total number of IPM hours: 242.5

Executive Summary

This report is informed by Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) findings during visits and speaking with prisoners, staff, and senior management, alongside an overall rating against each of the nine standards. The IPM Team ensured there was at least one visit each week as per the legislation and dealt with 69 requests received, an increase of 28% from the previous year.

Many challenges faced were cultural and ongoing consequences of COVID-19. Appointment of a new Governor, who took up post in August 2023, enabled a renewed focus, achieved through strong leadership and prioritisation of critical matters to improve performance, and supported by a more stabilised senior management team and future vision.

Key aspects the prison grappled with were food, as the quality at times was unsatisfactory; a rise in violence and concerns around substance use; progression delays due to the availability of national programmes, although it was noted that the number of people who progressed to HMP Castle Huntly increased by 25% from 2022/23; and ongoing challenges around meaningful and purposeful activity and the regime more generally, including work sheds not working to capacity due to insufficient numbers attending work daily, and limited structured evening activities.

IPMs recognised that the challenges were not surmountable. IPMs welcomed the development of a refreshed vision for the prison enabling key concerns and issues to be prioritised, engagement to inform plans and a focus on enhanced communication to ensure everyone was well informed.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Reception staff conducted processes robustly, which included a needs assessment related to each individual's cognitive ability to understand. A similar process applied for those leaving the prison i.e. for appointments, court, transfer. Staff also consider the support needs for those where English was not their first language. Any vulnerabilities were reported to healthcare. It was positive to hear that all staff had quick and easy access to interpreters.

The Links Centre Induction Officer was proactive in encouraging all prisoners to attend the prisoner induction and individualised the process recognising their individual circumstances. All prisoners, whether they attended induction or not were provided with a detailed induction pack to refer to later. The induction pack was also available in different languages.

New videos were being developed to improve 'HMP Castle Huntly' and 'National Top End' progression information. IPMs noted these were positive additions to the Prisoner Information Channel.

Standard 2: Decency

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

The building, accommodation, and facilities were fit for purpose and generally well maintained. However, issues related to corroded and faulty equipment in the hall pantries were of increasing concern. Replacement of such equipment were recommendations from the HMIPS full inspection in 2022. In January, a business case was submitted for new kitchen equipment.

In the latter part of the year a new daily 45-minute morning lock-up was implemented to address concerns about hall cleanliness. After its introduction noticeable improvements were observed, including pleasant scents from cleaning products and cleaner, tidier residential areas.

During the first part of the year, concerns persisted about both the quality and quantity of food. This raised concerns of potential discrimination in faith-based menu choices, leading to concerns about fairness and equality in meal options. Once the new Governor took up post, addressing this matter became a priority and significant efforts were made to address this. To tackle the issues, a set of food focus groups were conducted to engage with the prison population around the standards and development of new menus. Feedback and evidence gathered led to prompt improvement actions.

It should be noted that providing healthy nutritious meals within a limited budget was an increasing challenge for the prison. Catering supply issues during the year were reported, with items limited or unavailable which the SPS headquarters procurement team sought to address. Rising canteen prices, due to the cost-of-living crisis and unchanged SPS prisoner wages policy, meant it was harder for prisoners to afford extra food, and other essential and sundry items.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

There were particularly challenging periods for the prison in relation to deaths in custody, serious staff assaults, and an increase in violence. Further there were concerns around the nature of drugs impacting of the wellbeing of the population reported.

During the year there were four deaths in custody. HMIPS and the IPM Team expressed their condolences to all those impacted. Staff explained the available support for those affected by a death, such as speaking with staff, the mental health team, the Chaplain (a trained counsellor), and the clinical psychologist depending on the support needed.

There were reports of serious staff assaults and a rise in violent incidents. Addressing harm reduction was a primary priority for the new Governor upon taking up post in early August. The emphasis was on fostering engagement, which began with Governor-led harm reduction Prisoner Information Action Committees (PIACs) and an establishment wide harm reduction questionnaire. Progress continued throughout the year, and additional actions were planned for the year ahead.

Overall IPMs felt management were listening and responsive to the feedback received and actively taking steps to better support those in their care.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Route movements were observed, and staff engaged with prisoners during movements. There was an upbeat atmosphere whilst still conducted in a strategic and controlled manner. Cell searches, Risk Management Team, and orderly room procedures were also observed. It was noted these were conducted in line with prison rules and in a professional and respectful manner.

The Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) could often be at capacity and accommodated some of those with the most complex needs. SRU staff were knowledgeable about those in their care and demonstrated compassion and empathy. Across the SPS estate there were a number of individuals who could not be located safely within mainstream halls and were held in the SRU too long. Recognising the recommendations of the HMIPS [Thematic Review Of Segregation In Scottish Prisons](#) report, at a national level work is required to reduce those in an SRU or cellular confinement, and the replacement of the Prisoner Monitoring Assurance Group who discuss the management and movement of long-term SRU prisoners.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

● Overall RAG rating: Green

In general, IPMs witnessed positive and respectful interactions between staff and prisoners. Nevertheless, IPMs felt that staff were often behind hall desks rather than interacting with those in the halls. However, there was notable efforts made by management to address historic cultural work practices.

During the latter part of the year there was a strong focus on engagement and communication. This included a project which enabled input from those who lived, worked, and visited the prison to contribute and help shape the future vision. Insights from PIACs, establishment-wide surveys, focus groups, and other interactions surfaced numerous suggestions. Management promptly took immediate action where possible, like updating the menu in the third quarter and preparing for an expanded regime in 2024, which included evening activities. Actions were prioritised, with some part of the wider future vision. Previously IPMs had reported a sense that some prisoners felt their contributions did not result in anything which highlighted the importance of continuous communication and engagement. Positively there appeared to be a renewed focus on keeping everyone in the prison sighted on the prison's commitment to improvement.

IPMs raised concerns about the appropriateness of some language used on some recovery related posters. Management acted swiftly utilising guidance from the Scottish Drugs Forum and confirmed they would use more inclusive language going forward.

Internal Complaints Committees (ICC) observed were timely, professional, and conducted in a respectful and courteous manner. Complainants were actively listened to by the ICC panel and clear explanations given.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

The prison grappled with working through the consequences post COVID-19. Numbers attending work, education, gym, visits, and other events and activities could be limited. At times there was the requirement to run a restricted regime, prioritising key work parties and with staff in other areas redeployed to provide cover in residential areas. An inconsistent regime was difficult for prisoners.

In June there was focus on progressing 'Shotts Matter' priority projects, which included addressing the limited offering of structured evening activities, insufficient numbers attending work daily, and becoming a recovery orientated prison. Initial progress was slower than anticipated however aspects started to move at pace following stabilisation of the senior management team, including the new Governor starting in post in early August.

There had been excellent progress made. A new Recovery and Wellbeing Centre, The HUB (Hope Understanding and Belonging) opened in January 2024 with a primary focus to support recovery journeys and intrinsically linked to personal wellbeing. The prison highlighted they had the highest purposeful activity delivery across the estate in the last quarter of the year (Jan-Mar), with over 50,000 hours recorded each month and delivered 22 hours per person, per week which was understood to be comparable to establishment with similar convicted population numbers.

The prison recognised they should set a higher standard in relation to contact and engagement with families. The Family Contact Officer and support was provided to help develop a renewed family strategy; utilising information gathered from a visitor engagement survey. IPMs reported the new layout and information vastly changed the feel of the visits centre and they felt it was an excellent addition.

Significant efforts had obvious positive impacts in a relatively short period. IPMs felt there was a good diversity of support and activities available, options visible and further work was planned along side collaborative and less formal organic change, which was a positive position for the future which IPMs would continue to monitor.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

● Overall RAG rating: Green

There were 39 liberations during the year, 39% less than the previous year. Most prisoners were not released directly from HMP Shotts but transferred to other prisons in preparation for their release.

Prisoners were involved in the Integrated Case Management and Risk Management Team (RMT) processes with regards to pre-release and progression. RMT meetings observed were reported to be person-centred with a clear focus on the opportunities. RMT worked with the prisoner and shared useful information to help them better understand the next steps.

A short film on HMP Castle Huntly featured on the Prisoner Information Channel, aimed to offer additional insights for individuals progressing to the open estate. IPMs noted a renewed sense of leadership and vision that sparked potential opportunities to enhance progression support, such as building key life skills and independence. Enhancements in pre-release procedures will be explored as part of future plans, and IPMs eagerly anticipate the progress in this area which was also a recommendation from the HMIPS full inspection of the prison in 2022.

Offending behaviour programmes ran during the year and, despite difficulties encountered, completed the 2023/24 programmes two months ahead of schedule. Nevertheless, there was a national concern around progression and too often the national waiting list for programmes was too long, which negatively impacted progression timescales and Parole Board hearings.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

● Overall RAG rating: Green

In June 2023, the prison finalised the terms of reference for the HMP Shotts Project Board which set out plans for seven short-term key projects which linked to the “Shotts Matters” approach and had developed a strategy to be future facing and help the prison move forward in a post-pandemic world. Progress was slower than anticipated initially due to various challenges.

A new Governor took up post in early August 2023, with the acting Deputy Governor appointed to the substantive role around the same time. This bolstered stability and enabled a renewed focus through effective leadership and prioritisation of key issues to enhance performance. To shape the change and vision for the future an inclusive approach was taken, with opportunities for everyone who lived, worked, and visited the prison to contribute. There was a genuine sense of people being listened to. Communication was a golden thread, which was a specific project, which IPMs welcomed due to recurring issues around communications raised during monitoring. IPMs also reported a feeling of improved leaderships and clearer understanding of priorities and progress. Significant headway was made on immediate priorities, with promising advancements in other key areas of change, all aligning with the prison's broader vision.

GEOAmey performance was a national concern. The impacts for those in HMP Shotts cannot be underestimated. Cancellations were across the board from hospital appointments to inter-prison

transfers. The Scottish Government providing additional funding to address GEOAmeY staffing, and performance issues had not been significantly rectified by the end of the reporting year.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

Healthcare had often been understaffed and was heavily reliant on agency or NHS bank staff. During the year there had been significant improvements reported following stabilisation of the NHS staffing position. IPMs felt healthcare was committed to addressing health inequalities and had shown initiative and good ethics. Having observed medication dispensing the process was very respectful to ensure patient confidentiality and staff were excellent and person-centred.

IPMs reported that whilst access to healthcare was provided on arrival at reception, there was no information about healthcare in the induction pack and healthcare took action to address that. IPMs reported that much of what was required by the Medical Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards was being provided, however there was no process or policy to evidence that. However, the MAT Implementation Support Team visited around July to benchmark the delivery.

Great progress was made in the Recovery and Wellbeing Centre, The HUB, which continued to consider what would be possible moving it forward. IPMs felt there needed to be broader discussions around how it could support people, and it was key that the peer development in the prison could bring this model forward from an authentic viewpoint.

However, IPMs reported some healthcare partners working in the prison, felt healthcare was punitive and needed addressed. There was a sense of consensus as such issues suggested that approach had caused issues. Healthcare discussed this with the Governor.

Speaking with the mental health and addictions team leader it was evident that the healthcare provision within HMP Shotts had considerably improved. This reflected the work the team had undertaken during the period and was evident in the reduction in requests from people asking to speak with an IPM about healthcare related issues.

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. Regime.
2. Substance use and support.
3. Prisoner transportation i.e. GEOAmeY performance.



Encouraging Observations

Improvements were evident as the year progressed, and there was clear evidence of leadership, direction, and collaborative working to help inform, shape, and achieve the future vision for HMP Shotts. The IPM Team felt increasingly valued as a team with evidence that issues raised had been taken serious and swiftly acted upon where necessary.

Recognising continuous improvement progress during 2023/24 was extremely positive, targeting priority areas with ongoing engagement to help inform the future vision for the prison and how that could look and be delivered. There was a clear sense of direction to improve things for all those who lived, worked, and visited the prison.



Conclusion

The stabilisation of the senior management team, along with a wider staffing base, supported by clear priorities and future vision supported progress on key areas which required improvements. Although there were still concerns, particularly around the regime and harm reduction, moving into the latter portion of the year there were early signs of early changes and improvements having a positive impact.

It is important to also recognise that there are some challenges the prison encounter, and will continue to face, that are beyond their control. National concerns, such as the case management system which supports progression, GEOAmeY prisoner transportation performance, the need for a more effective complaints system, limited budget for meal provision and outdated prisoner wages policy. National concerns all demand significant changes and improvements to be developed by SPS headquarters.