



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP Grampian

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2023 – 2024

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Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 105



Total number of missed weeks: 0



Total number of prisoner requests received: 153



Total number of IPM hours: 624

Executive Summary

2023-24 was a busy year for the HMP Grampian Independent Prison Monitoring Team, with an average 12 new prisoner requests received each month, way above the national average. In addition, the team also fulfilled their duties in monitoring the nine HMIPS standards. The team clocked an impressive 624 hours of volunteering over 105 visits (two per week against the statutory minimum of one visit per week).

This annual report highlights the key findings that the 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 checked records at reception, talked to staff and prisoners and concluded that the reception process worked efficiently. Staff were very knowledgeable of the process. Prisoners confirmed that the information they were provided with was relevant to them, including key dates. Prisoners felt they had been treated courteously and IPMs agreed with this having observed them go through the process. This included prisoners with additional support needs and foreign language prisoners.

IPMs observed the induction process and discussed it with recently arrived prisoners. Prisoners reported that they felt it was useful and had helped them be less nervous upon arrival at prison. IPMs commented that there was a wide range of useful topics covered during the induction process.

IPMs considered the Cell Sharing Risk Assessment process to be thorough and fair, and also involved prisoners in the process.

Standard 2: Decency

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

IPMs noted that at times some new admission prisoners had to sleep on mattresses on the floors of cells, as there was no room to provide 'normal' cell accommodation. While this was clearly unsuitable, IPMs recognised that the prison must take in any prisoners that are sent to the prison. Staff therefore did everything in their power to ensure such prisoners were kept as comfortable as

the situation allowed and for the shortest period. It was noted that these arrangements were temporary before prisoners were moved to other prisons.

Prisoners spoke highly of the food on offer at the prison. Portion sizes, choice and quality appeared to be sufficient. Healthy Living Scotland checked the food on offer and confirmed that what was being served was sufficient. IPMs were pleased to hear that the kitchen had recently had a full inspection from the Environmental Health Department and received a clear pass in their annual report. The kitchen staff were rightfully very pleased with this and praised the prisoners who took such an active role with their kitchen jobs.

IPMs observed the service of food, specifically the arrangements for testing the temperature of food. While assurances were given that temperature checks were routinely made, IPMs found there were gaps in the recording of these checks. This was discussed with management who agreed to rectify this immediately, which was welcomed.

IPMs were satisfied that processes in place for prisoners to request Kosher meals were fair, and the meals provided to those who were entitled to them complied with the relevant advice provided by a Rabbi.

Provisions were in place to allow prisoners of various faiths to practice their religion, with the exception of the Jewish faith, as there was no regular visiting Rabbi. IPMs recognised that this was out with the prisons control

Prisoners complained about the fall in wages and the impact this had on what they could afford from the canteen, given that the prices had risen. IPMs were aware that wages at the prison had been higher than the national wage policy allowed for, and management confirmed that wages were being brought back down in line with national policy. Management further highlighted that a process was in place to minimise canteen price rises as much as possible, and that prisoners were still receiving 200 free minutes of phone calls that had been put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. IPMs accepted all of this.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Misuse of drugs proved to be a problem for the prison at times during the year but tended to present as 'spikes' related to particular incidents, rather than an increasing trend. Management assured IPMs that they were able to quickly detect the reasons behind such spikes and respond appropriately to improve prisoner safety.

IPMs heard from some prisoners that they felt that policies such as MORS (for managing prisoners at risk of substance misuse) and Talk-To-Me (management of prisoners at risk of self-harm) appeared to be more of a punishment than for their safety, given the restrictions placed on their movements. While understanding these views, it was clear to IPMs that such policies were professionally developed and assessed, and were in place specifically for the safety of prisoners and applied appropriately at the prison. IPMs saw some good examples where prisoners were managed under the Talk-To-Me Strategy.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs observed some RMT meetings taking place and concluded that the cases were considered carefully and thoroughly, with prisoners given the opportunity to represent themselves.

IPMs also observed the Orderly Room process taking place and concluded that they were run effectively, the presiding officer's documentation was comprehensive and set out all relevant factor, cases were presented firmly, clearly and reasonably, and prisoners were given the opportunity to present their case. On a couple of occasions, the case was briefly adjourned to seek evidence regarding matters raised by the prisoner; The penalties imposed were fair.

IPMs reviewed arrangements for administration of Prisoners Personal Cash (PPC) and concluded that the system was robust.

IPMs confirmed that Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) prisoners had reintegration plans. It was also clear that staff working in the SRU took time to familiarise themselves with these plans, the prisoners' needs, and the risks involved in dealing with prisoners, for example requirements when moving them from area to area. Staff in the SRU were observed to talk knowledgeably and compassionately about the prisoners, despite prisoners at times causing significant damage in their cell and being verbally abusive to officers. The team there appeared to work together effectively.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

IPMs spoke with prisoners in Ellon 3 Hall and there was a general agreement that the prison ran well, with generally good staff that they were able to build a relationship with and that were helpful. IPMs noted that it was apparent there was a good rapport between the staff and prisoners and that they knew each other well.

IPMs spoke with a number of prisoners regarding their Personal Officers (PO). A significant number said they did not know who their PO was. They noted that their PO frequently changed and that they did not hold meetings with prisoners to build up a relationship. Prisoners who attended the work sheds said they often asked the officers there to help them with matters and felt that they acted more like their PO. Some officers in one of the work sheds agreed with this and said that it was because the hall staff were very stretched.

IPMs saw evidence that prisoners were taking issues to the Co-Production meetings, and that their concerns were being listened to and responded to. Management informed IPMs towards the end of the reporting period that they were looking to improve the effectiveness of the process through a change in approach and structure. This was taken as evidence that the staff as well as the prisoners valued the process.

IPMs also confirmed that foreign prisoners had access to translation services where required.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs reviewed the arrangements in place to allow inter-prison calls between prisoners in a relationship and determined that within the context of the prison rules the process was applied fairly. However, IPMs considered that the prison rules could result in partners never speaking to one another during their sentence, which potentially could be construed as a breach of Article 8 of the ECHR, the right to respect privacy and family life. Partners are permitted to communicate in writing. IPMs understood this was an issue pertaining to the prison rules rather than the running of the prison.

Education was well attended with courses filled. IPMs observed prisoners fully engaged in their studies.

IPMs noted that wages for some jobs were to be reduced and brought back in line with the national wage policy and the rest of the prison estate. IPMs were initially concerned that

decreasing wages and an increase in cost of canteen items would cause difficulty. However staff explained that those currently on the higher wage would not see a reduction, instead only those coming into the jobs would receive the lowered wage. IPMs felt that this was a fair approach.

There was a lot of purposeful activity happening throughout the month. However IPMs did hear from staff that there was less opportunity for work for remand prisoners due to the demand for work from convicted prisoners. IPMs understood this to be acceptable within the prison rules, and that there were limited work spaces.

IPMs welcomed the decision to allow female prisoners to access the woodwork shed, which they had been requesting for some time. This showed that staff were willing to listen to prisoners and deliver on their requests where reasonable and practicable.

The partnership between HMP YOI Grampian, Greene King and Aberdeen City Council to train prisoners to work in a replica Greene King kitchens by professional chefs, with a job offer upon liberation, was welcomed by IPMs.

Access to gym and exercise in the yards appeared to be good, as was access to time in the fresh air.

IPMs observed visits taking place on a few occasions and found them to be run well. Staff were friendly and approachable, and offered help in an appropriate manner without being intrusive. Prisoners spoke well of their experience of visits, as did visitors, who welcomed the fact that the free bus service for visitors from Aberdeen to HMP YOI Grampian was back up and running.

IPMs welcomed the reintroduction of the Peer Mentoring system and hope that it will be sustained.

IPMs welcomed the service provided by Foyer to help remand prisoners (for whom there is less by way of support compared with convicted prisoners) with issues such as childhood trauma and bereavement.

Prisoners expressed their frustration at an apparent lack of progression. The lack of progression is not a new issue, and IPMs understand that progression courses are managed nationally rather than locally. HMIPS conducted a thematic review on progression, and it will be published on 14 June 2024.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Prisoners residing in Aberlour Hall spoke highly of the facility and the opportunities it provided them, including raising their self-confidence in coping with life upon release.

Throughcare provision at the prison appeared to work well. IPMs spoke with some prisoners about their impending release, and they said they had felt well supported by staff from various organisations operating at the prison. Prisoners had plans in place to access services upon their release, such as housing, finance, jobs, healthcare and various appointments etc.

IPMs attended Case Management Board Meetings and observed discussions to arrange support for short-term prisoners following release. IPMs were heartened to hear the work being done for the prisoners and the care with which the community partners were keen to help.

IPMs saw further evidence of the excellent work that the Outreach Team do for prisoners with additional support needs, including arranging temporary accommodation and mental health support.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

SPS staff shortages had an adverse effect on the regime, with work sheds having to close from time to time to release staff to work in other areas of the prison.

IPMs heard many examples of GEO Amey failures. This included them not being able to take a prisoner to a funeral, a prisoner missed their child's Children's Hearing, and a prisoner whose visit to a family member with a terminal illness was cancelled. Thankfully prison staff were able to facilitate this, but it required three staff to leave their duties to take the prisoner to the funeral. IPMs were also aware of the work that goes into any prisoner leaving the prison for appointments (paper work etc.), which goes to waste if GEOAmey ultimately cancel.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Red

IPMs confirmed that all prisoners had a healthcare plan in place. Prisoners regarded in good health had a small plan, those with greater issues had a bigger plan to accommodate their needs.

IPMs heard that access to dental services had improved at the prison, including provision of routine dental treatment. Before there had been a need to focus on emergency treatment.

There were substantial and prolonged staff shortages in the medical team meaning a number of agency staff were being used at greater cost. Moreover, even with agency staff on board there were still staff shortages. While plans were in place to address this, including a review of staffing requirements, there were individual cases where prisoners did not receive adequate healthcare, which concerned IPMs.

IPMs confirmed that a significant number of appointments were not taking place, and it was confirmed that at times there were only doctor's appointments for emergencies.

IPMs heard of a case where a prisoner had been administered medication which had resulted in a failed drug test. The administration of the medication had not been recorded in the prisoner's health records and this was attributed to an 'admin error'. This had an adverse impact on the prisoner's application for parole, with the parole hearing having to be postponed. The matter was ultimately resolved but not without distress for the prisoner.

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. SPS staff frequently alleviated these issues by taking prisoners to appointments themselves, which IPMs welcomed. However this came at the cost of these staff having to leave other duties.

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. GEOAmeys long running failure to transport a number of prisoners to hospital appointments was in breach of their right to healthcare.
2. Substantial and prolonged staff shortages in the medical team affected service delivery and quality.
3. SPS staff shortages resulted in prisoners' access to the regime being adversely affected.



Encouraging Observations

The work of the Outreach Team in supporting prisoners who struggled to engage and/or who had a range of complex needs, was deemed by IPMs to be excellent and an example of good practice.



Conclusion

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

Standard two – Decency – was rated 'Amber' (Some slight concerns), but in most of the matters included in this standard the prison also fared well. The key concern for this standard was in relation to prisoners having to sleep on mattresses on the floor in shared cells due to overcrowding. While this falls short of acceptable, it must be reiterated here that prison staff went out of their way to ensure that these prisoners, who volunteered, were comfortable. IPMs fully acknowledged that the issue was not of SPS' making, but due to HMP YOI Grampian being a local receiving prison and GEOAmeys failing to pick up prisoners due to transfer to another prison establishments.

Staff shortages gave IPMs some cause for concern due to the disruption it caused for prisoners accessing work for example. However, it was recognised by IPMs that the issue of staff shortages were beyond the direct control of the Governor and prison staff. There have been long standing recruitment challenges due to the location of Grampian and the better pay available in local industries. The SPS staff recruitment is also managed centrally).

Healthcare was also an area of concern, again due to staff shortages.

Perhaps the biggest concern, rated 'Red' ('Some serious concerns') was the consistent failure by GEOAmeys to take prisoners to hospital appointments. This resulted in a significant 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.

Overall, the picture for HMP YOI Grampian over 2023-24 was one of a dedicated workforce working hard to ensure prisoners could access their rights, in the face of an increased workload caused by short staffing and pressures caused by GEOAmeys failure to fulfil their contract.