



# Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

**Prison:**

**HMP YOI STIRLING**

**Year (19 June – 31 March):**

**2023 – 2024**

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# Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 45



Total number of missed weeks: 1



Total number of prisoner requests received: 18



Total number of IPM hours: 122

## Executive Summary

This report reflects monitoring observations since opening on 19 June 2023. The opening of HMP YOI Stirling, the third new establishment for women after the two Community Custody Units in Dundee and Glasgow which opened during 2022, represents another significant milestone of the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody which was both gender specific and trauma informed.

The operation of the prison is very much in its infancy. It had been a challenging nine months as they worked through staffing issues from the outset, dealt with building snagging issues, and faced national increasing population and GEOAmey prisoner transport performance concerns. Additionally, they worked on addressing concerns from the local community near the new prison, and HMIPS conducted a full inspection in February 2024.

Nevertheless, the IPM team reported signs of incremental positive actions to address the issues experienced and ongoing work with continuous improvements in mind. IPMs also felt there was increasingly positive evidence of good relationships, and staff dealing with incredibly difficult situations with sensitivity, compassion, and empathy.

## General Observations

### Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Staff in reception and the assessment centre (Thistle) displayed knowledge in procedures and showed empathy, acknowledging the challenging nature of the experience for new admissions. Similarly, the release procedures were conducted efficiently and compassionately by staff, offering support and basic practical release arrangements. The Links Centre team also offered pre-release support, such as a discharge grant, the opportunity to apply for a 'bag of hope' from Forth Valley Inclusion, and arrangements to be picked up on their release.

New admissions were mostly housed in the assessment centre (Thistle). From there people could transfer to another establishment, or within HMP YOI Stirling. There were different houses for different populations: a mother and baby unit (Primrose), a top end facility (Bluebell), the national separation and reintegration unit for women (Heather), a high dependency unit (Wintergreen), and an Enhanced Needs Unit (Sunflower). Convicted people were also housed in a mainstream unit (Iris), and separate houses for young people, under 21 (Myrtle) and untried people (Begonia).

In the initial six months after opening, IPMs reported instances where people indicated they had not received an induction and had relied on others where they were housed for the support that the induction should have provided. However, it was encouraging to see information displayed and easily accessible within Thistle, and in multiple different languages.

Concerns centred around national matters, population management and GEOAmeY performance, both out with the direct control of the prison. The fluctuating population and increased remand detainees, coupled with GEOAmeY cancellations, presented challenges to maintain capacity for court admissions. The time of day which new admissions arrived at the prison, often after 5pm, raised concerns around distressing experiences. Those who arrived after 9pm were placed on Talk to Me (TTM) with 15-minute observations until the next morning.

## **Standard 2: Decency**

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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The prison had a softer feel than others across the estate. A high level of cleanliness was reported. All rooms were anti-ligature in design, single occupancy, with a toilet and shower. Most rooms were well equipped, and a range of toiletries and personal hygiene products accessible.

Like with many new builds there had been ongoing snagging and teething issues and the priority varied depending on the nature and impact. They ranged from drainage issues and requirement to replace some wall panelling in the rooms, to interactive screens in Sunflower not working and issues with the magnetic window blinds. Towards the end of the year around 10 rooms were out of use however, some actions to repair the issues had been completed by the end of the reporting year and actions for the others were either underway or planned.

Most people were positive about the food quality, quantity, and that dietary needs were catered for. Kitchen staff emphasised the importance of variety, flavour, and alternative meal options. Meals were served hot and fresh either from the serving area adjacent to the kitchen in the hub, or in specific houses. Food trolleys, used to transfer food to the houses from the kitchen, appeared far superior to those in other establishments and helped to maintain the food quality in transport.

As in the community increased costs made it increasingly difficult for the prison to provide healthy nutritious meals, and for people to afford canteen and sundry items due to an outdated prisoner wages policy. These were national issues and out with the direct control of the prison.

## **Standard 3: Personal Safety**

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

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Comprehensive and empathetic procedures for identifying and supporting those at risk of suicide or self-harm were reported. Staff were trauma-informed and knowledgeable about initial needs and Talk to Me (TTM) assessments. New admissions were seen by a mental health nurse and care plans tailored to individual needs. However, too many new admissions had to be placed on TTM overnight as they could not be seen by healthcare staff due GEOAmeY prisoner transport performance issues, which was a national concern.

Wintergreen, Sunflower, and Heather cared for people with some of the most complex needs across the women's estate. Residential staff spoke compassionately, recognised the importance of interactions with people to help identify risks of self-harm, bullying, and intimidation. Approaches were used to, for example, ensure those on TTM were not isolated. Coping skills and distraction techniques were also trialled as a method to support people was reported to have been beneficial. Where there had been disruptive incidents experienced it was reported that individuals felt staff managed such situations well and they had felt safe.

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

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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Lines appeared a little blurred on the differences between Heather and Sunflower with IPMs reporting people were held under Rule 95 and Rule 41 in both locations. Management explained it

was due to the capacity pressures which Heather had faced. Staff highlighted instances which, had the door had a hatch, could have been less traumatic for the individual.

SRU staff were aware of the HMIPS SRU thematic review published in July 2023 and associated recommendation. There was good evidence of staff working hard to support those with mental ill-health and focussed on reintegration of those held in Heather and Sunflower. There was nothing to suggest anything other than focus to ensure effective care of all individuals.

Stirling was one of a couple of establishments piloting soft restraints. Physical restraint was reported to only be used where necessary and in accordance with prison rules, ensuring appropriate use of the disciplinary system. It was confirmed that staff were trained in relevant techniques and there was no indication from individuals of a fear of staff.

The sense that the use of Heather and Sunflower, at times, was necessary due to the lack of secure beds for women in psychiatric facilities was a concern. This issue was not in the prison's control and highlights systemic challenges that Scottish Government should prioritise.

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

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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The design and atmosphere of the recently built prison seemed to enhance relationships which were notably positive. The staff appeared welcoming, accessible, approachable, and guided by a principle of personal autonomy that accentuated the importance of personal decisions and encouraged compassionate interactions. Calm, orderly and respectful interactions were observed during evening medication distribution.

Residential managers spoke about staffing challenges which, at times, meant a lack of consistent staffing impacting how relationships were forged. Building relationships may have been elongated however, there was no doubt of staff efforts to do this. An unpredictable timetable, partly due to staffing challenges, could be unsettling for those in the prison. Concerns raised, particularly around the regime, had settled towards the end of the reporting year and people appeared to have adjusted to the new prison.

IPMs reported that individuals were consulted and kept informed about recreational activities, services and events, canteen products, menu options via regular meetings, Prisoner Information Action Committee (PIAC), with minutes available on house noticeboards. IPMs reported activities and events, which had come from user voice suggestions and ideas, had been planned.

There were no significant issues with the complaints system reported and it appeared to work better than in larger prisons, but that may just reflect lower prisoner numbers.

## **Standard 6: Purposeful Activity**

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

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In the initial months significant staffing challenges were encountered. Overall IPMs felt the facilities and potential for activities were excellent once staffing issues were resolved. Management explained, at times, the prison was unable to operate a proper and full regime and the focus had been keeping people safe. This was reflected in report of boredom from people who felt there was little for them to do and different services such as education and the library were unavailable. During these periods IPMs reported activities to be largely restricted to in-house.

Face-to-face delivery of education in the central hub was delayed. Education staff had been disheartened that their plans had initially been restricted. Nevertheless, they made the most of the situation by offering activity packs for the households during this time.

Work parties focused on essential services, commenced within the first few days and weeks after opening, these included kitchen, grounds and garden, industrial cleaning, and laundry work

parties. Additionally in the initial months post opening the physical training instructors also provided activity opportunities which continued to grow and develop, offering a range of physical and health activities both indoors and outdoors.

As time progressed IPMs confirmed a timetable for indoor and outdoor activities, for all houses, had been confirmed with a range of activities and a range of services available alongside events which were developed. Spiritual and pastoral care was available from Chaplaincy services who visited the prison and each house regularly. Purposeful activity was an improving picture through the reporting period, nevertheless there was ongoing work in this area and opportunities for improvement to help support the different population categories held there.

The IPMs found the visits area to be spacious, bright, and welcoming, with 'Curiosity packs' with activities for children. However, the absence of a dedicated family contact officer was noted, as the role was filled on a rotational basis. There was a period of weeks reported without child bonding visit, however this was resolved around mid-September, and virtual visits were only available until 3 pm which was problematic for those who wished to see school-age children.

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

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

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The prison faced challenges in implementing the rehabilitation focus outlined in the original Strategy for Women in Custody. This was mainly attributed to population pressure and a significant allocation of resources towards short-term individuals, particularly those on remand. For instance, in October 2023, Begonia encountered difficulties with the number of people on remand and the unreliability of GEOAmey, leading to assessment times extending up to seven weeks instead of the targeted two weeks. Nevertheless, the system seemed to function adequately, with people moving through/on as planned and the broader throughcare support appeared to be effective.

Intervention programmes were delivered in other prisons, however capacity constraints at HMP YOI Polmont and GEOAmey prisoner transport were both reported to have caused delays. Where longer term people had been held for a period the success rate is good, with most going on to Liliat or Bella and then release. Despite resource constraints multi agency collaboration was generally good.

A significant challenge reported was a lack of social work for those being discharged, the consequence being disjointed support i.e. good support within HMP YOI Stirling and sudden transition to weak support in the community. IPMs felt too many mentally unwell people continued to be released from HMP YOI Stirling, often after a short stay and direct into unsuitable housing/care.

## **Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness**

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

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HMP YOI Stirling was the third new establishment for women to open, after the two Community Custody Units, in Dundee and Glasgow which opened during 2022. The prison was built with significant consideration to the likely experiences of trauma and adversities, reflecting the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody which was both gender specific and trauma informed.

It was reported that the local Equality and Diversity (E&D) Strategy was being developed, and nearing being finalised. While being finalised, various action had been undertaken, including induction materials translated and progress on promoting E&D in the prison.

From the outset, appreciating the staffing challenges encountered, everyone was generally positive about the new prison. IPMs reported that the phased approach to increase the population

enabled everyone to build familiarity of the space that they lived, worked, and visited. There was evidence of positive collaborative working with internal and external partners.

Staffing challenges required clear leadership and management. Staff had to be deployed across the prison to ensure the regime ran as fully as possible, minimising the impact on prisoners and with a focus on safety and good order. As the year progressed challenges varied in intensity however was an improving position – there appeared to be a sense of, although limited evidence, of good and improved expectations led by the Governor and Deputy Governor.

IPMs were aware of complaints which has been made by people in the local community who lived directly adjacent to the new prison. The management team and SPS headquarters were working closely with relevant stakeholders and an action plan to address the issues and concerns raised was available on the SPS website.

There was anecdotal evidence that GEOAmeY continued, at times, to prioritise drop offs at establishments which held males over HMP YOI Stirling, included where Stirling was closer than other establishment(s). National concerns, specifically an increasing population and GEOAmeY performance, mentioned earlier were not in the direct control of the prison however they acted where possible to manage those challenges.

## Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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The healthcare centre facilities were good. Some Mental Health staff, previously at Cornton Vale, had transferred to HMP YOI Polmont and returned to HMP YOI Stirling which provided continuity to those requiring their care supported by regular mental health check-ins.

It was reported that GEOAmeY performance constraints were resulting in healthcare delays. In addition to initial health assessments on admission, mentioned under standard 1, it was reported that hospital appointments and transfers to HMP YOI Polmont for dental appointments had also been impacted.

It was reported that there was good evidence of support for those with mentally ill-health, as an example an individual was seen three times a week by mental health staff and daily by staff dispensing medication. There was also excellent communication reported between SPS and NHS staff and no significant issues reported with regards to being seen by the mental health team across the prison, but particularly in Wintergreen, Sunflower, and Heather.

IPMs also reported that it felt like those with a dependency on drug or alcohol were likely seen much quicker, supported more effectively, and the process itself more straightforward than in the community. Feedback from people indicated they too felt this and said their needs were better addressed inside the prison.

IPMs also discussed the limited number of rooms available to accommodate elderly people and those with significant health needs with the Governor. It was felt by IPMs, recognising an aging prison population and various health needs, that this may be a design flaw and one that SPS headquarter required to considered for new prisons in future.

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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. Population
2. GEOAmev
3. Support and rehabilitation for longer term prisoners (which felt compromised)



## Encouraging Observations

Overall IPMs felt the facilities and potential for activities were excellent once issues being worked through were resolved. The environment and person-centred relationships were trauma informed, in keeping with the ethos set out in the Strategy for Women in Custody 2012-2025.

There was good evidence of positive relationships, collaboration with other agencies who work within and out with the prison, support for those with mental ill-health, and staff dealing with incredibly difficult situations with sensitivity, compassion, and empathy.



## Conclusion

The opening of HMP YOI Stirling on 19 June 2023 marked the substantial progress made in realising the vision outlined in the Strategy for Women in Custody 2012-2025.

From the outset there were notable challenges experienced, local and national, which had various impacts. These were not insurmountable however, require time and resources. Nevertheless, throughout the reporting year numerous incremental positive actions had been taken amidst the backdrop of the challenges. The dedicated efforts of management and wider staff group was instrumental in mitigating and minimising impacts.