



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP & YOI STIRLING

Year (1 April – 31 March):
2025 – 2026



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	45 *	70	67
	Total number of missed weeks:	1	2	1
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	18	18	16
	Total number of IPM hours:	122	180	192

Note: *HMP & YOI Stirling opened the week commencing 19/7/2023

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) at HMP YOI Stirling between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026. Monitoring activity was undertaken regularly throughout the reporting year.

Overall, HMP & YOI Stirling was observed to provide a safe, decent, and respectful environment, supported by high levels of staff experience and expertise and a strong values-driven culture. Across the year, staff were observed by IPMs to demonstrate calm, compassionate, and responsive practice, particularly when supporting individuals experiencing distress or presenting with acute mental health and safety needs. Prisoners frequently reported being treated with dignity, feeling listened to, and having confidence in staff support. These positive relationships were a defining strength.

A significant proportion of prisoners were held on remand or presented with complex and often acute vulnerabilities, including mental ill-health. This resulted in frequent use of safeguarding measures and, at times separation, and placed sustained pressure on staffing, regime delivery, and available resources. Concerns persisted regarding the suitability of a custodial setting for individuals whose needs seem more appropriately met within specialist healthcare environments than prison.

A range of purposeful activities was available, showing commitment and a level of innovation. These contributed positively to prisoners' good health, skills development, and having a routine. However, the longer-term benefits of this were not always fully realised due to the transient nature of the population. Movement to other prisons, driven by national population management arrangements, affected continuity and engagement for some prisoners.

Release planning and transition arrangements were effective and supported by strong multi-agency partnership working. There was clear evidence of coordinated support to prepare individuals for liberation, including practical arrangements such as housing and benefits, alongside broader reintegration support. However, as with other aspects of the regime, the better outcomes were sometimes lost because of external factors, including population management decisions and system-wide pressures, which affected continuity and progression.

Some challenges identified during the reporting period were linked to wider structural issues. These included late admissions and court communication issues affecting reception processes; population management arrangements influencing transfers and progression; and limited access to external specialist mental health provision.

On balance, monitoring evidence indicated that the establishment continued to deliver a supportive and well-managed environment, with strengths in staff practice, interpersonal relationships, and partnership working all of which went towards mitigating the effect of wider system constraints.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

IPMs frequently reported that reception and arrival processes were well managed, with staff providing a calm, supportive, and structured introduction to custody. Prisoners reported positive interactions on arrival, with staff demonstrating awareness of immediate needs and vulnerabilities. However, late admissions continued to present challenges. In some instances, prisoners continued to arrive after healthcare staff had left or following prolonged periods in transit. Arrival times, alongside occasional inconsistent communication from court, affected early support and screening processes. However, staff demonstrated compassion, particularly when individuals arrived late or in a distressed state.

Information about the Prison Rules, rights and entitlements was available and supported by national materials, including the new national [Your Rights Under the Scottish Prison Rules](#) booklet published by the SPS in July 2025. Both staff and prisoners described the induction process as thorough but demanding. Many new prisoners felt that the quantity of information provided at a stressful point of custody meant that it was not possible to absorb all details, including specific entitlements. While some prisoners described feeling nervous on admission, they consistently described staff as supportive and reassuring.

IPMs felt improvements in communication and information flow would further strengthen early custody experiences.

Standard 2: Decency

Monitoring evidence over the year indicated that decency standards were maintained and often strong, particularly in relation to cleanliness, accommodation, and basic living conditions.

Accommodation and communal areas were clean and well maintained. Internal spaces, including residential areas and shared spaces, were bright, well presented, and welcoming. External areas were clean and tidy. Prisoners were largely complimentary about general living conditions, including clothing and laundry arrangements.

These positive views were reinforced through IPM visits to the laundry and cleaning bases, where processes were described clearly and operated to a high standard. However, some prisoners described discomfort due to the quality of the mattresses. While mattresses were procured through a national contract and were replaced when required, mattress comfort remained an ongoing quality-of-life issue reported to IPMs, which was also noted during the 2024 HMIPS inspection.

Food provision was frequently viewed positively. Prisoners described the quality of food as good, including culturally appropriate and medically required alternative dietary options. Prisoner feedback was actively considered through appropriate channels and had led to an increase in fruit provided. Relevant training for individuals working in the kitchen, including Elementary Food Hygiene, had lapsed. However, a dedicated training week was scheduled and completed, ensuring that all prisoners working in the kitchen, house pantries, and life skills areas held the required and up-to-date training.

Maintenance issues, such as water ingress or damaged fixtures, were identified and managed. While some areas for improvement remained, there was no evidence of systemic failure, and the prison generally provided a clean, safe, and respectful living environment.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

A largely safe environment was observed by IPMs and reported by prisoners, supported by strong staff awareness, vigilance, and proactive approaches to identifying and addressing any concerns. Prisoners across all houses reported feeling safe and able to approach staff with any concerns.

The population often included a significant proportion of individuals held on safeguarding measures such as the SPS Suicide Prevention Strategy - Talk to Me (TTM) and Prison Rules 41 and 95. Numbers fluctuated throughout the year and were often proportionately higher than other establishments, reflecting a significant cohort of individuals with complex health and safety needs. While the proactive use of safeguarding measures demonstrated appropriate risk management, it also placed increased demands on staff.

Despite the complex nature of the population, prisoners spoken with while subject to additional safeguards reported feeling supported. Anti-bullying measures were in place, including the SPS national Think Twice Strategy. Awareness of Think Twice among prisoners varied. Allegations of bullying or exclusion did arise occasionally; however, monitoring confirmed such instances were investigated promptly and responded to appropriately.

Day-to-day safety appeared well managed. The principal safety risks often stemmed from the complex nature and vulnerabilities of some of the population.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

Monitoring evidence throughout 2025–26 indicated that authority at HMP & YOI Stirling was exercised in a courteous, proportionate, and humane manner, consistent with HMIPS Standard 4.

Prisoners regularly provided unsolicited feedback which evidenced this, alongside IPMs frequently observing respectful staff-resident interactions, even in situations involving heightened risk or distress.

Segregation was used often. Monitoring confirmed that the required documentation, management oversight, and daily review procedures were in place. Staff demonstrated a good understanding of the purpose and limits of Prison Rules 41 and 95. However, demand for separation at times exceeded the dedicated capacity, requiring individuals to be managed within residential areas. This created additional operational pressures and occasionally affected regime flow and consistency. Concerns remained regarding individuals with significant mental health needs being managed in prison rather than specialist healthcare settings.

Property management largely functioned well with minor issues resolved promptly. Admission property processes were observed to be transparent and respectful. Searching practices, including the use of body scanners, were carried out in accordance with procedures and no concerns regarding the use of authority in relation to searching were identified by IPMs.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

The positive relationships and supportive culture observed throughout the year were a strength. Staff were observed engaging respectfully and calmly with prisoners, fostering a tranquil living environment. Prisoners reported feeling listened to and supported, describing staff as kind, approachable and responsive, particularly during periods of emotional distress or when adjusting to being in prison custody.

The regime was generally predictable, though staff redeployment and safeguarding requirements occasionally affected consistency and access to activities. It was noted that most prisoners reported little impact on their lived experience following implementation of the new staff roster arrangements from February 2026, which changed operational staff shifts. Management

acknowledged the importance of ongoing review following the new roster arrangements to ensure regime stability, as well as staff good physical and mental health.

Prisoners were able to raise issues informally and reported feeling listened to. However, a few prisoners reported a lack of confidence in the formal complaint processes and isolated incidents where they felt discouraged from raising concerns.

General information was accessible on house noticeboards, although they were not always clearly dated to ensure it was the most relevant and up-to-date information.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

A range of purposeful activities was available, including work, education, and health initiatives. These were generally well received and contributed meaningfully to prisoners' confidence and skills development.

Work opportunities played an important role for many people, particularly in providing a routine and wages. Individuals who secured employment following admission showed increased confidence. However, access was not always consistent. The short-term and transient nature of the population, driven by population management transfers and progression pathways, limited continuity and, in some cases, reduced motivation to engage in activities that could not be completed before moving to another establishment. The national prisoner wages policy had significant implications in the context of the cost-of-living crisis, making it increasingly difficult for prisoners to meet their day-to-day needs.

Education provision underwent a transition to a new provider, which initially led to some disruption such as cancelled classes, limited options, and delays in timetabling. However, provision was stabilising by the end of the reported period and prisoners were undertaking qualifications, such as National 5s and Open University study. Prisoners and staff highlighted a gap in structured provision, particularly for younger people approaching transfer to adult settings. While planning was underway and provision enhanced, this remained an area requiring further development.

The library had been closed temporarily and relocated. Improvement was reported gradually throughout the year. Purposeful activity beyond work and education, including gym, gardening, recovery and therapeutic opportunities, was well attended, valued, and praised by prisoners as a positive to their physical and mental good health.

Overall, provision demonstrated commitment and innovation and was varied and well received.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Release planning was generally effective, supported by multi-agency working. Prisoners approaching liberation reported feeling supported, with clear evidence of practical preparation, including accommodation and benefits arrangements.

The Links Centre played a key role in coordinating support and connecting prisoners with external agencies. It operated as a hub for release preparations supported by a multi-agency approach. Prison staff worked alongside social work, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), UpSide, and others to coordinate and support release planning. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their role in linking custody-based support with community provision, including accommodation, benefits, and practical arrangements prior to liberation. Prisoners preparing for their release spoke positively about the support they were receiving, with evidence of practical arrangements including liaison with external agencies. The contribution of the DWP, which supported benefit applications, was consistently praised, although equivalent support from Social Security Scotland was felt by prisoners to be less accessible.

Progression pathways were shaped by national population management arrangements and national SPS psychology resources available to develop programmes. Some accredited programmes required a transfer to HMP & YOI Polmont for the programme to be undertaken and some prisoners were reluctant to engage in activities if they were unlikely to be completed before transfer to another establishment

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

Leadership was stable, and staff demonstrated a strong commitment to reflective practice and continuous improvement. Proactive partnership working was particularly evident and contributed positively to day-to-day functions.

The establishment's design received [national awards](#) recognising its trauma-informed and rehabilitative approach, supporting public understanding of its purpose as a modern custodial environment. At the same time, wider media highlighted pressures associated with a [persistently high remand population](#), affecting regimes and the experiences of those in custody.

Overall, there was effective governance, responsive leadership, and strong operational oversight, constrained by national factors.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing provision was a significant strength. Services were responsive, and good partnership working between SPS and NHS supported effective delivery of care.

The population included individuals with complex and acute mental health needs, requiring intensive support and, in some cases, transfer to secure hospital settings. The new dedicated Women's Forensic Mental Health Service opened in July 2025 had capacity for up to six female patients, aimed at bringing care closer to home for women in Scotland. This reflected effective joint working, however limited specialist capacity continued to present challenges at a system level.

Prisoners generally reported positive experiences of healthcare and felt supported by staff. Isolated issues, such as missed medication following transfers, were identified and resolved promptly. Preventative measures, including flu vaccination and infection-control practices, were well organised and communicated.

A range of wellbeing activities complemented clinical provision and supported recovery, with activities including mindfulness, gym sessions, retreat programmes, and creative initiatives highly valued by prisoners and observed by IPMs.

Overall, health and wellbeing support was delivered within systemic constraints, supported by strong collaboration, and committed staff practice.