



# Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

**Prison:**

**The Bella Centre**

**Year (1 April – 31 March):**

**2023 – 2024**

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# Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 51



Total number of missed weeks: 2



Total number of prisoner requests received: 0



Total number of IPM hours: 102

## Executive Summary

This report is informed by the findings of Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) and provides a summary of the IPM observations over the year and an overall rating against each of the nine standards. The statutory duty of at least one IPM visit per week fell short with two weeks missed due to unforeseen circumstances, ill-health.

The Bella Centre, referred to as Bella hereafter, is still early in its journey. Overall, the position was mainly positive, alongside opportunities for learning and continuous improvements.

IPMs reported ongoing positive and supportive relationships and good access to healthcare. They also reported evidence of enhanced opportunities in the community or delivered by partners within Bella, which had been informed by those in Bella and developed by staff. Some challenges reported, including those beyond control of the local management, included inconsistent approaches by staff and an inability to fully deliver against the 'Strategy for Women in Custody: 2021-2025' i.e. due to the prison rules not wholly enabling the ethos envisaged by the Strategy.

## General Observations

### Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

● Overall RAG rating: Green

IPMs reported operating procedures in place appeared robust and there was regular assessment across the women's estate of those who may transfer or progress to Bella. There was a process to, wherever possible, facilitate a pre-move familiarisation visit or where that had not been possible a tour when they arrived. Whenever feasible the staff member who conducted the familiarisation visit or tour would be the designated personal officer. Those who had a pre-move visit said they felt it helped to see Bella beforehand and to ask any initial questions they had.

It was reported that people's experience of the induction process had been good, and those who moved to Bella generally always felt welcomed and supported. IPMs noted the diligence and care taken by staff before, during, and after the formal induction process. Some people felt there could be a lot to take in, as it was quite different from closed conditions. However, there was evidence that staff and housemates helped build an understanding, particularly in the initial days.

### Standard 2: Decency

● Overall RAG rating: Green

The communal areas were pleasant spaces for visits, work, recreation, and downtime, including the garden areas which are well established and maintained. The houses and equipment were in good condition, kept clean and tidy, and any repairs were undertaken promptly. Although the gym

was small, other areas within Bella such as the hub and outdoor spaces were also used for exercise, health, and wellbeing purposes.

Each house had cleaning materials, and a washing/drying facility for clothing, duvet covers, towels etc. and the duvets were cleaned for the arrival of a new occupant. Toiletry and sanitary products were available, and additional or alternative products could be purchased via the canteen, during community access or handed in by friends or family. People could wear their own clothes; however other clothing was available should it be required. People purchased their own food items, via a weekly online shop with a weekly allowance of £38.50 and cooked their own meals in their houses. The catering manager, or personal officer at times, reviewed online shopping orders to support healthy choices and ensure a balanced diet.

The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) training provided essential cooking knowledge for personal safety. Nonetheless, there were delays in some people receiving this training. Prison regulations prohibit cooking for others, including visitors, outside of a prison kitchen (which Bella does not have). However, items cooked in the hub kitchen, on occasions such as specific events, was permitted to be shared with others only where it had been prepared under the supervised of REHIS qualified staff.

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

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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There had been no assaults or serious incidents reported, however processes were in place and staff trained should it ever be required. The issues with the safer room, which had not been fit for purpose since Bella opened in August 2023, were resolved towards the end of the reporting year.

IPMs reported that people felt safe and able to approach staff if they needed to talk about anything, and staff were knowledgeable, compassionate, and offered support or assistance when necessary or requested. It was noted that an individual's confidence to raise concerns with staff could be limited, particularly for new arrivals. However, personal officers were proactive in building relationships at the earliest opportunity, and continued to check in with people regularly, especially during the initial period after arriving at Bella.

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

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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Where any rules were broken or issues during community access were identified it was reported that the approach was person-centred and, unless particularly serious, a return to closed condition was not the default position. In the first instance staff would try to support an individual and if a return to closed conditions was necessary it would be discussed, and the reasons explained.

There is no Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) in Bella, and there were no incidents reported that required someone to be transferred from Bella to the SRU in HMP YOI Stirling. There were no issues with force, physical restraint, or property reported.

Room searches were performed with care and compassion. However routine body searches, conducted in accordance with the standard operating procedures, did not feel well align with the trauma-informed approach outlined in the national strategy for women 2021-25.

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

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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The ethos of Bella, and the national strategy for women 2021-25, meant that staff being within the houses was generally restricted to essential reasons. Whether in the houses or communal areas mainly positive and respectful relationships and interactions were reported.

There were few complaints submitted. This partly felt due to people being able to speak with staff and resolve things without the need to submit a complaint, however information about the process and relevant forms were accessible if required. The weekly coffee cup meeting was an opportunity to discuss any issues, make suggestions, and discuss plans for the week ahead, and minutes of the meetings were available. Any sensitive issues could be raised on a one-to-one basis, rather than an open forum, with staff if necessary.

## **Standard 6: Purposeful Activity**

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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Work opportunities within Bella were mainly cleaning roles within the communal areas, however some people had access to community work placements. In the main people spoke positively about the opportunities, including those awaiting community access and pipeline work placements which they regularly discussed with their personal officer.

Visits, meetings, activities, and events were all mainly held in the hub, a multi-purpose room. Activities and events were supported and delivered by partners such as Fife College, NHS, and wider community partners. Activities included educational and vocational opportunities, including those where a certificate was issued on completion i.e. an employability course and food and hygiene training. Wider activities and events ranged from maths, literacy, ceramics, textile, and jewellery classes to a Macmillan coffee morning, recovery walk, and International Women's Day. It was disappointing that Chromebooks for education purposes were not in-situ during the year. Management explained testing within Bella, which was anticipated in mid-February, was delayed due to HMP Kilmarnock transferring to public ownership in March.

The gym was small, however other spaces such as outside and the hub were used. Cultural and religious opportunities were available with Chaplain's and Hillbank Church visiting regularly. The library had a good supply of books and DVDs which were regularly refreshed, and books could also be requested or provided by family/friends.

Visits and visitors' experiences were generally good. Some people felt the visit space, in the hub, could be quite noisy when there were multiple visits and at times others entered the hub during visits. Issues such as this were discussed during the regular coffee cup meeting. Visits was also an area where inconsistencies were reported, such as sharing of food. Senior management explained the prison rules did not allow for cooking for someone else out with a prison kitchen. This is an example where prison rules restrict what is possible.

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

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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Unless there were exceptional circumstances, those who met the criteria for community access were accessing the community. Those who could be in the community working, were in the community working. There was positive feedback from those with community access, including opportunities to continue working at their placement following release.

There continued to be some frustrations regarding the time it took for a First Grant of Temporary Release to be approved. Those concerned recognised it was not within Bella's control as application(s) had been timely. In February IPMs reported that staff were aware that Risk Management Team (RMT)/tribunal feedback delays had caused some frustration and were looking into process improvements. Equally there were examples of positive experiences where people had received RMT feedback within a day.

Release planning was supported by activities and opportunities provided by external partners who regularly visited Bella and personal officers who prepared and planned for various aspects of their release. With a mix of people who were on a short, long, and life sentences at times there could be uncertainty and a requirement to explain different entitlements and to manage expectations.

## Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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HMP YOI Stirling were developing an overarching Equality and Diversity (E&D) Strategy, which was close to being finalised by the end of the reporting year, which covered Bella. Accessibility had been considered within the design, with two accessible rooms available. There were aspects of these rooms which needed addressed for the rooms to be fully utilised.

At times people voiced their frustration around the sense of an inconsistent approach taken by staff. Whilst this may align to the learning curve of this new establishment, for both the staff and those living at Bella, it was disappointing that after 20 months this was still being experienced.

## Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Green

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IPMs reported that people's experiences around healthcare services for those in Bella were good. Examples given were being seen by a nurse within a day or two, access to a GP in the community and prescription of any medication required happened timeously. Those on regular medication received it timeously, access to other services, such as Chiropody, was arranged without issue via the nurses. Occupational Therapy (OT) visited twice a week to provide a range of support, including an OT work workplace assessment where required.

Health improvement, prevention and promotion information and activities were available, and during the year examples included a number of people who had completed a health and wellbeing course levels two and three; a Children in Need challenge which involved cycling 402 miles; a recovery walk; and other group and one-to-one from healthcare and other service providers.

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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. Chromebooks, for education purposes, were not in-situ by the end of the reporting year.
2. Some prison rules were not conducive to fully deliver the ethos of the facility and strategy.



## Encouraging Observations

The establishment, which opened on August 1, 2022, remained committed to providing care in alignment with the approach and vision set out in the national strategy for women 2021-25. The environment of all areas, indoors and outdoors, was soft and welcoming. Relationships were professional, with a person-centred focus which recognised people as individuals who were

encouraged and supported to be involved in plans for their future, and informed about decisions that affected them.

There was positive evidence since 2022/23 around the activities and services available, building on partnership agreements and collaborating with community partners to develop and deliver opportunities.



## Conclusion

The year has been a continuation, for everyone, on the learning curve since the establishment opened. During this reporting year it was clear there had been learning from the previous eight months. There was clear progress around purposeful activity and transition from custody to the community, there was less reporting around a sense of 'boredom', development of workplaces and community access opportunities for those who met the criteria.

Whilst there are further opportunities locally to address some of the concerns, there are some aspects out with the control of local staff, and senior management, which SPS headquarters need to consider. Such as whether the prison rules enable the two women's Community Custody Units to deliver their full potential to be fully trauma informed and support people to prepare for their release.