



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP BARLINNIE

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2023 – 2024

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Annual Monitoring Figures



Total number of visits: 70



Total number of missed weeks: 0



Total number of prisoner requests received: 194



Total number of IPM hours: 320.5

Executive Summary

This annual report is informed by the findings of Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) and provides a summary of the observations over the year and overall rating against each of the nine standards. The Barlinnie IPM Team ensured there was at least one visit each week and dealt with 194 requests received, an increase of 63% from the previous year, alongside general observations while in the prison and speaking with prisoners, staff, and senior management.

The main issue faced during the year was overcrowding. In the 2023/24 period, the average annual population was 1367, marking a 10.2% increase from the previous year. This exceeded the design capacity (987) by 38% and contracted places (1020) by 37%. At its peak, the average monthly population surpassed 1400 for three consecutive months (September to November 2023).

While the rising population remains a concern across the SPS estate, it particularly impacts HMP Barlinnie due to its surge capacity. The completed refurbishment work in the Reception and Health Centre was welcomed, however the outdated infrastructure of HMP Barlinnie was not fit for purpose and emphasised the importance of HMP Glasgow.

The leadership and commitment of staff must also be recognised and was commendable. There had been significant efforts and actions in the face to the challenges to identify ways to address, so far as possible, the inadequate resources which the prison faced on a day-to-day basis.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

From April 2023 the average monthly population had increased to over 1300, and the average monthly population peaked in November when it reached 1421. Concerns were raised regarding issues such as overcrowding, the performance of GEOAmeY in prisoner transportation, and the complexities associated with various prisoner categories, particularly the offence protection and remand populations. These concerns are mostly beyond the direct control of the prison.

Cell sharing had increased due to overcrowding. Unfortunately, there were instances where untried and convicted prisoners were not kept apart as required by the Mandela Rules, and as covered by Prison Rule 16.

Reception, healthcare, First Night in Custody (FNIC) Unit, and Links Centre staff managed a very busy environment well. Partly as a direct result of wider GEOAmeY performance issues (i.e. late arrivals), concerns centred on delayed admission health assessments, provision of medications, and for a period a backlog of prisoner induction and core assessment.

The management of both reception and the FNIC Unit was thorough and considerate of individual needs, supported by the Links Centre staff, and IPMs reported positive feedback from prisoner

experiences. The feedback also reflected that induction materials should be more accessible for reference purposes. It was also reported that some prisoners were held in the FNIC Unit longer than expected due to wider overcrowding issues.

Standard 2: Decency

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

HMP Barlinnie, a Victorian building, has been inadequate for many years, raising significant concerns. Despite this, the management and staff have made diligent efforts to overcome the challenges. The completed renovation of the reception area, replacing outdated holding cells which had been described as "cupboard-like" by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) during their 1994 inspection, had significantly enhanced the facilities.

As previously reported by HMIPS, shared cells, which had increased due to a rising population, did not meet the guidance of 4m² per person. Limited ventilation and natural light were a result of the Victorian-style prison. IPMs found that access to bedding, clothing, and toiletries was satisfactory, and the laundry facilities seemed to function well. While access to the communal shower area was typically every other day, it was daily for individuals with physical jobs or after physical training/gym sessions. Daily showers were not feasible for all due to infrastructure and population constraints.

Meal options included religious and medical menus, but the system for documenting individual dietary needs was inconsistent, particularly for those requiring specialised meals for health reasons. IPMs reported the food was served hot and those serving wore clean PPE and used appropriate serving utensils. IPMs reported hearing the food could be a "hit or miss, but generally okay" and weekend evening meals were served quite early, around 3:30-4:00 pm. The canteen did offer healthy options such as fruit and vegetables but maintaining product freshness was difficult as there was no ambient temperature storage in the halls.

The prison was generally kept clean and required cleaning materials and products were available in each area. Litter thrown from cell windows was regularly cleaned. There was evidence, such as the corridor leading to the Chapel, of dirty staining (water run marks) on the walls and sections of the ceiling appeared mottled with mildew/mould.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

The overall sentiment among the prisoners was that they felt safe, but due to limited opportunities for an increasing population, many prisoners felt they were still confined to their cells for extended periods. Many staff worked hard to manage relationships and reduce bullying and intimidation risks. Many conversations were often 'transactional' i.e. to request visits, appointments etc. However, there was also evidence of positive and respectful relationships where prisoners felt able to seek support from staff. Staff had a good knowledge of those who at times chose to 'self-isolate', i.e. stay in their cell, and who they regularly checked on.

To address overcrowding, individuals on remand and on protection were often placed in specific areas in alternative halls, leading to multiple regimes in certain areas. Staff managed this well, navigating the challenges it presented. Concerns were raised about alleged verbal abuse and intimidation, with some prisoners hesitant to report staff misconduct due to fear of repercussions. IPMs reported measures were in place to assess risk and safety factors in the daily operation and management of the prison, and management confirmed procedures were in place for both prisoners and staff to report concerns and complaints about unacceptable behaviours.

During the year staff spoke about the volume of illicit substances and it was felt that there could be more promotion of Public Health Scotland (PHS) notices, such as the displaying of PHS issued Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response (RADAR) alerts.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

IPMs reported that those held in the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) had reintegration plans in place. Towards the start of the year concerns arose regarding mental health and psychology support and services. As the year progressed there was an extensive number of prisoners with complex needs, and staff awareness was enhanced through a psychologist who helped them better recognise and understand behaviours.

There were challenges experienced with the number of both SPS Psychologists and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde mental health nurses, which impacted the services to prisoners who required them. SRU staff and management welcomed the [Thematic Review Of Segregation In Scottish Prisons](#) report and had awareness of the recommendations it set out. Overall, at a national level, work is required to reduce those segregated either in an SRU or cellular confinement and to ensure those who are segregated have meaningful social interactions and rehabilitative activities.

A meeting was arranged with the Multi-disciplinary Mental Health Team, which included representatives from the HMP Barlinnie senior management and the NHS. They agreed there could be better links, communication, and collaboration to enhance awareness and support for relevant parties. Senior management recognised that IPM escalation positively influenced progress of some of the issues raised.

IPMs observed the orderly room procedures and reported that they appeared well-structured, fair, transparent, and carried out with empathy. Moreover, they considered each prisoner's individual circumstances and clearly explained the decisions and the reasons behind them. Route movements, recognising the associated logistical challenges, often appeared relatively relaxed whilst well organised and managed.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

Staff were busy and faced pressures, yet they efficiently addressed requests for assistance and support. Unreasonable requests could mean that prisoners may not have got the attention they wished. IPMs highlighted a prevailing culture of mutual respect between staff and prisoners, reporting frequent positive and constructive interactions.

Prisoners were adequately informed about issues that affected them, each hall and the library had a copy of the Prison Rules, and peer-to-peer support appeared effective for those who were less confident or had lower literacy levels. Nationally prisoners lacked confidence in the complaints systems and IPMs reported more support could be provided for those who needed to use it. The effectiveness of the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) hearing system was raised with prison management, who reviewed their processes to strengthening the balance within the Committee as a self-challenging collective decision-making panel.

The regime plans were consistent and predictable. The prison had grappled with overcrowding and persistently sought ways to enhance opportunities and promote fair access to activities and services. Despite introducing new opportunities during the year, insufficient resources hindered the provision of ample work and other opportunities due to the increasing population and infrastructure, which was out with the direct control of prison management.

Improved communication between prisoners and their loved ones was enhanced by in-cell phones, and the prison were exploring further ways to improve the consistent delivery of crucial information between prisoners and their families.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

The prison ran a tightly run and stable regime. Various challenges were presented because of an antiquated building, layout, staffing levels, and contracts for work in some of the more traditional work sheds. There was a vision by the prison to start a move away from the traditional work opportunities, this was part of an ongoing culture change led by management. There were concerted efforts by both management, staff, and partners, who developed, created, and delivered opportunities which arguably had a greater rehabilitative and reintegration approach than traditional work opportunities.

During the year the new Wellbeing Centre, which appeared to have a multi-agency approach, continued to grow and support prisoners with mental health and wellbeing, and staff were central to progressing and promoting these opportunities and worked closely with partner agencies. There had also been efforts by management and staff to organise in hall opportunities during evenings and weekends. An example reported was the impressive efforts made by the E Hall manager and staff to organise and run activities during the festive period.

There was evidence that the population could be better informed about the opportunities available. It was encouraging to hear those working in the radio station speaking enthusiastically about their learning, training, and ideas for short films, to be used as part of the induction process and placed on the prisoner TV to promote the opportunities available.

All prisoners should be afforded at least one hour's fresh air. Although often within a tight regime, time outside was reported to be around 45 minutes on weekdays and 30 minutes at the weekend.

Staff were to be commended for their significant effort and commitment to develop and deliver opportunities and events throughout the year with the challenges that a prison the age, size, layout and with the population that HMP Barlinnie presented. Whilst potentially the most acute at HMP Barlinnie, this was a national concern compounded by an increasing population. GEOAmeY cancellations also required work sheds being closed to enable staff to be redeployed on escort.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

● Overall RAG rating: Amber

Throughout the year the prison ran offender outcomes programs and Short-Term Intervention Programs (STIP), in collaboration with partners. In the last quarter (January to March) it was noted that STIP would only run one strand until additional staff had been trained and were competent in the delivery of STIP. Efforts to identify and train staff had commenced. Initiatives were also being developed to better support those nearing their liberation and work was ongoing to enhance the personal officer system within HMP Barlinnie.

IPMs raised serious concerns about progression and programmes. Overall, issues related to timely access to offending behaviour programs and, although beyond the control of the Scottish Prison Service, the impacts of short sentences and the duration some people were held in remand were not inconsequential. Prisoner transportation was also a contributing factor i.e. GEOAmeY failing to appear for escorted day release had impacts on progression. A long-term prisoner described the situation as "progressing backwards". At its worst issues unnecessarily added pressure on SPS capacity, and an aging infrastructure, increased potential for delayed release and recidivism contributed to a sense of diminished prisoner morale.

The Links Centre collaborated with partners to assist and equip individuals for their release. As an example, both Social Security Scotland and the UK Immigration Department were set to be based in the prison and further staff training identified to better support pre-release planning.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Prisoners were generally positive about the care provided by staff but felt that staff shortages were at times creating unhelpful pressures and stresses. IPMs reported vacancies, frequent staff changes and a lack of experienced staff. However, First Line Managers supported and assisted new staff in their learning process and there was good evidence of a culture of innovation and continuous improvement led from the top.

There were actions taken to improve equality and diversity (E&D) including a themed month, training, a new staff E&D newsletter, prisoner documents translated, and parole dossiers recorded with subtitles for those with sight or hearing difficulties. The E&D Ambassador system appeared to be working well and supported hall staff to better understand and individualise support. E&D meetings were held quarterly with essential staff present, although it was disappointing that a prisoner was not always in attendance.

There was a high level of staff awareness that the Scottish Government intended to build HMP Glasgow, but also some uncertainty due to rising costs and public spending pressures, and IPMs felt clarity from the Scottish Government would be helpful.

GEOAme performance, mentioned earlier, was a significant national concern and continued to be escalated as an ongoing concern. Cancellations were across the board, from Special Escorted Leave and inter-prison transfers to court appearances and hospital appointments, including those with “must attend” marker. Any impact of the additional funding from the Scottish Government to address the GEOAme staffing and associated performance issues had not been significantly realised by the end of the reporting year.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

● Overall RAG rating: Green

Whilst some prisoners complained about the NHS service, in general there was little evidence to suggest UN Minimum standards were not being met, other than the concerns mentioned. Based on the evidence available during monitoring of health and wellbeing against the Mandela Rules 24-27 and 30-35, which specifically relate to healthcare services, IPM observations reflected that most were met in full or adequately. IPMs reported some areas of concerns most notably:

- A weakness was the occasional failures of GEOAme to transport prisoners to hospital appointments (Mandela Rule 27).
- Prisoners and staff felt NHS resources within the prison was insufficient to enable “daily access to all sick prisoners”, especially in relation to mental health (Mandela Rule 31). Although staff also said the level of access to healthcare was similar to that in the community.
- Prisoners had experienced deteriorating mental health resulting from imprisonment, and this issue received insufficient attention from the NHS and SPS management (Mandela Rule 33).
- IPMs were unable to find any member of staff or prisoner who was aware of regular inspection [by “physician or competent public health body”] taking place (Mandela Rule 35).

A meeting held following concerns raised by SRU staff, noted that mental health teams were severely under resourced. It was clear links and communication between the SPS and NHS could be better. Prison management acknowledged that IPM escalation had positively influenced progress of the issues raised. As the year progressed it was reported clinical psychologists had provided training for SRU staff and were providing advice about the needs of those in their care.

The lack of purposeful and meaningful activities was felt to have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. There was evidence of inroads being made to address this and there had been a focus on health and wellbeing events and activities during the year.

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. Population / overcrowding
2. Regime
3. GEOAmeY performance



Encouraging Observations

The completion of the refurbishment work was a vast improvement and removal of the small inhumane holding cells in reception was significant progress. The healthcare refurbishments were also welcomed, particularly by healthcare staff who spoke of the benefits and efficiencies of upgraded facilities.

It was positive to see the ongoing cultural change leadership and wider staff cohort being part of that journey. There was a clear sense of focus on continuous improvements and commitment to tackle the challenges head on was evident.

New opportunities which had been delivered, were being developed, and early shoots of other ideas being considered by staff was really encouraging. The continued efforts in the Resource Hub, and the progress of the new Wellbeing Centre, alongside the innovative approaches being trialled or introduced in other areas of the prison were examples of this.



Conclusion

The continued efforts to make improvements were evident. However, there were obvious signs of the increasingly challenging environment due to the rising population and aging estate.

Overcrowding and GEOAmeY performance have consequential impacts on so many different areas of the day-to-day operation of the prison and lives of those held there.

There is a vision by management to continue to strive to make continued improvements to address the challenges. It is therefore disappointing that vision and drive will be constrained without the sufficient resources.

Whilst this report relates to the 2023/24 reporting year the population has continued to increase and will continue to impact prisoners, staff, operations and access to the services available.