

Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report





Prison:
BELLA CENTRE

Year (1 April – 31 March):
2024 – 2025

By: HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS FOR SCOTLAND



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25
	Total number of visits:	51	54
	Total number of missed weeks:	2	0
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	0	2
	Total number of IPM hours:	102	118

Executive Summary

This report is based on the findings of Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) during their visits and conversations with prisoners, staff, and senior management, assessed against each of the nine HMIPS inspection and monitoring standards. The IPM Team conducted at least one visit each week. The team received two requests through the IPM Freephone number and engaged with residents to gather their perspectives on various aspects of life at Bella during every visit.

Staff dedication and resilience supported effective management and planning to maximise support opportunities and minimise the effect on residents where challenges presented themselves. Management engaged with SPS headquarters on matters beyond local control, such as IT systems for educational use and aspects regarding the prison rules where changes could help Bella reach its full potential, demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement. The population naturally fluctuated, given the nature of the unit, but as a result of targeted action reached full capacity of sixteen residents during the final quarter of the year for the first time since opening in August 2022.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

IPMs spoke with new admissions throughout the year. The processes to arrange a move to Bella and the induction once at Bella were reported as consistent, effective, timely and supportive. Most people spoke of having sufficient information prior to moving. Everyone, including those who had a lesser understanding, were well supported by staff during the days and weeks immediately after arrival. Decisions were taken at an individual level about whether a pre-familiarisation visit was required, demonstrating trauma-informed decisions. Some of those who had not had a pre-familiarisation visit to Bella had seen photos, which helped, but suggested a walk-through video would have been better to settle any anxiety – this is something management should consider.

During the initial three phases of the early release short-term prisoner legislation implemented from February 2025, there were no early releases; however, some individuals' release dates were brought forward. Recalculated key dates were communicated to those affected, with appropriate support plans and timing considerations. The release process was effectively managed and is further detailed in Standard 7, which includes collaboration with partner agencies.

All rooms were single occupancy, so there was no requirement for a 'cell sharing risk assessment.' A copy of the prison rules and other useful materials were available in the hub for people to freely access.

There was a general election on 4 July 2024. The prison had not refused anyone the right to vote and [ECHR Article 3](#) was not breached. However, IPMs reported there had been an oversight by SPS which may have affected those who wished to vote having sufficient time to register before

the 18 June deadline. This finding was part of an estate-wide monitoring exercise around information related to the General Election, and for future elections SPS should ensure adequate information and support is available to those eligible to vote.

Standard 2: Decency

Bella's facilities were modern, well-maintained, and included accessible rooms for individuals with specific needs. Houses and communal areas were kept clean with sufficient cleaning supplies and equipment. Each house was equipped with a washing machine, tumble dryer, and outdoor clothesline for residents to manage their laundry independently. Larger machines were available within the main building to wash larger items, such as duvets for room change over. SPS supplied cleaning, laundry, and personal hygiene products for use by residents, and the canteen offered alternatives to the SPS provisions which people could buy instead.

There were issues with the canteen. Supplies were kept in HMP & YOI Stirling which had limited space and there had been difficulties delivering orders to Bella due to issues with the delivery service provider. Mitigating action was taken and there was ongoing work, nearing completion, to have canteen supplies stored at Bella.

IPMs reported the lack of access to hairdresser services. Staff at Bella explored a partnership with an external provider and prepared a proposal, which was signed off by senior management - this was a positive action to develop a partnership and by the end of the year arrangements were finalised enabling access.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

Potential risk factors were considered during multidisciplinary Women's Case Management Board and Risk Management Team discussions as part of the process of for transferring and progressing people to Bella. In conversations throughout the year people felt safe and able to speak with staff if they had any concerns. IPMs felt staff managed such situations well and any issues were able to be raised confidentially. Staff were attentive, looking out for any indications, signals, or behavioural changes which raised personal safety concerns and took appropriate actions where necessary, for example those related to the SPS Prevention of Suicide Strategy, Talk to Me, and anti-bullying strategy, 'Think Twice.'

The safer room, which has not been suitable for use since its opening in August 2022, has still not been signed off. However, this issue is outside the direct control of Bella staff and senior management.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

There were no reported issues or concerns related to discipline, use of force, physical restraints, or property during the year.

Staff had a comprehensive knowledge of searching protocols. This included strip searches when people return from the community, which were undertaken at a ratio of 1 in 5, and quarterly room and house searches, or where intelligence prompted an earlier need. Strip search experiences were reported to be conducted in line with protocols and done respectfully, but were felt by individuals to be degrading, humiliating, and traumatising. People felt that was contrary to the trauma informed ethos and suggested that increased drugs testing would be more trauma informed. HMIPS continued to call for SPS Headquarters to change [body searching guidelines](#) to a more trauma informed approach - changes to current protocols could not be made locally, or by senior management at HMP & YOI Stirling, as it would require updates to the prison rules and applied uniformly across the estate.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection from Mistreatment

Residents reported positive relationships with both staff and other residents. While occasional personality differences or disagreements occurred among those living at Bella, residents felt comfortable approaching staff when needed, and staff proactively monitored such situations. Staff were approachable, helpful, and supportive. Bella's approach included assigning two personal officers to ensure consistent coverage during staff leave or absences. Initial relationships were typically established with the primary personal officer prior to residents moving to Bella and during the days immediately following their arrival. Overall, residents felt comfortable discussing concerns, questions, or everyday matters with most staff members.

There were few complaints submitted, and this was generally because residents were able to speak with staff to help resolve any issues, negating the need for a formal written complaint. Where formal written complaints were submitted, they were dealt with in line with the relevant procedures.

The regime was quite different to the routines in a closed prison but was stable and consistent. Some people took longer than others to adapt as it was more flexible, from 7:15 am to 9pm, and people had to take more responsibility on how to best use their time, supported by staff, to help them prepare for life in the community. There were occasions, due to staff absence, where the regime was affected with people being confined to their house to enable staff breaks to meet minimum staffing protocols. When such instances occurred staff tried to communicate the situation with residents and keep any restrictions to as short a time as possible.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Work opportunities within Bella were primarily focused on cleaning communal areas and outdoor spaces and gardening which was reviewed regularly, and work allocations could be alternated over time so they could do different jobs. The year also saw some individuals access community work placements and women's groups in the community. IPMs spoke to some of those who were, or who would soon be, working in the community. They were enjoying it or looking forward to it and felt well supported by staff and other partners.

Efforts were made by staff to explore and understand employment gaps within the wider Dundee community, with the goal of identifying training pathways and expanding opportunities for Bella residents. This proactive approach aimed to increase access to community-based roles, for those with full community access, and foster new partnerships that could bring meaningful opportunities and training initiatives directly into Bella.

Education staff visited twice a week providing a range of learning and qualification opportunities. The observed classes had good attendance, with active participation and meaningful engagement. IT for educational purposes was unavailable by year's end – further testing had been undertaken, but implementation was delayed again due to the switch of education provider (Fife College to People Plus) from around July 2025.

Various partners, including education, also supported initiatives such as Decider Skills and themed workshops, including wellbeing and positivity-focused activities like stone painting and jewellery making – an item made at the jewellery workshop won a bronze award at a UK wide creative arts competition which was subsequently exhibited in New York. Other meaningful activities included fire and safety sessions, yoga, evening church activities, the 'Sycamore Tree' victim awareness programme that taught the principles of restorative justice, structured addiction and recovery work through a weekly smart conversation café, and 'WeVolution' an 8-week entrepreneurship programme. Events during the year included a well attended Macmillan Coffee morning, annual recovery walk and a poet and playwright with lived experience of prison. There were also themed activities such as those around Halloween, the festive period, and Burns Night.

People described the gym as enjoyable and contributed positively to their overall health and wellbeing. The gym could be accessed throughout the day, and classes such as Zumba and Yoga were also available, along with activities such as 'Shapers Capers' and meditation sessions.

Physical and virtual visits were available and the flexibility around those compared to closed prison conditions was welcomed. Visits and many of the activities offered took place in the hub. Staff made every effort to minimise any clashes, however, on a couple of occasions visits had to be cancelled or rescheduled which could be difficult for individuals and their visitors.

Standard 7: Transition from Custody into the Community

Regular meetings of the Integrated Case Management (ICM) and Risk Management Team (RMT) involved relevant SPS staff and partner agencies, including social workers and psychologists, who contributed to discussions and informed decision-making. Both took a multi-disciplinary approach with relevant SPS staff and partner agencies present to inform case management decisions for all those in Bella. Everyone was offered the chance to submit written self-representations to the RMT. Management cited resource issues which constrained the ability for people to contribute directly during their RMT but should look at ways to enable this and mitigate or minimise resource constraints where possible, as reflected in the HMIPS [inspection](#) report, recommendation 16. SPS headquarters should consider per the recommendations of the HMIPS [progression thematic review](#).

Some residents noted the timescales for community work placements, home leave, and day releases etc. were longer than anticipated and felt clearer reference materials would help to set realistic expectations, alongside speaking with their personal officer. Those engaging with personal officers and partner agencies reported positive experiences. Examples included Shine, a national mentoring service for those in custody, which provided support with housing, furnishings, and phones. Other residents spoke of how their personal officer, community visits and rehabilitation planning had boosted their confidence for the future. Another individual credited their progress at Bella to the support from staff and partners to help them turn their life around.

It was noted that some people felt a sense of disparity in housing support upon release i.e. they felt those who completed their full sentence received better housing support compared to those released on parole or Home Detention Curfew (HDC), resulting in some people deciding to complete their full sentence. Residents may have benefited from earlier formal information about HCD to help them consider their options and prepare.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

There had been staff absences or vacancy challenges during the year which had, on occasions, had an effect on the regime – see Standard 5. The unit manager kept staffing complement under review to mitigate or minimise problems as much as possible.

Bella staff actively collaborated with wider partners, fostering supportive relationships to support those in Bella – an example of this was the development and planning with Dundee City College to secure arrangements to access hairdresser services. Wider communication about Bella to the public was also achieved including recognising the work of a resident who had three pieces of art exhibited in Glasgow, through Fife College. Similarly Channel 4 News covered Bella on 8 October; and two people were supported to attend the Scottish Drug Forum conference on 31 October, held in Dundee. Bella, and its sister unit Lilius in Glasgow, were also recognised for the advancement in providing gender-specific and trauma informed care, being placed second at the Europris 2024 European Prison Achievement Awards.

Last year's annual report highlighted some concerns about perceived inconsistencies in staff approaches. Encouragingly, such concerns were expressed far less frequently during this

reporting period. Although the unit manager position was temporarily vacant, the appointment of a new manager in June brought renewed stability, consistent leadership, and strengthened management. This transition also supported the resolution of staffing challenges, with senior managers stepping up to ensure smooth operations and continuity until the post was filled.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Although the NHS did not have fixed visiting times for Bella, they also supported HMPs Perth and Castle Huntly and remained accessible. The NHS were responsive and easy to contact, with GP appointments being arranged promptly when needed. This aligned with the experiences of individuals in Bella, who reported no concerns and IPMs felt waiting times for appointments were broadly comparable to those in the wider community. Personal officers supported any referrals and connected people with services available, such as a substance use councillor who visited weekly and an occupational therapist who visited two days per week.

Towards the end of the year concerns were raised about access to mental health services, which senior management were aware of and worked to resolve. In March, a seven-week mental health programme commenced, supported by a psychologist. This built upon a previous similar initiative, and attendees expressed appreciation for the refresher.

Residents also recognised the overall health and wellbeing benefits of the gym and meditation type activities, enjoyed activities during mental health awareness week May and the national recovery month in September. Two people attended the Scottish Drugs Forum 2024 Innovative Practice Showcase conference in October. Both were naloxone trainers who delivered peer-to-peer training to others in Bella and both planned to continue that once released.



Key Issues

1. Access to IT for educational purposes – outwith the control of local and senior management
 2. Canteen: availability to items/delivery times – actions to resolve nearing completion
 3. Access to hairdresser services – resolved in the latter half of the year.
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Encouraging Observations

Despite some staffing challenges, the appointment of a new unit manager brought renewed stability and direction. It was evident that all those who worked in Bella were committed to supporting individuals to the best of their abilities, demonstrating a strong willingness to contribute, drive improvements, and explore new opportunities for partnership and collaboration. A good example of this dedication was the work undertaken to provide access to hairdressing services—staff explored options, developed a proposal for senior management approval, and successfully implemented a process to enable access.

Strong, person-centred relationships remained a cornerstone of support within Bella. Staff, particularly personal officers, played a key role in encouraging positive engagement, identifying individual needs, and tailoring opportunities and support to help each person thrive.