

Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report





Prison:
HMP BARLINNIE

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:	70	120
	Total number of missed weeks:	0	1
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	194	262
	Total number of IPM hours:	320.5	425

Executive Summary

This annual report summarises the observations made and engagement with prisoners, staff, and management throughout the year, by Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) against the nine HMIPS inspection and monitoring standards. There was an average of 2.3 visits per week, although one week in mid-March was missed due to unforeseen circumstances. The number of visits, IPM hours, and requests received all increased compared with 2023/24.

Overcrowding, and its impact, were the primary concerns throughout the year. Despite the emergency early release programme, in June-July 2024, and implementation of the early release of short-term prisoners' legislation (SPT40) from February 2025, the average population was 1,370, exceeding the design capacity by 38.8%. The population peaked at 1,468 in May 2024 and was at its lowest, 1,310 (coinciding with the final tranche of the emergency early release programme) on July 17 and 18, 2024. Overcrowding is a national concern, though a particular issue at HMP Barlinnie. Whilst senior management continually strive to manage the effects of overcrowding, and the antiquated infrastructure, wider population management is the responsibility of those at SPS headquarters and the Scottish Government.

Despite the challenges presented by and the impact of overcrowding, the leadership and dedication demonstrated by many staff was acknowledged. Many staff identified and implemented effective measures to address the challenges posed, within the resources available, which reflected a proactive and resilient approach to daily operational demands.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Reception processes observed, for those arriving and leaving the prison, were orderly and efficient, with staff encouraging conversation and any questions. Late admissions occasionally did not receive a timely health assessment which management took steps to address.

Staff responsible for inductions and core screening were observed to be professional, sensitive, and supportive, recognising individual needs. Part of these processes included opportunities to speak with the Chaplain, discuss work arrangements, and sign up for relevant services that were available. Attending the induction was optional, so those who chose not to attend missed the opportunity to build an understanding of life in prison. There was an induction booklet and information sheets which covered the essentials issued by the Links Centre to those in the first night in custody hall following their admission. It was recommended that the first night in custody staff had access to those resources which would enable them to better support new admissions.

As a result of overcrowding there was evidence of untried and convicted populations being held together in the same residential area, including occasional instances of cell sharing. It was noted that where such cell sharing issues come to the attention of staff action was taken to address it as

soon as possible. The prison did their best to adhere to the rules, as set out by [Prison Rule 16](#), though this was an increasing challenge due to sustained overcrowding. Housing different prisoner categories together was a breach of [Mandela rules 112 & 113](#).

Pre-release support, starting eight weeks pre-liberation, was via the Links Centre and involved partners such as DWP. A six-week 'peer support' programme for those serving three to twelve months and close to release was also implemented during the year. Planning for those to be released because of the emergency early release (June/July 2024), and early release of short-term prisoner legislation in February 2025, involved significant efforts by the Link Centre staff and partners such as Citizens Advice who ran workshops. IPMs concluded, following conversations with some of those due to be released, that communications could have been clearer and timelier from Scottish Government, SPS headquarters, and agencies.

General election voting rights: there was a general election on 4 July 2024. The prison had not refused anyone the right to vote therefore [ECHR Article 3](#) was not breached. However, IPMs reported those eligible to vote were not adequately supported to exercise their democratic right. This finding was not restricted to HMP Barlinnie and the SPS should ensure adequate information and support is available to those eligible for future elections.

Standard 2: Decency

There were significant concerns regarding the antiquated infrastructure and population constraints, and shared cells that do not meet the recommended minimum standard of 4m² per individual. It was not possible for every prisoner to have a daily shower. Overall, the infrastructure does not properly support efficient operation of the establishment or the needs of the population.

Access to bedding, clothing, and toiletries was adequate, and feedback regarding the laundry services was generally positive, with regular collections and timely delivery of fresh laundry. The local rule, requiring prisoners to wear jeans when leaving their halls was raised during the year as the rule appeared more rigidly applied by E Hall staff, and this was confirmed by IPM observations during route movements. This was raised with management with a recommendation that every hall should be treated equally as there was a disparity, not only across halls in HMP Barlinnie, but also with other SPS establishments. It was recognised, however, that there may be legitimate reasons for differences due to clothing requirements set out under [Part 4](#) of the prison rules i.e. differences between untried and convicted prisoners and aspects which were at the Governor's discretion.

Despite the ageing infrastructure it was well-maintained. There were some exceptions reported by IPMs in Letham Hall relating to insanitary toilet/shower facilities. Communal areas were clean and bright and there were effective means to report any issues. The grounds were well-maintained and with hanging baskets and a landscape projects which included a raised flower bed, bird feeders, and sculpture which had been designed and crafted in the metalwork shed.

There was a three-weekly rotation of seasonal, summer and winter menus that included fruit, and alternative menu options based on dietary requirements. The kitchen was clean, well-organised, and those preparing food in the kitchen and those serving meals within the halls wore personal protective equipment and avoided cross contamination between food groups. Feedback was generally positive, though there were some who disagreed and felt the menus were repetitive and had issues with the portion size and temperature. IPMs reported the menu was somewhat repetitive and carbohydrate-heavy, though fresh fruit and vegetables were available daily.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

Challenges around substance use, in line with much of the Scottish prison estate, was highlighted as a concern. Essential care procedures, such as Management of an Offender suspected to be at Risk due to the ingestion of a Substance (MORS) and Talk to Me (TTM), were in place and

actively managed for those at risk of suicide or self-harm. A 'sweep' with dogs trained to detect drugs was done thoroughly and handled with sensitivity. This vital prevention initiative was welcomed by many prisoners, some of whom expressed a preference for increased frequency.

During numerous routine interactions during monitoring, IPMs reported that prisoners felt safe, partly attributed by some to the tight regime and level of staff supervision, and that staff were helpful and supportive. However, some requests to see IPMs included allegations of behaviours perceived to be bullying or intimidation. Although these alleged incidents of intimidation were not witnessed by IPMs, and therefore unverified, such concerns could not be discounted, although they were thought likely to be rare and isolated. Nevertheless, with overcrowding pressures and demands, some frontline staff reflected that a loss of patience was almost inevitable from time to time. Management explained that procedures were in place to ensure a full investigation was carried out and reported to Police Scotland by SPS, including on behalf of the individual concerned, when allegations were reported. Overall, SPS were managing pressures, but continual monitoring of such behaviours was recommended by SPS management as well as HMIPS.

During the year staff mentioned that there had been five violent incidents over a short period, which was unusual for their hall. IPMs reported that was indicative of the risks associated with sustained overcrowding and there was anecdotal evidence suggesting that some prisoners felt defeated and believed there was no point in speaking up or voicing their concerns. In contrast, there were also reports from those in C hall where staff were praised for listening to concerns and providing prisoners with support and environments, like D Hall high dependency unit, which was perceived to be free from such behaviours and conducive to positive wellbeing.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

IPMs escalated a concern to HMIPS of occasions, one of which was identified in HMP Barlinnie, of solitary confinement for over 72 hours without reference to Scottish Ministers. The cause was due to the consecutive use of Prison Rules 95 and 114, which IPMs felt was contrary to the spirit of the legislation. This issue was raised with SPS headquarters, and their Operations Directorate advised all establishments to comply with the Rule 95 process. This was not felt to address the concerns about the consecutive use of rules fully and HMIPS continue to pursue this issue.

Staff in the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) demonstrated a good understanding of the individuals in their care, and explained challenges were often where individuals refused to return to the general population. This reflected a wider concern, seen elsewhere in the Scottish prison estate, and aspects of the 2023 HMIPS thematic review of [segregation in Scottish prisons](#) around the use of the SRU for extended periods and how best to support those people.

There were no significant issues or concerns raised regarding searching, property, personal cash, or testing for alcohol or controlled drugs during the year. HMP Barlinnie was part of an ongoing body worn video camera pilot and were issued with 25 bodycams, with two cameras available in each hall and operational area. IPMs undertook focused monitoring of the pilot around three months into the trial. There were some discrepancies noted from frontline staff on their use. Senior management explained that a staff rota assigned the mandatory bodycam wearing per shift, but activation was not compulsory. If an incident occurred warranting activation, the residential First Line Manager would check if staff dealing with the incident had activated the bodycam if assigned and advise accordingly. Overall, although the pilot was at an early stage it was limited by the number of cameras available, and communications which could have been more informative. Prisoners were aware but otherwise had very limited understanding of the pilot.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection from Mistreatment

Throughout the year, overcrowding and population management challenges resulted in multiple regimes within many of the halls, to maintain separation between different population groups.

IPMs reported that some staff found managing and operating multiple regimes within the same hall or landing to be one of the most challenging aspects of their responsibilities. Overall, it appeared stable and managed effectively by staff, however overcrowding and resource constraints hindered providing ample out of cell opportunities for a considerable proportion of the population.

Prisoner Information Action Committee (PIAC) meetings, which management indicated should occur monthly in each hall, were reported by IPMs as varied, infrequent, and inconsistent. Management confirmed that regular PIACs had slipped and that was being addressed as part of a broader review. To mitigate for the lack of consistent PIACs, management indicated increased informal daily interaction opportunities for prisoners to provide feedback and suggestions. However, there was limited evidence on the effectiveness or outcomes of these informal exchanges. Where PIACs were held, regardless of how regularly, they were run well and there were examples of positive outcomes i.e. polytunnel opportunity for E Hall and yoga following a gym user voice group.

There was a continued lack of confidence in the complaints systems by some prisoners and concerns raised about the perception that complaint forms go missing or unanswered. Similar experiences were heard in other establishments. HMIPS had previously reported that the SPS complaints process does not follow the model practice advised by SPSO and recommended a review as a matter of urgency. There has been no change nationally yet. IPMs felt that there was an issue at the early stages of the complaints process, which from time to time then resulted in the submission of inappropriate confidential complaints. Management arranged an analysis of the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) processes and SPSO responses early in the reporting year, followed by a wider review by management, and learning opportunities were identified.

Due to the extent of overcrowding and limited time out of cell for a proportion of the population, opportunities for staff and prisoners to build and improve relationships were affected. During exercise, in their work parties, and the hubs etc. positive relationships and interactions were observed by IPMs, and unsolicited feedback given that staff were helpful and supportive. However, there were examples where prisoners were less positive and indicated difficult relationships.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Monitoring highlighted positive aspects and challenges due to limited resources available to the population. It was disappointing that a review of the prisoner wages policy, dated October 2012, had yet to be undertaken by SPS headquarters. There were a range of work opportunities ranging from kitchens, cleaning, and laundry to re-use IT, hairdresser, and horticulture which was introduced in late 2024. Those who had roles within those or other work opportunities spoke about the sense of purpose it gave them, learning new skills and working collaboratively with others.

Few prisoners felt they had a full programme of work, education, and counselling as per [prison rule 81](#), and there were occasions where people felt they had to choose between gym and outdoor recreation, despite [prison rule 87](#). While regular work was available, overcrowding and resource limits prevented access for all. Alternative activities included education, gym, clubs, recovery programmes, the Resource and Wellbeing hubs, and events which improved participants' rehabilitation and wellbeing. Overall, good activity opportunities existed, but access was limited as were out of cell opportunities.

Regular daily access to one hour in the open air had generally improved. IPMs reported concerns regarding access for the non-offence protection population, who at times had to request their one-hour exercise. There was little doubt that this statutory right was under severe pressure for those who were unable to exercise with other prisoners for safety reasons. Senior management took steps to address this, reminding front line staff that access to fresh air should be offered, rather than having to request it. There was also work undertaken in some exercise yards, though they were not the most inviting of spaces with little to do.

Visits were well-run and in a warm and friendly environment. Occasionally, virtual visits were limited due to room availability and staff shortages, and the tea bar queue sometimes affected visits which prompted visitors to suggest it should open earlier. Management identified that not all of those on remand had daily visit access. They addressed this by ensuring a schedule for each hall. Overall, though, visits fostered positive family connections with family contact staff and partners working to improve and enhance the visit experience for neurodiverse children, families, and elderly relatives.

Standard 7: Transition from Custody into the Community

Speaking with prisoners and staff, all reported delays in progression leading to delayed parole. Few were aware of [prison rule 81](#) (also see standard 6), and none believed it was being implemented. The November 2024 HMIPS full inspection of HMP Barlinnie reported that the most recent SPS guidance for Generic Programmes Assessments (GPA) to be considered was two years prior to parole qualification dates, delaying access until individuals served a significant proportion of their sentence.

Despite HMP Barlinnie being a short-term establishment they had a significant long-term prisoner population. This, alongside the challenges of overcrowding and resource constraints, highlighted significant concerns about progression and programmes. In March 2025 around 250 people required a GPA to determine if they needed to complete Offending Behaviour Programmes. IPMs were concerned about advice issued by SPS headquarters to all establishments in November 2024 indicating a new approach to programmes, with some being suspended, as national waiting lists were at a critical level. The new approach was at an early stage but further evidences the concerns highlighted in the [2024 HMIPS progression thematic review](#). However, management highlighted that during 2024/25 more short-term prisoners progressed to the open estate (HMP Castle Huntly) than within the last ten years, recognising the continued efforts of staff to deliver interventions and case management to progress short-term prisoner.

SPS and partner agencies collaborated to support release planning and prisoner reintegration. Parkhead Citizens Advice Bureau and DWP delivered pre-release support through the Resource Hub and Links Centre, offering drop-in sessions and advice on various aspects including housing, finances, and form completion. A pilot programme launched in January 2025 which was a six-week Peer Support course for those nearing their release focusing on structuring daily life, problem-solving, and fostering a positive mindset to unlock potential.

The Links Centre and partner agencies worked exceptionally hard to support those released early as part of the emergency early release in June-July 2024 and during the implementation of the early release of short-term prisoners' (STP40) legislation from February 2025. Overall, IPMs reported that it appeared well planned, and once individuals had been identified communication flowed well between the Link Centre, partner agencies, and the individuals.

At the end of March 2025, to help population management, transfers from Letham Hall at HMP Barlinnie to Chrisswell House at HMP Greenock began. Initial transfers were reported by staff to have gone smoothly, and personal officers liaised with Chrisswell House staff. Future monitoring at HMP Greenock will consider any negative outcomes such as community workplace placements, where relevant.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

The Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion First Line Manager (FLM) was commended by some of those who they had supported for their caring and patient manner. There were quarterly Equality and Diversity meetings, chaired by the Governor, which were well-attended, with prisoner representation.

Some staff raised the need for increased mental health first aid training. In D Hall's high dependency unit (HDU) there was evidence that suggested a slightly higher staffing level and additional mental health first aid training had improved understanding, relationships, and support. The mental health team highlighted a growing need for neurodiversity support. IPMs felt extending mental health first aid training, and introducing neurodiversity training to the wider staff group would be beneficial. Staff also spoke about wider role specific training, such as to help the new horticulture endeavours, which was welcomed and supported new activities and learning.

There were still some concerns about GEOAmeY prisoner transportation, a national concern. During the year IPMs continued to report concerns regarding failure to provide transport, including for hospital appointments, and reported that during September almost 25% of hospital appointment were cancelled (though not all due to GEOAmeY, other examples were due to court appearance or refusals to attend). Whilst still a concern, reception staff reported there were slight improvements.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Early in the reporting period IPMs reported that the healthcare system was under increasing strain due to overcrowding. There was some evidence of delays issuing prescribed medication, and lengthy delays in routine dental treatment. Prisoners also spoke negatively about the waiting times, often several weeks, for non-urgent treatment and appointments with a nurse, GP, and optician. IPMs acknowledged the challenges faced by prison NHS health services were similar to those in the community following COVID-19. It was acknowledged that healthcare needed to prioritise care provision as the over-population had a significant impact on healthcare i.e. medication rounds took longer, more people were accessing services, and waiting times were increasing.

In October, healthcare confirmed nurse and psychology waiting times were within Health Improvement, Access, and Treatment (HEAT) targets, although significant challenges remained regarding dental services. Staffing challenges had also affected access to a GP, but critical and urgent cases were seen swiftly. Nursing staff were supporting routine GP services and clinics, with increased triage and the introduction of Advanced Nurse Practitioners. Towards the end of the year service users felt that accessing timely medical care and advice was increasingly difficult, with some noting that it affected their mental and physical wellbeing.

More generally there were various health and wellbeing orientated activities, often delivered in partnership. There were also focused events, such as a wellbeing and health week, with various events and stands including Hope Connections, Samaritans, Speak Out Scotland, and the Croft Visitor Centre; health matrix checks carried out by trained SPS staff and a personal trainer; and a presentation delivered by a representative for The Thistle, Glasgow's safer drug consumption facility. One of the sessions during the wellbeing and health week, observed by an IPM, was well attended with people proactively engaging with what was on offer.



Key Issues

1. Overcrowding
 2. Regime – links to overcrowding and population challenges
 3. Programmes and progression
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Encouraging Observations

There were stronger foundations for the changes required for HMP Glasgow. Through leadership and a growing drive from frontline staff the 'early shoots' of ideas referred to in the 2023/24 annual report for the establishment materialised, with ideas developed by staff and approved by management. These ideas were aspects such as the horticulture shed, new partnerships such as that with Bikeability and Scottish Autism providing learning opportunities for fathers with their children, peer mentoring group pilot, and the relaxation room.

Developing partnership opportunities with internal and external agencies, the piloting of ideas, and a growing staff enthusiasm are all integral parts of creating the changes required for the years ahead. Barbed Wireless was increasingly more involved in creating and developing materials and resources, and working with partners, to increase awareness shared via in-cell TVs.

Staffing resources could be challenging at times and the journey for new recruits after college training was taking time. Innovative approaches were developed and implemented for new recruits to further introduce them to their role, their colleagues' roles, and the operations of the prison prior to working in their assigned job, alongside peer mentors who provided support.