



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP LOW MOSS

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2024 – 2025

By Chris Collins



Annual Monitoring Figures*

		2023-24	2024-25
	Total number of visits	80	59
	Total number of missed weeks	0	6
	Total number of prisoner requests received	162	124
	Total number of IPM hours	302	194

Executive Summary

Overall IPMs' impressions remain of a busy, functioning prison at HMP Low Moss. There were many individual examples of good practice highlighted by the IPM team, particularly when noted against the rising population and challenges of a diverse number of categories of prisoners. IPMs note many innovations and flexible responses to issues arising in the prison. IPMs have welcomed the support and open communication from senior management for their work in the establishment.

IPMs will continue to monitor against the key issues highlighted in the coming months, particularly personal safety.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

The disciplinary systems in HMP Low Moss were used appropriately and there were clear processes in place for ensuring lawful and transparent custody. Where queries around processes or decision making were raised, management engaged with transparency and offered reasoned explanations to the IPM team.

IPMs attended a Death in Prison Learning Audit and Review conference during this reporting period and noted a respectful learning environment with all relevant professionals in attendance.

IPMs visited the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) on various occasions and found an orderly unit with careful management plans for those held in this area of the prison. It is noted this had been a particularly challenging area of the establishment to work in and staff have frequently given updates and assurances to IPMs on their visits, offering evidence of a compassionate approach in difficult circumstances. Where complaints and allegations of mistreatment have been made, management have been swift to act appropriately.

IPMs, staff and prisoners all commented on good visibility of senior managers around the prison.

Standard 2: Decency

Throughout the year monitors described the prison as clean and tidy on all visits and observed passmen and the industrial cleaning work party carrying out their duties effectively across the establishment. All categories of prisoner were regularly observed taking exercise and time in the fresh air. However, while prisoners from Clyde and Kelvin halls were observed taking time in the fresh air, IPMs were aware of challenges in organising various different regimes to ensure this was adhered to for every prisoner on a daily basis. There were few issues regarding food and most basic materials for prisoners. However, IPMs took several requests about a perceived lack of provision of fresh bedding and towels towards the end of the reporting year.

The kitchens had been visited frequently and were functioning well with a good quality of food. There was adequate provision in the halls for prisoners to request necessary items for day to day living.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

There were instances of violence at various times during the year, including significant incidents, and, sadly, deaths in custody. There were a high number of prisoners on Management of Offenders at Risk Due to Any Substance (MORS) for a period also. IPMs have received detailed updates on levels of drug use and violence in the prison throughout the year and noted the pressures of a rising population in maintaining staff and prisoner safety. This continues to be a challenge for management at the prison.

IPMs continued to receive high numbers of prisoner requests, many of which relate to personal safety of prisoners. Various prisoners mentioned issues with staff culture and attitude towards prisoners. Clyde 2 had an issue due to noise from the SRU that has affected prisoners' mental health and has resulted in sleep deprivation. This seemed to be an issue for most individuals in the hall and the issue has been raised by prisoners to staff in the halls.

IPMs visited the residential areas regularly and officers confirmed that prisoners are sharing their needs and concerns with prison staff. Prisoners who were at risk were also participating in discussions about their management plan. Incident reports were being completed and recorded appropriately.

Personal Safety is a key part of the induction process, and reception staff confirmed the use of Talk to Me forms and their focus on prevention of suicide in prison. Prisoners were also allocated personal officers to be their first form of support. Prison staff confirmed that prisoners in a situation of vulnerability or had a protected characteristic were identified and supported appropriately.

IPMs were reassured by both staff and prisoners that the prison continued to fulfil its responsibilities, despite many challenges including overpopulation, the prevalence of illicit substances and significant incidents. Some individual prisoners revealed that the atmosphere, especially in the residential areas, could be difficult and unpredictable. IPMs were aware that various measures remained in place to control and monitor this, including a Violence Reduction Strategy, a Violence Reduction Action Plan and Working Group.

IPMs visited the SRU on almost every visit and noted a well-run unit with difficult challenges. All prisoners looked after in the SRU had a management plan with appropriate reviews built in.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

IPMs commented on a prison with a strong focus on maintaining security with staff demonstrating a high awareness and diligence in all areas of the prison. Processes for keeping population groups

and individuals separate were adhered to, although IPMs were made aware by staff and prisoners of the increasing challenges in doing this safely this year. Management of the route was diligent.

IPMs will continue to monitor for assurance that basic needs of prisoners are met amidst the logistical challenges.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

IPMs received many prisoner requests during this reporting period, covering progression, personal safety, property, decency and protection against mistreatment. When prisoners reported mistreatment, this was acted on immediately by staff and managers, in accordance with policies and procedures.

The prisons complaints system was frequently used by prisoners. Where IPMs investigated matters raised by prisoners they noted that there was in almost all cases a genuine desire by staff to follow standard processes and, on the odd occasion where decision making could perhaps be open to a different judgement, management readily explained the context for decisions. Various mechanisms exist in the prison to ensure protection against mistreatment. IPMs observed Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) throughout the year, where prisoners were given the opportunity to appeal any disciplinary punishment imposed, and noted them to be well run with opportunities for prisoners to express their views appropriately.

While the IPM Team were informed about the level of incidents in the prison, many caused by use of illicit substances, the team's general observations were that the prison was for the most part calm and order was maintained the majority of the time.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

IPMs reported on a busy, dynamic prison with functioning work parties and daily schedules of events, activities and programmes. Work parties continued to run daily, and all essential services were maintained. There was some disruption due to staffing levels but in general there was good provision of activity and a fair allocation of tasks across the establishment.

IPMs visited the laundry, gym, work sheds, kitchen, gymnasium, library, links centre, education and life skills and reported positively on these areas of the prison.

The recovery activities for September were extremely positive and prisoners were fully engaged in the events, including the recovery walk at the prison which took place on 20 September, with approximately 80 prisoners taking part. IPMs also observed the recovery café in the prison and commend all involved for a very positive innovation.

IPMs consistently reported a welcoming visits room, conducive to good levels of contact and connection for families and friends. Officers on visits sessions maintained high levels of security awareness while continuing to offer privacy for prisoners and loved ones.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

IPMs noted good levels of activity in the Links Centre and the effort made to progress individuals through their sentence through all the usual channels. IPMs observed and were briefed on, planning for the release of prisoners under the Emergency Early Release legislation. Some prisoners were being released under this scheme during IPM visits and the team had good discussions with the prison officers managing the release of the prisoners under this scheme, who followed the robust procedures. IPMs were also shown the appointments card for each prisoner prior to release for the different services to support the transition from custody into the community. All prisoners had also been notified, through individual letters, of this Emergency Early Release measure, including the criteria for early release. IPMs thought the process had been very well managed at HMP Low Moss.

IPMs reported positively on the Links Centre in HMP Low Moss and the range of appointments and community-based services available to prisoners. A reasonable timetable of support groups and preventative addiction and wellbeing services was on offer in the prison.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

IPMs reported on an establishment with varying challenges. They highlighted effective inter-departmental work and good communication from senior management on key priorities and changes.

Where possible matters raised by IPMs were resolved at the appropriate level in the halls or elsewhere in the prison. Where more significant issues had been escalated to senior management, the response continued to be agile and prompt.

IPMs noted some improvements with the escort contract with GEOAmev which had not functioned adequately throughout last year. This was welcome as were the mitigations put in place by prison management.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Some prisoners continued to speak to IPMs about access to mental health nurses and there were still a large amount of requests relating to dispensation of medication. There were pressures on NHS staff in meeting the needs of a large and diverse group of individuals but relationships between NHS and SPS staff were positive and respectful. IPMs considered that provision was in place to meet the basic health needs of the prison population.



Key Issues

1. Population increases
2. Personal safety and illicit substances



Encouraging Observations

Excellent purposeful activity and strong sense of inter connectedness across the prison. Flexible and agile approach across the establishment to addressing daily challenges. Very good provision of recovery work.

* Data reconciliation currently taking place