

Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report





Prison:
HMP & YOI STIRLING

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:	45	70
	Total number of missed weeks:	1	2
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	18	18
	Total number of IPM hours:	122	180

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 1.3 visits per week and there were two missed weeks towards the end of the year due to unforeseen circumstances or weather conditions. IPM visits and hours undertaking monitoring work increased compared with 2023/24.

It had been a challenging year, partly as there was a continued learning curve reflecting that the prison only opened on 19 June 2023 and there was a full inspection of HMP YOI Stirling, and the two community custody units, during the year. Challenges overall linked to a fluctuating population and increased remand population across the women's estate; the vulnerable and complex nature of the population with some people spending lengthy periods on the SPS Suicide Prevent Strategy, Talk to Me (TTM); and periods where some accommodation was out of use due to defects and damage.

However, initiatives aimed at addressing the issues and challenges demonstrated the ongoing efforts focused on continuous improvement by both management and frontline staff, who were committed and compassionate.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

The national induction was offered to new admissions on arrival and information was also available within Thistle in the most common languages. A 'Listener' service was introduced later in the year, and their role included being informal peer-mentors, available to support new arrivals and others as required. Throughout the year many new admissions felt supported by staff and the accessible materials within Thistle. IPMs also reported that staff had a clear understanding of the admissions process and adapted their approach to recognise individual needs.

There was evidence reported by IPMs of careful consideration and risk assessment about where an individual would be located within the prison, or other establishments. The complex needs of some would be better supported by specialist care in secure psychiatric units, but the efforts of staff and services supporting the need of the Wintergreen population was recognised.

Reception staff were knowledgeable about the admission and liberation processes. IPMs noted there were examples, due to inefficiencies in the broader criminal justice system such as court paperwork delays, which could complicate liberation arrangements (e.g. time of day when released and availability of public transport particularly for those who may be travelling longer distances). SPS staff showed diligence, sometimes going above and beyond to assist and support those liberated.

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 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

Houses and bedrooms were spacious and bright. IPMs reported a high level of cleanliness and robust procedures for an elevated level of bio-hazard incidents. There were ample cleaning supplies and materials were accessible.

During the year there was damage from time to time which was reported to Estates who swiftly organised and coordinated the necessary repairs. Rooms were well-equipped. There had been an issue with bedroom blinds where management sought alternative options to ensure privacy. There was a good provision of clothing, and no issues were raised with IPMs regarding the laundry service provisions. Personal hygiene products were provided by the prison, and the canteen provided these and sundry items for those who wished to purchase alternatives or additional items. IPMs reported a broad selection of reasonably priced items, and most people were content with what was available. Where necessary, carers regularly visited to help those who were unable to take care of themselves well due to their mental health.

No issues or concerns were raised regarding meals and feedback was generally good, with comments about a good variety and accommodation of differing dietary needs. An IPM also sampled an evening meal, penne bolognese with garlic bread, and described it as tasting “homemade and genuinely enjoyable. It was excellent.” Temperature record logs were maintained and when randomly checked by IPMs all were in order.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

There was often a high proportion of people on TTM at any given time. This was partly due to the complex needs of some of the population and exacerbated by late admissions - i.e. people who arrived at the prison after 8.30pm and were put on TTM with regular observations until a health risk assessment was completed the following morning. On the 7 October 2024, SPS headquarters communicated an interim process for admissions and transfers who arrived outside NHS working hours. Since implementation this appeared to be working well.

Staff demonstrated patience, compassion, and skills to build good relationships with those in their care, helping them to identify the clues and cues of those who may be at an increased risk. There was a close working relationship between SPS and NHS to support those who may have been at increased risk. Safer rooms within the houses helped maintain a degree of familiarity and minimised any potential trauma that a move to a different house may otherwise have caused. Sunflower, an enhanced needs unit, provided further safer rooms in a separate area. The interactive screens were still not fully operational and at times those on prison rule 95 were held in Sunflower, so it could feel like an extension of Heather, the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU). The challenges experienced by some of those most vulnerable, would be better supported in secure care as mentioned under Standard 1.

Overall, those housed in HMP & YOI Stirling generally spoke of feeling safe and able to speak to staff if they had any concerns or felt they needed support. It was also positive that IPMs observed peer mentors support and encourage those most vulnerable, including joining them in alternative activities within the gym area.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

IPMs raised concerns with HMIPS about instances of solitary confinement exceeding 72 hours without Scottish Ministers' approval, which was viewed as contrary to legislative intent and stemmed from the consecutive use of prison rules 95 and 114. One such instance was identified at HMP & YOI Stirling. There was no question of the duration, or that staff had not followed the process, it was the procedure itself that was in question. This 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 consecutive use of rules concern fully and HMIPS continue to pursue this.

In Heather, the SRU, IPMs found that records were up to date and each person had a reintegration plan. Staff were well-informed and exhibited empathy and concern for the persons welfare while in the SRU. 'Daily rapid rundown' meetings took place, with SPS and healthcare, to review those on TTM, prison rule 41, and Special Security Measures to help ensure staff were as well informed as possible. The importance of this was vital and recognised the complex nature of the population and individual needs. Staff in Heather also managed Sunflower, with three safer rooms, and had a similar level of knowledge and compassion for those housed there.

The orderly room process was well-conducted ensuring the individual understood the process, charge, and was encouraged to participate. There were no concerns raised or reported regarding searching, property, personal cash, or testing for alcohol or controlled drugs during the year.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection from Mistreatment

Complaints processes and prison rules were easily accessible in residential areas. Suggestion opportunities existed, though some residential staff could not provide details about recent and planned Prisoner Information Action Committees (PIACs). Management confirmed Myrtle (young offenders) held a PIAC/prisoner voice discussion every other month and discussions had taken place elsewhere but may not have been recorded as PIACs. The Head of Residential took steps to identify a representative from each house to coordinate PIACs, ensure bi-monthly meetings were scheduled and occurred, and that minutes were available for both staff and residents.

IPMs reported positive relationships across all houses, despite the odd exception, citing staff's approachability, empathy, and a tailored person-centred approach to recognise an individual's needs. Examples included those in Thistle and Begonia who said their peers and staff helped to make their transition into custody easier, and those in Bluebell and Iris who felt they were treated with respect, fairness, encouragement, and support.

The regime had generally stabilised but could be restricted for operational reasons to respond to any incidents or to facilitate staff escorts outside the prison if GEOAme failed to provide transport. The need to redeploy staff due to unforeseen circumstances was unavoidable, though management aimed to minimise the negative effects in such circumstances. There was a concern that the remand population added to the challenge in trying to deliver a full range of support and activities for everyone, and some people felt there was a more structured and predictable regime elsewhere.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

During monitoring visits, conducted at various times throughout the day and week, individuals were frequently observed outside their rooms engaged in work, education, wider activities, exercise, or within their houses often doing personal chores, listening to music, or relaxing.

Essential work opportunities included the kitchen, cleaners, laundry, gardening, and pass workers, mainly from the convicted population, with some of those untried working in the kitchen or

cleaning. Most work parties were consistent, and a few people held more than one job to support under-resourced areas. Those who worked enjoyed it and they were often complimentary of the routine it helped give them and it had contributed to developing new skills and confidence.

The central hub, serving as the main activity space, included a gym, education, life skills, a library, and hairdressers. Vocational and life skills opportunities included hairdressing, budgeting, and cooking. There were alternative offerings for Wintergreen residents, recognising their diverse needs, which incorporated peer support to encourage participation and in a different environment to their house. Early in the year, some residential staff raised concerns about limited educational opportunities, though those who were able to attend had enjoyed it. Management reviewed and adjusted the timetables to ensure equitable access and to minimise or mitigate where people had to leave their work early to attend other activities, such as their scheduled education or gym times. This was an ongoing piece of work due to the fluctuating population, engagement levels, and other interests.

No issues were raised regarding access to the fresh air. Each house had an allocated exercise area. Although they were small, residents were seen using them. People often preferred the gym/PT opportunities as staff were encouraging, motivational, and supportive; examples included a running class and Zumba.

The Chaplain noted a rise in service attendance which led to additional services being considered. Later in the year the Governor highlighted the Chaplaincy were experiencing staffing challenges, so any development was slower than hoped. However, no issues were raised by residents who felt supported in their ability to practice their faith freely.

Standard 7: Transition from Custody into the Community

Those serving longer sentences and nearing their critical dates also felt supported in their progression journey. Information about the Community Custody Units in Glasgow and Dundee was accessible within Iris/Bluebell, which housed convicted adults, alongside a folder with information about services and events within the prison created by the Visitor Centre, Forth Valley Inclusion.

External services who supported release, and community reintegration plans were co-located in the Link Centre and known by residents. Partners providing support included Shine, Women's Aid, Early Years Scotland, DWP, and Quiet Waters. Monitoring during the emergency early release scheme in June and July 2024, IPMs reported a coordinated approach with Shine, DWP, housing, and the Link Centre, who worked swiftly and effectively with the aim to maximise post-release support and a smooth transition which appeared to work well.

IPMs spoke to people pre-release who all spoke positively about their release planning and support from SPS and partner agencies. Some people were slightly more anxious than others, but they were able to speak with SPS and agency staff who provided additional information to help settle their anxiety and provide reassurance. An IPM did observe the difficulties experienced by some of those most vulnerable on their release and commendable actions by staff who did what they could to help and support individuals who were clearly distressed. However, there were aspects beyond the control of SPS and this highlighted some of the issues with the judicial and healthcare system that specifically affected those with significant mental ill-health.

There had been clear development of interventions compared with 2023/24. Two Interventions staff were recruited to lead the delivery of Ultimate Self, aimed at long term prisoners, delivered 1-to-1, and STIP-F, aimed at short-term prisoners though it was not set up in Stirling by the year end. In the final quarter of the year, plans were developing for a suite of programmes and interventions to support and prepare people for their release, recognising the diverse risk and needs of the population.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

Concerns about GEOAmey prisoner transportation persisted as a national issue and were beyond the prison's direct control. Specific concerns included late admissions and lengthy journeys with anecdotal evidence suggesting that drop-offs at other establishments were prioritised over HMP & YOI Stirling. Additionally, there were instances of cancelled transport for appointments and transfers. Despite these challenges, GEOAmey's performance had improved as the year progressed though reception staff remained concerned about the longevity of the improvement and continued to monitor the situation.

The prison and SPS headquarters had acted and provided evidence following the full inspection of the prison during February 2024, which published mid-August 2024. The HMIPS Inspection Team had been able to close 35 (49%) of the recommendations and had received updates on actions taken in respect of other recommendations. As part of routine establishment business planning and operation reviews, consideration was given to any changes which may be beneficial. This would also take account of areas under phase 2 building work, which included a 'retreat', teaching space and animal care, which required sign-off before space could be used.

The prison was recognised by receiving a gold award in the health building or project category of the [Scottish Design Awards 2024](#). With the design "heavily focused on mental wellbeing and a trauma informed approach to design, creating a therapeutic environment with landscape and nature at its core." SPS also worked with national media, for example on the four-part BBC documentary "Jailed: Women in Prison," and with the local community to address their frustrations and complaints about the noise levels from SRU.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Overall, healthcare provision was good and adequately resourced, with a higher ratio of NHS staff compared with other prisons. Waiting times to see a doctor/nurse were in line with the community or better in some cases. GEOAmey delays for hospital visits, which staff felt had deteriorated at the beginning of the year, were largely resolved later in the year but as noted against Standard 8, continued to be monitored by staff.

Healthcare staff had a structured approach, effective team communication and demonstrated compassionate care.

IPMs heard good examples from people across the houses who were positive about their healthcare experiences, including someone who had seen an improvement in their condition which had a big impact on their day-to-day life. There were leaflets, posters, and information available with the houses regarding health matters, such as domestic abuse, menopause, and breast cancer.



Key Issues

1. Complex and enhanced care needs
 2. Population/wider population strategy – a national concern
 3. GEOAmey prisoner transportation performance – a national concern.
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Encouraging Observations

The multi-agency approach to ensure a consistent and collaborative approach recognised the complex and enhanced care needs of a vulnerable population, and all partners supported each other. A positive example of this was the 'daily rapid rundown' meeting.

Development of meaningful activities and intervention programmes, with increased partnerships, engagement with external agencies, revised timetabling, and staff training were encouraging signs of increased support to all populations. It was also positive to observe peer-mentors encouraging and supporting those with enhanced need to engage in opportunities and help them feel more comfortable in a different environments.