



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP Castle Huntly

Year (1 April – 31 March):
2025 – 2026



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	52	52	52
	Total number of missed weeks:	0	1	1
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	7	13	15
	Total number of IPM hours:	177	146	164

Executive Summary

Over the reporting year, Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) at HMP Castle Huntly identified a predominantly settled and constructive prison environment, characterised by positive relationships between staff and prisoners, a wide range of purposeful activity, and consistent efforts to support preparation for release. In most cases, the establishment was observed to be operating in a manner broadly aligned with the HMIPS Standards, while accommodating an increasing prisoner population.

Key strengths included respectful and humane interactions between staff and prisoners, personal officer relationships, and the conduct of Risk Management Team (RMT) meetings. IPMs observed staff communicating clearly, acting supportively, and exercising authority proportionately.

Purposeful activity was a notable strength, with strong access to work placements, education, gym facilities, and constructive family contact. Individual examples of educational achievement and sustained engagement with rehabilitation and recovery activity demonstrated the positive potential of the regime.

The principal concerns identified by IPMs during the year related to the sharing of accommodation, and elements of progression and transition planning. Increasing prisoner numbers led to periodic cell sharing, which was a recurring source of anxiety and dissatisfaction among prisoners.

Access to purposeful activity remained strong overall but was affected at times by staff absences and transitional issues with the new education provider. These interruptions resulted in occasional gym closures, IT outages, and delays in education accreditation, which prisoners reported as frustrating.

Transitions from custody into the community presented some challenges. IPMs identified repeated concerns regarding delays in parole processes, inconsistent communication from external social work services, and difficulties affecting some prisoners including those subject to cross-border arrangements. Although staff were observed making sustained efforts to mitigate these issues, they caused understandable frustration among prisoners approaching release.

Cost-of-living pressures were increasingly evident in prisoners' reported experiences. Prisoners raised concerns regarding canteen affordability, with canteen item costs increasing in the face of unchanged wage rates and spending limits. While many of these matters were set nationally, their cumulative impact may have influenced prisoners' perceptions of fairness and decency within the regime.

Overall, HMP Castle Huntly was deemed to be largely meeting its role as an open establishment focused on progression and reintegration.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Throughout the reporting year, IPMs observed lawful and generally well-organised processes governing admission, temporary release, and liberation providing good outcomes for prisoners.

Reception procedures, particularly around home leave returns, were observed to be structured, clearly explained, and focused on risk management. Prisoners were routinely informed of licence conditions and restrictions, and processes for handling personal property and money were transparent and controlled.

No concerns were raised by IPMs regarding the integrity of the cell-sharing risk assessment process.

Prisoners were provided with written explanations of changes to early release criteria, which IPMs assessed as thorough and accessible.

There were some minor concerns related to inconsistent delivery of induction appointments reported by prisoners, but overall, the induction process was viewed positively.

Standard 2: Decency

Accommodation and environmental standards at HMP Castle Huntly were generally observed to be clean, well-maintained, and orderly. Communal and residential areas were routinely tidy, and cleaning work parties were visible and active.

Food provision was consistently observed to be varied, plentiful, and inclusive of medically required and religious diets, with good oversight of hygiene and food safety standards.

The principal concern expressed by prisoners was about being asked to share a cell. While cell sharing was conducted in suitably sized cells, prisoners nevertheless reported dissatisfaction to IPMs, particularly where they had not expected to share accommodation prior to their arrival, viewing it as a 'downgrade'. IPMs were however assured that cell-sharing risk-assessments were conducted, and that the selection of a cell mate was done carefully, including prisoners being offered the opportunity to choose who they shared with.

Bedding quality, especially mattresses and pillows, were the subject of recurring complaints across the year. While IPMs confirmed replacement processes were in place in line with national SPS policy, discomfort remained a persistent issue for some prisoners

Standard 3: Personal Safety

Monitoring activity under this Standard was limited but consistent in its findings. IPMs spoke with several prisoners across the reporting year, who reported feeling safe within the establishment and did not raise any concerns regarding bullying, racism, or intimidation. One prisoner specifically referenced the usefulness of information provided during induction about the anti-bullying process.

Similarly, no patterns of violence, intimidation, or unsafe practice were identified through IPMs' direct observation. The open nature of the establishment, combined with positive staff-prisoner relationships, appeared to contribute to a generally calm and safe environment.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

Across the reporting year, IPMs observed disciplinary and rules-based processes that were conducted fairly, transparently, and with respect for prisoners. IPMs sat in on orderly room hearings, which were observed to allow prisoners adequate opportunity to present their account, with sanctions applied proportionately to the offences considered. Segregation facilities were observed to be in good condition and infrequently used.

Concerns were raised by prisoners about the searching of shared cells, where accountability for any prohibited items that were found was placed on both occupants. Staff explained to IPMs that sharing a cell brought with it some responsibility, but there remained some anxiety among prisoners around the fairness of this, and notably any potential impact on progression.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

IPMs consistently observed positive, respectful, and constructive relationships between staff and prisoners. Officers were observed assisting prisoners with administrative issues, health and emotional concerns, and progression planning with care and empathy. IPMs also spoke directly with a number of prisoners about their relationships with prison officers. All said they felt they were shown respect and it was a boost to their confidence.

IPMs attended some Prisoner Information and Advice Committee (PIAC) meetings. The composition of the group was wide, including staff from different agencies working at the prison, as well as SPS staff and managers. Prisoners were also well represented. There was a positive atmosphere and genuine discussion as to how the issues raised could be resolved. There was a notetaker and the meeting was recorded with actions identified and progress discussed.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

HMP Castle Huntly offered extensive access to purposeful activity, including work placements, education, gym facilities, recovery programmes, and volunteering opportunities.

IPMs observed high levels of prisoner engagement and individual examples of sustained educational achievement, including higher-education study and vocational qualifications. However, the transition to a new education provider resulted in ongoing IT issues, delays in accreditation, and temporary loss of access to systems. While staff and prisoners described these issues as frustrating, improvement was reported later in the year.

The gym was, as in previous years, very popular among prisoners. At times access was curtailed due to staffing shortages when gym staff had to cover other areas.

Prisoners of different faiths were able to access worship at the prison, with multi-faith services provided by the Chaplaincy. Access to Muslim faith leaders appeared to be an ongoing challenge across the SPS estate and the management at HMP Castle Huntly countered this by providing external access to a local mosque for eligible prisoners.

IPMs observed visits taking place in the Links Centre. Longer visits were made available to visitors who had to travel long distances. Virtual visits were also routinely available.

IPMs were impressed with the Sycamore Course that is run at the prison, which helps to develop a sense of victim awareness among those attending the course. The volunteers working to deliver the course expressed their belief that it was of real benefit to the prisoners.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Staff at HMP Castle Huntly were observed supporting housing, employment, and skills development in preparation for release. In individual cases IPMs saw effective planning and positive outcomes.

Delays to the parole process were reported by prisoners and staff, with key parole process dates having to be put back due to late or incomplete dossiers, as well as inconsistent communication from external social work services. IPMs heard there were lots of examples of social workers failing to turn up to meetings, and very little evidence of them trying to build up a relationship with prisoners before reaching decisions. IPMs picked up on a sense of frustration that nobody seemed able to apply any pressure to improve the situation. Prison managers acknowledged the difficulties being encountered (indeed by parole teams across the prison estate) and informed IPMs that a 'Parole Dossier Recovery Group' chaired by a senior manager at SPS HQ, had been formed to address the backlog. This backlog appeared to have been resolved towards the end of the reporting period.

Cross-border cases presented particular difficulty, with prisoners reporting prolonged uncertainty around transfer dates. While prison staff efforts to mitigate these issues were evident, responsibility lay primarily with the individual local authorities in England.

Prisoners complained to IPMs about the home leave allowance, suggesting that it was 'unfair' [IPMs took this to mean 'too low'] and stressful for their family to provide for them during the week they were home if they were already struggling financially.

IPMs observed RMT meetings, which were conducted well, with attention to detail and consistent reference to relevant guidelines when considering progression options. Community partners were also in attendance.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

While staffing levels were generally at full complement, there were occasions throughout the year where activities were curtailed in some areas of the prison due to staff absence. Managers moved staff from activities to other areas in order to ensure the safe and secure running of the establishment.

IPMs noted good practice in relation to staff recognition and development opportunities. Letters from prisoners' families thanking officers for support had been received and were viewed positively in terms of recognising staff performance. IPMs also heard examples of staff getting time for their own continuous professional development.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Health provision at Castle Huntly was reported to be accessible, with waiting times comparable to the community. As prisoner numbers started to increase towards the end of the year, NHS staff confirmed to IPMs that the increase in numbers was not affecting waiting times. Prisoners could get a phone consultation with a GP either the same or the next day, and a face to face with the GP during a weekly surgery.

Addiction services were coping well with demand. Prisoners were able to join organised 'recovery walks' around the grounds alongside family members and were joined by staff. Naloxone training was provided to officers.