



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP SHOTTS

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



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	61	77	72
	Total number of missed weeks:	0	0	0
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	69	70	73
	Total number of IPM hours:	242.5	256	182

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) at HMP Shotts for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Monitoring was carried out consistently throughout the reporting year, with good levels of access and engagement with the IPM team across the establishment. The prison operated within the context of wider national pressures affecting the Scottish Prison Service, including challenges in managing the prisoner profiles, staffing pressures, and limited progression opportunities.

Overall, HMP Shotts was observed to be a calm, stable, and well-managed establishment. Across the reporting year, IPMs consistently witnessed a positive culture characterised by respectful and constructive relationships between staff and prisoners. Staff were observed to engage in a courteous, professional, and proportionate manner, contributing to an environment where most prisoners reported feeling safe and treated fairly. Many prisoners described Shotts as safer and more settled than other establishments they had been in, reinforcing the sense of a comparatively stable and orderly regime.

Standards of decency were generally good. Residential areas and communal spaces were consistently clean and well maintained, with prisoners supported to take shared responsibility for their living conditions. Concerns continued to be noted regarding the affordability of everyday items, with static national prisoner wage levels and spending limits, set against wider cost-of-living pressures. Practical issues relating to consistent availability of basic supplies in the halls were also raised.

The provision of purposeful activity was a clear strength of the establishment. A wide range of opportunities in work, education, family engagement, and wellbeing activity was evident, and these were frequently described by prisoners as meaningful and beneficial. Family contact was of a high standard, with a welcoming and inclusive approach that was valued by both prisoners and their families. Work and learning opportunities were similarly viewed as contributing positively to personal development but access to these opportunities was not always consistent. Operational pressures, including staffing and regime constraints, sometimes limited availability, and some groups, particularly offence-protection prisoners, reported inequity in access to work, education, and time out of cell.

Most prisoners reported feeling safe, and monitoring evidence indicated that staff responded appropriately to risks, including violence, bullying, and substance-related harm. The continued presence of illicit substances remained a concern, contributing at times to unpredictable behaviour and medical emergencies, and affected safety.

Services such as reception, induction, case management, and progression planning were generally well organised, transparent, and skilfully delivered. Induction and liberation processes were particularly strong, supporting individuals at key transition points. Outcomes for some individuals were constrained by national factors, including limited programme availability and

capacity pressures across the wider estate. These systemic challenges were frequently reflected in prisoners' perceptions of fairness and their ability to progress.

While day-to-day interactions and processes were largely positive, a longstanding and significant issue remained in relation to the complaints system. Although local complaint handling procedures were observed to be followed, confidence in the system among prisoners remained consistently low. This reflects a broader, national concern that has persisted over several years and continues to affect prisoners' perceptions of transparency, fairness, and access to justice.

Healthcare provision within the establishment was mostly positive, with staff observed delivering care in a respectful and compassionate manner. However, staffing pressures and service capacity constraints were evident at times, leading to some reported delays and concerns regarding continuity of care, particularly during periods of increased demand. Mental good health and general wellbeing was positively linked to wider regime activity, including purposeful activity provision.

IPMs noted with sympathy that a prisoner died in HMP Shotts during the reporting year and expressed their condolences to family and those who knew him, including prisoners and staff.

In summary, staff at the prison demonstrated many areas of strong and effective practice during the reporting year, particularly in relation to relationships, purposeful activity, and the overall stability of the establishment. These strengths were evident despite operating within a challenging national context. Continued progress will depend on both the maintenance of this positive local culture and the extent to which wider systemic issues, particularly those relating to progression, resource constraints, regime consistency, and the complaints system, are addressed at a national level.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Reception processes were well-ordered and responsive, with staff demonstrating good awareness of procedures for admissions, transfers, hospital escorts, and releases.

Induction and liberation arrangements were a particular strength. Due to the nature of the prison, new admissions always transferred from another establishment and there were few liberations, with a total of fifty-six during the reporting year. Inductions and liberations were done thoroughly and records maintained. One-to-one induction and liberation support ensured flexibility and responsiveness, and the induction officer visited any prisoners in the hall who did not initially engage with the induction to ensure they at least had the information pack. Both prisoners and staff described these processes positively and IPMs witnessed constructive engagement.

Information about the prison rules and regime was available in each hall, and residential staff were often reported as supporting prisoners to understand the rules, entitlements, regime and general routine.

Overall, there was evidence of good carrying out of procedures, comprehensive induction provision with transparency, supported through clear explanations and prompt engagement at key stages.

Standard 2: Decency

Standards of decency were generally good. Residential areas, communal spaces, and workplaces were consistently observed by IPMs to be clean and well maintained. Prisoners had access to cleaning materials and shared responsibility for maintaining their living environment. Other general improvements to facilities were also noted throughout the year.

Food provision was broadly regarded as acceptable and prisoners often acknowledged and appreciated the improvements made during the year, though continued to report limited variety.

Accommodation was sufficient. There were repeated concerns raised by prisoners related to basic supplies, including toiletries and cutlery, which residential staff confirmed, regarding the stock held in the halls, despite there being sufficient availability in the central stores.

Ventilation and airflow, particularly during warmer weather, was the main concern raised by prisoners. Stairwell windows were permanently closed but during the movement of prisoner airflow was improved as the doors were opened. End of section landing windows could be opened by first-line managers as required. A ventilation and air-extraction system also operated to support temperature regulation. As measures were introduced during the cooler winter months, the effect of these security-led changes will be monitored during the 2026/27 reporting year.

Access to personal hygiene items, either issued by the prison or purchased via the canteen, was generally sufficient; however, concerns about affordability were raised. While the range and availability of canteen items felt appropriate, concerns about cost due to the historical and static national prisoner wage earnings policy and spend limits, largely unchanged for 14 years, were increasingly viewed as having implications for decency and fairness alongside the cost-of-living increases in the community.

Overall, a good standard of daily living conditions was maintained; however, there were some ongoing and emerging concerns which required ongoing attention locally and at SPS headquarters.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

Monitoring evidence throughout the year suggested that most prisoners felt safe, and staff responded appropriately to concerns and risks related to violence, bullying, and harm. Prisoners frequently described a calmer and safer environment compared with other prisons, and many reported confidence that staff would take concerns seriously.

Observations across residential halls and the SRU showed courteous staff engagement, structured routines, and use of risk management measures, including Management of an Offender Suspected to be at Risk due to the ingestion of a Substance (MORS) with healthcare involvement as required. Active oversight of safety arrangements and periods of reduced MORS levels were noted. This included a greater emphasis placed on support and recovery versus punishment.

Illicit substance use remained a persistent underlying concern, with these substances contributing to unpredictable behaviour and medical emergencies. While these incidents were managed well, they nonetheless affected perceptions of safety and stability. Where observed, incidents were dealt with swiftly and proportionately.

The establishment was generally safe and well-managed, with proportionate responses to risks, and security and safety arrangements in place, despite ongoing challenges associated with illicit substance use and items.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

Monitoring of this standard indicated that day-to-day routines, movements, and interactions were generally calm and orderly, and that authority was mostly exercised in a courteous, proportionate, and respectful manner.

Orderly room procedures were conducted well, with prisoners given clear explanations and opportunities to engage.

The Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) frequently operated at or near capacity, but was managed effectively, with efforts to support and progress reintegration. Sustained pressure on segregation arrangements, including the increased use of segregation within halls, was of concern. Ensuring those held on a prison rule within halls received their entitlements alongside the regular routine and regime for prisoners on the hall was increasingly challenging for residential staff.

Routine and intelligence led search procedures were completed in line with the national policy, including use of the body scanner, strip-searching, and random quarterly cell searches. We continue to query the use of routine strip searching in tandem with the use of the body scanner. During searches, prisoners' property was respected and wider property management processes appeared effective.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

Relationships between staff and prisoners were consistently respectful. IPMs observed positive, respectful interactions between staff and prisoners across the establishment. Staff were widely described by prisoners as approachable, courteous, and willing to listen, supporting a positive culture.

However, confidence in the complaint system remained low. While processes were generally followed, prisoners mostly perceived the system as ineffective. While IPMs observed that Internal Complaint Committees were conducted fairly and professionally, the wider complaint system was perceived negatively. This issue is a concern nationally and has been raised by IPMs for many years. HMIPS welcomed the August 2025 Scottish Human Rights Commission's (SHRC) report, [Access to Justice for Prisoners: The Complaints System](#) and echo the SHRCs call for urgent

reform, grounded in human rights principles and informed by the experiences of prisoners and their families.

The regime in place since December 2024 generally worked well, although there were frequent times throughout the year where work areas were not operational mainly because of staff shortages. A further regime change was implemented from February 2026, following a staff roster review and SPS wide consideration of the overcrowding across the Scottish prison estate. The new regime was still in its infancy and whilst still settling in there was evidence of adjustments being made and ongoing review by managers.

Overall, a respectful culture was evident, characterised by positive staff-prisoner relationships and courteous day-to-day interactions. However, longstanding concerns regarding the complaints system continued to undermine confidence. While regime changes during the year were largely well managed, ongoing operational pressures highlighted the need for continued monitoring as new arrangements became embedded.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Visits and family engagement were a strength throughout the year. Direct IPM observations repeatedly noted a well-maintained and welcoming visit environment, with child-focused resources and clear information for families. Special events were well organised, inclusive, and highly valued, including Easter, Halloween and Christmas activities, homework clubs, and themed family visits. Prisoners and families consistently highlighted feeling welcomed, accommodated, and supported, including families with additional support needs and for first-time visitors. The whole-family approach was frequently described as uniquely welcoming and supportive by families and prisoners.

Work, education and learning opportunities were generally meaningful and positively received by prisoners. Direct IPM observations highlighted good engagement in work sheds (including woodwork, textiles, recycling, and bike sheds), education classes, art provision, and the production of the STIR magazine. Prisoners frequently reported gaining a sense of purpose, structure, and improved wellbeing through participation, describing work and education as transformative. The education area, which had the library located within it, was well resourced and prisoners were positively engaged in the opportunities available. However, operational pressures led to temporary work shed closures, varied attendance, and concerns from some groups (notably offence-protection prisoners) regarding equitable access to meaningful work, qualifications, and sufficient education class time.

Gym, health and wellbeing activities were observed to be well attended, with staff actively encouraging participation. Changes to gym provision and targeted activities, including the introduction of a Hyrox programme, contributed to increased participation. Outdoor exercise continued consistently in all weather conditions and was observed and reported by prisoners to support their morale and social interaction.

The Hub and other purposeful activities provided notably good opportunities, offering recovery programmes, mindfulness, creative arts which supported expression, helpful habits and peer connection. The Hub area was expanded during the year, increasing opportunities. The Support and Wellbeing Team regularly worked with individuals, encouraged and identified opportunities to support needs and worked with a range of external partners, including Creative Change Collective and Keep the Heid, and provided a range of opportunities from mental health workshops to yoga classes.

Overall, there was sustained good practice in family engagement and a wide range of meaningful and purposeful activities. Identified concerns related primarily to consistency of access and equality of opportunity for all residential groups.

Standard 7: Transition from Custody into the Community

Progression and transition planning appeared structured and supported, despite being affected by national programme delivery issues.

Direct observation of Risk Management Team (RMT) meetings demonstrated skilled, fair, and multidisciplinary decision-making, supported by comprehensive documentation and action planning. Good engagement between case management staff, psychology, social work, and external partners was evident and supported informed decision-making. Where progression was not approved, next steps were routinely and clearly outlined.

Family Contact Officers regularly supported prisoners and families to understand progression, helping to reduce anxiety and misinformation. Where prisoners raised concerns, IPMs often observed prompt efforts by staff to clarify processes and provide explanations.

There were national limitations around programme availability, pressure on places at prisons offering National Top End opportunities, and particular complexities affecting foreign national prisoners where SPS policies allowing equitable opportunity for progression were not supported by Home Office “flight risk” vetoes. These issues all affected individual prisoner experiences and increased the time men were held in custody.

Overall, the prison worked constructively to support progression and transition planning. While national factors constrained outcomes for some prisoners, local processes were generally fair, transparent, and supportive.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

Organisational procedures were largely understood and implemented consistently. Leadership was visible and staff were engaged, with good awareness of roles and responsibilities across the establishment.

Changes were generally well understood by staff, clearly explained, and embedded in practice. Staff training and development were consistent strengths, with regular training and good practice embedded through mentoring, first-line manager shadowing, and being clear about the expectations of roles. These initiatives supported staff competence, particularly during periods of staff turnover and change.

Equality and diversity practice showed mixed evidence. There was targeted support for foreign national prisoners reflected through, for example, an informal but proactive approach whereby a named member of staff and a passman made themselves available to support foreign nationals to navigate the virtual visits system. However, this did not appear to be consistently applied across the prison and therefore understanding of equality and diversity responsibilities and support appeared inconsistent.

Overall, the prison demonstrated positive leadership and staff development, while continuing to manage ongoing operational pressures.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

IPMs observed healthcare staff dispensing medication in the halls in a caring, attentive, and respectful manner. Winter flu vaccination planning was well organised, with successful delivery of flu vaccination clinics across residential halls and a good uptake among prisoners. Staff responded compassionately to prisoners with health and care concerns, including during what sometimes had to be short, time-limited interactions due to regime constraints.

Mental good health was noted to be closely linked with purposeful activity. Discussions highlighted positive outcomes of regular access to work, education, and the Hub etc. Arrangements with mental health and psychiatric services were reported to be in place where needed.

Staffing pressures within healthcare were evident during some monitoring visits, due to staff sickness absence and high workload. This raised some concerns about capacity and continuity, particularly at weekends. Some prisoners reported delays and communication gaps regarding appointments. Concerns raised by SPS staff were primarily around substance use and the fluctuating numbers of people on MORS, but this was felt to be well managed within existing processes.

Overall, healthcare was delivered competently and compassionately, notwithstanding occasional short-term pressures.