



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP GRAMPIAN

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	105	109
	Total number of missed weeks	0	0
	Total number of prisoner requests received	153	237
	Total number of IPM hours	624	605

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.

Despite the IPM team diminishing in numbers over the course of the reporting period, an unprecedented level of prisoner requests was handled and completed by them. There were on average twice the statutory minimum level of weekly visits carried out, and there were no weeks where a statutory visit was missed.

Generally, the prison worked well despite the key issues it faced in terms of low staffing levels (both SPS staff and NHS staff), and the effects of overcrowding. Staff worked very hard in overcoming these issues to ensure that prisoners benefitted from time out of cell and a range of purposeful activity.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

IPMs monitored the arrangements and information available for staff and prisoners for the General Election on 4 July 2024. IPMs spoke with around 20 remand prisoners about voting in the general election. Only one of these prisoners had voted (postal vote), the rest said they did not know how to vote. IPMs also surveyed various members of staff, approximately 30, to see if they were aware of the Governor and Management Action notice (GMA) and the majority said that they were not. Senior management made it clear to IPMs that the GMA was available on the SPS Intranet, however it was clear to IPMs, given the outcome of their discussions with staff, that this was not an effective way to communicate the GMA to the wider staffing group. Ultimately, IPMs were concerned that remand prisoners were not sufficiently facilitated to exercise their democratic right to vote. That being the case, there were no prisoner comments or complaints made by prisoners to IPMs on the matter. Senior management have subsequently introduced a new process for the distribution and action of future GMAs which will improve communications of this nature.

IPMs observed the reception process throughout the year and were satisfied that prisoners were dealt with in a friendly and efficient manner. However, given that toilet facilities are not available on

GEOAmey vans, IPMs felt that the waterproof bags for motion sickness that have routinely been used for prisoners in an emergency were especially unsuitable for female prisoners to urinate in. IPMs also felt that on arrival in reception staff should ensure that toilet facilities are available to prisoners as soon as possible, rather than a half hour wait after a long journey, which was the experience of two female prisoners who raised this matter with IPMs.

Prisoners who arrived from other prisons were not offered a further induction at HMP Grampian but due to the different systems operating in other establishments prisoners felt that a further induction would have been helpful. However, after the initial induction there is a ten day follow up meeting with hall staff where they go over the salient points of induction to ensure that prisoners have fully understood the procedures in Grampian. IPMs felt this was beneficial to prisoners as they have a lot to take in when they first arrive.

IPMs were talked through the procedure for calculating a prisoner's Earliest Date of Liberation (EDL) and were impressed with the thoroughness of the process. Whilst most dates were calculated automatically within the system, where calculations had to be done manually, for example where there were concurrent sentences, these were double checked at all stages to ensure that accurate information was put on record. Where there had been a change in the EDL this was conveyed to the prisoner in a clear and concise manner.

Standard 2: Decency

IPMs reported that there was an insufficient supply of clean bedding, clothing, underwear and towels. They checked the store on Ellon level 3, which seemed to have little in it. Staff confirmed it was an issue, in part caused by prisoners taking more items than they were entitled to keep. Staff confirmed that positive action would be taken to address this and the problems were eventually resolved, albeit a couple of months after IPMs first reported it.

Prisoners spoke positively about the food on offer at the prison. Prisoners were also consulted about changes to the food menus at monthly co-production meetings, which IPMs welcomed.

At the start of July 2024 IPMs reported that there had been no instances of doubling up of cells for a while. While emergency release measures had freed up some spaces, numbers eventually rose again. IPMs were later made aware of 'doubling up' in Banff using bunk beds, where the cells did not meet the minimum standard for floor space. It was recognised that these were implemented as temporary measures but concerning, nevertheless. Staff there informed IPMs that the aim was to ensure that any doubling up for any one prisoner would only be for a few days at most. While overcrowding is clearly an issue, the prison staff were doing all they could to mitigate the effects. For example, management and staff discussed prisoner population levels at daily planning and tasking meetings, and in conjunction with SPS HQ. If the prison was likely to be over capacity contingencies were put in place to ensure the comfort of prisoners. This action also ensured that prisoners were not needlessly transferred to other prisons. Later in the reporting period IPMs learned that prisoner numbers had dropped, which relieved the situation.

Staff said they did not anticipate the increased population would bring any difficulty with regards to complying with the one hour of exercise per day, nor any issues with food or laundry. Plans were in place to ensure there was enough clothing. It was acknowledged there would be problems with work opportunities due to the extra population. Ultimately the opening up of Cruden Hall relieved some pressure. The move of 25 prisoners to the newly opened Cruden improved space in the Ellon flats and officers in Ellon said they felt under less stress. IPMs commented that it certainly felt much quieter with more space for prisoners to move around in.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

IPMs checked some records relating to Management of an Offender suspected to be at Risk due to the ingestion of a Substance (MORS) and not for the first time found evidence of prisoners supposed to be on observations with no record about these being completed. The Unit Manager was made aware and said that he had already raised the issue with staff. IPMs discussed MORS with the Governor and Deputy Governor who said that the impact of illicit substances within the prison continued as an ongoing challenge. The increase in synthetic drugs had also brought a range of responses in those taking them, including violence and depression, which staff at the prison had to manage. IPMs heard evidence of how staff were working hard to prevent drugs getting into the prison.

The NHS confirmed that 38% of the population of Grampian were on drug treatment and accessing recovery interventions.

IPMs spoke with staff on Ellon 3 about bullying amongst prisoners and were advised that there were very few problems encountered. Where movement of prisoners was required, for instance for cell sharing, then a risk assessment of all parties was carried out. IPMs had some concerns over the information available to prisoners about the anti-bullying strategy. While there were plenty of posters regarding bullying, none of these seemed to say what to do and there was incomplete awareness of the strategy among staff. IPMs raised the issue with Senior Management and were informed work was under way to improve the situation. IPMs were later pleased to see that this work was moving forward.

IPMs reported very positively on the work of the Outreach Team, who worked closely with prisoners in situations of vulnerability.

IPMs were pleased to note that there were two Listeners in place in the newly opened Cruden Hall, with more in training. According to prisoners that IPMs spoke with, they were greatly respected and good to talk to.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

IPMs confirmed that a process was in place to ensure that where a prisoner wished to gift another prisoner some of their property, this could be registered on the receiving prisoner's property card. This helped prevent prisoners bullying others for their belongings.

IPMs looked in to whether staff in Banff had now stopped the routine strip searching of female prisoners (following a key HMIPS inspection recommendation). The Unit Manager explained that this had been stopped in April 2024, which IPMs welcomed. IPMs discussed the arrangements for searching female prisoners and were satisfied that they were appropriate. New body scanners had been put in place, which increased the dignity of those being searched.

The Governor confirmed to IPMs that there was a move to have televisions installed in the safer cells and IPMs welcomed this. IPMs commented that because the televisions would be required to be fitted into the wall at great expense it was good that this was still being considered as important.

IPMs monitored the holding of prisoners in the SRU on various Rules (Rule 95(11); Rule 41; and Refusing to Return to Circulation (RRC). They looked at related paperwork and no issues were identified. There was evidence of some prisoners improving (later entries in Talk to Me paperwork were more positive than initial entries, for example). IPMs also confirmed that prisoners held in the SRU were able to get family visits.

IPMs discovered that there were issues when it came to transferring prisoner's property between prisons. For example, one prisoner had been waiting to receive his property from Barlinnie for some months despite every effort being made by Grampian staff to locate it. Another prisoner had been waiting to receive his property from Castle Huntly for some weeks. IPMs were keen to

emphasise that it was no criticism of HMP Grampian staff, who evidently tried to help at all stages. IPMs felt that this should receive more priority nationally given the cost of the hours wasted in chasing up examples such as these.

IPMs attended an orderly room for a foreign national prisoner who required an interpreter, which was arranged. He was treated with care and attention, ensuring that he understood the process at all stages. This all took a considerable amount of time, in view of the requirement for an interpreter, but the officers were still considerate and helpful to the prisoner. IPMs observed other orderly room hearings. One was adjourned for an officer, who was not on duty, to be in attendance, and two were dismissed because the charge was incorrect on the charge sheet. IPMs felt that the whole process was delayed or exacerbated by minor problems in completing the correct procedure or ensuring the correct charge was laid. This was not a reflection on the officers who carried out the orderly room process with care but indicated a need for wider training amongst the staff group.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

IPMs noted some concern over staff morale although IPMs mainly observed positive, individualised staff-prisoner relations with staff building these under challenging circumstances (for example challenging the behaviour of a prisoner expressing racist views). IPMs witnessed a good example of pastoral care with staff allowing a prisoner, who was getting agitated, to settle down in private before returning to his section

IPMs observed the Interpretation Service in operation and felt it operated well. The prisoner in receipt of the service complimented it. Food menus were available in foreign languages. The library was able to provide books and other reading material in foreign languages.

IPMs attended Co-Production Meetings, the Grampian prisoner consultation councils, during the reporting period. These covered all the halls and communication between management and the prisoners was excellent. Whilst the prisoners were keen to negotiate their requirements, they were also reasonable in their requests. Issues were clearly identified along with SPS' responses and prisoners felt that they had contributed to improving their living conditions. There was a good rapport between prisoners and staff. Similarly, the minutes of these meetings were effective, clearly identifying what was discussed, date of next meeting etc.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

IPMs observed work taking place in the woodwork and charity workshops. Prisoners in both expressed their satisfaction with the work. Staff were equally complimentary of the work done by the prisoners and said that the workshops were running well. There were some prospects for work upon release because of what prisoners were learning on the job. There was consensus among prisoners, staff, and IPMs that the Greene King initiative was excellent. IPMs also spoke with prisoners across a range of workshops, and the general view was one of positivity.

IPMs spoke to two prisoners who were on remand and both of them had been given jobs. This is good practice as there is no requirement in the prison rules for the prison to provide this.

IPMs were pleased to hear that language support was available in the library. The Sign-Up Sheet for the library was available in 12 languages and there were also pages of translations of well used phrases that a prisoner will need. Newspapers were provided in different languages. The library provision and engagement at the prison is very good.

IPMs looked at the timetable for which sections visited the library throughout the week. While some sections had two opportunities, other sections only had one. IPMs were concerned at the lack of parity of access, however prison management explained that it was the enhanced regimes that got an extra weekly visit to the library, as part of their enhanced status (rather than there being disparity

with other regimes). The librarian advised that 87% of the prison population accessed the library, which IPMs thought was impressive.

Staff in charge of visits did not seem to be aware that remand prisoners were entitled to daily visits during the week (according to Prison Rule 64). Management said that 'Post COVID' this was not happening nationally. This is a breach of Scottish Prison Rules and needs to be addressed. It was noted that all prisoners had further access to virtual visits, the possibility of requesting double visits and for those eligible, family visits. IPMs reported that the visits facility was excellent, well run, and beneficial for all who used it, including the children of prisoners.

IPMs were delighted to hear that HMP Grampian prisoners were very successful at the Koestler Awards, noting that it was a boost for the prisoners and an encouragement for others to take part.

Several prisoners raised the cost of telephone calls and asked whether there could be a monthly contract as there is on the outside where they could pay a fixed fee for unlimited telephone calls. Management explained that the phone contracts were managed centrally by SPS but that they were able to give feedback of this nature to the relevant Head Office Team for consideration. Prisoners were still provided with 200 free minutes per month, which was implemented as a COVID measure, whereas before they had to pay for all calls. IPMs had no concerns about prisoners getting access to phone calls.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

IPMs reported that there was a feeling of desperation among many prisoners that they were not able to access the programmes that they require to progress to the open estate or count towards parole. IPMs acknowledged that SPS were looking at programme delivery across the estate following the HMIPS Thematic Review of Progression, but nonetheless major concerns remained about progression (estate-wide rather than specific to Grampian).

IPMs visited Aberlour Community Integration Unit. It was noted that there had been relatively few prisoners at the start of the reporting period, although this increased significantly as the year went on. IPMs acknowledged that only prisoners who meet the criteria can reside there. IPMs were informed that there were some prisoners who had been earmarked but had not been able to get onto programmes. Each prisoner in Aberlour was assessed for suitability on a case-by-case basis. For example, one female prisoner had been earmarked, but this would have meant her being on her own in Aberlour facing potential loneliness, which would not have been suitable. All female prisoners were given the opportunity to be considered for Aberlour for the last eight weeks of their sentence. IPMs understood that prisoners in Aberlour had no access to the rest of the prison (e.g. gym, worksheds) where they may come in to contact with other prisoners because of the security implications.

IPMs visited the newly opened Cruden. The FLM was happy with how things were going to help prisoners progress. There were five prisoners per personal officer which meant that they could devote more time to prisoners to help them progress. IPMs welcomed this. Prisoners and staff in Cruden spoke highly of their experiences of living and working there. As it housed an enhanced regime for lower risk prisoners it was positive for prisoners' progression.

IPMs discussed with Social Work staff the arrangements for ensuring prisoners had accommodation on release. The Head of Social Work confirmed the team was well staffed and they had a good relationship with Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Councils which was helpful. They did say however that they found it more difficult to build the same relationships with local authorities who were further away, and those in England. The Head of Social Work also said that one of the difficulties they experienced was finding accommodation for, mostly female prisoners, returning to the Highlands when they were unexpectedly bailed. They had tried to liaise with the courts to hear these cases earlier in the day, but they have apparently not been very supportive. Sometimes they had to house prisoners in hotels. Despite such instances they confirmed that they could get most

prisoners accommodated. Prisoners were entitled to support for one year after release and this was provided by Third Sector Charities.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

The shortage of staff was having an impact on staff welfare. There was evidence of purposeful activity being cancelled to allow staff to cover in residential areas. Some staff confirmed that morale had been affected.

IPMs were very impressed with the arrangements put in place to allow a family member to visit their brother, who was in end-of-life care at the prison, to be there with him when he died. The family member expressed their gratitude at how they had been treated by staff during this visit.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

NHS staff shortages were a common issue throughout the reporting period. IPMs heard that staffing issues had made provision of the service challenging. NHS staff said there had also been some logistical issues in terms of prisoners missing appointments because they had not been taken to the NHS hub. When IPMs enquired into this they found there had been some 'operational issues' occurring in the prison, which made the movement of prisoners difficult. A robust process was put in place with SPS staff specifically dedicated to escorting prisoners to and from appointments at the Health Centre which was welcomed.

Prisoners stated they found it difficult to get appointments at the Health Centre, and this was backed up by officers. NHS staff confirmed to IPMs in April that the three-week referral period for an appointment was not being met due to staff shortages. IPMs also found issues with psychiatry referrals, in that prisoners appeared to be left without confirmation that a referral had been made. Several prisoners complained that they had not received confirmation of medical appointments.

IPMs were made aware of a backlog in NHS complaints. IPMs also suggested that the practice of responding to some complaints verbally rather than in writing may have been the reason, in part, that some prisoners told IPMs that they had not received a response. NHS staff responded to say that their complaints process was the same as that available to patients in the community. Towards the end of the year IPMs were advised that the number of outstanding complaints for the Health Centre to deal with was between six and eight which was good to hear.

IPMs witnessed a huge amount of work going on in the Health Centre to support a prisoner who had multiple health problems. IPMs thought work was well coordinated and the nurses were working hard to arrange all aspects of care. NHS staff managed the process well.

The prison provided a good range of support for prisoners struggling with addiction.

Medication timings had been an issue previously with IPMs reporting that morning medications were being administered quite late in the morning. IPMs were pleased to note mid-July that the NHS had brought in more staff to help improve the situation. The NHS were also bringing in more Mental Health specialists.

IPMs had a concern that the medical marker process seemed inconsistent where prisoners were transferred between prisons/NHS Board areas. IPMs found examples where prisoners at Grampian were not being managed according to medical markers that had been in place at a previous prison. It was recognised that different NHS Boards had different approaches to decision making – this is also true in the community – and an improved process was put in place towards the end of the reporting period whereby all prisoners are screened and reassessed for medical markers upon arrival at the prison as part of the reception process. IPMs suggested that the policy itself at a national level merited attention.

The waiting list for the optician was running at 200 in January and the optician was only contracted to see six to eight patients on the monthly visit. Management looked to see what could be improved and introduced a stock of spectacles to replace lost or broken ones, whilst prisoners awaited replacement prescription glasses.



Key Issues

1. SPS Staffing
2. NHS Staffing and service delivery
3. Overcrowding



Encouraging Observations

The Outreach Team was identified by IPMs as being an excellent example of good practice in providing support for hard to reach prisoners and those in situations of vulnerability.