

PRISON	THE BELLA CENTRE		YEAR	1 AUGUST 2022 – 31 MARCH 2023	
Total number of visits	37	Total number of missed weeks	1	Total number of IPM hours	114
Total number of prisoner requests received	1	Number of IPMs in the team (as at 31 March)			5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of key Independent Prison Monitor (IPM) observations at Bella from the point of opening, week commencing 1 August 2022 to 31 March 2023. The statutory duty of at least one visit per week fell short with one week missed due to unforeseen circumstances, however additional visits were undertaken. The total number of IPM hours, time spent monitoring in the Bella Centre was slightly elevated as IPMs had been unable to visit prior to the opening. All IPMs monitored in other establishments, however the experiences and learning for IPMs were equally as new for them as it was for the women and staff who live and work in The Bella Centre.

Staffing levels seemed satisfactory, although the population was low and did not reach the potential capacity. Inevitably there were some challenges following the opening of Bella. However, it was positive to see the women who lived there were as motivated as staff to work together to learn, generate ideas and find solutions to overcome any teething issues, this included understanding and patience when immediate resolution was not possible. Change affects everyone differently and can be part of everyday life for everyone. There were obvious supportive relationships between the women, supporting each other, and staff. There were clear ongoing efforts by staff to develop and build relationships with the local community and third sector partners to develop opportunities.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Standard 1 – Lawful and transparent custody

All women either progressed or transferred to Bella from another establishment. Staff at Bella had the advantage of knowing who was arriving and when. IPMs reported that, on the whole, the women confirmed they had a positive experience moving to Bella. The induction process was complemented by pre-move visits and or conversations i.e., some women were able to visit Bella before their move. However, where that did not happen, they had met and spoken with their personal officer in advance of their move which women reported to be very helpful in immediately establishing a relationship. This was seen by IPMs as a good practice and helped to support the move and change of environment.

Overall RAG rating

□	□	✓
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<p>Standard 2 - Decency</p> <p>The standard of the facilities was impressive, IPMs confirmed there was a high standard of cleanliness, and both the houses and communal areas were kept clean and tidy. The houses and communal spaces were well equipped, and the women commented on the big changes in such simple things i.e. being able to control the shower temperature, having their own space (bedroom, shower, and toilet v shared/communal). Women cooked their own meals in their house using products that each had purchased in their weekly shop. The Catering Manager regularly met with the women to support healthy choices, meal, and weekly shop planning.</p> <p>Immediately post-opening there were inevitable teething issues i.e., insufficient fridge/freezer storage space for perishable goods; issues linked to the canteen and online weekly shopping and delayed deliveries. Some women commented that the sofas and chairs in the living space were uncomfortable. However, there was exceptional two-way communication. The majority of issues raised were swiftly rectified, although where that was not possible the position was explained ensuring that there was a good understanding of what could and could not be done and the relevant timescales.</p>	□	□	✓
<p>Standard 3 – Personal safety</p> <p>IPMs did not report any key issues. The women were all very positive, felt safe, supported, and able to speak with staff.</p>	□	□	✓
<p>Standard 4 – Effective, courteous, and humane use of authority</p> <p>Bella does not have a Separation and Reintegration Unit and the women were more able to move around Bella than they would have been used to in a closed prison. However, Bella has processes and procedures in place to ensure the safe lawful running and operation of the unit. IPMs did highlight an issue regarding timely communication of decisions, for example those related to Risk Management Team (RMT) meeting decisions. However, women felt comfortable speaking with staff about this and staff listened and looked to explain the position or find out for them.</p>	□	□	✓
<p>Standard 5 – Respect, autonomy, and protection of mistreatment</p> <p>IPMs confirmed that Bella had a calm, relaxed atmosphere, and observed extremely positive interactions between the staff and women. The women universally agreed, from day one of their experiences at Bella, that staff were welcoming, friendly, approachable, helpful, and supportive. All women knew who their personal officer was and felt that they could speak with other staff too and that they were treated like an individual.</p> <p>There was a weekly ‘coffee cup’ meeting on a Monday morning which was well attended. This was a regular opportunity to have conversations with each other and staff about activities, events, and canteen etc. and to put their ideas forward. It was also an opportunity to think about the week ahead, what activities and events were happening. Weekly shopping orders were often done at this time, with a member of staff and the Catering Manager to ensure orders supported balanced healthy meal choices. IPMs reported that there were not any notes taken or shared. This may be helpful as a reminder for both staff and women of the discussion and what was agreed to be explored.</p>	□	□	✓

<p>Standard 6 – Purposeful activity</p> <p>In the initial months post opening the ‘newness’ seemed to prevail with IPMs reporting a positive feeling evident from the women. There were limited jobs available within Bella, therefore the women had to start adapting from a stricter regime and take more responsibility, supported by staff, around how they used their time. Visits appeared to work well, and it was an inviting environment for family and friends, especially for children. IPMs reported that the women and staff spoke of the many different opportunities, and the women appeared to embrace learning opportunities.</p> <p>While staff continued ongoing efforts to identify opportunities in the community, there were other key aspects such as meal planning, weekly grocery shopping and cookery classes. Activities and events were varied and included taking part in the Recovery Walk, organising a McMillan Coffee morning, creative activities, and International Women’s Day. However, women increasingly indicated aspects of boredom and part of this linked to adapting to having more personal responsibility of how to use their time. However, Bella was still in its infancy and opportunities within the community, particular for partners who may come into Bella, continued to be explored and to get partnership agreements in place.</p>	□	✓	□
<p>Standard 7 – Transition from Custody to the community</p> <p>The move to Bella provided an opportunity to further or begin their individual transition with close working and support from staff, particularly their personal officer and community partners. IPMs heard of some frustrations from the women around the lack of community access and it was unclear how the women’s expectations were being managed by the SPS. Some women also felt there was a lack of progression, delays in relation to community-based social work reports and first grant of temporary release applications would be detrimental to their Parole Board meetings etc. There was a perception, for some, that they may have progressed more rapidly elsewhere.</p> <p>It was disappointing that the positive experiences and individual preparations were dampened when some experiences did not align with expectations. However, as the year progressed IPMs reported good evidence of a structure coming together, further plans to increase workplaces and community access opportunities for those who met the criteria. Some changes also enabled RMT to pick up pace. Overall, it appeared to be an upward trajectory - positive for the future.</p> <p>During the reporting year individuals were liberated from Bella. IPMs heard from women of experiences, including plans with services outside Bella, which may not have happened if there had not been awareness of the services. Staff explained that on liberation, someone picking up the individual is invited into Bella, so it is a more relaxed liberation.</p>	□	✓	□
<p>Standard 8 – Organisational effectiveness</p> <p>IPMs confirmed that staff were really passionate about the new facility and the approach set out in the ‘Strategy for Women in Custody: 2021-2025’. Although there were some issues from a practical perspective, staff were keen to make it work and maintain and promote the positive trajectory, and all were keen to build on the lessons learned post opening. Staff completed specific training to work in Bella and it was a learning curve for many. There were ongoing efforts by staff to build relationships with partners and the community and to create opportunities within and out with Bella.</p>	□	□	✓

<p>Standard 9 – Health and wellbeing</p> <p>Some challenges raised by healthcare i.e. the working space within Bella, staffing and dispensing of medication. Although there were slight concerns regarding the healthcare, both Healthcare and Bella management were working together in continued efforts to ensure there was a fit for purpose healthcare provision, including prescribing. The challenges were well managed and were not reflected in the experiences voiced by the women. There were some frustrations with NHS waiting times, reflective of the community setting, however generally women spoke positively and health appointments outside of Bella appeared to be good and happened promptly. IPMs heard that some nurses joined some of the activities with the women, building relationships, and of health-related activities, including a five-week pain association workshop.</p>	□	□	✓
<p>RAG (Red, Amber, Green) status key: Some serious concerns Some slight concerns No concerns / good practice</p>			
<p><i>RAG rating: where IPMs felt each standard would be rated given their experience - not a complete analysis but based on their judgement.</i></p>			

KEY ISSUES	
1.	Work parties and community placements
2.	Embedding, adapting and familiarisation – an ongoing learning curve for both the women and staff

ENCOURAGING OBSERVATIONS
<p>From the outset there were good relationships, strengthened by pre-move visits either to Bella or by the Bella personal officers to where the women were located. IPMs heard from some of the women that management also spoke with them shortly after arriving, which was positive, as often previous experiences of speaking with management was around a negative issue e.g. an orderly room. Management also made significant ongoing efforts to address the challenges to identify and enable community partners to deliver services within Bella, and the trajectory of opportunities in the community and community access, for those that met the criteria appeared positive.</p>

CONCLUSION
<p>The SPS have made stepped progress towards delivery against the ‘Strategy for Women in Custody: 2021-2025’ following the opening of the Women’s Community Custody Units (WCCUs) during 2022, and plans for the new national custodial facility and assessment centre for women, HMP YOI Stirling, due to open by summer 2023. The independent evaluation of the WCCUs, which is underway, will be an early insight to the person-centred, gender specific and trauma informed approach, and how the learning and best practice is shared and implemented across the wider SPS women’s estate, and in the longer term the male estate.</p> <p>Bella had been operational for nine months (35 weeks) by the end of the reporting year. From the outset the women and staff recognised that that this was the first unit of its kind in Scotland and new for all those living and working there. They were keen to work together, highlight any issues, learn, adapt, and suggest improvements – this has continued since opening and the positive relationships between the women and all staff working within The Bella Centre were evident.</p>