



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:
HMP EDINBURGH

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



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	73	92	148
	Total number of missed weeks:	3	1	2
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	134	199	200
	Total number of IPM hours:	254	380	524

Executive Summary

This Annual Monitoring Report presents the findings of Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) at HMP Edinburgh over the reporting year, based on regular monitoring visits, engagement with prisoners and staff, and observation of daily prison life. The IPM team was able to increase the number of times they visited compared with previous years, visiting an average of three times each week and more than doubling the hours spent in the prison compared with 2023-2024. Across the year, IPMs observed a prison operating under sustained and significant pressure, particularly arising from overcrowding, staffing constraints, and the management of an increasingly complex prisoner population. Within these constraints, staff at all levels were frequently observed demonstrating expertise, care, and commitment.

Overall, conditions in many areas of the prison were orderly and generally calm. Reception processes were often observed to be respectful and supportive, induction staff and peer supporters were described as engaged and empathetic, and several areas of purposeful activity, when accessible, were of good quality and positively regarded by prisoners. IPMs repeatedly noted constructive staff–prisoner relationships in work parties, education, chaplaincy, visits, and support services such as the Recovery Café.

However, the ability of the prison to deliver a decent regime for all prisoners was limited by persistent staffing and population pressures. Overcrowding was an issue throughout the year, and cells designed for one person continued to be used to accommodate two. Staffing shortages, exacerbated by sickness, maternity leave, and redeployment, affected time out of cell, access to activities, and consistency of supervision on residential halls. These pressures were raised repeatedly by both staff and prisoners and were reflected in the monitoring by IPMs.

IPMs also observed growing concern among prisoners about the affordability of items available through the prison canteen. As at other prisons, prisoners raised issues about rising prices and the impact of the wider cost-of-living crisis on their ability to meet basic personal needs. This was compounded by the fact that prisoner wages and weekly canteen spending limits have remained unchanged for years. While the quality and delivery of canteen provision itself was acceptable, IPMs considered affordability to be an increasing concern with implications for perceptions of decency and fairness within the prison.

In relation to personal safety, HMP Edinburgh was generally calm and stable, which was positive given the complexity of the population and ongoing challenges relating to drugs, serious, organised crime, and the high number of prisoners on protection. IPMs recognise the significant efforts made by staff to maintain a safe environment. This stability was achieved alongside significant constraints to the regime, including much reduced access to activity and some reductions in time out of cell.

While overall stability was maintained, IPMs continued to record concerns raised by prisoners about bullying, intimidation, and inconsistent staff presence on residential areas, indicating that safety challenges remained at an individual level.

During the reporting year, IPMs were saddened to learn of eight deaths in custody, apparently five from natural causes, two completed suicides, and one drug-related. The causes of the deaths will not formally be determined until the Fatal Accident Inquiry. IPMs recorded these events with sympathy and acknowledged the loss these deaths represent to families, friends, prisoners, staff, and the wider prison community. The prison had developed a comprehensive approach to bereavement support for prisoners, staff and families, which has been recognised nationally.

Across the nine inspection and monitoring standards, performance was mixed. Some areas showed stability or modest improvement compared with the previous year, particularly in reception, elements of induction, cleanliness in many areas, and the quality of activity where it took place. Other issues, most notably overcrowding, staffing pressures, access to healthcare, and the consistency of prisoners' experience, remained persistent and generally unresolved over the year. Taken together, these issues reflected sustained pressure on the prison's ability to deliver a consistent, safe and purposeful regime for all prisoners, despite the continued efforts of staff.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Across the reporting year, IPMs observed generally respectful and authoritative conduct in reception and some elements of induction. However, induction was not delivered consistently or within expected timescales for all prisoners, and some prisoners reported not receiving sufficient information about prison rules or procedures. These gaps affected prisoners' ability to understand their status, access services, and navigate the prison system effectively.

Reception and admission processes were often observed to be calm, orderly, and conducted with care. IPMs noted staff engaging patiently with new arrivals, offering reassurance, and allowing time for questions. Peer supporters involved in induction were widely regarded as conscientious and empathetic, and when induction sessions took place, they were generally of good quality.

Despite this, induction arrangements were not reliable. Prisoners reported delays in receiving induction, in some cases waiting significantly longer than expected after arrival. As recorded last year, induction was not provided for all prisoners on remand. Some reported not being provided with information on prison rules or feeling unclear about how the prison operated in practice. These concerns were raised intermittently across the year rather than as isolated incidents, indicating a recurring issue rather than a one-off failure. While the prison has set out its position regarding the delivery of induction, and to whom it should be offered, IPMs did not observe a clearly articulated rationale for the approach taken, or how it was in prisoners' best interests. These processes did not meet the expectations of the monitoring and inspection standards.

While IPMs observed ongoing challenges in ensuring timely and consistent access to translation and information in appropriate formats, the prison had taken steps to improve its approach. This included investment in translation services, the use of staff language skills, and structured equality and diversity processes. However, monitoring evidence suggests that these measures could not always be relied upon by prisoners at the point of reception and early custody.

As reported last year, planned work to freshen up reception was still to take place. Space has not yet been identified to allow prisoner peer mentors to conduct conversations with new prisoners in a discreet and private area

Standard 2: Decency

IPMs observed generally acceptable standards of cleanliness and food delivery in many areas. However, overcrowding, accommodation pressures, inconsistent access to showers and clean clothing, and concerns about food quality and affordability affected prisoners' experience of decency throughout the year.

Across the reporting year, IPMs frequently observed communal areas, halls, and workspaces that were clean and well-maintained, with staff and prisoners actively involved in cleaning duties. Food service was generally observed to be orderly and timely, and kitchen areas appeared clean during visits.

Views varied about food. While some prisoners reported meals to be adequate, others raised concerns about repetitive menus, limited fresh produce, and there was mixed feedback regarding the ability to meet all dietary requirements consistently. These perceptions were compounded by increasing concern about canteen affordability, as reported last year. Prisoners highlighted that rising prices, static wage rates, and unchanged spending limits made it more difficult to supplement prison food, affecting perceptions of fairness and dignity. When IPMs checked on food

it generally looked to be of a decent standard. However, as reported last year, the budget available to prisons to provide three meals a day to prisoners remained a matter of concern.

Prisoners reported occasions where showers were unavailable due to maintenance work or regime restrictions. The prison advised that refurbishment work was being undertaken during this period, and that access to showers was maintained at least every second day. Prisoners reported inconsistency in access to clean bedding and timely kit exchange, most notably at the start of the reporting year. While these issues appeared to improve over time, they were raised repeatedly on Glenesk.

Decency was significantly undermined by the physical environment and overcrowding. IPMs repeatedly raised concerns about the ongoing use of cells designed for one person to accommodate two. These cells were observed to be cramped, with limited space, reduced privacy, and difficulties for prisoners requiring bottom bunks or single-cell accommodation. Prisoners being forced to share single cells explained the significant negative impact on them, from maintaining relationships with family as they could not talk in private, to the simple logistics of moving around a cramped area with another person. More than one prisoner spoken to explained the difficulty of sharing such a small space if both prisoners were out of their beds at the same time. There was not sufficient space for both people to eat at the same time, nor sit and write or draw at a table. This fell short of expected standards for decency and prisoners' daily living conditions.

Two further issues were raised in the previous report that remain unchanged. The exercise yard on Glenesk remains stark concrete with nothing to improve time spent in the fresh air there. Toilets remain without lids and in many cases without seats.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

HMP Edinburgh was generally found to be calm, despite population complexity. However, staffing pressures, bullying reports, and mental health concerns raised significant issues in relation to personal safety.

Prisoners and staff alike acknowledged the challenges posed by drugs, and population pressures related to managing a complex prisoner population including mainstream, remand-, short- and long-term, offence- and non-offence- protection prisoners, and those involved with serious organised crime. Yet levels of violence were generally perceived as lower than might be expected given the population mix. IPMs recognise the work undertaken by the prison to manage a potentially complex and volatile population, and it is impressive that levels of violence remained comparatively low. This suggested that overall stability was maintained although it was not always supported by consistent staff presence on residential areas.

At an individual level IPMs reported repeated concerns about safety. Prisoners alleged experiences of bullying, intimidation, and perceived favouritism. Confidence in staff intervention varied, with some prisoners expressing reluctance to report issues due to fear of repercussions or ineffective responses.

Staffing shortages affected the consistency of supervision and dynamic security. IPMs observed occasions where staff were desk-bound rather than present on landings, limiting informal engagement with prisoners and early identification of tensions. Officers also reported concerns about operating with what they described as reduced staffing numbers on some halls, describing increased stress and perceived risk.

As above, IPMs were saddened to learn of eight deaths in custody during the reporting year. IPMs recorded these events with sympathy and acknowledged their profound effect on families, friends, prisoners, staff and the wider prison community.

The prison has developed a comprehensive approach to bereavement support for prisoners, staff and families, including trained bereavement champions, peer supporters, and structured chaplaincy input. This work has been recognised nationally, with Edinburgh becoming the first prison in the UK to receive the Bereavement Charter Mark.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

IPMs observed many examples of authority being exercised professionally and respectfully, particularly in routine movements, reception processes, and work with vulnerable prisoners. However, concerns remained about privacy during some searches, the influence of staffing pressures on regime delivery, and the prolonged or widespread use of separation arrangements.

Throughout the reporting year, IPMs frequently observed routine prisoner movements that were well-organised, timely, and managed calmly by staff. Movements to visits, education, the gym, and work parties were generally conducted efficiently, even when large groups were involved. Reception and visits staff were often noted to be courteous and attentive, including towards children and family members attending visits.

Orderly room hearings observed by IPMs were conducted in a structured and generally fair manner, with clear explanations provided to prisoners about outcomes. Searches and security procedures at reception were typically carried out professionally and respectfully, with staff maintaining control in busy environments.

However, IPMs also identified areas where the exercise of authority did not meet expectations. On one occasion, searches of prisoners following visits was observed to take place with doors open to public corridors, raising concerns about privacy and dignity.

The use of the Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) was consistent across the year, with it being fully occupied, or nearly fully occupied, during all IPM visits. IPMs observed that many prisoners held in the SRU felt safer and more settled than in mainstream accommodation and spoke positively about staff support. Nonetheless, IPMs remained concerned about the lack of consistent reintegration planning for some individuals, leading to uncertainty and prolonged separation. The overall prisoner population across the entire estate means managing difficult or vulnerable prisoners is more challenging, as there is pressure on accommodation and staffing.

Prisoner searching was also an area of concern. With the introduction of body scanners, prisoners should not routinely be subject to strip-searching when entering the prison. These practices raised concerns among prisoners and IPMs in relation to dignity and proportionality.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

Many respectful and supportive staff–prisoner interactions were observed. However, persistent issues remained around staff communication styles, access to complaints systems, consistency of personal officer support, and prisoner confidence in raising concerns without negative consequences.

Several individual staff members were noted by prisoners for their calm, supportive approach. Despite these examples, IPMs continued to observe and report concerns about aspects of daily interaction on residential halls. As reported last year, the practice of staff shouting down corridors or from behind grille gates to attract prisoners' attention was observed repeatedly across different halls and throughout the year. IPMs considered this behaviour unnecessary in many instances and inconsistent with a respectful prison environment. Opportunities for meaningful day-to-day engagement between staff and prisoners were not being realised.

Access to complaints processes was a significant and recurring issue. Prisoners frequently reported difficulty obtaining complaint forms, uncertainty about which process to use, and concerns that complaints went unanswered or were not properly recorded. When checked, IPMs found, on occasion, that complaint forms were not available on some halls, and more generally the system for accessing complaint forms varied across halls, in many cases prisoners having to ask staff for them. In some cases, IPMs tracked specific complaints that could not later be found in the system. These issues undermined prisoners' confidence and contributed to reluctance to raise concerns. Systems for providing copies of submitted complaint forms were also inconsistent, with no set process for ensuring prisoners could have copies of complaints submitted. The prison has taken steps to improve access to complaints processes, including the introduction of complaint boxes on all residential halls.

Prisoners also reported inconsistency in personal officer engagement, with some stating they had minimal or no contact beyond formal reviews. While staff acknowledged pressures on the system, the impact on prisoners' sense of support and autonomy was evident.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

As in the previous two reports, where purposeful activity was available, it was often of high quality and positively received. However, access to activity was inconsistent, with many prisoners, particularly those on remand, spending long periods without meaningful engagement due to overcrowding, staffing shortages, limited capacity, and regime clashes.

IPMs observed a broad and varied range of purposeful activities across the reporting year, including education, library services, gym provision, workshops, chaplaincy, recovery programmes, and family visits. In these settings, prisoners frequently appeared engaged and motivated, and staff demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment. The library, in particular, was noted as a strength, with creative displays and responsive services, led by a dedicated and enthusiastic member of staff.

Despite this, access to purposeful activity remained uneven. Staffing shortages led to the cancellation of classes and the closure of work sheds, sometimes at short notice. Prisoners reported frustration at waiting lists for education and programmes, with some describing waits of several months. Remand prisoners were particularly affected, reporting long periods in their cells with limited opportunity to engage in meaningful or structured activity.

Regime clashes further limited access. Prisoners reported needing to choose between activities such as gym, education, visits, or fresh air, reducing opportunities for balanced daily routines. While staff attempted to manage these pressures, the cumulative effect was reduced participation across the population. Even without these pressures, IPMs concluded that the prison was limited in its physical capacity to provide activity for the majority of the population, based on the prison's reported capacity within activity spaces.

IPMs noted that the quality of activity, where delivered, had remained strong and in some areas improved slightly. However, overall access did not meet the needs of the population.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Across the reporting year, IPMs observed a mixed picture in relation to transitions from custody, with some elements of release planning and community engagement described positively, alongside ongoing challenges in progression and assessments being completed.

In some cases, prisoners approaching liberation spoke positively about engagement with external agencies, recovery services, and practical support, including housing and benefits advice.

Structured initiatives such as Lifeworks sessions, recovery-focused groups, and the development of new case management tools were observed and regarded as helpful where accessible. IPMs also observed positive examples of support for short-term prisoners, including engagement with release planning and access to practical support. While this was not experienced across the entire population, it represents an area of developing strength.

Progression to less secure conditions showed some improvement during the reporting year, with 25 prisoners progressing to the Open Estate, HMP Castle Huntly, compared to 12 in the previous year. A small number of prisoners also progressed to National Top End conditions, although in some cases there were delays between approval and transfer. These figures suggest a positive direction of travel, although access to required programmes and assessments continued to limit progression for others.

A small number of prisoners were also approved for progression but had not yet transferred, indicating ongoing delays within the wider system.

However, progression through sentence plans and access to required programmes remained a significant and recurring source of concern. As reported last year, and as observed across the prison estate, prisoners described lengthy waiting lists for Generic Programme Assessments and subsequent offending behaviour programmes. In several cases, prisoners reported that parole hearings had taken place before required programmes could be completed. These delays contributed to perceptions of stagnation and anxiety, particularly among longer-term and prisoners on protection. While these challenges reflect national constraints, they were experienced particularly acutely at Edinburgh due to the complexity and composition of the population.

IPMs also noted inconsistencies in communication relating to progression decisions, risk levels, and reintegration planning. Some prisoners reported receiving conflicting or unclear information, leading to confusion and distress.

Throughcare arrangements for short-term and remand prisoners remained variable overall. Staff reported limited visibility of external throughcare provision, often relying on informal communication rather than integrated systems. The introduction of Upside was viewed positively and had begun to strengthen aspects of release planning and post-release support, although its impact was not yet consistent across the population.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

Organisational effectiveness was significantly constrained by staffing pressures, overcrowding, infrastructure limitations, and inconsistent systems.

Throughout the reporting year, IPMs encountered the impact of staffing shortages on daily operations. Staff deployment challenges resulted in curtailed regimes, redeployment from activity areas to residential halls, and variable staffing levels across the prison. Officers spoke candidly about fatigue, reliance on overtime, and the difficulties of maintaining consistency when teams were frequently reconfigured.

These pressures affected not only regime delivery but also internal processes. IPMs observed inconsistencies in access to forms, including complaint and application paperwork, and ongoing confusion around photocopying policies. In some instances, paperwork submitted by prisoners could not later be located on electronic systems, undermining confidence in administrative processes.

IPMs raised concerns that were not always progressed or prioritised for example around prisoner induction, or were informed they were not priority issues, such as shouting on halls. At times, it was not clear how monitoring feedback was being reflected in operational decision-making. Despite these challenges, IPMs also observed some positive engagement from managers and

staff, including openness to scrutiny and willingness to discuss issues raised during visits. Improved engagement and responsiveness were noted towards the end of the reporting year. Collaborative work with partner agencies was noted, and staff from third sector organisations spoke of the positive relationships they had fostered with the prison staff, and the support they had in delivering their programmes.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Healthcare access and mental health support were the most frequently raised concerns by prisoners across the year, accounting for a quarter of all requests by prisoners to see an IPM. While some positive practice was observed, and there was a clear improvement over the reporting year, delays, communication issues, and unresolved complaints significantly affected prisoners' confidence in health services.

Across the reporting year, healthcare was the single most consistent issue raised with IPMs by prisoners. Prisoners across multiple halls reported long waiting times for GP appointments, mental health assessments, and specialist input. Some described cancelled or delayed appointments, changes to medication without adequate explanation, and difficulties obtaining results of tests or follow-up treatment.

Mental health provision was a particular concern. Prisoners reported lengthy waits to see psychiatrists and mental health nurses, and some described a deterioration in mental wellbeing while waiting for support. Neurodiverse prisoners reported inconsistent recognition of their needs and uncertainty about available adjustments.

IPMs observed some positive aspects of healthcare delivery, including orderly medication rounds, clean healthcare facilities, and informative health-promotion materials. Engagement from health staff in recovery and harm-reduction services was also noted positively.

However, confidence in healthcare complaints processes was low. Prisoners reported submitting complaints that went unanswered or were difficult to track, and uncertainty persisted about how to raise concerns effectively. While requests relating to healthcare fluctuated over the year and showed a clearly improving picture in the second half of the year, some underlying issues had reappeared by the end of the reporting period.