HMIPS
HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS FOR SCOTLAND

Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings
Annual Report

Prison:
HMP KILMARNOCK

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

Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
	Total number of visits:	53	57	60
	Total number of missed weeks:	4	4	3
	Total number of prisoner requests received:	91	93	129
	Total number of IPM hours:	222	202	228

Executive Summary

Monitoring of HMP Kilmarnock over the 2025–26 reporting year indicated a prison operating under sustained operational pressure, primarily associated with population levels and complexity, and staffing levels. The population averaged at 608 over the year, peaking at 636 in February 2026.

Across the period, staff prisoner relationships were generally observed to be respectful and constructive, and a range of purposeful activity opportunities remained available. However, the cumulative effect of systemic pressures resulted in variability of prisoners' day-to-day experience across several standards.

A consistent strength throughout the year was the quality of interactions between staff and prisoners. Across multiple visits, staff were observed to engage in a courteous, competent, and empathetic manner, including in challenging circumstances such as incidents requiring restraint. Purposeful activity provision, particularly in education, gym, and work allocations, was also a positive feature, with many prisoners reporting beneficial outcomes for their wellbeing and engagement.

However, key concerns persisted and, in some areas, intensified over the reporting period. Staffing shortages and high levels of absence were repeatedly reported as disrupting the regime, leading to restricted unlock periods, inconsistent application of regimes across halls, and reduced access to work and activities. These disruptions contributed to frustration among prisoners and confusion among staff regarding regime implementation. Population pressures, with the establishment operating above design capacity, compounded these challenges and affected multiple aspects of prison life.

Food provision remained a significant and recurring concern, particularly in relation to quality, variety, temperature, and hygiene. While some improvements were noted in specific areas, issues such as dirty food trolleys, kitchen capacity constraints, and concerns about food handling practices persisted throughout the year. Cleanliness standards varied between areas and deteriorated at points, most notably in specific wings and serveries.

Healthcare provision represented a further area of continued concern. Prisoners and staff consistently reported delays in accessing healthcare services, including mental health support, and difficulties obtaining prescribed medication. These issues were compounded by staffing pressures and operational changes to regimes, which affected appointment scheduling and access.

In terms of personal safety, while many observations indicated a generally calm and orderly environment, there were reported concerns regarding bullying, intimidation, and isolated allegations of staff misconduct. These were not corroborated by direct observation but indicated areas requiring ongoing monitoring.

The impact of the cost-of-living was reflected in concerns about the national prisoner wage earnings policy and affordability of items. Evidence indicated low wages for work and ongoing dissatisfaction with food provision. While explicit references to canteen pricing were limited, the combination of low earnings, perceived poor food provision, and constraints on choice contributed to negative perceptions of fairness and decency among prisoners.

It was noted with sympathy to their families and those who knew them that three prisoners had died in HMP Kilmarnock during the reporting year.

Overall, while core processes were evident and many staff demonstrated commitment and skill, pressures continued to affect the consistent delivery of safe, decent, and purposeful custody.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

Processes relating to reception, admission, and liberation were generally orderly and respectful. However, some inconsistencies were noted in induction engagement, availability of up-to-date information, and staffing pressures affecting delivery.

IPMs felt that reception processes were generally well managed. Prisoners arriving at the establishment were consistently treated with dignity. Initial interviews and assessments, including the SPS Suicide Prevention Strategy - Talk to Me processes, were undertaken appropriately. Liberation procedures also appeared to be done properly with no significant concerns identified.

Induction processes were in place; however, attendance varied and was often reported to be low. Staff explored ways to improve participation and engagement. Information about peer support roles, such as Insiders, formed part of the induction. Outdated materials were identified early in the year and updated accordingly by the prison. The Prison Rules were available; however, there was a prevailing sense that some prisoners had a lack of understanding about the rules and their entitlements. The new national Your Rights Under the Scottish Prison Rules booklet, published by SPS in July 2025, went part way to addressing prisoner understanding.

Liberation and transfer processes were generally managed well. Staff ensured the required documentation was fully completed and that all property was returned to prisoners. Other support included liberation grants and support from third-sector organisations.

Overall, lawful processes were in place and generally adhered to, but improvements in communication, information availability, and staff availability were required to ensure consistency.

Standard 2: Decency

Conditions across the establishment were variable, with generally acceptable levels of cleanliness, but persistent concerns about food quality and hygiene, and some aspects of accommodation and equipment.

Many areas were observed by IPMs to be clean and maintained acceptably, with showers, accommodation, and communal spaces generally meeting basic expectations. However, these standards were not consistent across all areas or throughout the reporting period.

Food was a recurring concern. Across multiple monitoring visits, prisoners reported dissatisfaction with food quality, variety, and temperature. Direct IPM observations identified issues including delays in service, and, critically, poor hygiene associated with food trolleys, which were repeatedly observed to be unclean with crusted residue.

In A-wing, poor cleanliness including dirty serveries and overflowing bins, was regularly observed by IPMs. On occasion SRU cells were also not cleaned adequately before reuse. Equipment issues, such as deteriorating mattresses were reported in some wings, with replacement programmes being progressed later in the year. Laundry and personal hygiene facilities were generally available and functional, though isolated failures and delays were reported.

While basic decency standards were often met across much of the establishment, persistent issues in food provision and localised issues about cleanliness indicated that the standard was not consistently achieved.

Standard 3: Personal Safety

The prison was generally calm and orderly; however, reported concerns regarding bullying, intimidation, staff conduct, and institutionalised responses to alleged incidents indicated areas requiring ongoing scrutiny.

Many prisoners reported feeling safe and able to approach staff if they had a concern. Staff were observed to conduct movements safely and measures were taken appropriately to manage drug-related incidents i.e. individuals placed on Management of Offender at Risk Due to Any Substance (MORS) which involved enhanced monitoring of them.

However, in some areas a more worrying picture was highlighted. Prisoners and staff described concerns regarding bullying and intimidation, particularly in areas managing mixed populations. There were allegations reported relating to harm, violence, and intimidation. While these allegations were not substantiated through direct IPM observation, they were sufficiently recurrent to warrant attention. Where IPMs reviewed documentation related to such allegations, they were satisfied that matters had been escalated appropriately, though delays in follow-up undermined confidence.

Health and safety arrangements were largely sound, with staff demonstrating awareness of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans and risk management processes. Occasional infrastructure failures were identified, reported, and repaired.

Overall, while the establishment demonstrated a commitment to maintaining basic order and safety, the presence of illicit items, mixed populations, and unverified but recurring concerns about bullying and intimidation indicated a complex and challenging environment.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

Staff interactions during movements, disciplinary procedures, and incidents involving use of force were consistently described as calm and competent. Formal processes, including orderly room hearings and searches, were observed to follow procedural requirements and allow prisoners the opportunity to engage. Use of force incidents observed were proportionate, controlled, and conducted well.

The Separation and Reintegration Unit (SRU) was frequently observed to be calm, orderly, and well-managed, despite often operating at or near full capacity. Those held in SRU confirmed they received basic entitlements, including access to showers, exercise, and meals, and understood the reasons for their placement. The use of segregation for individuals with significant mental ill-health, including those held on Prison Rule 41, was of concern. In some cases, prolonged segregation was reported, with limited evidence of regular meaningful engagement and alternative or therapeutic pathways, raising concerns about the appropriateness of the placement and the alternatives available.

The day-to-day exercise of authority was appropriate; however, population pressures locally and across the Scottish prison estate affected the flexibility in managing more complex cases.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection Against Mistreatment

Monitoring identified generally positive relationships between staff and prisoners, with IPMs frequently observing respectful and supportive interactions, contributing to a generally calm environment. Staff were seen engaging actively with prisoners on the wings, and examples of responsive practice, such as prompt resolution of issues, reinforced this positive dynamic.

However, the regime was a key area of concern. In the first half of the reporting year frequent and sometimes unclear regime changes, driven by staffing shortages and operational pressures, resulted in inconsistent access to out-of-cell activities. At times, a “weekend regime” was

implemented during weekdays, reducing opportunities for purposeful activity and increasing time spent in cells. Both prisoners and staff reported confusion regarding which regime was in operation, with evidence that even staff required clarification. The lack of consistency and communication contributed to frustrations and undermined the ability to anticipate and manage daily routines, and reduced opportunities for social interaction and showers.

Efforts were made to maintain communication through forums such as the Prisoner Information and Action Committee (PIAC). Points raised in these forums, particularly regarding food, persisted and resulted in many prisoners questioning the PIAC purpose and effectiveness.

Confidence in the complaint processes was consistently low. Multiple prisoners reported missing complaints and delayed responses, with IPMs witnessing examples where submitted complaints could not be traced. The effectiveness of the complaint processes is a national concern for HMIPS and has been consistently reported by IPMs for many years. The absence of meaningful reform is of significant concern and the Scottish Human Rights Commission's (SHRC's) Access to Justice for Prisoners: The Complaints System report of August 2025 the latest call for urgent reform.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Many work opportunities were available, with evidence that prisoners could apply for roles aligned with their interests and skills. IPMs felt work allocation processes were fair and regularly observed positive workspaces with prisoners actively engaged. Work opportunities included recycling, textiles, painting and decorating, bricklaying, industrial cleaning, catering support, and passmen roles. Many prisoners spoke positively about gaining practical skills relevant to future employability.

Following the transfer to a new education provider in August 2025, there were initial delays to education provision and reduced engagement. However, later there was good engagement in a constructive learning environment with participants reporting benefits to their wellbeing, and a range of subjects, including creative and vocational classes. Education provision included art, numeracy, victim-awareness, and creative writing, with art classes proving especially popular. Attendance in some subjects at times fluctuated due to regime changes and staffing pressures.

The gym offered a positive environment supporting physical health and offering a structured programme. High attendance levels were regularly observed and reported with a wide range of activities offered, including fitness sessions, team sports, and health-promotion initiatives. Daily access to fresh air was available, though IPMs noted some inequalities regarding access for individuals held under protection or awaiting transfer.

Library facilities were available but often underused, particularly during periods where weekday regimes mirrored weekend routines. Visits were generally well managed, with good facilities and a positive environment. Prisoners raised concerns about inconsistent arrangements which affected their access to virtual visits such as not being collected and escorted to the area.

Overall, there was a range of meaningful opportunities with positive engagement evident, although operational pressures affected access and limited maximum participation.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

Preparation for liberation was limited by not enough access to offending behaviour programmes and wider national challenges affecting progression, with concerns often being raised by prisoners about access to programmes and progression opportunities.

Prisoners reported difficulty accessing offence-related courses and accredited programmes required for progression, reflecting national course suspensions and psychology staff shortages. The temporary approach to offending behaviour programmes taken by SPS from November 2024,

which included no new Constructs or Pathways programmes starting during 2024 and 2025, was felt to be a contributory factor which limited opportunities for progression.

Where evidence was reviewed by IPMs, they found constraints in accessing offending behaviour programmes and progression pathways was accurate. Resource limitations within both prison and community-based social work teams also affected the completion of assessments and case management processes linked to progression and risk management. All this contributed to limited clarity for prisoners and staff around progression pathways and options for release.

Prisoners nearing their release reported support through the Links Centre and external partners such as Upside, the national voluntary throughcare service which was introduced in April 2025. There was also evidence that there was sound partnership working with third sector partners, with release planning processes considering individual needs.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

Staff were broadly operating in a productive and supportive way towards prisoners. There was good collaborative working with wider service providers, including NHS and third sector organisations who operated within the establishment. The effectiveness of communication between SPS and NHS teams was mixed. While regular meetings were scheduled, cancellations and gaps in information sharing were reported to delay resolution of healthcare and operational issues.

Senior leadership and managers were visible, acknowledged shortcomings and outlined improvement plans which included the new regime implemented in November 2025, and investment such as the new Wellbeing facility which opened in January 2026.

There was some evidence that equality and diversity considerations were affected by operational and systemic factors. There was a sizeable non-English-speaking population which created challenges in communication and understanding prison processes. This was considered by IPMs to affect equitable access to information and services.

Overall, organisational effectiveness was constrained by operational pressures, though monitoring evidenced strong leadership intent and staff commitment.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

While there were several reports of positive healthcare access experiences, prisoners and staff reported delays in accessing prescribed medication and medical appointments, including both primary and mental health services. Evidence indicated that staffing challenges and regime changes, including movement restrictions due to a complex population, and rescheduling of appointments caused delays in access to care. Evening medication rounds were reported as particularly pressured following the introduction of a revised daily routine in November. These pressures led to rescheduled appointments and reliance on healthcare triage prioritisation.

Notwithstanding these challenges, positive developments were reported. In-cell technology was introduced towards the end of the year. Phase 1 enabled triage for healthcare requests via in-cell technology, but monitoring was unable to determine the impact of this during the reporting period. The creation of a Wellbeing Room in January provided a more supportive environment for prisoners.

Overall, healthcare provision was not meeting demand. Access to timely and appropriate care remained a concern due to population pressures and operational demands.