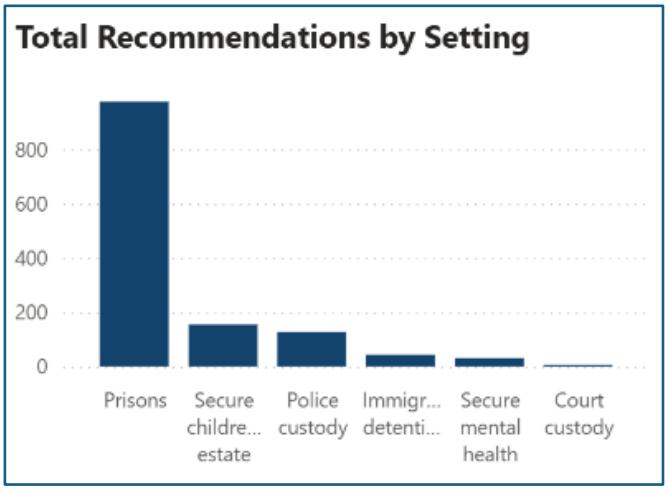
Good Practice: Insights from 2025-26



Total number of good practice records by setting (April 2025 – March 2026)

This Good Practice Thematic paper identifies some common areas of good practice, drawing on NPM body inspection, monitoring and thematic reports published between April 2025 and March 2026 and collated in the NPM Reporting Dashboard. A similar paper on 2024-25 was published in November 2025.

The three most frequently reported themes have recurred: **wellbeing support**, **staff-detainee relationships**, and **staff training and oversight**. This suggests that good practice remains consistent despite considerable pressure on services across the UK.

Wellbeing support:

In its Good Practice Thematic on Wellbeing Support, the UK NPM Secretariat noted that compassionate care, meaningful activity, creativity and expression, and physical activity all contributed to increased wellbeing, with good practice identified across many establishments.[1] This paper builds on this theme with further examples of good practice identified throughout 2025-26.

Services that tailored their approach to particular groups were frequently praised in NPM body reports, which suggests that individualised care is a recurring feature of good practice. HMP The Verne ran a monthly support group for autistic prisoners with very good attendance, and a Lego workshop was planned there, drawing on evidence that similar groups in other prisons improved socialisation, communication and cooperation among neurodivergent prisoners. The Inclusion Team at HMPYOI Polmont provided support for those at risk of (self-) isolation and encouraged them to re-engage through a tailored support package, including personal tuition at the gym and escorting people individually to try out opportunities in the Learning Centre and work sheds. These examples respond to specific barriers to wellbeing, such as sensory or social difficulty, rather than assuming general provision will reach everyone.

Health initiatives were another route to wellbeing. For example, at HMP North Sea Camp, a well-attended ‘Wellbeing Event’ was carried out monthly, during which prisoners could discuss their mental and physical health with healthcare professionals.

[1] Good Practice Thematic: Wellbeing Support, NPM, June 2026

Peers were also used as a source of health and wellbeing support. At HMP Barlinnie, a peer mentor programme shared information and support on tobacco, vaping, second-hand smoke, alcohol, naloxone, oral health and healthy minds. Peer-led delivery can, at times, be more accessible to prisoners than information from staff alone.

Staff-detainee relationships:

Relationships appear to be built most readily through informal, shared activity. In HMIP's thematic report on positive relationships in young offender institutions (YOIs), officers at one YOI said the best thing they could do was "be amongst [the children]", and that chatting over a meal or a game of pool helped children relax and speak openly. Leaders modelled the same approach: at HMYOI Parc, managers were visible and accessible on the wing, and it was not uncommon to see the head of the children's unit serving lunch.

Physical and recreational activity played a similar role in the adult male estate. At HMP Humber, physical activity was combined with leadership and team building to build trust and confidence between staff and prisoners. Similarly, weekly football at HMP Birmingham promoted positive staff-prisoner relationships and a sense of community through teamwork. In each case, shared activity places staff and detainees on a more equal footing, which may explain why it encourages openness. The same pattern appeared in a health setting. At Stratheden Hospital, one-to-one meetings often took place while individuals were out on activities, and walking trips gave them the opportunity to open up in a way a meeting room might not.

Relationships were also built through small gestures that showed detainees being seen as individuals. Custody visitors in the Hertfordshire scheme noted that a Perspex screen on a cell door was left open so a claustrophobic detainee could see the corridor and feel less enclosed. Lay Observers praised court custody officers who took time to explain processes and establish calm, respectful relationships. At HMP Edinburgh, staff had started wearing country flags on their name badges to show other languages they spoke. These gestures were low-cost, but offered the potential for strong positive outcomes.

Positive relationships were also linked to better outcomes. At HMP Bure, "excellent" staff-prisoner relationships were a factor in promoting a good learning environment. Low levels of assaults and incidents at HMP Stafford were attributed to strong relationships and prisoners' sense of safety. These observations suggest that relationships are central to safety and wellbeing.

Staff training and oversight:

Several services treated reflection as routine rather than an occasional event. At HMP Glenochil, healthcare clinical staff were encouraged to attend a monthly reflective practice group to identify strengths and weaknesses and guide their learning. At Marydale Lodge (a secure children's home), debriefs took place at the end of every shift, with further debriefs

after incidents. Together, these give staff frequent, low-barrier opportunities to turn experience into learning, rather than relying on formal training alone.

Echoing the targeted approach seen with regard to wellbeing support, training often went beyond mandatory requirements to help equip staff. For example, HMP Brixton trained staff in using force with neurodivergent prisoners. At Rowanbank Clinic, one team won a regional Team of the Year award for innovative, individualised practice for women, in the absence of any high secure provision for women in Scotland. In each case, staff were prepared for the particular needs of the people they supported rather than given generic guidance.

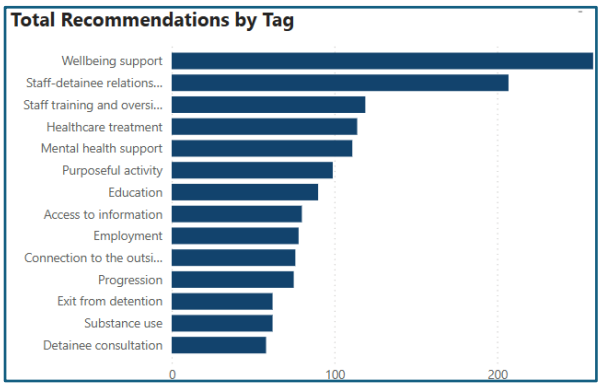
On restrictive practices, Good Shepherd Centre Bishopton, described as "courageous and progressive", embedded enhanced training, reflective practice and de-escalation, which contributed to the removal of some restrictive interventions. At HMP Chelmsford, experienced officers were commended for using verbal de-escalation in tense situations. These examples suggest that investment in staff skills can reduce reliance on restrictive practices and force.

Some services brought the perspective of those in their care into staff learning. At the Lincolnshire Secure Unit, three children produced a video about their experiences, shared at a staff away day, which reinforced the importance of listening to the child's voice when shaping practice. At HMP Lewes, an ex-prisoner was commissioned to give insight and to develop a "good prison officer" guide showing how officers' conduct and decisions can promote better behaviour in prisoners. Both examples treat people with direct experience of the system as a source of expertise.

Good practice also depends on staff being supported. At HMP Styal, reflective sessions with the psychology team were helping staff cope with the traumatic incidents they faced daily, which may help sustain consistent practice.

Concluding remarks:

The three most frequently reported themes of good practice appear closely connected rather than separate. Tailored support was underpinned by well-trained staff who had good relationships with those in their care. These examples highlight the important contribution staff make to good practice in deprivation of liberty settings across the UK, despite pressures on services.



Thematic tags in good practice (April 2025 – March 2026)