

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Strategic Plan 2023-26

Business Plan 2023/24

OUR VISION

To deliver high quality and timely independent investigations and work closely with partners to achieve tangible benefits for the safety and confidence of those in custody and under community supervision.

WHAT WE DO



WHAT WE VALUE



Ombudsman's foreword

I am delighted to publish my first combined Strategic Plan and Business Plan in November 2023, seven months into my tenure as the new Prisons and Probation Ombudsman.

I am grateful to Kimberley Bingham, my predecessor as Acting Ombudsman, who decided not to publish this before I took up post as it has allowed me time to understand the challenges faced by the PPO and how best to meet them.

I have now met with every member of my staff, as well as with key stakeholders, charities, academics and, most importantly, prisoners, who have all influenced the changes I believe will best serve our core business. You will see in this plan that I have recently refreshed our Vision and Values. These will give my staff the tools they need to make difficult decisions.

This plan sets out our key strategic objectives for the next three years, which consists of four themes set out on page 5.

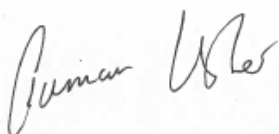
Our first objective is to be visible, accessible, and transparent to service users and stakeholders. We will rebrand our complaints function in prisons and the Children and Young People Secure Estate to make it clearer about what we do and how we do it. My staff are committed to visiting every establishment to reinforce this new messaging when we rebrand.

We will also aim to conduct high-quality investigations in a timely manner. I have set more ambitious timeliness targets so that those in custody, frontline staff, stakeholders, and bereaved families know that we are striving to deliver in every case.

We will also seek to increase the impact of our work and strengthen our research capability to ensure we are a truly data-driven organisation. A newly focused team will extract and disseminate a greater volume of learning from our investigations in a more user-friendly format, assisting the services in our remit to implement learning more effectively. We will continue to review our publication programme to provide that necessary and targeted support.

The final objective I set is to use our resources efficiently and effectively. The PPO's staff are at the heart of this organisation, and we will invest in their continuous professional development to support their skills and capability. We will continue to work with partners to embrace digital working and new technology to provide a more inclusive, accessible service.

I look forward with great optimism to what remains of this business year and into the next. This is an ambitious plan but I know my staff have the skill, experience and motivation to deliver it.



Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

November 2023

About the PPO

The role of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman is to carry out independent investigations into complaints and deaths in custody. We provide this service for prisoners, young people in detention, those under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals).

The purpose of our investigations is to understand what happened, to correct injustices and to identify learning for the organisations whose actions we oversee so that the PPO makes a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and community supervision.

Strategic goal

To deliver high quality and timely independent investigations and work closely with partners to deliver tangible benefits for the safety and confidence of those in custody and under community supervision.

Function

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) is appointed by and reports directly to the Secretary of State for Justice. The Ombudsman's office is wholly independent of the services in remit, which include His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Prisoner Escort and Custody Services; the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement); the Youth Justice Board; and those local authorities and voluntary organisations who administer secure youth detention accommodation. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in their Terms of Reference (ToR)¹.

The PPO has three main duties:

- To investigate complaints made by prisoners, young people in secure accommodation², offenders under probation supervision, and individuals detained under immigration powers.
- To investigate deaths of prisoners, young people in secure accommodation, approved premises' residents and detained individuals due to any cause. This also includes neonatal deaths and stillbirths that occur in prisons or in hospital following a transfer from prison; and the deaths of recently released prisoners.³
- To identify and share learning with the services in remit based on findings from the PPO's investigations.

¹ <https://www.ppo.gov.uk/about/vision-and-values/terms-of-reference/>

² The PPO investigates complaints from young people detained in secure accommodation such as secure training centres (STCs) and young offender institutions (YOIs). Its remit does not include complaints from young people in secure children's homes (SCHs).

³ The PPO investigates the deaths of recently released prisoners that occur within 14 days of release from prison (except homicide).

Resource

The PPO is a demand-led organisation and to deliver our goals we need to have staff in the right roles, equipped with appropriate expertise and skills. Our allocated budget for 2023/24 is £6,404,000. This includes funding from the MOJ and the Home Office.

Strategic objectives 2023-26

Our key strategic objectives for the next three years are set out under four themes:

1. To be visible, accessible and transparent to service users and stakeholders.
2. To deliver investigative excellence in a timely manner.
3. To increase the impact of our work on the actions of services in remit and the day to day lives of those in custody.
4. To use our resources efficiently and effectively.

This plan also sets out the priorities for the Ombudsman and our staff for 2023/24.

Strategic objectives 2023-26 and priorities for 2023-24

Objective 1: Be visible, accessible, and transparent to service users and stakeholders.

- We will increase awareness of the PPO amongst those in custody, so they know how to use our services.
- We will raise awareness of the PPO in the immigration estate and to those under probation supervision.
- We will improve the understanding of the PPO's role to those who use our services.
- We will improve relationships with those who use our services and services in remit to increase confidence in the PPO.
- We will review and improve our processes to ensure that the PPO is accessible.
- We will be more transparent about our investigation findings and data, promoting learning within the services in our remit.

2023-24 priorities	Measure of success (2023-24)
Rebrand the PPO's complaints service across prisons and the youth estate, to increase awareness and understanding of the PPO's role.	<p>New branding for prisoner and young offender complaints investigations agreed.</p> <p>Rebrand communicated to the prison and youth estate using different communication avenues.</p>
Carry out a programme of visits to immigration removal centres (IRCs) and run workshops with detained individuals to raise awareness of the PPO complaints process and understand any barriers.	<p>Increased number of contacts from those in IRCs.</p> <p>Identified and implemented any learning for the PPO to improve accessibility.</p>
Carry out a programme of engagement with probation services and those under probation supervision to raise awareness of the PPO complaints process and understand any barriers.	<p>Increased number of contacts from those under probation supervision.</p> <p>Improvements made to remove any identified barriers.</p> <p>Identified and implemented any learning for the PPO to improve accessibility.</p>
Continue to raise awareness of the PPO to young people and women in prison.	<p>At least one visit and prisoner engagement forum delivered in every women's prison, and in all of the youth estate.</p> <p>Increased number of contacts from young people and women in prison.</p> <p>Identified and implemented any learning for the PPO to improve accessibility.</p>
Implement a proactive and targeted	Developed and implemented a

communications strategy to increase awareness of the PPO to prisoners, those under probation supervision and detained individuals.	communications strategy.
Publish a Race Action Plan with a renewed focus on service users.	Demonstrable understanding of how PPO services are affecting black and minority ethnic service users.
Develop and embed a robust and consistent approach to investigating issues relating to diversity and inclusion.	Development of a consistent investigation methodology to identify discriminatory behaviour. Evidence from investigation reports demonstrating this aspect has been included in the investigation, where relevant.
Hold workshops with D/deaf prisoners to understand any barriers to accessing the prison complaints process or the PPO.	Identified and shared learning for prisons from the workshops. Identified and implemented any learning for the PPO to improve accessibility.
Include names and inquest dates on the website when publishing fatal incident investigation reports.	Website updated to include names and inquest dates.
Publish summaries and outcomes of upheld and partially upheld complaints.	Upheld and partially upheld complaint investigation summaries published on the website at regular intervals.
Respond to all Freedom of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Requests within the prescribed timescales.	Success will be measured against a target of 100% of FOI and Subject Access Requests being completed on time.
Launch a new PPO website, providing accessible and transparent information.	Project to create a new website launched and progress made with development. Content of current website reviewed.
Publish information and guidance about how the PPO carry out investigations.	Publish the PPO's investigation methodology for complaints and fatal incident investigations.

Objective 2: We will deliver investigative excellence in a timely manner.

- We will improve the timeliness of our investigations and reports by ensuring a robust and proportionate approach to investigations.
- We will provide up-to-date guidance to support our staff in carrying out investigations.
- We will develop a continuous improvement model to aid the sharing of internal learning with staff.

2023-24 priorities	Measure of success (2023-24)
<p>Meet the following timeliness targets for all fatal incident investigations:</p> <p>Initial reports: Natural cause deaths: Complete our investigation and issue our initial report within 20 weeks (100 working days) of the PPO being notified of the death.</p> <p>All other fatal incident cases: Complete our investigation and issue our initial report within 26 weeks (130 working days) of the PPO being notified of the death.</p> <p>Final reports: Finalise all fatal incident investigation reports within 12 weeks (60 working days) of the initial report.</p> <p>Publication: Produce and publish anonymised reports for fatal incident investigations within 10 working days of being notified that the inquest has concluded and the investigation report has been finalised.</p>	<p>Targets will have been met if at least 90% of fatal incident reports are delivered to time and there is no longer a backlog of fatal incident investigations awaiting initial report.</p> <p>Target will have been met if at least 90% of anonymised fatal incident reports are published on the website on time.</p>
<p>Meet the following timeliness targets for all complaints investigations:</p> <p>Eligibility: We will determine the eligibility of all complaints within 10 working days of receipt.</p> <p>Standard complaints: Complete our investigation and submit our initial report for consultation for standard complaints within 12 weeks (60 working days) of accepting the complaint as eligible.</p>	<p>Targets will have been met if at least 90% of complaints assessments are completed on time.</p> <p>Targets will have been met if at least 90% of standard and complex complaints investigations are completed on time.</p>

Complex complaints: Complete our investigation and submit our initial report for consultation for complex complaints within 26 weeks (130 working days) of accepting the complaint as eligible.	
Continue to review the investigation approaches and report templates for all types of fatal incident investigations to ensure they are proportionate and we are delivering investigative excellence.	Investigation methodology agreed and report templates reviewed.
Develop operational manuals for fatal incident and complaint investigations to provide more accessible and up-to-date guidance to support our staff in carrying out their work.	Production of operational manuals for fatal incident and complaints investigations. Process in place to ensure operational manuals are kept up to date, using current learning to improve the methodology.
Develop and embed an approach for identifying and sharing learning internally with staff, including learning from prevention of future death (PFD) reports and PPO surveys.	PFD reports are regularly reviewed, and any learning is shared internally. Process embedded for identifying and sharing learning from PPO surveys.

Objective 3: Increase the impact of our work on the actions of the services in our remit and the day to day lives of those in custody.

- Make custody and community supervision safer and fairer by identifying and sharing thematic and real-time learning from our investigations.
- Work with others to improve the complaints processes within services in remit to encourage complaints to be resolved at the earliest opportunity.
- We will review our approach to making recommendations to ensure they have impact.
- We will use our evidence base to target our thematic work to where it is needed the most.
- We will hold services in remit to account.
- We will work collaboratively with partners to increase our collective impact.

2023-24 priorities	Measure of success (2023-24)
Embed a learning strategy for identifying and sharing both thematic and real-time learning with services in remit.	A clearly defined learning strategy for 2023/24.
Introduce a monthly communication to share real-time learning with prisons.	Communication produced and distributed monthly.

Produce and publish thematic learning publications to increase the PPO's impact.	<p>The publication of 4 x quarterly thematic learning publications and 2 x Policy into Practice publications.</p> <p>Recommendations from our learning lesson bulletins are accepted by the relevant services in remit and actions have been taken.</p>
Implement proactive and targeted communications to ensure publications are widely disseminated and have impact.	<p>Each learning product has a unique, targeted and proactive communications plan.</p> <p>Awareness of PPO publications amongst stakeholders using stakeholder surveys.</p>
Continue to develop and establish effective partnerships with stakeholders to share expertise and learning and increase impact.	The success measure will be based on the output achieved from joint working with stakeholders.
Continue to use learning from our investigations to influence national policies within the services in remit, by responding to policy consultations.	PPO responds to relevant policy consultations with influential evidence.
Review approach to making recommendations following fatal incident investigations.	<p>Improvement in timeliness for receiving action plans in response to PPO investigation reports.</p> <p>Introduction of Governor to Note findings.</p>

Objective 4: We will use our resources efficiently and effectively.

- We will become a data-led organisation.
- We will invest in and support our people to develop their skills and capability.
- We will embed an effective performance management approach.
- We will improve our I.T. to enable us to use our resources more efficiently and effectively.
- We will work with our partners and stakeholders to embrace digital working and new technology to provide a more efficient, effective, and inclusive service.

Establish an effective performance management approach.	<p>Performance framework designed and embedded.</p> <p>Timeliness targets achieved.</p>
Identify any training needs across the organisation and develop a training programme for both new and existing staff.	<p>An evaluation of current training needs for existing staff carried out.</p> <p>Development of a training programme for new and existing staff.</p> <p>Development of a process for monitoring Continuous Professional Development (CPD) / training that is carried out.</p>
Continue to refine and improve our databases, data collection and data management to improve methods for monitoring casework and identifying trends/themes.	Demonstrable improvements made to data recording, collection and management.

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