

**Prisons &  
Probation**

**Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

# **Prisons and Probation Ombudsman**

## **Business Plan 2022/23**

**To carry out independent investigations to make custody and community supervision safer and fairer**

# Contents

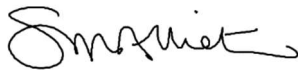
Ombudsman Foreword	3
Purpose, Priorities and Strategic Goals	4
Purpose Statement	4
Priorities and Objectives	4
Strategic Goals	5
Resource	5
Our Move to Hybrid Working	6
Business Plan Actions	7
Confidence	7
Effectiveness	7
Impact	9
Efficiency	9
Measuring Success	11
Conclusion	12

# Ombudsman Foreword

As we start this business year, we have been able to return to the office, and most of our staff are now combining working in the office with some remote working from home. We continue to use technology to support this new operating model, including the secure scanning of incoming post and our use of the 'Email a Prisoner' service, and we are using video calls alongside in person prison visits to carry out our investigations.

Our focus on the four strategic themes, Confidence, Effectiveness, Impact and Efficiency continues. We have made changes to our Terms of Reference, so that we will investigate neo-natal deaths and stillbirths in prison and the death of any child living in a prison Mother and Baby Unit. We will also investigate the deaths of those people recently released from prison. Our revised Terms of Reference have now been published.

A number of staff changes, at all levels, have allowed us to refresh our teams, so that we can benefit from a combination of experienced staff and those who bring new skills and experiences to the work of the PPO. Our expanded remit, alongside our work across all PPO functions, supports the work we do to help make prisons safer and fairer and this plan sets out how we will continue to do that.



**Sue McAllister CB**  
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

# Purpose, Priorities and Strategic Goals

## Purpose Statement

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) carries out independent investigations into complaints and deaths in custody. While the detailed role and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in our Terms of Reference (which are available at [www.ppo.gov.uk/about/vision-and-values/terms-of-reference/](http://www.ppo.gov.uk/about/vision-and-values/terms-of-reference/)), our main duties are:

- To investigate complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention (prisons and secure training centres), offenders under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals).
- To investigate the deaths of:
  - prisoners, young people in detention (prisons, secure training centres and secure children's homes), approved premises' residents, detained individuals and people in the custody of the Prisoner Escort Custody Service (PECS) due to any cause, including any apparent suicides and natural causes.
  - recently released prisoners, using the PPO's discretionary powers.
  - children living in a prison's Mother and Baby Unit and neonatal deaths and stillbirths that occur in prison or during prison transfer.

The purpose of these 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 offender supervision.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has continued from the previous financial year into this year, we have continued to face challenges to our work, our productivity and our staffing. Our continuing response to the pandemic and return to business as usual, is detailed in section 3 'Our Move to Hybrid Working'.

## Priorities and Objectives

As stated above, the PPO's objective is to carry out effective and independent investigations helping to make custody and community supervision safer and fairer.

To do that, we will make sure that all our staff have the knowledge and skills to carry out their respective roles. That encompasses our Complaints team, which includes the Assessment team, the Fatal Incidents team and our Learning Lessons and Strategic Support team.

We will further support our staff by striving to make the PPO an inclusive work environment which is anti-discriminatory, and brings a trauma informed approach to our investigations. Some of the ways we will pursue this are detailed in this Plan.

It is also essential that our stakeholders know who we are and what we plan to deliver. We have developed a Communications strategy and plan for 2022/23, which aims to:

- Continue to engage external stakeholders, people in custody and families on our recommendations, learning and findings from investigations.
- Ensure those in custody are aware of how to complain to us.
- Improve how prisons perceive the PPO and the recommendations we make.

## Strategic Goals

Building on our objectives and priorities as an organisation, our Strategic Plan highlights our areas of focus. The three-year Strategic Plan was published in 2019 and was due to run until 2021, though it has been extended to 2022 to cover the current Ombudsman's tenure. Our areas of focus, as detailed in our Strategic Plan, are:

- Confidence – Improve the confidence of our stakeholders in our role as an independent, impartial and fair investigative body and complaints resolution service.
- Effectiveness – Empower staff to further improve the quality and timeliness of our investigations and resulting reports ensuring a robust and proportionate approach.
- Impact – Focus on the outcomes of investigations and increase the impact of our work on the actions of services in remit and the day to day lives of those in custody.
- Efficiency – Use our resources efficiently and effectively.

## Resource

To deliver our goals, we need to have staff in the right roles, equipped with appropriate expertise and skills. We are a demand-led organisation and must respond to all eligible complaints and investigate all fatal incidents within our remit. It can be difficult to predict our volume of work, so we need to be agile and flexible in the way we work.

We have completed a review of our organisational design to ensure that we have the right roles in place to deliver our services and recruited more staff as a result. Our allocated budget for 2022/23 is provisionally £6.2m. This includes funding from the Ministry of Justice and Home Office Immigration Enforcement.

# Our Move to Hybrid Working

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the PPO changed its working practices to be able to operate remotely. We are now following a hybrid way of working. We will use technology to give us the flexibility to conduct our work remotely, where it is necessary and appropriate. We will also collaborate in person and maintain the benefits of working together. Our staff will continue to visit prisons, approved premises, immigration removal centres and secure training centres but will also use alternatives such as video conferencing or teleconferencing software to conduct interviews.

While the PPO has changed its working practices, we acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected our ability to meet the timescales published in the PPO's 2021/22 Business Plan (which is available at <https://www.ppo.gov.uk/document/corporate-documents/>). Despite this, we were still able to deliver effective investigations and the quality of our work was not compromised.

# Business Plan Actions

The actions that the PPO will deliver over the next year will focus on our four Strategic Goals, which are Confidence, Effectiveness, Impact and Efficiency. All the activities outlined below are priorities for the Ombudsman and for our staff.

## Confidence

We will improve the confidence of our stakeholders in our role as an independent, impartial and fair investigative body and complaints resolution service. We will do this by:

- Continuing to campaign for the PPO to be given Statutory Footing, as we believe that this is a key way to build confidence in our independence. We remain hopeful that the Government will find a legislative vehicle to make this possible.
- Raising awareness of the PPO's work with our external stakeholders and those in custody by:
  - Producing a series of communications with external partners, such as National Prison Radio, Inside Time, Prison Reform Trust, Women in Prison and other communication avenues available.
  - Continuing to run our prisoner focus groups to listen and share important information with those in prison. Although the COVID-19 pandemic meant that we had to pause the groups, we are now able to meet with groups of prisoners to talk about our work and hear from them how we can do better. We will gather evidence of impact by looking at the number of complaints from under-represented groups and through stakeholder surveys.
  - Working with our external stakeholders to participate in their apprenticeship schemes and training courses, both in person and virtually.
  - Redesigning our website so it is accessible and ensuring the content is continuously updated.
- Regularly reviewing our recommendations to services in remit to ensure they are proportionate, targeted and appropriate. Where necessary due to their significance or their frequent reappearance, we will escalate recommendations to senior staff.
- Effectively seeking and taking account of our key stakeholders' opinions, including feedback from our general stakeholder and bereaved families surveys.
- Ensuring our updated publicity materials are available in all establishments so those in custody and under offender supervision have up-to-date knowledge about our services and how to contact us.

## Effectiveness

We will continue to empower all staff to further improve the quality and timeliness of our investigations and resulting reports, ensuring a robust and proportionate approach. We will do this by:

- Attempting to meet the following timeliness targets for all complaints investigations:
  - We will determine the eligibility of all complaints within ten working days of receipt.
  - We will 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<sup>1</sup>
  - We will 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.<sup>2</sup>
- Attempting to meet the following timeliness targets for all fatal incident investigations:
  - We will complete our investigation and submit our initial report for consultation into natural cause deaths within 20 weeks (100 working days) of initial notification<sup>3</sup>.
  - We will complete our investigation and submit our initial report for consultation into self-inflicted, non-natural, drug related deaths and homicides within 26 weeks (130 working days) of initial notification<sup>4</sup>.
  - We will finalise all fatal incident investigation reports within 12 weeks (60 working days) of the initial report.
  - We will consider these targets to have been met if at least 70% of reports are delivered to time and quality.
  - We will publish an anonymised investigation report for all fatal incidents on our website within one week (five working days) of being notified that the inquest has concluded, and our investigation report has been finalised.
- Continuously improving as an organisation:
  - Our Senior Leadership Team will conduct regular reviews of our cases and investigation reports to ensure we have confidence and consistency in our decision making and to assure ourselves that we are contributing to safer, fairer custody and offender supervision.
  - We will consider trialling the use of external bodies or another Ombudsman to conduct reviews of our cases and investigation reports to further ensure we have confidence and consistency in our decision making and to assure ourselves that we are contributing to safer, fairer custody and offender supervision. For these reviews we will ensure that personal data, particularly for our complaints investigations, is removed.
  - We will work with our staff to identify areas where our productivity is blocked and reduce activities that do not add value to our investigations.

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<sup>1</sup> Occasionally, we must suspend our Complaints investigations while we wait for key information. Timeliness calculations exclude the times when a case is suspended for reasons that are outside the PPO's control.

<sup>2</sup> As above at footnote 1.

<sup>3</sup> Occasionally, we must suspend our Fatal Incident investigations while we wait for key information, such as the cause of death, toxicology tests or a clinical review. Timeliness calculations exclude the times when a case is suspended for reasons that are outside the PPO's control.

<sup>4</sup> As above at footnote 3.



## Impact

We will focus on the outcomes of investigations and increase the impact of our work on the actions of services in remit and the day to day lives of those in custody. We will do this by:

- Continuing with the pilot to investigate the deaths of recently released prisoners who died from any cause, except for homicide. As with our other fatal incident investigations, we will work to the timeliness targets defined above. We will evaluate the impact of these investigations to help determine the PPO's remit going forward.
- Producing our Annual Report for publication in Autumn 2022, which will update Parliament and our stakeholders on our key cases, progress and findings during 2021/22.
- Continuing to refine our data collection and data management to continue to uncover themes and trends in our case work.
- Continuing our efforts to develop an effective means of tracking repeat recommendations and holding services in remit to account for not implementing recommendations.
- Ensuring we have impact by producing regular news and publications, including Learning Lessons Bulletins and The Investigator (our newsletter), to engage external stakeholders.
- Responding to all Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests within the prescribed timescales.
- Developing our relationships with HM Inspectorate of Prisons, the Independent Monitoring Boards, HM Inspectorate of Probation and the Independent Advisory Panel for Deaths in Custody, and working together where our aims align.
- Continuing to work closely with universities and academics to support our work and ensure we are having an impact.
- Updating the PPO's corporate branding so it is accessible and allows us to have a stronger impact.

## Efficiency

We will use our resources efficiently and effectively. We will do this by:

- Supporting the wellbeing of our staff through our Staff Support Team and through introducing a trauma informed approach to investigations. This will particularly support those carrying out fatal incident investigations.
- Championing diversity and inclusion through our five Equality and Diversity Groups and across our teams. We will take action to make the PPO a great place to work and ensure that all colleagues are well supported.
- Producing a Race Action Plan, which will set out how the PPO will tackle racism and ensure that our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff feel a sense of belonging, empowerment, value and respect. We will also begin actioning the previous plan drawn up over the past year.

- Reviewing our recruitment processes with all the PPO's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Staff Groups to make the PPO even more inclusive.
- Maintaining a case management system, which supports an efficient and effective investigation process.
- Supporting our staff with a Learning and Development Strategy and signposting colleagues to opportunities to build their skills and capability.
- Supporting our staff by holding regular full staff meetings and development events across the year to promote collaboration, training and development across the office.
- Keeping staff up to date on important information through regular internal communications.
- Responding to the findings from the People Survey and implementing actions to support colleagues across the office.
- Developing a PPO Green Policy which will include being less reliant on paper and embracing digital working.

# Measuring Success

We will know we have been successful as an organisation if we achieve some or all of the following:

- We receive positive results from our stakeholder survey, particularly their rating of the quality of our work provided during the last 12 months.
- We receive fewer ineligible complaints and receive more complaints from under-represented groups.
- We receive positive feedback from families that we have handled our fatal incident investigations appropriately and in a timely way.
- We can see changes made within the services in remit as a result of our recommendations or learning and we are issuing fewer repeat recommendations
- We see positive engagement results from our staff in the annual People Survey, particularly in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We have produced a series of Learning Lesson publications that have impact by contributing to safer, fairer custody and offender supervision.
- We have produced our Annual Report on time and it clearly shows the work that we deliver.

# Conclusion

The PPO has continued to adapt quickly to working under the different and difficult circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we have continued to make a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and offender supervision.

However, we know that we can do more. We will strive, through the implementation of key changes to our working practices and continual reviews of our ways of working, to further achieve our goals.



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