

POST-RELEASE DEATH INVESTIGATIONS REVEAL HOMELESSNESS ON RELEASE IS A CONSIDERABLE ISSUE

18 July 2024: Adrian Usher, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) has published the second Learning Lessons Bulletin in the post-release deaths series, highlighting the detrimental effect on prison leavers being released homeless.

The PPO carries out investigations into the deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and individuals detained under immigration powers. They also investigate any death (except homicide) where the individual dies within 14 days of release from prison into the community.

The PPO's first bulletin on post-release deaths published in January 2023, highlighted the acute vulnerability of those being released from prison. The second bulletin in this series adds to these findings, stressing that more needs to be done to ensure that prisoners are released with suitable accommodation and support measures.

Homelessness on release is a significant and complex challenge, and the PPO have revealed today that unfortunately accommodation is not always found for individuals released from prison. Between 6 September 2021 and 31 December 2023, the PPO started investigations into 137 post-release deaths. In their analysis of 105 of these cases, they found that 32% of these individuals were released homeless and died within 2 weeks of release¹. When viewed in the context of other MOJ research, it seems that prisoners who are released homeless may be overrepresented in our post-release death investigations.

The PPO highlight that many of those released homeless suffer from mental health and substance misuse issues, and that homelessness can increase the likelihood of committing further offences or seeking shelter and support in harmful places.

"We know that prison leavers often have multiple risk factors" said Ombudsman Adrian Usher. "However, more must be done by HM Prison and Probation Services and community service providers to ensure that vulnerable prisoners have the right support in place so they are released with suitable accommodation and to protect them from substance misuse on release".

The Ombudsman's office also found that just over 50% of individuals died within the first four days of release and 72% of these deaths were drug-related².

¹ Where the initial or final report had been issued

² Data based investigations started into 137 post-release deaths

They also shared staggering information that more drug-related deaths occurred within the first day of release than any other day as out of the 83 drug-related deaths they investigated, 20 occurred within one day of release³.

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman urge HM Prison and Probation Service and the community service providers to strengthen their release planning as this stark finding demonstrates how acutely vulnerable prison leavers are.

“We cannot stress enough the importance of release planning to ensure that individuals are released to safe, suitable environments. We know prison leavers have complex needs which makes it harder to house them, however my office regularly makes recommendations in these areas and more must be done to prevent further deaths from occurring”.

ENDS

³ Data based on investigations started into 137 post-release deaths

Notes to editors:

1. The bulletin is available at www.ppo.gov.uk
2. Adrian Usher was appointed as Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) in April 2023.
3. The 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 those provided by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Prisoner Escort and Custody Service, the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement), the Youth Custody Service, and those local authorities with secure children's homes. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).
4. The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the latest version of which can be found at <https://www.ppo.gov.uk/about/vision-andvalues/terms-of-reference/>
5. The PPO has three main investigative duties:
 - complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention, offenders under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals)
 - deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and detained individuals due to any cause
 - deaths of recently released prisoners that occur within 14 days of release from prison (except homicide)
6. Please contact ppocomms@ppo.gov.uk if you require more information.