



## **“PRISONERS SHOULD HAVE PHONE CONTRACTS” says Ombudsman Adrian Usher**

**5 August 2024:** In a news post published today, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman Adrian Usher states why he believes that prisoners having phone contracts could save lives.

It is currently standard practice in prisons for prisoners to pay for their phone calls by the minute. Each call is paid for by the prisoner themselves and one of the ways they can be paid for is through the money they earn by working in prisons.

Ombudsman Adrian Usher argues that telecom providers should provide unlimited minute contracts to the prison service. He suggests that the prisoner should pay for their contract and the prison Governor should hold the decision on how many minutes each prisoner is given.

The suggestion comes as Adrian believes this change in the prison service’s approach to phone calls can be used to not only incentivise good behaviour, but it could also potentially reduce suicide and self-harm.

“When I am investigating the circumstances of a self-inflicted death in a prison, far too frequently do I find that they had no credit on their phone account.”

“This leaves me to speculate if, in their darkest hour, they had the ability to contact a friend or a family member, would they have made a difference choice?” said Adrian.

In 2023 – 2024, the PPO’s office started investigations into 104 self-inflicted deaths. This was 13 more than the previous year. With the rise in self-inflicted deaths, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman believe there is an opportunity for HM Prison and Probation Service to change their approach to how phone calls are managed as this decision could help those in crisis.

“I have regularly shared my thoughts with HMPPS during meetings with their senior leaders and on prison visits – not only would this change make practical sense, but it would also make a positive difference to prison culture and to reducing the rise in self-inflicted deaths.”

“We know HMPPS takes many compassionate measures to save lives in prison, but this small change could have a significant and positive outcome for many prisoners. Access to more minutes could help save lives, especially for those in a time of need.”

“This change may take months to implement, but I believe this work should start now.”

The Ombudsman plans to continue talking about this change and hopes for a positive outcome for all.

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors:**

1. This release is available at [www.ppo.gov.uk](http://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://ppo.gov.uk/document/prison-and-probation-ombudsman-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](mailto:ppocomms@ppo.gov.uk) if you require more information.