

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Ged Corbett on 19 August 2023, following his release from HMP Thameside

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

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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



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Summary

1. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman aims to make a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and community supervision. One of the most important ways in which we work towards that aim is by carrying out independent investigations into deaths, due to any cause, of prisoners, young people in detention, residents of approved premises and detainees in immigration centres.
2. Since 6 September 2021, the PPO has been investigating post-release deaths that occur within 14 days of the person's release from prison.
3. If my office is to best assist His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in ensuring the standard of care received by those within service remit is appropriate, our recommendations should be focused, evidenced and viable. This is especially the case if there is evidence of systemic failure.
4. Mr Ged Corbett died of a heroin overdose on 19 August 2023 following his release from HMP Thameside on 16 August. He was 28 years old. We offer our condolences to those who knew him.
5. Mr Corbett had a history of substance misuse. We found that Mr Corbett received appropriate support for his substance misuse issues while he was at Thameside. The prison substance misuse service (SMS) saw him regularly and warned him of the risks associated with drug taking. He remained under their care until he was released, when he was transferred to a community SMS team. He was released from prison with a naloxone (medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose) kit.
6. We consider that Mr Corbett's community offender manager (COM) appropriately prepared for his release. She liaised with external support agencies, completed the relevant housing referrals, and gave him licence conditions to ensure he addressed his issues relating to substance misuse.
7. Mr Corbett was released homeless. However, we found that his COM had completed the appropriate accommodation referrals to local authorities and housing agencies. The provision of suitable accommodation for people leaving prison is an issue that extends beyond the remit of Thameside or local probation services, and the local authority may want to be aware of the issues raised in this case.
8. We make no recommendations.

The Investigation Process

9. HMPPS notified us of Mr Corbett's death on 6 November 2023.
10. The PPO investigator obtained copies of relevant extracts from Mr Corbett's prison and probation records.
11. We informed HM Coroner for Inner North London of the investigation. They gave us the results of the post-mortem examination. We have sent the coroner a copy of this report.
12. The Ombudsman's family liaison officer contacted Mr Corbett's next of kin, his father, to explain the investigation and to ask if he had any matters he wanted us to consider. He asked why Mr Corbett was in prison, how long he was there, and which prisons he was in. This has been addressed in the report.
13. Mr Corbett's next of kin received a copy of the initial report. They did not make any comments.
14. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS did not find any factual inaccuracies.

Background Information

HMP Thameside

15. HMP Thameside is a category B local prison in London which holds up to 1,232 men who have either been convicted or are on remand. It is managed by Serco. Until 5 May 2023, Oxleas NHS Trust provided healthcare and substance misuse services at the prison. From 6 May, Practice Plus Group began providing healthcare services, but substance misuse services are still provided by Oxleas NHS Trust.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons

16. The most recent inspection of HMP Thameside was in November 2021. Inspectors reported that there was an up-to-date drug strategy and meetings were well attended, with good oversight of local issues. The substance misuse service supported prisoners through telephone consultations, one-to-one work, programmes, and in-cell packs, which prisoners told inspectors were good, and were meticulously reviewed to ensure completion. Community drug teams were notified when any of their clients arrived at the prison and were invited in, in advance of the prisoner's discharge, to start release planning. Strong relationships had been developed with many of the London boroughs because of the high turnover of the prison population. Naloxone (a medication that can rapidly reverse the effects of an opioid overdose) training and supply had been embedded successfully over recent months.
17. Inspectors reported that the demand for help with resettlement services was high and only around a quarter of prisoners said that they were getting the support they needed before release. Just over half of prisoners leaving Thameside had accommodation for their first night of release and around three-quarters of the prisoners had left the establishment with a housing appointment arranged in the community. To address these serious deficits, leaders had recently engaged with housing teams in the London boroughs of Croydon and Lambeth, to facilitate housing assessments for prisoners before release. As a result, a small number of prisoners had gained access to temporary accommodation on release.

Probation Service

18. The Probation Service works with all individuals subject to custodial and community sentences. During a person's imprisonment, they oversee their sentence plan to assist in rehabilitation, as well as prepare reports to advise the Parole Board and have links with local partnerships to whom, where appropriate, they refer people for resettlement services. Post-release, the Probation Service supervises people throughout their licence period and post-sentence supervision.

Key Events

19. On 9 August 2022, Mr Ged Corbett was sentenced to a community order for sexual offences, and he was placed on the sexual offenders' register.
20. On 13 February 2023, Mr Corbett was convicted of assault and sentenced to 34 weeks in prison. He was sent to HMP Hull.
21. On 19 April, Mr Corbett was released from HMP Hull.
22. On 26 April, Mr Corbett was sentenced to 26 weeks in prison for failing to comply with the requirements of the sexual offences order. He was sent to HMP Thameside.

Substance misuse services

23. When Mr Corbett arrived at Thameside, he was already on a methadone detoxification programme (medication used to treat the symptoms of heroin withdrawal). He continued the programme at Thameside and was taken under the care of the prison's substance misuse service (SMS).
24. On 7 May, a nurse at Thameside saw Mr Corbett for a substance misuse assessment and they agreed on a care plan to address his substance misuse issues. The nurse warned him about the risks associated with taking psychoactive substances (PS) in prison, which included heart attack and overdose. She gave Mr Corbett harm minimisation advice and warned him about the dangers of polydrug use and misusing prescribed medication. She warned him about the risk of catching blood borne viruses by sharing needles and gave him advice on the risks related to drug use and overdosing, especially after a period of abstinence.
25. On 22 May, a nurse at Thameside saw Mr Corbett to discuss his detoxification programme. Mr Corbett said that he wanted to reduce his methadone to zero before he was released from prison. The nurse advised against this and warned him about the dangers of overdose on release. Mr Corbett insisted he wanted to finish his detoxification before he was released, so a plan was made for him to reduce by 5ml each week until his release.
26. On 26 June, Mr Corbett completed a naloxone training programme, so that he could safely administer naloxone in the event of a drugs overdose. (Naloxone is a medication that can rapidly reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.) Mr Corbett said that he would like to be released with a supply of naloxone.
27. On 21 July, an SMS worker saw Mr Corbett for a pre-release appointment. They again warned him about the risks associated with taking drugs on release. As Mr Corbett did not yet have a community drugs worker, the SMS worker sent his discharge paperwork to Change Grow Live, a community substance misuse service in York (in line with his release plans).
28. On 24 July, Mr Corbett said that he did not want to complete his methadone detoxification programme, so a GP at Thameside discontinued his prescription.

29. On the day of his release from prison, a nurse gave Mr Corbett a supply of naloxone, along with training information on how to administer it in the event of an overdose.

Accommodation

30. On 30 May, Mr Corbett attended a pre-release video call with his community offender manager (COM). Mr Corbett told his COM that he would like to be released to Woolwich where he had family support and job opportunities. The COM told Mr Corbett that she would explore this and let Mr Corbett know if it was possible. Over the next few months, the COM spoke to agencies working with Mr Corbett, including the police, and found that there were outstanding allegations of domestic abuse perpetrated by Mr Corbett in that area. The COM assessed that it was therefore not suitable for Mr Corbett to return to Woolwich.
31. On 12 July, the COM had a meeting with her manager, a senior probation officer (SPO). They agreed that Mr Corbett's risk level should be increased to high, and that he would benefit from a period in an Approved Premises (AP) on his release from prison. (APs are used by probation services to monitor and manage the risk posed by the individual, as well as giving the individual additional support to re-integrate back into the community.) After the meeting, the COM submitted a referral to an AP in York. (Mr Corbett had lived in York previously and had been managed by York Probation Service.)
32. On 1 August, the AP in York contacted the COM and told her that they could not accept Mr Corbett as they did not have any space for him on the dates required.
33. On 14 August, the COM submitted a duty to refer application (DTR - where certain public authorities must notify local authorities that a person who has engaged with them might be homeless or at risk of homelessness) to York Council. She also completed a CAS3 referral (the community accommodation service provides temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers).
34. Later that day, the CAS3 team contacted the COM and told her that they could not accept the application as they required a minimum of seven days' notice to house an individual with sexual offence convictions.
35. On the day of his release, Mr Corbett was allocated a housing officer from York Council. The COM emailed the housing officer and asked if she could find Mr Corbett temporary accommodation for that day. The housing officer said that Mr Corbett would need to present himself to the council as homeless that day. As Mr Corbett did not attend his initial appointment, the COM was unable to notify him of this.

Release from Thameside

36. On 16 August, Mr Corbett was released from Thameside. He was told to report to York probation office by 2.00pm, but given the distance from Thameside, was given some leeway. He did not arrive on 16 August. As Mr Corbett did not have a mobile phone, his COM was unable to contact him. The COM gave Mr Corbett 24 hours in which to make contact. As he did not make contact and due to the risk of harm he posed to others, the COM initiated a recall to prison the next day.

Circumstances of Mr Corbett's death

37. On the morning of 19 August, a member of the public found Mr Corbett outside an address in London. Police and paramedics arrived and pronounced Mr Corbett dead at 11.24am.
38. On 3 October, the Metropolitan Police informed HMPPS that Mr Corbett had died.

Post-mortem report

39. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Corbett died of acute respiratory depression and coma due to heroin toxicity.
40. The inquest, held on 15 January 2024, concluded that Mr Corbett's death was drug related.

Findings

Substance misuse services

41. Mr Corbett had a history of substance misuse. While he was in prison, he was seen regularly by the SMS team who advised him not to come off his methadone script and warned about the risks and dangers of taking drugs. He was also trained in the use of naloxone and was released with a supply of this. As Mr Corbett did not attend his initial appointment, the COM was unable to discuss his licence conditions with him. We are satisfied however that Mr Corbett's COM put appropriate measures in place to address his substance misuse issues when he was released from prison. This included adding licence conditions to comply with any requirements relating to addressing his substance misuse issues. We are satisfied that both the prison and probation services did all they could to manage the risks associated with his substance misuse.

Accommodation

42. Homelessness on release from prison is a significant and complex challenge. While prison and probation staff can submit referrals to local authorities and charities, there are occasions when beds are not available, or the individual does not meet the eligibility criteria for housing. This means that these individuals are released homeless and are expected to report to the local authority on the day of their release in the hope of receiving emergency housing. If an individual is homeless, it can increase the likelihood that they will commit further crimes or seek shelter and support in harmful places.
43. We consider that Mr Corbett's COM suitably prepared for his release by completing accommodation referrals to an approved premises, the local authorities and housing agencies. The provision of suitable accommodation for people leaving prison is an issue that extends beyond the remit of the prison and local probation services, and the local authority may want to be aware of the issues raised in this case.

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April 2024

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