

Learning lessons bulletin

Complaints investigations | Issue 11

Property complaints

Foreword

Property has consistently been the most common complaint category investigated by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO). In our annual report for 2023 to 2024, we reported that property complaints made up 27% of the complaints we completed. In total, we received 1,164 complaints regarding property during that reporting period. I was keen for us to explore this further, to better understand what the key issues with property are and what changes HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) could make.

This learning lessons bulletin summarises the learning from PPO investigations into property complaints from prisoners.¹ It also sets out some interesting quantitative findings on our property complaints.

Unfortunately, it seems the new Prisoners' Property Policy Framework that came into effect in September 2022 has not resulted in a reduction of property complaints to the PPO. This bulletin outlines a number of policy and operational improvements that, we believe, would help address the main causes for property complaints. While implementing these recommendations will require some resource, HMPPS would benefit in the long term from a reduction in the amount of time spent by staff dealing with these complaints, a reduced amount spent in compensation payments to prisoners, reduced tensions between staff and prisoners, and improved prisoner wellbeing.

¹ Since November 2023, the PPO now investigates prisoner complaints under the name of Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations (IPCI). For simplicity and historical accuracy, this bulletin will refer to the PPO to mean both the PPO and IPCI.

A consistent issue our researchers found was that prisons are insufficiently motivated to improve property practices. This strongly suggests the need for HMPPS to make operational changes (driven and monitored by key performance indicators and audits) to help motivate prisons to address property handling.

I hope that HMPPS utilises the learning in this bulletin to address the longstanding issues with property handling in prisons which negatively impact the prisoners in their care.



Adrian Usher

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

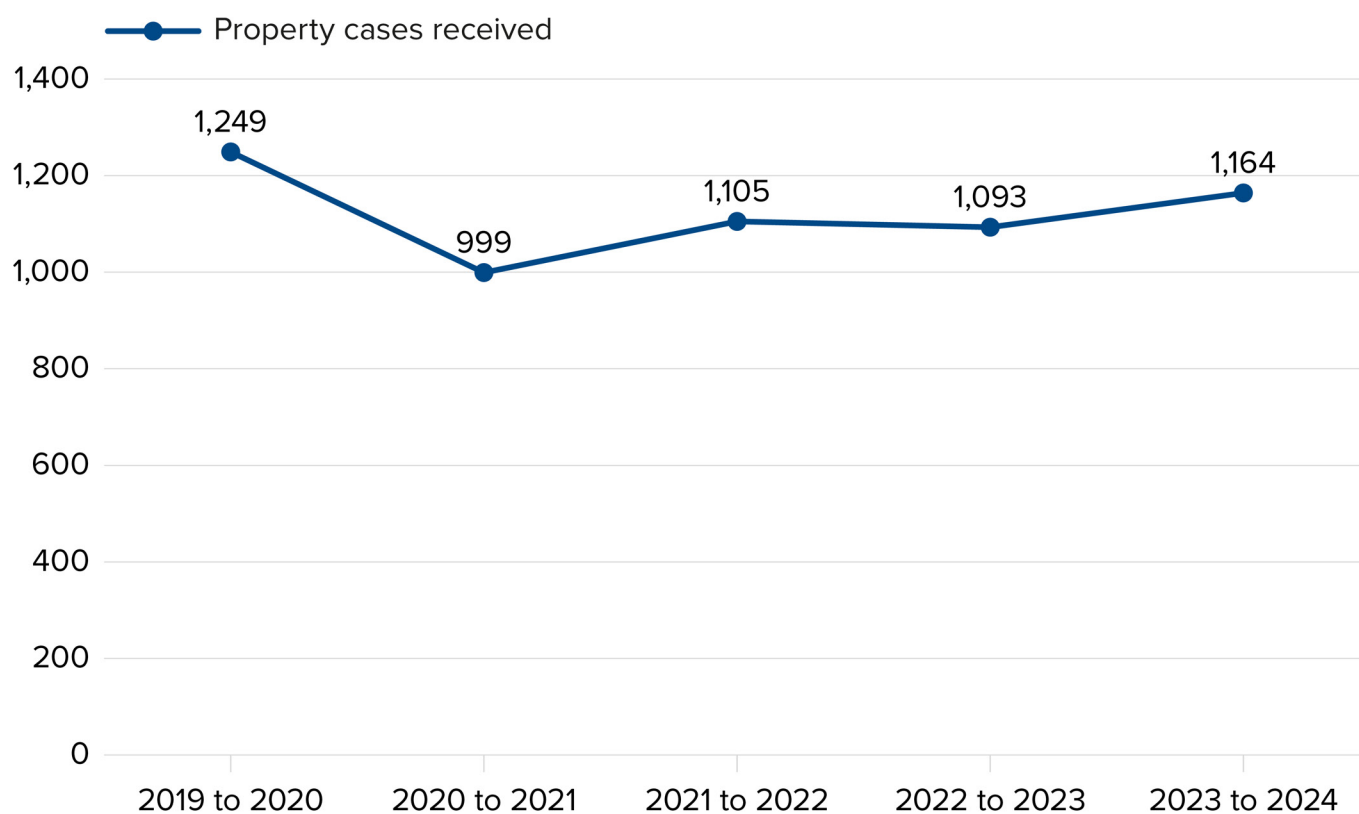
Context and data

This learning lessons bulletin covers PPO investigations into property complaints from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024. During this five-year period the PPO received 5,610 property complaints. Of these, 2,953 (53%) were eligible for investigation. For comparison, in 2023 to 2024, across all complaint categories other than property, only 45% of cases were eligible for investigation.

In the same five-year period, the PPO completed investigations into 3,039 property complaints. Of the 3,039 complaints investigated, 1,356 (45%) were either upheld or partially upheld. This includes 867 upheld or partially upheld complaints that were mediated to achieve a resolution. In 2023 to 2024, across all complaints categories other than property, only 23% of cases were upheld. The higher uphold rate reflects the fact that the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework (Policy Framework) sets out clear responsibilities for prisons, and where prisons fail to fulfil these, it is relatively straightforward to uphold a case. These figures demonstrate that property is a significant issue for prisoners, and property complaints are a large part of the PPO's caseload and an issue for both prison staff and prisoners.

The year-on-year change in property complaints received can be seen in figure 1. The PPO received the most property complaints in 2019 to 2020, before a large decrease in 2020 to 2021, which most likely can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. It appears from HMPPS transfer data that the reduction in complaints correlates with a decrease in the number of transfers that took place during this period. We explore the correlation between transfers and complaints received by the PPO later in this bulletin. Other factors may also have contributed to this drop in complaints received during the pandemic. For example, prisoners may have had less support to make complaints to the PPO.

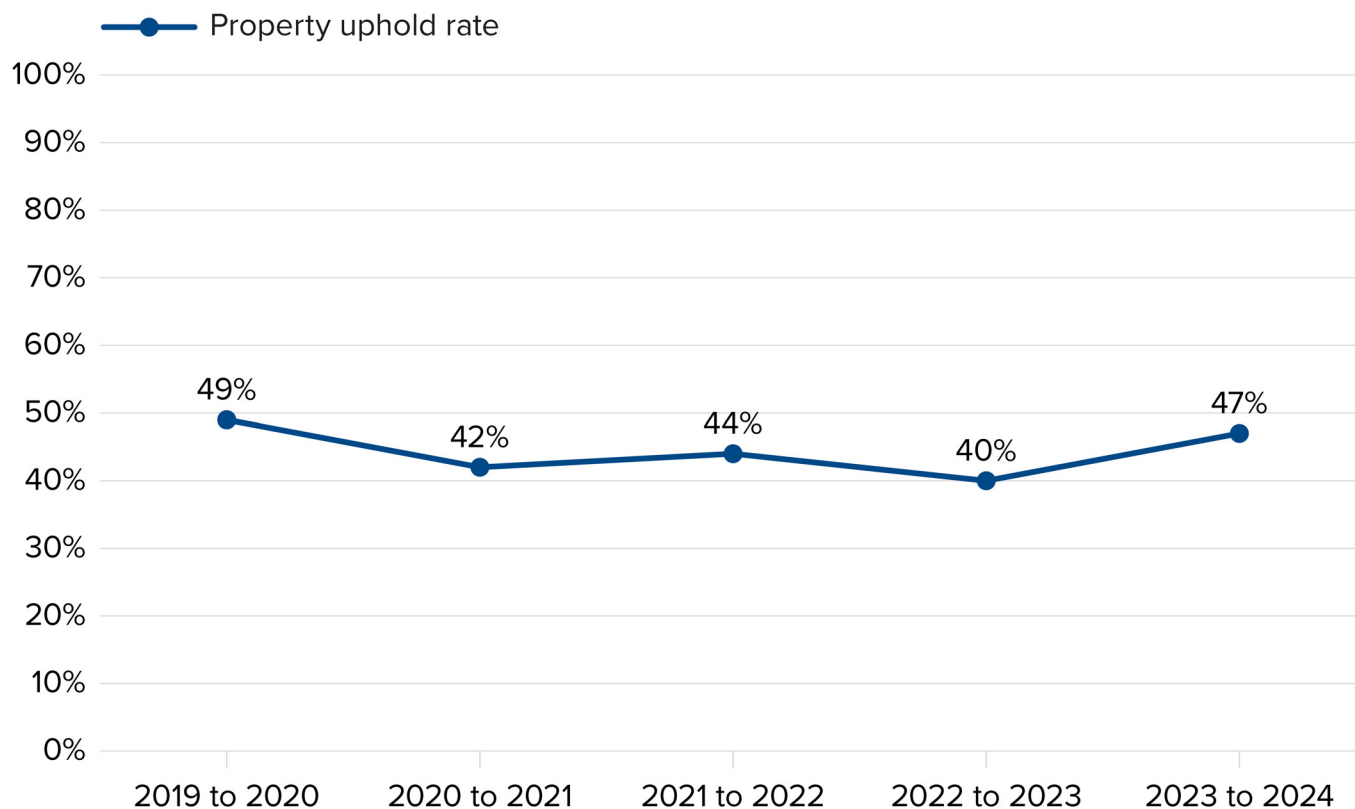
Figure 1: Property complaints received by the PPO from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024.



The Policy Framework came into effect in September 2022 with the aim of ensuring “prisoners’ property is managed efficiently, effectively, consistently and with care and respect...”²

Figure 2 shows the PPO’s uphold rate for property complaints completed. The data suggests that implementation of the Policy Framework has not impacted the number of complaints we receive from prisoners.

Figure 2: Uphold rate for property complaints completed by the PPO from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024.



2 HMPPS (2022), Prisoners’ Property Policy Framework, section 3 ‘Outcomes’. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prisoners-property-policy-framework>

Long-term and high security prisons

In the five-year period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024, prisoners in the long-term and high security prisons submitted disproportionately more property complaints when adjusted for population. The PPO received an average of 27.1 and 31.4 property complaints each year per 1000 prisoners from Category B and high security prisons respectively.

This is disproportionately reflected in all PPO complaint categories. For the same period, the PPO received an average of 145 complaints each year per 1000 prisoners in the Long Term and High Security Estate (LTHSE), which is almost triple the number of complaints we received from the next highest complaining Prison Group Directorate (PGD).³

Figure 3: Property complaints received and completed by the PPO, their eligibility and uphold rates by predominant function and adjusted for predominant function cumulative population.

Predominant function ⁴	Cases received			Cases completed		
	Cases received	Average each year per 1000 prisoners	Eligibility %	Cases completed	Average each year per 1000 prisoners	Uphold rate
High security	592	31.4	72%	426	22.6	35%
Category B ⁵	1,008	27.1	59%	633	17.0	41%
Reception	1,739	14.1	44%	823	6.7	53%
Category C ⁶	1,879	10.1	50%	949	5.1	44%
Open	252	10.1	55%	141	5.7	43%
Youth estate	26	7.0	81%	17	4.6	24%
Female	79	5.2	49%	38	2.5	58%

11 of the 12 LTHSE prisons appear in the top 17 of prisons for highest number of property complaints received when adjusted for population. There was one exception to this, with HMP Belmarsh listed 29th for property complaints received by the PPO.

Among the LTHSE prisons, HMP Belmarsh has the highest rate of transfers and the lowest rate of complaints in the group. The lower rate of complaints could be because it is the only LTHSE prison with a reception function.

3 The LTHSE, as assigned for the purposes of this report, is made up of 12 prisons which have the predominant function of high security or Category B.

4 As provided by HMPPS data on the prison estate and probation service regions from January 2024.

5 Grendon/Spring Hill is a Category B and Open prison with population given cumulatively by HMPPS. Population was split into Category B/Open by 2023 to 2024 population ratio, as found in: <https://www.gupc.org.uk/media/Council%20Documents/Reports/2023-24/HMP%20Springhill%20Annual%20Report%202023-24.pdf>

6 Usk/Prescoed is a Category C/Open prison with population given cumulatively by HMPPS. Population was split into Category C/Open by 2023 population ratio, as found in: <https://howardleague.org/prisons/usk-prescoed/>

Demographic data

Age

The statistics for the youth estate show high eligibility rates and low uphold rates, and this is mirrored when looking at complaints from those aged under 18. We received a very small number of complaints from those under 18, however those we did receive tended to be eligible for investigation by the PPO. The PPO upheld fewer complaints from those under 18 than any other age category. There could be several reasons for this. It is possible that those in the youth estate receive greater support when submitting their complaints, which means they are more likely to be eligible.⁷ Across the rest of the age groups, the eligibility and uphold rates were similar to the PPO's average.

Sex

Out of all the prison groups and categories, we receive the least number of property complaints (on average per prisoner) from the women's estate. This is in keeping with previous data and research by the PPO on the lack of complaints generally from women. The eligibility and uphold rates for the complaints we received were broadly the same across sex. While we received fewer complaints from the women's prisons, they had the highest uphold rate of all the prison categories.

Categories of property

Out of the 713 sampled cases from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024 into which we did an in-depth analysis, clothing was the most common category of property complainants said to have gone missing. It was mentioned as a category of missing property in 53% of analysed cases. Electrical items were mentioned in 38% of analysed cases and shoes in 22%.

Property on transfer

Out of the cases where we could determine where the property went missing, we found that 40% of the complaints involved transfers and 89% of these involved a prison-to-prison transfer.

Excluding the LTHSE, we found that the total number of prison-to-prison transfers (adjusted by population) was aligned with the number of complaints received by the PPO per prisoner when grouped by predominant function (see figure 4).⁸ Reception prisons have the highest rate of transfers and the highest rate of complaints to the PPO outside of the LTHSE. However, when we plotted the volume of transfers to and from PGDs or individual establishments against the property complaints received at the PPO, a correlation is no longer observed.⁹ This would suggest that individual establishments and PGDs have property handling systems with differing levels of efficacy. Areas or establishments with high transfer volumes and low complaint rates could be picked out as potential examples of good practice.

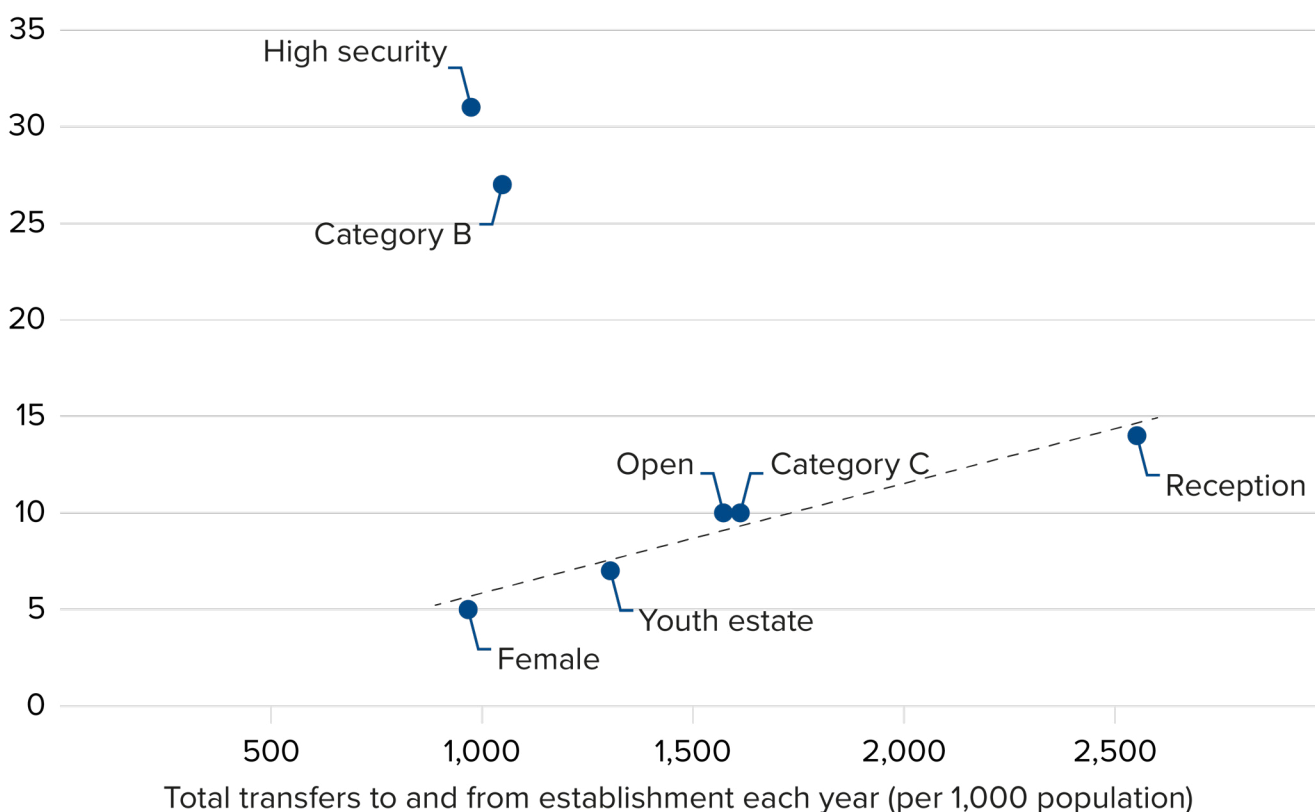
7 Due to the small number of complaints from this age group, it is not possible to infer causation for the high eligibility and low uphold rate.

8 Please refer to page 5, 'Long-term and high security prisons', to see an explanation as to why LTHSE has been excluded from this finding due to disproportionality in the extent to which prisoners in the LTHSE estate complain to the PPO.

9 The volume of transfers and the property complaints received at the PPO were adjusted for population.

Figure 4: Relationship between prison-to-prison transfers and complaints received at the PPO by predominant function.¹⁰

Complaints received each year (per 1,000 population)



An in-depth analysis of our sampled investigations showed that most complaints concerned prisoners' property not being returned to them following their transfer to a new establishment, either because it was lost or not sent on for an extended period of time.

The Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) used to transfer prisoners between prisons are contracted to transport property in accordance with the Policy Framework and volumetric control limits.¹¹

The Policy Framework makes it clear that the sending prison is responsible for sending any property above volumetric control limits to the

receiving prison "within four weeks of the transfer unless exceptional circumstances prevent this".¹²

In general, it is typical for prisons to take one to two months to send on property left behind, and in some cases, it takes significantly longer. Delays in sending property to the next prison creates the opportunity for property to be lost and appears to be the root cause of many property complaints. The failure by prisons to enforce volumetric control also exacerbates issues on transfer and is explored later.

The Policy Framework acknowledges that "the transfer of property between prisons can be a common source of difficulty, and loss or

10 This graph totals complaints and transfers data from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024. To proportionately compare the establishments, we have combined both directions of transfer together. Please note that by summing the transfers this way, there will likely be a single transfer that is double counted given both the transfer out of one location and the transfer into another location has been summed together. This means each instance of transfer will be counted twice, which will not align with the Accredited Official Statistics.

11 On transfer, volumetric control limits equate to three bags of property per prisoner and an additional 7.5KG bag for consumables, oversized items and items exempt from volumetric control.

12 HMPPS (2022), Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, paragraph 4.47. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prisoners-property-policy-framework>

damage of items can lead to frustration, anxiety, resentment and a loss of trust in staff and the Prison Service".¹³ Despite acknowledging this, the policy does not go far enough to address the issues that arise on transfer. The policy could go further in mandating that prisons must send property on to the receiving prison as soon as possible and no later than four weeks. Enforcing this timeframe could encourage prisons to send property earlier and therefore reduce the chances of it being lost.

Case study 1

Mr A submitted a complaint in February 2024 that some of his property did not arrive at his current prison following his transfer in November 2023. The current prison sent the complaint to the previous prison to respond. The previous prison confirmed that they delivered the property to the current prison in December and that they had no further property. They suggested that this was a matter for the current prison's reception department.

Mr A submitted his complaint to the PPO and said that both prisons were saying they did not have his property. Mr A asked for his property to be returned or to be paid compensation.

The previous prison provided a full audit trail, including the signed receipt, to show the property had arrived at Mr A's current prison.

The PPO's investigation found that Mr A's property had been at his current prison for around two months at the time he complained. However, instead of telling Mr A the property had arrived and taking him to reception to check the property, the complaints were all sent to the previous prison.

As a result of the PPO's involvement, Mr A was finally taken to reception to check his property and have the property issued. This was eight months after the property had arrived, and six months since Mr A had raised a complaint.

Lessons to be learned

- HMPPS to consider amending the Policy Framework to mandate that property must be sent to the receiving prison as soon as possible and no later than 4 weeks.
- The Policy Framework should specify a strict timeframe by which prisoners should be informed of the arrival of their property and given the opportunity to attend reception for it to be opened in their presence and, where allowed, issued to them.

Handling property issues

Cases like Mr A's highlight how poorly the receiving prison dealt with the prisoner's complaint, but also how easily the complaint could have been resolved if someone at the receiving prison had dealt with his initial complaint properly.

The Policy Framework explains that some prisons have found it helpful to identify a member of staff to act as a single point of contact for property. It suggests this could help where issues arise following a transfer. Given the impact on prisoners, and the amount of time spent by staff dealing with property issues and complaints, the PPO would suggest that establishments should consider whether having a designated property officer would help them with property complaints handling. We plan to undertake further work to better understand the effectiveness of property officers.

13 HMPPS (2022), Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, paragraph 4.38. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prisoners-property-policy-framework>

In our research, we found that prisons consistently fail to comply with national policy. Within the recommendations we have made to prisons over the past four years about property complaints, 18% were categorised as recommending a notice to staff to comply with national policy. The level of non-compliance with policy is likely much higher. 31% of our cases over the past four years recommended that the prison should compensate the prisoner, and in 24% of cases we mediated an outcome. Often in the cases where we recommended compensation or mediated an outcome, prison staff had failed to comply with policy requirements. This suggests that simply adding more policy requirements alone will not solve the issue.

The PPO strongly believes that HMPPS needs to make operational changes which help encourage prisons to change their property handling process, for example, by including property as a key performance indicator. Without such changes, it is unlikely that policy changes will be effective.

Lessons to be learned

- HMPPS should introduce key performance indicators / audits to motivate prisons to improve their property handling practices and encourage willingness to address property issues internally.

Volumetric control

It is understandable that the transfer vehicles will have limited capacity to take large volumes of property, and this is made clear to establishments in the Policy Framework. This issue is compounded by many prisoners having property that exceeds the amount they are allowed, often more than six bags.

The Policy Framework addresses volumetric control and explains that a focus on compliance with volumetric control is important not just on transfer, but throughout an individual's time in prison. The policy also makes clear that "consideration must be given to how much property a prisoner already has when permitting the purchase of any further items (e.g. from catalogues). Where a prisoner exceeds volumetric control limits, staff should consider writing to the prisoner to explain this and to set out how their property can be brought back within the limits".¹⁴

Our thematic analysis showed that prisons are not enforcing these limits, which is exacerbating the issues with follow-on property going missing during transfer.

Lessons to be learned

- HMPPS should reiterate the responsibility on prisons to enforce volumetric control limits and consider tighter controls on what prisoners are allowed to retain in the establishment or purchase to help enforce volumetric control limits.

14 HMPPS (2022), Prisoners' Property Policy Framework, paragraph 4.21. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prisoners-property-policy-framework>

Record keeping

Another issue that came up in PPO investigations was the lack of audit trails when property was transferred between prisons. As well as the issue of missing property, the PPO's investigations have highlighted issues with missing property cards. There is a statutory requirement to maintain a clear and legible inventory of a prisoner's property. The Policy Framework states that this is important in order to track, safely store and later locate items. There is a requirement for all property cards (including old completed cards) to be stored securely in the prisoner's core record. However, the PPO regularly sees cases where previous property cards cannot be found.

Case study 2

Mr B complained that his books went missing after he transferred prisons. Mr B said that the books were included with his legal papers and had been bagged and sealed in his presence. Mr B said that the bag was not loaded on to the van because of the three-bag limit and staff told him it would be sent on.

In response to his complaint, staff at the sending prison said that there were no books listed on his property card and therefore they would not compensate him as there was no evidence he had the books there.

During their investigation, the PPO investigator asked both the sending and receiving prison for a copy of Mr B's property cards. The investigator was provided with a new set of property cards that had been created at the receiving prison. Neither prison could locate Mr B's previous property cards and therefore it was not possible for the PPO to establish whether Mr B had the books at the sending prison. The fact that the prison said they had checked the property records when Mr B complained suggests

that they had either kept them or made a copy before he left. The absence of the full property records meant there was no audit trail for the property prior to Mr B arriving at the next prison and this was a breach of policy. For this reason, the PPO upheld the complaint.

Prisoners are unable to prove they had property in their possession if the prison does not maintain and safely store property records. Having clear, accurate and easily accessible property records would speed up complaint investigations for staff and prisoners, reduce staff time spent dealing with complaints and enable more complaints to be efficiently resolved. For this reason, HMPPS could introduce estate-wide digital property cards that are comprehensive and enable a full and accurate audit trail. This would enable both sending and receiving prisons to access the property records and keep them updated.

Lessons to be learned

- HMPPS should consider introducing estate-wide digital property cards that are comprehensive and enable a full and accurate audit trail for property.
- In the meantime, sending prisons should maintain an audit trail to demonstrate what happened to the property in the lead up to and following the transfer. This could be in the form of keeping copies of the property record.

Local policies

Another cause for complaint is related to prisons' local facilities lists and restrictions on what prisoners can have in their possession. Governors can exercise wide discretion in determining what items are allowed in-possession in their prison. Following a transfer, prisoners sometimes found that property they were allowed at the previous prison would be confiscated on arrival as it was not allowed under the new prisons' local policies. We understand that some discretion is necessary to address local security concerns, however prisons should be conscious that unnecessary disparities among prisons can lead to unfair outcomes for prisoners where they are unable to use items they have previously purchased and used in another prison. Local restrictions should be considered carefully.

A number of these complaints related to possession of the Xbox 360 video game console. The HMPPS Incentives Policy Framework states that prisoners are not allowed Xbox 360s in-possession. However, the policy gives Governors discretion to allow prisoners to retain consoles with disabled internet connection that were in-possession or had been ordered before September 2014.

Despite this policy, it has become apparent from PPO investigations that a number of prisons are allowing prisoners to purchase Xbox 360s. This then causes an issue when the prisoner transfers because the items are not allowed in the next prison.

Case study 3

Mr C complained that he had purchased an Xbox 360, controllers and games while at his previous prison, but was not allowed the Xbox 360 hard drive in his possession after he was transferred to a different prison.

Mr C's current prison said that the only Xboxes allowed in-possession were those purchased before September 2014.

However, as a gesture of goodwill they were allowing Xboxes purchased after this date in-possession without the hard drive. Mr C complained that his Xbox 360 would not work without the hard drive and he was allowed the Xbox 360 (including the hard drive) in his previous prison.

The PPO investigator asked the previous prison why they had allowed Mr C to purchase an Xbox 360 in breach of the national policy. The previous prison told the PPO that they had made the decision that Xbox 360s were allowed in-possession if purchased from their approved supplier and if the Wi-Fi capability was disabled. The prison said that the national framework was a guide and each prison was different.

As the national policy is clear that Xbox 360s are not allowed in-possession unless they were ordered or held in possession prior to September 2014 and have internet connectivity disabled, the PPO found that the current prison was correctly following the national policy. However, the PPO did find that Mr C had been financially disadvantaged by the previous prison's decision to allow him to purchase the Xbox 360 contrary to national policy.

Lessons to be learned

- HMPPS need to review compliance with the policy relating to Xbox 360s across the prison estate and amend the policy accordingly to ensure consistency across prisons.
- There needs to be greater coordination by HMPPS to facilitate more consistency with facilities lists across the prison estate.
- Prisons should ensure that their discretion to impose their own local facilities lists and restrictions is used carefully and selectively.

Cell clearance

Cell clearances typically take place when a prisoner is moving to another area of the prison, to hospital or to another prison. Cell clearances which occurred in the context of a transfer compounded the difficulty of ascertaining when and how an item was lost, as it may have been lost at the time of the clearance, or at some later stage during the transfer, such as during transport or on arrival at the receiving prison.

In some cases, the prisoner can pack their own belongings, but in circumstances where the prisoner is unable to do this, prison staff are responsible for securing the cell and carrying out a cell clearance. The Policy Framework mandates that the cell clearance certificate (with the property card) must be stored in the prisoner’s core record. Our investigators often find staff have failed to do this.

Our research also found that as cell clearances were often conducted in the context of a prisoner’s move to segregation following a behavioural/disciplinary breach or the initiation of Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) procedures, this tended to heighten prisoners’ suspicions that their property was intentionally lost or damaged, reducing their trust in the establishment.

Case study 4

Mr D complained that, following his move from segregation to his cell, the prison failed to return some of his property. We upheld the prisoner’s complaint. The prison was unable to provide a valid cell clearance certificate. The investigator noted that the prison had failed to comply with Section 4.11 of the Policy Framework which states that all property records including “cell clearance certificates, must be stored securely in the prisoner’s core record to allow for effective recording and management of prisoner’s property”. Some of the items complained about were

recorded on Mr D’s property record as in-possession property prior to his relocation.

On the balance of probabilities, and in the absence of information to the contrary, we were satisfied that the complaint was reasonable and found the prison liable for the cost of replacing the items listed on the prisoner’s property record.

In response to a PPO recommendation, HMPPS have annexed the cell clearance certificate to the Policy Framework so it should be easier for staff to find.

Our research has shown that several prisons repeatedly received PPO recommendations to improve their cell clearance processes. A number of prisons have told the PPO that they prefer to use their own cell clearance form as they believe their form is clearer and easier. As the cell clearance process contributes to a significant amount of property complaints and is the subject of repeated PPO recommendations, HMPPS should take further action to address the issues with cell clearances.

Lessons to be learned

- HMPPS should carry out a review of the cell clearance certificate, seeking feedback from prisons.

An additional security measure when carrying out a cell clearance would be for staff to use body-worn video cameras (BWVC), and also keep the footage and relevant CCTV footage should the prisoner make a complaint.

Lessons to be learned

- HMPPS should consider expanding the use of BWVC to include cell clearances, and retaining the BWVC and any relevant CCTV footage on receipt of a complaint, to help establish what happened and who had access to a cell.

Laundry

About 4% of all property complaints from our in-depth sample analysis concerned property lost or damaged following it being handed over to the prison laundry. This issue is specifically mentioned in the Policy Framework. The policy states that “it is not reasonable to expect the prisoner to bear any loss or damage if they have handed it over to be washed in the prison laundry”.¹⁵ Despite this clear policy direction, many complaints concerned prisons refusing to accept responsibility for clothing lost in laundry, based on the disclaimer that prisoners are responsible for their in-possession property.

Our research also discovered that several prisons asked prisoners to sign a separate disclaimer agreeing that the prison could not be held responsible for clothing put through laundry. This was essentially an attempt to ‘contract out’ of the Policy Framework, which provides that prisoners cannot be held fully responsible in circumstances where property is out of their control and the prison is at fault for loss or damage. It is unknown how many prisons have their own disclaimer form which breaches national policy, but this needs to be given attention on a systemic level.

Case study 5

Mr E complained that some of his clothes were lost in the prison laundry. In response to his complaint the prison relied upon the disclaimer and said that in-possession property was his responsibility.

The prison informed the PPO’s investigator that the prisoner laundry is entirely run by prisoners without any officer input. There was no audit trail or method of tracking any items that went in or out of laundry. This meant that there was no means of being able to track property following a complaint.

Mr E’s property cards showed that the items Mr E complained were missing were in-possession items. The PPO concluded that Mr E would have had no control over his property once it was handed in to laundry, and therefore it could not have been his responsibility. The PPO upheld the complaint on the basis that there was no audit trail and no evidence to suggest Mr E did not hand his clothes into the laundry. The PPO recommended that Mr E was paid compensation and that the prison considers introducing a method for prisoners to record the items sent into laundry.

Lessons to be learned

- The Policy Framework should mandate the requirement for prisons to have audit trails to evidence what property has been handed in and out of laundry to help make it easier to resolve complaints internally.
- HMPPS should investigate which prisons are asking prisoners to sign disclaimers for laundry and make clear that these breach national policy.

15 HMPPS (2022), Prisoners’ Property Policy Framework, paragraph 4.96. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prisoners-property-policy-framework>

Summary of lessons to be learned

Property on transfer

- HMPPS to consider amending the Policy Framework to mandate that property must be sent to the receiving prison as soon as possible and no later than 4 weeks.
- The Policy Framework should specify a strict timeframe by which prisoners should be informed of the arrival of their property and given the opportunity to attend reception for it to be opened in their presence and, where allowed, issued to them.

Handling property issues

- HMPPS should introduce key performance indicators / audits to motivate prisons to improve their property handling practices and encourage willingness to address property issues internally.

Volumetric control

- HMPPS should reiterate the responsibility on prisons to enforce volumetric control limits and consider tighter controls on what prisoners are allowed to retain in the establishment or purchase to help enforce volumetric control limits.

Record keeping

- HMPPS should consider introducing estate-wide digital property cards that are comprehensive and enable a full and accurate audit trail for property.
- In the meantime, sending prisons should maintain an audit trail to demonstrate what happened to the property in the lead up to and following the transfer. This could be in the form of keeping copies of the property record.

Local policies

- HMPPS need to review compliance with the policy relating to Xbox 360s across the prison estate and amend the policy accordingly to ensure consistency across prisons.
- There needs to be greater co-ordination by HMPPS to facilitate more consistency with facilities lists across the prison estate.
- Prisons should ensure that their discretion to impose their own local facilities lists and restrictions is used carefully and selectively.

Cell clearance

- HMPPS should carry out a review of the cell clearance certificate, seeking feedback from prisons.
- HMPPS should consider expanding the use of BWVC to include cell clearances, and retaining the BWVC and any relevant CCTV footage on receipt of a complaint, to help establish what happened and who had access to a cell.

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About the data

The data used in this bulletin came from four sources – PPO case summary data, PPO recommendations summary data, PPO reports and letters, and HMPPS summary data. The PPO data used was frozen in May 2024. Some totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The majority of our quantitative analysis was done using the data stored in our complaints database from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024, which totalled 5,610 property complaints cases received. An in-depth quantitative analysis was also performed on 713 sampled cases to retrieve further information. Finally, 217 cases were sampled for our thematic analysis.

The rate calculation used in our quantitative data was done by adjusting the PGD property complaints received and completed by PGD population. This is the calculation used:

$$\frac{\text{Complaints over 5 years}}{\text{Average population between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2024}} \times \frac{1000}{5}$$

= Complaints per 1000 prisons per year

It must be noted that some prisons have changed function over the period of five years and would therefore impact the population size. This was considered and factored in when adjusting for population above.

The figures in this report have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

HMPPS data

Prison population data is taken from the **April 2019 to March 2024 population bulletins** published on GOV.UK. It was aggregated over the five years.

Transfer volumes were obtained from the MOJ Prisons Statistics Team for the period April 2019 to March 2024. The data was quarterly transfer volumes by establishment.



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