



“Prisons are insufficiently motivated to improve property practices” says Ombudsman

24 March 2025 - In a Learning Lessons Bulletin published today, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reveal policy and operational learning needed to improve property complaints handling in prison.

The first in an upcoming series of publications on property, the bulletin summarises learning from PPO investigations into property complaints received from prisoners over the last five years¹.

The investigative office strongly believes HM Prison and Probation Service need to make operational changes. Property is consistently the most common complaint the PPO receives from prisoners and in 2023 to 2024, they received a staggering 1,146 complaints regarding property in prisons suggesting this is a significant issue.

In undertaking this research, repeat issues including property going missing during transfers, missing property cards, and problems with prison laundry were found.

Concerningly, the PPO found several prisons were asking prisoners to sign a separate disclaimer agreeing that the prison could not be held responsible for clothing put through laundry. They insist this needs to be investigated further by HMPPS as these disclaimers breach national policy.

“Prisons are insufficiently motivated to improve property practices”, said Ombudsman Adrian Usher.

“Taking into consideration the number of property complaints we receive, HMPPS must make operational changes now in order to motivate prisons to address property handling and bring these numbers down”.

The PPO also found a correlation between transfers and complaints received. Where they could determine property went missing, shockingly 40% of the complaints involved transfers, 89% of these involved a prison-to-prison transfer². HMPPS’ Prisoners’ Property Policy Framework makes it clear that the sending prison is responsible for sending any follow-on property to the receiving prison within four weeks of the transfer. The PPO found this was often not happening.

“The policy framework does not go far enough to address the issues that arise on transfer.

The policy should require property to be sent as soon as possible and mandate a timeframe for the receiving prison to inform the prisoner of the arrival of their property", said Adrian.

The bulletin states that the Prisoners' Property Policy Framework issued in September 2022 has not resulted in a reduction of property complaints to the PPO, given the issues their research has shown.

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman believe HMPPS would benefit in the long term by implementing the suggested policy and operational improvements, with a significant reduction in the amount of time staff spend dealing with property complaints.

"More should be done to ensure property is handled efficiently, effectively and with respect to reduce tensions between staff and prisoners, as well as improve prisoners' wellbeing", said Adrian.

"This longstanding issue needs to be addressed now".

-ENDS-

Notes to editors:

1. This release is available at: www.ppo.gov.uk

The bulletin is available at: https://ppo.gov.uk/learning_research/learning-lessons-bulletin-issue-11-property-complaints/

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-andprobation-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 if you require more information