

**Prisons &  
Probation  
Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

# **Business plan 2025/26 Strategic plan 2023 - 26**

## 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



**Resolve  
complaints**



**Investigate  
deaths**



**Identify and  
disseminate  
learning**



**Ensure trust  
and confidence  
in the criminal  
justice system**



**Special  
investigations**

## WHAT WE VALUE

**Ambitious  
thinking**

**Professional  
curiosity**

**Diversity &  
inclusion**

**Transparency**

**Teamwork**

## Ombudsman's foreword

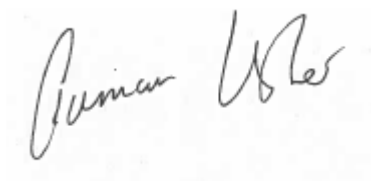
I am delighted to publish the 2025-2026 Business Plan. My vision for the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman has already been set in our [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) and the key objectives in this Business Plan show my priorities for the next year. Having been in post as the Ombudsman for two years, I feel immensely proud of what this office has achieved.

In the past year, our complaints investigators have continued to raise the profile of Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations (IPCI) and successfully launched the IPCI Ambassador scheme in 46 sites. This year, we will continue rolling out the IPCI Ambassador scheme. We will also be considering the learning we have gathered from our programme of visits to our service users in immigration detention and those under probation supervision, and tackling the barriers they face when trying to complain.

I am proud to say that last year, we successfully launched our new website, which is easier to navigate and more accessible. We also importantly increased our efforts to understand and address the impact of race for our service users.

Under objective 2, our timeliness targets are set out and our Business Plan continues our commitment to conduct high-quality investigations in a timely manner. To support our investigators, we will continue to develop and update our new operational manuals and share our learning internally.

Sharing learning from our investigations to the services in remit remains a priority for me. We will be continuing to share learning with prisons from our investigations and through our thematic research. This year, we are hoping to conduct deep dives into epilepsy, segregation, and self-inflicted deaths. Finally, our Business Plan continues our commitment to use our resources efficiently and effectively. It is important that we efficiently manage the budget allocated to us. We will consider ways in which technology can enhance our processes to ensure we maximise value for the public. Once again, I am extremely grateful for all the hard work and dedication shown by the PPO's staff and look forward to what we will achieve over the next year.



**Adrian Usher**  
**Prisons and Probation Ombudsman**

**April 2025**

## About the PPO

The role of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman is to carry out independent investigations into complaints and deaths in custody. We provide this service for prisoners, young people in detention, those under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals).

The purpose of our investigations is to understand what happened, to correct injustices and to identify learning for the organisations whose actions we oversee so that the PPO makes a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and community supervision.

## Strategic goal

To deliver high quality and timely independent investigations and work closely with partners to deliver tangible benefits for the safety and confidence of those in custody and under community supervision.

## Function

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (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 His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Prisoner Escort and Custody Services; the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement); the Youth Justice Board; and those local authorities and voluntary organisations who administer secure youth detention accommodation. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in their Terms of Reference (ToR)<sup>1</sup>.

The PPO has three main investigative duties:

- To investigate deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals), due to any cause.
- To investigate deaths of recently released prisoners that occur within 14 days of release from prison (except homicides and accidents)
- To investigate complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention<sup>2</sup>, offenders under probation supervision and detained individuals.

Complaints from prisoners and young people in custody are investigated by Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations (IPCI). IPCI is part of the PPO.

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<sup>1</sup> [PPO Terms of Reference](#)

<sup>2</sup> The PPO investigates complaints from young people detained in secure accommodation such as secure training centres (STCs) and young offender institutions (YOIs). Its remit does not include complaints from young people in secure children's homes (SCHs) or secure schools.

## Resource

The PPO is a demand-led organisation and to deliver our goals we need to have staff in the right roles, equipped with appropriate expertise and skills. At the time of writing, our provisional budget allocation for 2025/26 is £7,100,000. We expect to receive an additional £160,000 to help conclude the delivery of our special investigation into Medomsley Detention Centre.

## Strategic objectives 2023-26

Our key strategic objectives for 2023-26 are set out under four themes:

1. To be visible, accessible and transparent to service users and stakeholders.
2. To deliver investigative excellence in a timely manner.
3. To increase the impact of our work on the actions of services in remit and the day to day lives of those in custody.
4. To use our resources efficiently and effectively.

This plan sets out the priorities for the Ombudsman and our staff for 2025/26.

## Strategic objectives 2023-26 and priorities for 2025-26

**Objective 1:** Be visible, accessible, and transparent to service users and stakeholders.

- We will increase awareness of the PPO amongst those in custody, so they know how to use our services.
- We will consider and disseminate the findings from our visits to the those in the immigration estate and those under probation supervision to inform future practice.
- We will continue to improve the understanding of the PPO's role to those who use our services and services in remit.
- We will continue to improve relationships with those who use our services and services in remit to increase confidence in the PPO.
- We will continue to improve our processes to ensure that the PPO is accessible.

2025-26 priorities	Measure of success (2025-26)
Continue to promote IPCI to those in prison and the youth estate.	<p>IPCI awareness video for prisoners and a good practice in handling complaints video for prison staff produced, launched, and disseminated.</p> <p>Youth-specific accessible IPCI promotional material developed and disseminated across the youth estate.</p>
<p>Continue establishing IPCI Ambassadors across the prison estate (a scheme where volunteer prisoners support others in effectively using local complaints processes and escalating to IPCI when required).</p> <p>Create an IPCI Ambassador Community which will enable continued support to be provided to Ambassadors. This will support their training needs and to strengthen the relationship between IPCI Ambassadors and the PPO.</p>	<p>There will be a further roll out of the scheme in 2025/26.</p> <p>An IPCI Ambassador community established.</p> <p>2 IPCI Ambassador newsletters produced and distributed.</p> <p>Increased number of eligible complaints received from individuals in IPCI Ambassador prisons.</p>
Continue to reduce the proportion of ineligible complaints received by IPCI by rolling out a targeted programme of work to the 10 prisons with the highest numbers of ineligible complaints in the prison estate.	<p>10 prisons identified using data on highest numbers of ineligible complaints.</p> <p>Completion of programme of training and awareness raising with staff and prisoners in the 10 prisons.</p> <p>A reduction in levels of ineligible complaints received from the ten prisons in scope of the targeted work.</p>

Consider the findings from our visits to Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs) and work with the authorities in remit so they better understand what we do.	<p>Increased eligibility of complaints from detained individuals.</p> <p>Improvements made to remove any identified barriers to complaining to the PPO.</p> <p>Implement learning identified for the IRCs and PPO to improve detained individuals' access to the complaints process.</p>
Consider the findings from our work with probation services and those under probation supervision so they better understand what we do.	<p>Increased eligibility of complaints from those under probation supervision.</p> <p>Improvements made to remove any identified barriers to complaining to the PPO.</p> <p>Implemented any learning identified for probation and PPO to improve people on probation's access to the complaints process.</p>
Using the findings from our engagement activities, implement a proactive and targeted communications strategy to increase awareness of the PPO to those under probation supervision and detained individuals.	Developed and implemented a communications strategy aimed at those under probation and those in Immigration Removal Centres.
Enter the next phase of work in raising awareness of IPCI with young people and women in prison.	<p>Learning and recommendations to be implemented.</p> <p>All women and young people's prisons visited again in the 2025/26 business year.</p> <p>Increased number of eligible complaints from those in the youth and women's estate.</p>
Publish a Race Action Plan with a continued focus on service users.	Staff consider the impact of race in all investigations. Detail on the progress of workstreams will be provided in our annual report.
Embed a robust and consistent approach to investigating issues relating to diversity and inclusion.	Investigators feel confident using an investigation methodology to identify discriminatory behaviour.
Respond to all Freedom of Information (FOI) requests within 20 working days.	Success will be measured against a target of 100% of FOI and Subject Access Requests being completed on time.

Respond to all Subject Access Requests within one calendar month.

**Objective 2: We will deliver investigative excellence in a timely manner.**

- We will ensure the timeliness of our investigations and reports using a robust and proportionate approach to investigations.
- We will continue providing up-to-date guidance to support our staff in carrying out investigations.
- We will continue sharing internal learning with staff.

2025-26 priorities	Measure of success (2025-26)
<p>Meet the following timeliness targets for all <b>fatal incident investigations</b>:</p> <p><b>Initial reports:</b> Natural cause deaths: Complete our investigation and issue our initial report within 20 weeks (100 working days) of the PPO being notified of the death.</p> <p>All other fatal incident cases: Complete our investigation and issue our initial report within 26 weeks (130 working days) of the PPO being notified of the death.</p> <p><b>Final reports:</b> Finalise all final fatal incident investigation reports within 12 weeks (60 working days) of the initial report.</p> <p><b>Publication:</b> Produce and publish anonymised reports for fatal incident investigations within 10 working days of being notified that the inquest has concluded and the investigation report has been finalised.</p>	<p>Business targets will have been met if at least 90% of fatal incident reports are delivered to time and there is no longer a backlog of fatal incident investigations awaiting initial report.</p> <p>Business target will have been met if at least 90% of anonymised fatal incident reports are published on the website on time.</p>
<p>Meet the following timeliness targets for all <b>complaints investigations</b>:</p> <p><b>Eligibility:</b> We will determine the eligibility of all complaints within 10 working days of receipt.</p> <p><b>Standard complaints:</b></p>	<p>Business targets will have been met if at least 90% of complaints assessments are completed on time.</p> <p>Business targets will have been met if at least 90% of standard and complex complaints investigations are completed on time.</p>

Complete our investigation and submit our initial report (output) for consultation for standard complaints within 12 weeks (60 working days) of accepting the complaint as eligible.

**Complex complaints:**

Complete our investigation and submit our initial report (output) for consultation for complex complaints within 26 weeks (130 working days) of accepting the complaint as eligible.

**Publication:**

Produce and publish summaries of anonymised upheld or partially upheld complaints on a monthly basis.

Regular updating and reviewing of operational manuals for fatal incident and complaint investigations.	Operational manuals provide accessible and up-to-date guidance to support our staff in carrying out their work.
Embed the investigative approach to post-release death investigations.	<p>Continuous improvement in investigation methodology for post-release death investigations.</p> <p>Greater joint working with relevant stakeholders to maximise the impact of post-release death investigations.</p> <p>Improved levels of wider stakeholder engagement beyond HMPPS.</p>
Continue sharing learning internally with staff through newsletters and dashboards. Identify and share learning from prevention of future death (PFD) reports and from PPO surveys. Operational teams to utilise learning.	<p>Develop an intel dashboard for fatal incident investigations.</p> <p>PFD reports are regularly reviewed, and any learning is shared directly and swiftly with investigators. Learning is shared from PPO surveys. Improved outcomes and feedback from surveys.</p>

**Objective 3:** Increase the impact of our work on the actions of the services in our remit and the day to day lives of those in custody.

- We will make custody and community supervision safer and fairer by identifying and sharing thematic and real-time learning from our investigations.
- We will work with others to improve the complaints processes within services in remit to encourage complaints to be resolved locally at the earliest opportunity.

- We will continue reviewing our approach to making recommendations to ensure they have impact.
- We will use our evidence base to target our thematic work to where it is needed the most.
- We will hold services in remit to account.
- We will work collaboratively with partners to increase our collective impact.

2025-26 priorities	Measure of success (2025-26)
Produce thematic learning publications and hold stakeholder engagement sessions to share learning from investigations and increase the PPO's impact.	<p>The publication of six themed learning publications.</p> <p>Recommendations from our learning lesson bulletins are accepted by the relevant services in remit.</p> <p>Each learning product has a stakeholder engagement plan that is implemented in a timely manner to encourage a collaborative and problem-solving approach to the learning identified.</p>
Implement proactive and targeted communications plans to ensure publications are widely disseminated and have an impact with the intended audiences.	Each learning product has a unique, proactive communications plan that targets intended audiences. The success of each communications plan is measured to improve engagement.
Continue to develop and establish effective partnerships with stakeholders to share expertise, learning and increase impact.	<p>This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint communications.</li> <li>• Introduction of joint forums.</li> <li>• Working with stakeholders to effect policy changes.</li> <li>• Working with stakeholders to make improvements to working practices.</li> </ul>
Continue to use learning from our investigations to influence national policies within the services in remit. Respond to relevant Parliamentary select committee and Government inquiries.	<p>PPO responds to relevant national policy consultations with influential evidence.</p> <p>PPO provides valuable information to inquiries and calls for evidence.</p>
Continue reviewing our approach to making recommendations following a complaint investigation to identify systemic and endemic issues and improve the	<p>Increase in accepted and implemented complaints recommendations that result in policy changes.</p> <p>Increase in accepted and implemented recommendations that address systemic</p>

impact of our recommendations and drive system-wide change.	and institutional issues across the prison estate.
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**Objective 4: We will use our resources efficiently and effectively.**

- We will become a data-led organisation.
- We will invest in and support our people to develop their skills and capability.
- We will embed an effective performance management approach.
- We will continue improving our I.T. to enable us to use our resources more efficiently and effectively.
- We will work with our partners and stakeholders to embrace digital working and new technology to provide a more efficient, effective, and inclusive service.

2025-26 priorities	Measure of success (2025-26)
We will use our skills and expertise to carry out special investigations when commissioned to do so.	Conclude delivery of Operation Deerness (a special investigation into Medomsley Detention Centre).
Implement our knowledge management strategy that promotes effective and efficient knowledge sharing within the PPO.	Knowledge management strategy effectively embedded throughout the PPO.  Review the PPO's data retention policy.
Continue developing our digital learning and knowledge hub to promote and share training, learning and knowledge across the PPO.	Strengthening our learning and knowledge hub and promotion across the PPO.
Continue developing our performance management approach using our existing framework and tools.	Greater confidence and use of the performance management approach.
Introduce a training programme for both new and existing staff.	Training needs identified from our review are successfully met.  Monitoring of any Continuous Professional Development (CPD) / training that is undertaken.  Agree and deliver a training programme for investigators.
Effective use of the model developed for reviewing the allocation of resources against demand.	Sophisticated and effective use of the model to help the PPO remain resilient when responding to fluctuations in workload.

Continue to refine and improve our databases, data collection and data management to improve methods for monitoring casework and identifying trends/themes. This will involve exploring the use of new software or methods to support processes at the PPO.	<p>Demonstrable improvements made to data recording, collection and management.</p> <p>Use of data dashboards to become business as usual across the PPO.</p> <p>New technical solutions implemented which maximise efficiencies within the PPO.</p>
Continue reviewing the PPO's approach to family liaison to further understand the needs of bereaved families and the resource allocation requirements.	Implement any changes from our review.
Continue to improve and embed the PPO's approach to business continuity and risk management.	<p>Production of a business continuity plan and raise and maintain staff awareness of business continuity principles.</p> <p>Continue embedding tools and approaches for maintaining business continuity and risk management.</p> <p>Undertake a business continuity exercise.</p>
Continue exploring the use of new technology and digital working as a means of communicating with those who use our services.	<p>Tangible uses of existing technology to communicate with those who use our services.</p> <p>Introduction of new technology to communicate with those who use our services.</p>



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