Prisons & Probation Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr John Freer, a prisoner at HMP Northumberland, on 29 October 2024

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

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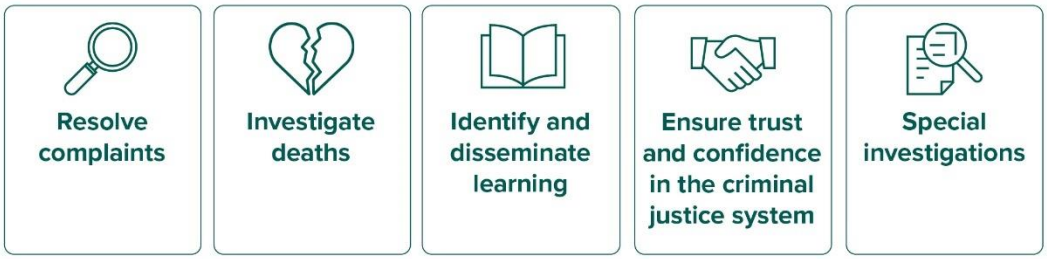
OUR VISION

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

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. 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.

3. On 1 July 2024, Mr John Freer was sentenced to 14 months in prison for breaching his licence conditions (accessing a laptop and smartphone to stalk his victim). He died of metastatic adenocarcinoma of the lung on 29 October 2024, while a prisoner at HMP Northumberland. He was 45 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Freer's family and friends.

4. The Ombudsman's office contacted Mr Freer's next of kin to ask if they had any matters, they wanted us to consider. Mr Freer's next of kin declined the offer of engagement.

5. The PPO investigator investigated the non-clinical issues relating to Mr Freer's care. We did not find any non-clinical issues of concern.

6. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Freer's clinical care at Northumberland.

7. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Freer received at Northumberland was of a variable standard and only partially equivalent to what he could have expected to receive in the community. She found that Mr Freer's medical records contained evidence of excellent individualised end of life care engagement. However, we make the following recommendation related to Mr Freer's cause of death:

   The Head of Healthcare at HMP Northumberland should review the care management of patients with a cancer diagnosis. This should include ensuring each patient has an identified lead nurse who will oversee the implementation of a plan of care, including advance care planning discussions and DNACPR discussions, in line with the national framework, Dying well in custody charter.

8. The clinical reviewer made other recommendations not related to Mr Freer's cause of death which the Head of Healthcare will wish to address.

9. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS and Spectrum CIC did not find any factual inaccuracies.

10. At the inquest held on 27 May 2025, the coroner concluded that Mr John Freer died of natural causes.

Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman **April 2025**

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