

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Jamie Graham, on 3 April 2025, following his release from HMP Durham

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 investigated 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 Jamie Graham died from an acute cardiac arrest caused by taking synthetic cannabinoids and cocaine on 3 April 2025 following his release from HMP Durham on 31 March 2025. He was 28 years old. We offer our condolences to those who knew him.
5. Mr Graham accessed substance misuse support during his time in prison and received advice about the risks of using illicit substances while in prison. Mr Graham's community offender manager (COM) appropriately prepared for his release. They made accommodation referrals to homelessness support services and liaised with the local council, which advised Mr Graham to present for housing support upon release. Mr Graham did not attend, and as a result, was unable to access further housing support or a housing assessment. We are satisfied that the COM took reasonable steps to source accommodation before his release.
6. We did not identify any significant learning relating to pre-release planning or post-release supervision of Mr Graham requiring a recommendation.

The Investigation Process

7. HMPPS notified us of Mr Graham's death on 9 April 2025.
8. The PPO investigator obtained copies of relevant extracts from Mr Graham's prison and probation records.
9. We informed HM Coroner for Gateshead and South Tyneside of the investigation. He gave us the results of the post-mortem examination. We have sent the Coroner a copy of this report.
10. The Ombudsman's office contacted Mr Graham's next of kin to explain the investigation and to ask if they had any matters they wanted us to consider. They did not respond.
11. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS did not find any factual inaccuracies.

Background Information

HMP Durham

12. HMP Durham holds convicted male prisoners. Spectrum Community Health CIC provides healthcare, mental health and substance misuse services.
13. 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, prepare reports to advise the Parole Board and have links with local partnerships to which they refer people for resettlement services, where appropriate. Post-release, the Probation Service supervises people throughout their licence period and post-sentence supervision.

Key Events

14. On 20 December 2024, Mr Jamie Graham appeared in court, charged with possession of a knife, was remanded to prison and taken to HMP Durham. On 13 January 2025, he was convicted and sentenced to 20 weeks imprisonment. His licence and sentence were due to expire on 11 May 2025.
15. On 21 January, the COM was allocated as Mr Graham's community offender manager (COM). On 24 January, the COM wrote Mr Graham a letter to introduce himself and inform him that either he or the pre-release team would be in contact with Mr Graham before his release.
16. On 29 January, Mr Graham transferred to HMP Northumberland. No issues were identified during his reception screenings, and he was seen by the drug and alcohol recovery team. He had a history of using cocaine and synthetic cannabinoids while in the community.
17. On 3 February, Mr Graham met his recovery coordinator for an initial substance misuse assessment. They referred him to community substance misuse services. Mr Graham disclosed that he was homeless and lacked a support network. He said that he would not accept hostel or shared accommodation and would only consider housing if it was his own tenancy. He told the recovery coordinator that he preferred to return to his homeless community in Gateshead, where he had routine and connections, and did not want to return to his local area due to his risk of reoffending.
18. On 4 February, the COM referred Mr Graham to an Approved Premises (AP), which provide 24-hour staffed accommodation for individuals released on licence and assessed as posing a high risk of harm. The following day, the application was rejected.
19. On 6 February, the COM referred Mr Graham to the Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3 - a service open to adult prison leavers who are at risk of homelessness on release which provides access to up to 84 days of accommodation.)
20. On 13 February, Mr Graham was released from prison with CAS3 accommodation. Mr Graham failed to attend his probation appointment or contact his COM that day.
21. On 14 February, the COM confirmed that he did not attend his CAS3 accommodation. The COM completed paperwork to recall Mr Graham to prison for 14 days.
22. On 19 February, Mr Graham was sentenced to 28 days in prison for a drug offence and taken to HMP Durham. During his first reception screening, he tested positive for cocaine and denied alcohol misuse. The next day, he declined support from the drug and alcohol recovery team, stating he had not used substances.
23. On 3 March, Mr Graham was released from prison and instructed to report to South Tyneside probation office. He attended Gateshead probation office, stating he did not want to go to South Tyneside. He agreed to see his COM the following day but did not attend.

24. On 10 March, the Probation Service received notification that Mr Graham had been arrested the previous day for being drunk and disorderly. Following his arrest, he caused damage to his police cell and was subsequently charged with criminal damage.
25. On 11 March, the COM completed paperwork to recall Mr Graham to prison for 14 days. Mr Graham appeared in court later that day and received a six-month conditional discharge for criminal damage. (This meant that if he did not commit another offence within that period, no further sanction would be applied in relation to the original offence.) The recall was not approved until later that day, so Mr Graham was not recalled directly from court.

HMP Durham, 18 March – 31 March

26. On 18 March, Mr Graham was taken to HMP Durham following his recall. During his initial reception screening, he tested positive for cocaine. Mr Graham declined a referral to substance misuse services. He did not raise any concerns or issues. He told a nurse that he had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD – symptoms include impulsivity, hyperactivity, inattention and emotional dysregulation) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD – a developmental condition that can affect communication, social interaction, and behaviour). He declined a mental health referral due to only being in prison for a short time.
27. On 18 March, Mr Graham told the reception nurse that he expected to be released homeless. The nurse recorded a plan for him to present at the local council for housing support and to engage with the community drug and alcohol service to ensure continuity of care.
28. During a wellbeing check, Mr Graham told staff he had concerns about probation arrangements. He explained that he had previously been given appointments he was unable to attend due to restrictions. On previous recalls, he said these restrictions were linked to his risk of reoffending and his wish to be relocated to a different area where he did not have a local connection. Mr Graham anticipated being released homeless and said he wanted to engage with the resettlement team and the Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team (DART). He denied any current thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
29. On 19 March, Mr Graham was placed on a waiting list for an assessment with the DART and referred to the community substance misuse service. He saw a healthcare worker and disclosed daily alcohol and crack cocaine use in the community. He reported that he had not used psychoactive substances (PS) for 16 days but expressed concern about a potential relapse. He also said that he had previously misused buprenorphine (used to treat opioid misuse). The healthcare worker discussed the risks of using PS, risks of overdose, reduced tolerance to drugs and explained the effects of withdrawal.
30. On the same day, Mr Graham saw Officer A, a key worker. (Keyworkers provide prisoners with an allocated officer that they can meet regularly to discuss how they are and any day-to-day issues they would like to address.) Mr Graham told Officer A that he was familiar with the prison regime and did not raise any concerns.

31. On 20 March, Mr Graham was allocated to Ms A, recovery coordinator. On 24 March, Mr Graham told Ms B, resettlement worker, that he needed support obtaining a bank account and benefits.
32. The following day, Ms C was allocated to complete the Basic Custody Screening Tool (BCST). As part of this process, she emailed the COM to offer support with housing referrals if required. Further resettlement support was expected to be provided following Mr Graham's release.
33. On 27 March, Mr Graham saw Ms A to prepare for his release. She informed him about his reduced tolerance to drugs, risk of overdose and provided harm reduction advice. He said that he would accept naloxone on release.
34. On 31 March, Mr Graham was released from prison.

Pre-release planning

35. On 5 February, the COM completed a Duty to Refer to Sunderland Council for housing as this was Mr Graham's local connection. (Duty to Refer means that when prisoners need a place to live after being released, prison or probation staff must refer them to the appropriate services or housing authorities to ensure they have support in finding stable accommodation.)
36. On 12 March, the COM told the Duty to Refer Officer at Sunderland Council that Mr Graham had been recalled to custody and to request housing support in preparation for his release. Later that day, he received confirmation that Sunderland Council would undertake a homelessness assessment.
37. On 19 March, Mr Graham was allocated to Prison Offender Manager (POM) A. However, due to POM A's rest days and annual leave, he did not contact Mr Graham during his time in prison.
38. On 20 March, the COM telephoned the Duty to Refer Officer to request an update. They said that the Duty to Refer process remained open and that Mr Graham should present himself at Sunderland Council upon release to complete the assessment.
39. On 24 March, the COM sent instructions to the prison outlining Mr Graham's probation reporting requirements and additional licence conditions ahead of his release.
40. On 27 March, Mr Graham attended a pre-release planning session with Ms A. He told her that he had overdosed on PS approximately two weeks earlier. She noted that he had no current signs of intoxication or withdrawal. Ms A referred him to Reconnect, a service that helps prisoners continue accessing healthcare in the community. She noted that Mr Graham had received naloxone training and was motivated to abstain from drug use. She noted that no further appointments would take place due to his upcoming release.
41. Mr Graham told Ms A that he would be homeless upon release. She advised him to present at his local council and engage with the community drug and alcohol service for continuity of care. Ms A told him that he had an appointment with

Gateshead Drug Recovery partnership (GRP) scheduled for 1 April at 1.00pm. He confirmed he would attend.

42. Mr Graham was instructed to attend Gateshead Probation Office on the day of his release. He was aware of his licence conditions.

Post-release management

43. On 31 March, Mr Graham was released from Durham. A healthcare worker noted that, although Mr Graham had said he would accept a naloxone kit, there was no record of it being issued in the medical notes. Staff contacted Gateshead Recovery Partnership (GRP) to inform them and requested that they offer him naloxone at his appointment the following day.
44. At 12.00pm, Mr Graham attended Gateshead Probation Office as agreed to support his engagement with appointments. He expressed concern that he might not receive his benefit payments, as he had previously been arrested at a job centre. Mr Graham confirmed he was aware of his appointment with Gateshead Recovery Partnership scheduled for the following day. His next probation appointment was on 7 April at 2.00pm.
45. On 1 April, Mr Graham did not attend his scheduled appointment with Gateshead Recovery Partnership. That morning, he attended Reconnect and registered to engage with the service. A drug recovery worker recorded in the medical notes that Mr Graham showed no signs of intoxication and did not disclose any illicit drug use. Staff gave him a mobile phone and a naloxone kit, along with training on its use.
46. On 3 April, Mr Graham's The COM attempted to contact him twice by phone after hearing rumours that he had died from another person on probation.

Circumstances of Mr Graham's death

47. On 3 April at approximately 11.41am, a member of the public called emergency services after finding Mr Graham unresponsive in a car park in Gateshead. Paramedics attended and found Mr Graham lying on his back in a sleeping bag. He was cold to the touch, not breathing, and paramedics concluded that he had been dead for some time so did not attempt resuscitation. A friend of Mr Graham who was present, said that they had both used the same batch of synthetic cannabinoid at approximately 10.30pm the previous evening.

Post-mortem report

48. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Graham died from acute cardiac failure, caused by the use of synthetic cannabinoids and cocaine.

Inquest

49. The inquest held on 20 June 2025, concluded that Mr Graham's death was drug-related.

Findings

Substance misuse services

50. Mr Graham's COM identified that his offending was linked to substance use and included drug testing and engagement with community substance misuse services as part of his licence conditions.
51. Prior to Mr Graham's release, his recovery worker referred him to community substance misuse services and arranged for him to receive naloxone training. She also scheduled appointments with the community drug and alcohol team and referred him to Reconnect for support following his release. We are satisfied that his substance misuse support was appropriate.

Accommodation

52. Mr Graham's COM previously referred Mr Graham to CAS3 accommodation, and the referral was accepted. However, Mr Graham did not attend the accommodation upon release in February and was subsequently recalled to prison for 14 days. This recall impacted the time available to plan and secure alternative accommodation before his final release on 31 March. Mr Graham's COM completed an application for Mr Graham to reside in an Approved Premises, but this was rejected.
53. Mr Graham's local connection was with Sunderland, and the COM submitted a Duty to Refer to Sunderland Council. Although Mr Graham expressed a preference to live in Gateshead, he did not have a local connection to that area and was therefore expected to seek housing support through Sunderland Council.
54. During his time in prison, Mr Graham stated that he intended to remain street homeless unless he could live in Gateshead. To support Mr Graham's engagement with housing services, the COM included a licence condition requiring Mr Graham to register and engage with housing and benefits services. the COM liaised with the local council and followed up for updates. Mr Graham was expected to present at Sunderland Council upon release, but did not do so, and therefore did not access further housing support or a housing assessment.
55. We are satisfied that the COM made appropriate and timely referrals and took reasonable steps to source accommodation for Mr Graham before his release.

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November 2025

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