

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Edward Owens, a prisoner at HMP Dartmoor, on 4 November 2022

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. 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. Mr Owens died of bronchopneumonia caused by end stage chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in Kingsbridge Hospital on 4 November 2022, while a prisoner at HMP Dartmoor. He was 77 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Owens' family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Owens received at HMP Dartmoor was of a reasonable standard and at least equivalent to that which he could have expected in the community. She highlighted examples of good practice and opportunities for improvement in areas not directly related to Mr Owens' death, for the Head of Healthcare to address.
5. We found no non-clinical issues of concern.
6. This version of my report, published on my website, has been amended to remove the names of staff and prisoners involved in my investigation.

The Investigation Process

7. We were notified of Mr Owens' death on 4 November 2022.
8. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer, to review Mr Owens' clinical care at HMP Dartmoor.
9. The PPO investigator investigated the non-clinical issues relating to Mr Owens' care.
10. The PPO family liaison officer wrote to Mr Owens' next of kin, his cousin, to explain the investigation and to ask if he had any matters he wanted us to consider. He asked to receive a copy of this report and did not submit any questions.
11. Mr Owens' family received a copy of the draft report. They did not make any comments.
12. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS pointed out a typographical error and this report has been amended accordingly. They did not find any factual inaccuracies.

Previous deaths at HMP Dartmoor

13. Mr Owens was the 14th prisoner to die at HMP Dartmoor since 4 November 2019. Of the previous deaths, eight were from natural causes and two were self-inflicted. There are no similarities between our findings in this investigation and our investigation findings for the previous deaths.

Key Events

2018- 2021

14. On 21 October 2014, Mr Owens was given a 20-year sentence for sexual offences and transferred to HMP Exeter. On 12 January 2018, Mr Owens transferred to HMP Dartmoor.
15. Mr Owens had COPD (a group of lung conditions that cause breathing difficulties), conductive deafness, ischemic heart disease, chronic kidney disease and prostate cancer. The prison healthcare team created care plans to manage these conditions and provided regular medications.
16. In January 2015, Mr Owens experienced acute exacerbation of his COPD, which was treated with medications.
17. In September, blood tests results showed a decline in Mr Owens' kidney function. Mr Owens was admitted to hospital and treated for acute kidney failure and pneumonia. He was treated and then returned to prison on 25 September.
18. In October, November and December 2018, Mr Owens had several blood tests to review his kidney function and staff referred him for an appointment with a urology specialist.
19. On 24 January 2021, Mr Owens's received treatment for a further acute exacerbation of his COPD.
20. On 4 and 5 February, Mr Owens received treatment in hospital for acute abdominal pain. He returned to prison on 5 February.
21. On 11 March, Mr Owens received antibiotics and oral steroids for a further acute exacerbation of COPD.
22. On 22 October, Mr Owens attended a urology review and was prescribed medication which was not issued until 2 April 2022. The reasons for the delay were not recorded.

2022

23. Throughout 2022, Mr Owens attended urology reviews every three months to monitor his kidney function. The hospital provided dietary advice which they noted HMP Dartmoor sometimes struggled to fulfil.
24. On 16 September, a Senior Primary Care Nurse completed a clinical history review for Mr Owens and assessed his clinical observations. She noted that his levels of consciousness and oxygen saturation were reduced so called a code blue (an emergency code triggering a request for an ambulance). Paramedics arrived soon after and transferred Mr Owens to hospital. The hospital treated Mr Owens for an exacerbation of his COPD, acute kidney injury, chronic kidney disease and chronic respiratory failure. He was given antibiotics and intravenous fluids but his health did not improve. Hospital staff advised Mr Owens that no further treatment could be offered due to his poor health.

25. On 20 September, HMP Dartmoor nominated a Prison Family Liaison Officer (FLO). The FLO contacted Mr Owens' cousin and next of kin and advised him that Mr Owens was unwell in hospital and receiving end-of-life stage care.
26. On 21 September, staff started an application for early release on compassionate grounds for Mr Owens.
27. On 24 September, Mr Owens was referred to a Palliative Care Team.
28. On 28 September, Mr Owens' two cousins visited him in hospital.
29. On 3 October, medical staff indicated that Mr Owens' prognosis was three to six months left to live. They considered that he was medically fit for discharge but staff at Dartmoor raised concerns that they would be unable to meet his medical needs in a prison setting. He remained in hospital.
30. On 22 October, Mr Owens transferred to a different hospital. His health declined rapidly.
31. Mr Owens died on 4 November 2022. The FLO contacted his cousin by telephone on the same day and advised that he had died.

Post-mortem report

32. The coroner accepted the cause of death provided by a hospital doctor and no post-mortem examination was carried out. The doctor gave Mr Owens' cause of death as bronchopneumonia related to end stage COPD and kidney failure.

Inquest

33. The inquest into Mr Owens' death concluded on 20 March 2025 and recorded a verdict of natural causes.

Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

September 2023

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