



Independent investigation into the death of Mr Liam Cronin, on 2 July 2023, following his release from HMP Ranby

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

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



OGL

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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 been investigating 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 Liam Cronin died of mixed drug toxicity on 2 July 2023, following his release from HMP Ranby on 30 June 2023. He was 34 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Cronin's family and friends.
5. Mr Cronin had an extensive offending history linked to his drug use. In prison, he used drugs and engaged with the substance misuse team. He told staff that, if necessary, he would seek the services of a drug rehabilitation service in the community. His prison offender manager and community offender manager worked with Mr Cronin to address his needs for release. They secured accommodation for him so he would not be homeless and arranged for the police to accompany him to his first appointments on his release from prison, to keep him safe.
6. On 2 July, Mr Cronin was found unresponsive at his ex-partner's home. Ambulance paramedics confirmed that Mr Cronin had died.
7. We did not find any issues of concern relating to Mr Cronin's death.

The Investigation Process

8. HMPPS notified us of Mr Cronin's death on 6 July 2023.
9. The PPO investigator obtained copies of relevant extracts from Mr Cronin's prison and probation records.
10. We informed HM Coroner for Derby of the investigation. He gave us the results of the post-mortem examination. We have sent the Coroner a copy of this report.
11. The Ombudsman's family liaison officer contacted Mr Cronin's mother to explain the investigation and to ask if she had any matters she wanted us to consider. Mr Cronin's mother wanted to know why Mr Cronin was released without a probation officer being present to meet him. Mr Cronin's mother's question has been addressed in this report.
12. Mr Cronin's family received a copy of the initial report. They did not make any comments.
13. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS did not find any factual inaccuracies.

Background Information

HMP Ranby

14. HMP Ranby is a category C prison which holds over 1,000 male remand and sentenced prisoners. It is managed by HMPPS.

Probation Service

15. 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, as well as prepare reports to advise the Parole Board and have links with local partnerships to whom, where appropriate, they refer people for resettlement services. Post-release, the Probation Service supervise people throughout their licence period and post-sentence supervision.

Key Events

16. On 10 November 2022, Mr Liam Cronin was convicted of burglary, theft, drug possession and fraud and was sentenced to one year and four months in prison. He was sent to HMP Nottingham.
17. Mr Cronin had a history of drug misuse. He used cannabis, crack cocaine, heroin and amphetamines regularly, which led to a chaotic lifestyle and repeat offending.
18. On 24 October 2022, the substance misuse team at Nottingham completed a full assessment. Mr Cronin said that he wanted to stop using drugs. He said he wanted to complete work in relation to his substance misuse and would participate in group work, and complete in cell workbooks.
19. Mr Cronin's prison offender manager (POM) contacted Mr Cronin on 17 November and said her role was to support his external community offender manager (COM). Mr Cronin told her that he wanted to work towards being drug free and was happy to receive assistance to achieve this. He said he had stopped using drugs since arriving in prison. Healthcare staff explained the use of naloxone (used to reverse or reduce the effects of opioids), and Mr Cronin completed naloxone training.

HMP Ranby

20. On 7 December, Mr Cronin was transferred to HMP Ranby.
21. Mr Cronin referred himself to the substance misuse service as he said he did not want to use drugs in prison. He said he wanted to learn better ways of coping in the community as he spent between £20 and £200 daily on heroin and crack cocaine.
22. The substance misuse team met Mr Cronin on 12 December, for an initial assessment. Mr Cronin said that, in the community, he would disengage with services and return to drug use and crime to fund his habits. The team offered Mr Cronin one to one support, which he declined. He said that he did not want to complete any workbooks and that he preferred group work. The substance misuse team arranged for Mr Cronin to join the relapse prevention group which aims to teach users strategies to minimise the risks of relapsing back into drug use.
23. Mr Cronin told his POM that the substance misuse team had issued him with a relapse prevention workbook which he had not completed. Mr Cronin said that he wished to reconnect with a rehabilitation service in Derby when released.
24. On 30 March 2023, prison staff reported that Mr Cronin appeared to be under the influence of drugs. A member of the substance misuse team spoke to Mr Cronin and he admitted smoking psychoactive substances (PS). He said that he would smoke it again if it was available. The substance misuse team worker discussed the dangers associated with smoking PS and drug addiction and arranged for Mr Cronin to attend the substance misuse recovery support review meeting for additional support.

Pre-release planning

25. On 4 May, his COM met Mr Cronin at Ranby to discuss the arrangements for his release and his risk management plan. They discussed his previous chaotic lifestyle which had led to his arrest. They agreed timings for his release and agreed that two police officers would meet Mr Cronin at 9.00am, to accompany him to his probation appointment and then to his accommodation. He noted that Mr Cronin was happy with the high levels of support.
26. On 22 May, a substance misuse worker conducted a telephone consultation for a substance misuse recovery support review. He repeated warnings about using substances in prison and after release. Mr Cronin said that he had reduced his use of PS to two or three times a week at night when locked in his cell. The substance misuse worker explained the risks of using PS whether it was in prison or the community, as there was no antidote. He concluded that on release, Mr Cronin would need to voluntarily attend a drug advisory service.
27. Three weeks before his release, healthcare staff referred Mr Cronin to a community treatment provider (which they noted would be confirmed once Mr Cronin had confirmation of his release address). Accommodation was arranged with Green Pastures (a social enterprise that provides housing to the homeless) in Derby to provide Mr Cronin with a home and support when released.
28. On 20, 28 and 30 June, the substance misuse team met with Mr Cronin in preparation for his release. They discussed measures to help him resist urges to use PS, as this had become his drug of choice. The substance misuse team confirmed Mr Cronin's release date with the nearest community drug advisory service so that he could obtain support following his release.
29. On 30 June, a substance misuse nurse saw Mr Cronin shortly before his release and issued him with a naloxone kit to take with him. Mr Cronin said crack and heroin were his drugs of choice outside prison. The nurse discussed with him how to keep safe as he was at higher risk of overdose and reminded him about the community support that had been put in place for him.

Post-release

30. At 8:46am on 30 June, Mr Cronin was released from Ranby. The police officers did not arrive at Ranby until 9.40am, by which time, Mr Cronin had already left.
31. Mr Cronin's licence conditions required him to report to his probation officer at the Derby Probation office at 2.00pm. He arrived for his appointment as planned and apologised for not following the agreed plan. His probation officer explained the terms of Mr Cronin's licence and completed an induction. He scheduled Mr Cronin's next probation appointment for 11.00am on 7 July.
32. Mr Cronin reported to Green Pastures as agreed. However, he was assessed on arrival as being heavily under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Mr Cronin admitted that he had used alcohol and PS, and as a result, he was refused admission to the hostel. (One of the criteria to secure accommodation at Green Pastures was for residents to remain drug free.)

33. That day, Mr Cronin was involved in a fight in the street, and he was stabbed in his back. Mr Cronin received first aid, but he refused further medical treatment.

Circumstances of Mr Cronin's death

34. On 1 July, Mr Cronin saw his grandmother and he complained of pain in his lower back from the stab wound. Later that evening, he went to stay with his ex-partner at her home address.
35. When Mr Cronin's ex-partner awoke at 2:00pm on 2 July, she found Mr Cronin unresponsive in the toilet, surrounded by drug paraphernalia. Paramedics attended and confirmed that Mr Cronin had died.

Post-mortem report

36. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Cronin died of mixed drug toxicity.
37. The report noted that there was a stab wound to the right lower back/upper buttock region, which had not completely penetrated through his gluteus maximus (buttocks) muscle. There was no injury to the underlying bone, no major blood vessel had been damaged and there was no significant haemorrhaging in the wound.

Findings

Substance misuse

38. Mr Cronin had a history of substance misuse. Although he claimed to only use drugs in the community, there was evidence of his continued drug use in prison. The substance misuse team at Ranby had frequent meetings with Mr Cronin and emphasised the dangers of his continued drug use and offered him support. Mr Cronin was appropriately referred to community drug services ahead of his release and he was appropriately given a naloxone kit and harm reduction information on the day of his release.

Good practice

39. Despite having no confirmation of the release address, the substance misuse worker completed referrals to two local community drug services, so they were aware of Mr Cronin's release.

40. Probation staff also took account of Mr Cronin's previous chaotic lifestyle and put support measures in place and arranged for two police officers to accompany him to his probation appointment and accommodation following release, to ensure he received immediate support on release. (Although it is a shame that the officers were late arriving, and Mr Cronin had not waited for them.)

Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

January 2024

Inquest

The inquest, held on 30 May 2025, concluded that Mr Cronin's death was drug related.



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