

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Business plan 2026 to 2027

Strategic plan 2026 to 2029

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



Ombudsman's foreword

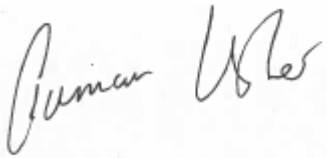
I am delighted to have been reappointed as Ombudsman until April 2029. I feel that an enormous amount has been achieved in the past three years and I am excited to continue building upon this. I have reviewed our strategic objectives and am satisfied that these are the right objectives for the PPO to continue focusing on.

It is my ambition that the complaints investigation function continues to grow and strengthen the IPCI Ambassador scheme to ensure we are accessible to our service users. They will also continue our work with probation services and the immigration estate to help improve access to the complaints process for our service users. Our fatal incident investigations team will be reviewing and refining its approach on drug-related deaths as we continue to investigate an increasing number of these. I remain committed to a 90% timeliness target for our investigations to ensure our service users are provided with answers as quickly as possible.

Sharing learning from our investigations and highlighting thematic issues remains a priority for me. Last year, our ambitious work on epilepsy was supported closely by NHS England, prison GPs and consultants. Since we published the bulletin on epilepsy, stakeholders have been working diligently to improve the care for prisoners with epilepsy. We will continue pushing forward with our work on epilepsy in the next financial year. I am keen that our future thematic work continues in this spirit, with more joined-up working with stakeholders continuing after publication. I will be continuing to highlight the importance of reception processes within prisons and continuing our focus on self-inflicted deaths.

Improving our technology within the PPO will also be a focus within the next year, as our AI Working Group continues to consider the applicability of new technologies to our work and helps to introduce these where appropriate.

I am extremely grateful for all the hard work and dedication shown by the PPO staff and look forward to what we will achieve over the next year.



Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

April 2026

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 our Terms of Reference (ToR)¹.

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 detention², 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.

¹ [PPO Terms of Reference](#)

² 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 2026 to 2027 is £7,426,000. We will receive an additional £337,000 to support our investigation into the restraint of pregnant prisoners.

Strategic objectives 2026 to 2029

I have decided that the strategic objectives from 2023 to 2026 should be continued for the next three years. Our priorities for 2026 to 2027 are set out under these objectives.

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 2026 to 2027.

Strategic objectives 2026 to 2029 and priorities for 2026 to 2027

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

- We will continue raising awareness of the PPO to those who use our services and the services in remit, so they understand what the PPO does and how to use our services.
- 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.

2026 to 2027 priorities	Measure of success
<p>Support existing IPCI Ambassadors (a scheme where volunteer prisoners support others in effectively using local complaints processes and escalating to IPCI when required).</p> <p>Establish IPCI Ambassadors in prisons without the scheme where there is appetite for this.</p> <p>Continue providing support to IPCI Ambassadors through the IPCI Ambassador community to strengthen the relationship between IPCI Ambassadors and the PPO.</p>	<p>Any new establishments enrolling on the IPCI Ambassador scheme are onboarded through a streamlined process.</p> <p>2 IPCI Ambassador newsletters produced and distributed.</p> <p>Develop guidance for Ambassadors into a Complaints Reference Manual for use in prison libraries and Business Hubs.</p> <p>Increased number of eligible complaints received from individuals in IPCI Ambassador prisons.</p>
<p>Reduce the proportion of ineligible complaints received by IPCI by continuing our programme of targeted work with the 10 prisons with the highest numbers of ineligible complaints in the prison estate.</p>	<p>A reduction in levels of ineligible complaints received from the ten prisons in scope of the targeted work.</p>
<p>Continue our work with Immigration Removal Centres working with the authorities in remit so they better understand what we do.</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> <p>Increased eligibility of complaints from detained individuals.</p>

<p>Continue our work with probation services to help improve people on probation's access to the complaints process.</p>	<p>Review the revised Probation Instruction on complaints handling for people on probation. Consider changes to the handling of probation complaints to ensure timely investigations.</p> <p>Increased eligibility of complaints from those under probation supervision.</p>
<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.</p>	<p>Developed and implemented a communications strategy aimed at those under probation and those in Immigration Removal Centres.</p>
<p>Continue engaging with young people and women in prison to raise awareness of IPCI.</p>	<p>Continue to engage with young people and women through the year.</p> <p>Youth-specific accessible IPCI promotional material developed and disseminated across the youth estate.</p> <p>Increased number of eligible complaints from those in the youth and women's estate.</p>
<p>Publish a Race Action Plan with a continued focus on service users.</p>	<p>PPO staff consider the impact of race in all investigations. Detail on the progress of workstreams will be provided in our annual report.</p>
<p>Continue work to ensure a consistent approach to investigating issues relating to diversity and inclusion.</p>	<p>Investigators are aware of issues related to diversity and inclusion and can identify and investigate these properly.</p>
<p>Continue reviewing the PPO's approach to family liaison to further understand the needs of bereaved families.</p>	<p>Implement any changes identified to help meet the needs of bereaved families.</p>
<p>Respond to all Freedom of Information (FOI) requests within 20 working days. Respond to all Subject Access Requests within one calendar month.</p>	<p>Success will be measured against a target of 100% of FOI and Subject Access Requests being completed on time.</p>

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.

2026 to 2027 priorities	Measure of success
<p>Meet the following timeliness targets for all fatal incident investigations:</p> <p>Initial reports: 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>Final reports: Finalise all final fatal incident investigation reports within 12 weeks (60 working days) of the initial report being issued.</p> <p>Publication: 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 initial fatal incident reports are delivered to time.</p> <p>Business targets will have been met if at least 90% of final fatal incident reports are delivered to time.</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 complaints investigations:</p> <p>Eligibility: We will determine the eligibility of all complaints within 10 working days of receipt.</p> <p>Standard complaints: Complete our investigation and submit our initial report (output) for consultation for standard complaints within 12 weeks (60</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>

<p>working days) of accepting the complaint as eligible.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Publication: Produce and publish summaries of anonymised upheld or partially upheld complaints on a monthly basis.</p>	
<p>Regular updating and reviewing of operational manuals for fatal incident and complaint investigations.</p>	<p>Operational manuals provide accessible and up-to-date guidance to support our staff in carrying out their work.</p>
<p>Continue sharing learning internally with PPO staff through newsletters and dashboards.</p> <p>Identify and share learning from prevention of future death (PFD) reports and from PPO surveys. Operational teams to utilise learning.</p>	<p>PFD reports are regularly reviewed, and any learning is shared directly and swiftly with investigators. Learning is shared from PPO surveys directly with staff on a regular basis. Improved outcomes and feedback from surveys.</p> <p>A process is created and used to regularly share information from the intel dashboard for fatal incident investigations.</p>
<p>Work with NHS England colleagues on clinical reviews for fatal incident investigations.</p>	<p>Greater consistency and quality of clinical reviews.</p>
<p>Review of the approach taken to investigating drug-related deaths.</p>	<p>An agreed approach on how best to investigate drug-related deaths equipping investigators with the ability to assess against an agreed set of objectives covering supply of and demand for illicit substances in prisons.</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 continue to improve custody and community supervision by identifying and sharing thematic and real-time learning from our investigations.
- 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.

2026 to 2027 priorities	Measure of success
Produce thematic learning publications and disseminate learning to the services in remit.	The PPO addresses thematic issues in a targeted manner, working with stakeholders beyond publication to create positive policy and operational change. Learning from bulletins is further amplified through events, such as roundtables. Recommendations from our learning lesson bulletins are accepted by the relevant services in remit.
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.	This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenting at conferences/events. • Leading pieces of work with stakeholders. • Organising events with stakeholders to discuss thematic issues. • Introduction of joint forums. • Working with stakeholders to effect policy changes. • Working with stakeholders to make improvements to working practices.
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.	The PPO uses its expertise from investigating to respond to relevant national policy consultations, inquiries and calls for evidence.
Continue to identify systemic and endemic issues from complaint investigations and improve the impact of our	The issuance of targeted recommendations that address systemic and institutional issues across the prison

<p>recommendations to drive system-wide change.</p>	<p>estate which are accepted by the service in remit.</p>
<p>Consider the use of technology by the services in remit and highlight areas for advancement.</p>	<p>Areas of technology and the opportunity for improvements which could better safety outcomes are highlighted by the PPO to the services in remit.</p>
<p>We will use our skills and expertise to carry out special investigations when commissioned to do so.</p>	<p>Complete our independent investigation into the restraint of pregnant women in prison during pregnancy-related hospital escorts.</p>

Objective 4: We will use our resources efficiently and effectively.

- We will continue improving our technology to enable us to use our resources more efficiently and effectively.
- We will continue to be a data-led organisation.
- We will continue investing in and supporting our people to develop their skills and capability.
- We will continue embedding an effective performance management approach.

2026 to 2027 priorities	Measure of success
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.	Demonstrable improvements made to data recording, collection and management. Use of data dashboards to become business as usual across the PPO. AI is considered for office's processes and is introduced where appropriate.
Continued work embedding our knowledge management strategy that promotes effective and efficient knowledge sharing within the PPO.	Knowledge management strategy effectively embedded throughout the PPO.
Continue developing our digital learning and knowledge hub to promote and share training, learning and knowledge across the PPO.	Strengthen our learning and knowledge hub and continued promotion across the PPO.
Continue rolling out training for new and existing staff.	Training needs identified from our review are successfully met. The agreed training programme is delivered for investigators.
Continue to embed the PPO's approach to business continuity and risk management.	The PPO can manage known or unknown risk with contingencies in place, so we are able to fulfil our responsibilities effectively.
Continued work to further embed our performance management approach.	Consistent use of the performance management approach.



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