

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Harold Wharton, a prisoner at HMP Northumberland, on 13 October 2025

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

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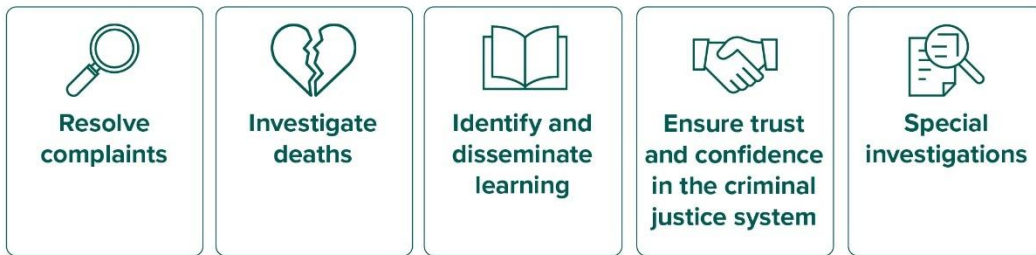
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OUR VISION

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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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. In February 2024, Mr Harold Wharton was sentenced to 10 years in prison for sexual offences. He died of multi organ failure caused by metastatic oesophageal cancer on 13 October 2025, while a prisoner at HMP Northumberland. He was 75 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Wharton's family and friends.
4. The Ombudsman's office wrote to Mr Wharton'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.
5. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer, supported by another independent clinical reviewer, to review Mr Wharton's clinical care at HMP Northumberland. The clinical reviewer's report is attached as Annex 1.
6. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Wharton received at Northumberland was equivalent to what he could have expected to receive in the community. She found that Mr Wharton's medical records contained evidence he was cared for with compassion, by confident and competent staff. He was monitored closely and appropriate management plans were put in place. When his condition deteriorated, healthcare staff saw him promptly and the emergency response was timely.
7. The PPO Assistant Ombudsman investigated the non-clinical issues relating to Mr Wharton's care.
8. We did not find any non-clinical issues of concern. We make no recommendations.
9. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS did not find any factual inaccuracies.
10. At the inquest held on 13 March 2026, the coroner concluded that Mr Harold Wharton died of natural causes.

Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

March 2026

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