Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

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Meeting Minutes – 16 July 2026, for publication

Attendees

Wendy Sinclair-Giebens
Kate Eves
Seena Fazel
Jake Hard
Andrew Harris

Carl Melia (MoJ), for item 4

Item 1. Minutes and actions

1. The Panel approved the previous meeting minutes, subject to Andrew Harris providing minor amendments to wording attributed to him.
2. Members reviewed outstanding actions, including work relating to End of Release on Compassionate Grounds (ERCG), PPO clinical reviews, risk assessments outside the cell environment and ligature reduction. There was discussion about the low uptake of compassionate release, concerns regarding the quality and consistency of PPO clinical reviews, and the importance of identifying high-risk prison environments and prisoners who may not have been recognised as being at risk of suicide.

Item 2. Data Dashboard and trends

3. The Panel reviewed the latest data dashboard, including new information on offenders supervised in the community. Panel members discussed related research on the continuity of healthcare for those leaving prisons, a NACRO report data stating that over 500 people died in the three months following release from prison, and dashboard data stating that 488 deaths were self-inflicted. Seena noted that the risk is elevated even for those with community sentences, and that another risk area was those with cardiovascular disease. In terms of risk factors, a combination of substance misuse and psychiatric disorder was also important.
4. The Panel noted the reduction in overall deaths but an increase in homicides in prisons, the increase in assaults in women's prisons and the self-harm figures. Concerns were raised about the four levels of secure estate for young people, the different approaches to their inspections and that use of force had increased for children and young people.

5. The Chair had raised parity for independent investigations of deaths in mental health detention with the Minister. The Minister would not be able to consider any proposals until the NHSE reforms were complete. The Panel will follow up the IAPDC MHA report to include a business case detailing the financial aspects and the Chair will raise the question of the future of NHSE at her next meeting with DHSC.
6. The self-harm rates in England and Wales prisons are nearly double those in other countries. The Chair noted that for "other" deaths following police contact, three were aged under 18 years and 10 were young adults. The Panel noted that race disproportionality was a feature of the Angiolini report; Seena stated that his research showed there was no race disproportionality in deaths when compared to arrests.

Item 3. IAPDC Workplan update

1. Mental health investigations: the Panel will write to the Minister on the need to follow up the Panel's report. Otherwise, this area will be a watching brief.
2. Use of lethal force during arrest: the report will be finalized at the end of July and shared with stakeholders for comments ahead of publication in September. An executive summary will be added and a short list of three headlines prepared for media outlets.
3. PFD reports: the summary of the reports may need some help from Liverpool University's AI toolkit to pull out emerging themes. The data may be used to link to the Ministerial Board's work priorities.
4. Post police custody suicides: the NPCC and College of Policing are setting up a reference group of stakeholders to implement the recommendations. The Panel queried how to link this work with the developing joint core priorities. Jake referred to a conversation with DHSC on whether the pilot neighbourhood mental health centres had any connection with Right Care Right Person - the centres may be useful in helping to reduce risk on release. The reference group will need a Panel member to provide clinical input, as this is an area which they are lacking. Otherwise, this area will become a watching brief.
5. Urgent care in immigration detention: the Panel will keep a watching brief of this work.
6. Support for bereaved families: Kate presented at two HMPPS family liaison events for FLO staff. The Panel considered whether there may be insights from Scotland and Northern Ireland to feed into the work.

Item 4. HMPPS Older Prisoners Strategy

7. Carl Melia outlined the development of a national Older People in Custody strategy, driven by recommendations from the Independent Sentencing Review and Chief Medical Officer's reports. Older people in custody often experience health conditions and levels of need associated with people around ten years older in the community. HMPPS are working closely with NHS England on a more coordinated system approach. Among the key themes identified are issues around health, ageing, continuity of care, local authority partnerships, self-neglect, safeguarding and mental capacity, dementia and end-of-life care. The discussion touched on compassionate release for older prisoners. It was noted that use of the scheme remains relatively low and that a range of factors may influence outcomes, including individual choice, clinical circumstances, eligibility criteria, the high-

risk profile of some offenders, despite their age, and the complexity and timing of decision-making processes.

8. The strategy will require a stronger evidence base, improved identification of need and better understanding of future demand, including the likely implications of an ageing prison population over the coming years. It will also highlight the importance of prevention, maintaining independence and avoiding avoidable deterioration, rather than responding only when needs become acute.
9. The strategy is beginning to crystallise around four major pillars - suitability of the prison estate, how the prison regime supports healthy ageing, health and social care arrangements and system interfaces, and preparation for release, including continuity of care into the community. It will also need to reflect the differences in the commissioning arrangements in Wales and ensure inclusion of women in custody. An Older People's Health and Social Care Steering Group will start soon.
10. In the Panel discussion, Seena highlighted significant levels of undetected and undertreated clinical depression amongst older prisoners and stressed the need for early identification and treatment. Kate highlighted the Panel's family liaison work, in supporting families after a death but also in preparing for an expected death and palliative care support. There was some innovative practice in US prisons around peer-support models. Jake emphasised the importance of data for patient care. Andrew discussed the possibility of specialist older prisoner units and potential secure care-home style models. Carl will keep the Panel updated on progress.

Item 5. Hillsborough Law / Duty of Candour

11. Members discussed the implications of proposed Duty of Candour and Public Accountability measures. The conversation focused on implementation challenges, workforce training requirements, organisational culture, whistleblower protections and the need to avoid creating a culture of individual blame. The Panel considered whether a future Ministerial Board roundtable could support learning and sharing of good practice across organisations.

Item 6. Library of Evidence and AI

12. The Secretariat updated members on discussions with the University of Liverpool regarding AI-enabled evidence repositories. While there was interest in the opportunities presented by artificial intelligence, members agreed that any future development should be based on clear proof of concept and careful evaluation. The Panel supported initially developing a searchable evidence database before considering wider AI applications.

Item 7. Ministerial Board and Priorities

13. The Chair reiterated the importance of maintaining the Panel's independent advisory role alongside its relationship with the Ministerial Board. Members reaffirmed existing strategic priorities and discussed additional priorities relating to independent investigations of deaths in mental health detention and stronger engagement with Scotland and Northern Ireland. A further meeting will be held before the September Board meeting to refine proposals.

AOB

14. The Panel discussed a potential submission to the Independent Review of the Prison System in England and Wales.
15. Members also received an update on recruitment, noting four appointable candidates for the current vacancy,
16. The possibility of subscribing to Prison Oracle was also raised for further consideration.

Actions

- Action 1 – Andrew to feedback on amendments to the minutes.
- Action 2 – Panel to raise issues with ERCG at next meeting with PPO, then decide if further action is needed.
- Action 3 – Secretariat to contact PPO about a review of the clinical review system so that Panel can feed in.
- Action 4 – Secretariat to obtain data on risk assessments outside the cell environment prior to Wendy's meeting with Sarah Coccia on 1st September.
- Action 5 – Panel to consider MHA independent investigations follow up report on business case for change.
- Action 6 – Secretariat to flag with DHSC that NHSE abolition update to be on agenda for next meeting between Wendy and Caroline.
- Action 7 – Secretariat to draft an executive summary for Use of Force report.
- Action 8 – Secretariat to draft a letter to Baroness Merron on follow-up to the IAPDC MH investigations report, to share with Panel.
- Action 9 – Secretariat to determine the time allocation required for the police custody reference group, to feedback to Seena for a decision on becoming Panel lead.
- Action 10 – Panel to await outcome of Andrew's report on PFDs and then look at possibility of holding an MBDD roundtable to learn from senior managers how they are implementing the duty of candour.
- Action 11 – Secretariat to follow up with University of Liverpool to develop a Library of Evidence specification to assess further and to get further information about their pharmacology database once it is available to share with Seena.
- Action 12 – Secretariat to pull together an Excel spreadsheet (possibly using AI) for reports of interest to the Panel.
- Action 13 – Secretariat to set up a Panel meeting before the September MBDD to clarify Panel's workstreams. *(complete)*
- Action 14 – Secretariat to pull together an early draft skeleton for a submission for the Independent Review of the Prison System.
- Action 15 – Secretariat to investigate Prison Oracle subscription costs

Date of next meeting: 26 August 2026, 13:00–16:00 (Virtual).