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The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) has recommended the Home Office to refer three doctors to the General Medical Council for their alleged failures relating to the death of a man in “inhumane and degrading” conditions in an immigration removal centre.

Sue McAllister also recommended that the Home Office investigate the actions of Home Office staff who were responsible for monitoring Prince Fosu’s care in the segregation unit at Harmondsworth IRC at Heathrow. She further recommended a range of actions which could prevent such a death in the future.

Mr Fosu, a 31-year-old Ghanaian national, died in 2012. A lengthy police investigation and consideration by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) led to a decision in late 2018 that no criminal charges would be brought.

The PPO was then able to reactivate an investigation it had started and suspended after Mr Fosu’s death. Publishing her report at the end of an inquest into Mr Fosu’s death, Sue McAllister said: “I very much regret that the lengthy delay will inevitably diminish the impact of this (PPO) report and make it more difficult to hold those involved properly to account.

Mr Fosu – who faced removal and before arriving at Harmondsworth had been arrested while running naked in the street - died on 30 October 2012 at Harmondsworth IRC, then run by GEO Group.

Sue McAllister added: "This is a very troubling case. Mr Fosu spent six days at Harmondsworth, and apart from his first few hours, he spent his time segregated, living naked in a room dirty with faeces, urine and uneaten food, without a mattress or bedding. He did not eat for much of this time and rarely engaged with staff.

"I am very concerned about the standard of care that Mr Fosu received. No one referred him for a mental health assessment or even seemed to consider whether there might be any underlying physical or mental ill health conditions affecting his behaviour."

Although his segregation should have been independently reviewed every 24 hours by a Home Office manager, she said, "the manager who conducted these reviews did so without seeing or speaking to Mr Fosu herself and relied on what she was told by unit staff."

Mr Fosu's wellbeing should also have been assessed by the doctors who visited the unit each day. "I am very concerned that apart from one very brief interaction on 25 October, the doctors also failed to see or speak to Mr Fosu." Staff appeared to have become de-sensitised to the signs of possible mental or physical distress.

"I am particularly troubled that Mr Fosu lived in an unfurnished room without proper justification or review, which I consider to be inhuman and degrading. I consider that IRC managers were responsible for a culture which I can only describe as uncaring."

The PPO acknowledged that managing Mr Fosu's complex and difficult behaviour presented staff at Harmondsworth with challenges. However, she added, "we consider that the care he received fell considerably below acceptable standards."

Among a range of recommendations, the PPO said the Director of Home Office Immigration Enforcement should refer three doctors to the GMC "for failing to see or speak to Mr Fosu or to assess his wellbeing." She also recommended that consideration be given to disciplinary action against the Home Office monitors at the centre.

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Notes to editors

1. An inquest into Mr Fosu's death ended today.
2. The PPO report on the death of Mr Fosu can be found here – <https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/ppo-prod-storage-1g9rkjhkhjmgw/uploads/2020/02/F1786-12-Death-of-Mr-Prince-Fosu-Harmondsworth-30-10-2012-NC-31-40-31.pdf>
3. 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 those provided by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the National Probation Service for England and Wales, the Community Rehabilitation Companies for England and Wales, Prisoner Escort and Custody Service, the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement), the Youth Custody Service, and those local authorities with secure children's homes. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).
4. The PPO investigates: Complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention, offenders under probation supervision and immigration detainees; Deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and immigration detainees due to any cause.
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