

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Adam Holden a prisoner at HMP Altcourse on 13 February 2021

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Our Vision

To carry out independent investigations to make custody and community supervision safer and fairer.

Our Values

We are:

Impartial: *we do not take sides*

Respectful: *we are considerate and courteous*

Inclusive: *we value diversity*

Dedicated: *we are determined and focused*

Fair: *we are honest and act with integrity*



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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. We carry out investigations to understand what happened and identify how the organisations whose actions we oversee can improve their work in the future.
3. Mr Adam Holden died in hospital from lung cancer on 13 February 2021, while a prisoner at HMP Altcourse. He was 48 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Holden's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Holden received at Altcourse was equivalent to that he could have expected to receive in the community. She made four recommendations but as none were directly related to Mr Holden's death, we have not included them in this report.
5. We found no non-clinical issues of concern. We make no recommendations.

The Investigation Process

6. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Holden's clinical care in prison.
7. The PPO investigator has investigated non-clinical issues, including Mr Holden's location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
8. The PPO family liaison officer wrote to Mr Holden's next of kin, his son, to explain the investigation. He did not respond to our letter.
9. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS did not find any factual inaccuracies.

Previous deaths at HMP Altcourse

10. Mr Holden was the 13th prisoner to die at Altcourse since February 2019. Of the previous deaths, ten were from natural causes, one was self-inflicted and one unascertained.

Key Events

11. On 21 December 2020, Mr Adam Holden was sentenced to 140 days in prison for breaching a restraining order. He was taken to HMP Altcourse.
12. On 3 January 2021, Mr Holden reported coughing up blood, headaches and weight loss. On 14 January, after a chest X-ray showed a lung abnormality, a prison GP made an urgent referral under the suspected cancer pathway for a hospital appointment within two weeks.
13. On 23 January, Mr Holden became very short of breath when he attended the medication hatch. A nurse took his clinical observations and found that his respiratory rate and blood oxygen levels were outside the expected range. She discussed the results with a prison GP who decided to send Mr Holden to hospital.
14. Hospital staff diagnosed Mr Holden with metastatic lung cancer (cancer that has spread to other parts of the body) and gave him a life expectancy of 6-12 months but said it could be only three months. Mr Holden also tested positive for COVID-19. Hospital staff completed a Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) order with Mr Holden who agreed that he did not want to be resuscitated if his heart or breathing stopped.
15. On 26 January, Mr Holden was discharged back to Altcourse. He was placed in isolation on the prison's healthcare unit. As Mr Holden was due for release on 26 February, staff did not apply for his early release on compassionate grounds.
16. On 12 February, Mr Holden reported feeling unwell, dizzy, lightheaded and breathless with mild stomach pain. He was admitted to Aintree Hospital. The next day, he was moved to the acute cardiac unit for further investigation but suddenly became unresponsive, suffered a heart attack and died.
17. There was no post-mortem examination. At inquest, the coroner recorded Mr Holden's cause of death as pulmonary embolus (a blockage in an artery in the lung) caused by metastatic lung cancer.

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Assistant Ombudsman

July 2021

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