

**Prisons &  
Probation**

**Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

# Independent investigation into the death of Mr Matthew Laffan, a prisoner at HMP Leeds, on 9 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 Matthew Laffan, who was 95 years old, died of cancer on 9 February 2021, while a prisoner at HMP Leeds. We offer our condolences to Mr Laffan's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Laffan received at Leeds was of a good standard and equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community. She made no recommendations.
5. We did not find any non-clinical issues of concern. We make no recommendations.

## The Investigation Process

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

## Previous deaths at HMP Leeds

10. Mr Laffan was the 17th prisoner to die at Leeds since February 2019. Of the previous deaths, eight were from natural causes, six were self-inflicted and two were drug related.

## Key Events

11. On 12 September 2018, Mr Matthew Laffan was remanded in custody for sexual offences. He was later sentenced to ten years and nine months in prison. He was sent to HMP Moorland.
12. Mr Laffan was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome (a type of blood cancer) in 2018.
13. On 29 August 2020, Mr Laffan was admitted to hospital with COVID-19 and pneumonia. On 16 October, he was discharged from hospital but could not return to Moorland because he needed 24-hour health care which they could not provide. He was sent to HMP Leeds.
14. Mr Laffan was appropriately located on the social care unit where he could access 24-hour healthcare.
15. Over the next few months, Mr Laffan was admitted to hospital on several occasions where he was treated for a chest infection and sepsis.
16. On 16 November, hospital staff discussed a Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) order with Mr Laffan who agreed that if he stopped breathing he did not want to be resuscitated.
17. Mr Laffan was escorted to hospital every two weeks for blood transfusions. On 7 January 2021, at a routine hospital appointment, Mr Laffan's blood test came back as abnormal. He was admitted to hospital where he was treated for sepsis. On 19 January, he was discharged and returned to prison.
18. On 8 February, a nurse noted that Mr Laffan's health had deteriorated and he appeared frail and weak. He was nursed in bed as he refused to get out of bed.
19. On 9 February at 5.10am, healthcare staff went to Mr Laffan's cell and found that he was not breathing and had no signs of life. There was no doctor in the prison to verify Mr Laffan's death, so a paramedic was called. The paramedic arrived at the prison and confirmed that Mr Laffan had died.
20. There was no post-mortem examination as the coroner accepted the cause of death provided by a prison GP. The GP gave the cause of death as myelodysplastic syndrome.

**Louise Richards**  
**Assistant Ombudsman**

**August 2021**

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