

Strategic Plan

2019-22

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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Ombudsman's Foreword



This Strategic Plan was first published in April 2019 and covered the period to March 2021.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our work was substantial, therefore we did not publish a new Strategic Plan in April 2021. Instead, we have extended this 2019-21 plan to cover the period April 2021 to March 2022. We have reviewed the four strategic themes we set out in the original plan, and we agree that they remain relevant and should continue to inform our priorities for the current year.

The four strategic themes are **confidence, effectiveness, impact** and **efficiency**.

As well as our focus on these four themes, we have confirmed our commitment to, and emphasis on, diversity and inclusion. Our race action plan, which will be published on our website, sets out what we will do to be a truly inclusive organisation where our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues are empowered to reach their full potential and where they feel valued and respected.

During the final year set out in the Strategic Plan, we have an ambitious programme of work, including expanding our Terms of Reference to include investigating post-release deaths and neo and post-natal deaths. We will also be returning to our offices after a period of remote working and resuming visits to prisons and face-to-face contact with our stakeholders which is so important to our work.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Sue McAllister'.

Sue McAllister CB

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Statement of purpose

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's office exists to carry out independent investigations into deaths and complaints in custody. Our service is in respect of prisoners, young people in secure accommodation, those supervised by probation and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals).

The purpose of our investigations is to understand what has happened, to correct injustices and to identify lessons to be learned for the organisations whose actions we oversee.

Strategic goal

Effective and independent investigations helping to make custody and community supervision safer and fairer.

Values

- **Impartial:** We are independent, and we do not take sides.
- **Respectful:** We are considerate and courteous to each other, the users of our service and wider stakeholders.
- **Inclusive:** We value diversity, so that everyone can give their best.
- **Dedicated:** We are determined and focused in our approach to our work.
- **Fair:** We are honest and act with integrity in all our dealings, both internally and externally.

Function

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), Prisoner Escort and Custody Services; the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement); the Youth Justice Board; and those local authorities and voluntary organisations who administer secure youth detention accommodation. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in their [Terms of Reference](#) (ToR).

The PPO has three main investigative duties:

- Complaints made by prisoners, young people in secure accommodation,¹ offenders under probation supervision, and detained individuals due to any cause.
- Deaths of prisoners, young people in secure accommodation, approved premises' residents and detained individuals due to any cause. This also includes neonatal deaths and stillbirths that occur in prisons or in hospital following a transfer from prison.
- Using the PPO's discretionary powers, the investigation of deaths of recently released prisoners.

¹ The PPO investigates complaints from young people detained in secure accommodation such as secure training centres (STCs) and young offender institutions (YOIs). Its remit does not include complaints from young people in secure children's homes (SCHs).

Resources

The work of the PPO is demand led and so the office must respond to all eligible complaints and deaths in remit. It is therefore difficult to predict the volume of work that will come into the office at any one time. This means the bulk of our budget pays for staff to support our operational delivery. Changes to financial allocation have a direct impact on the number and type of staff that we employ. To operate efficiently within existing constraints, we must adapt and flex by prioritising our efforts to maximise our impact and maintain the quality and timeliness of our delivery.

Context

This section makes some assumptions about the kind of environment the PPO will be working in over the period of this plan, from April 2021 to March 2022, and what would have a direct impact on the strategic priorities of the Ombudsman.

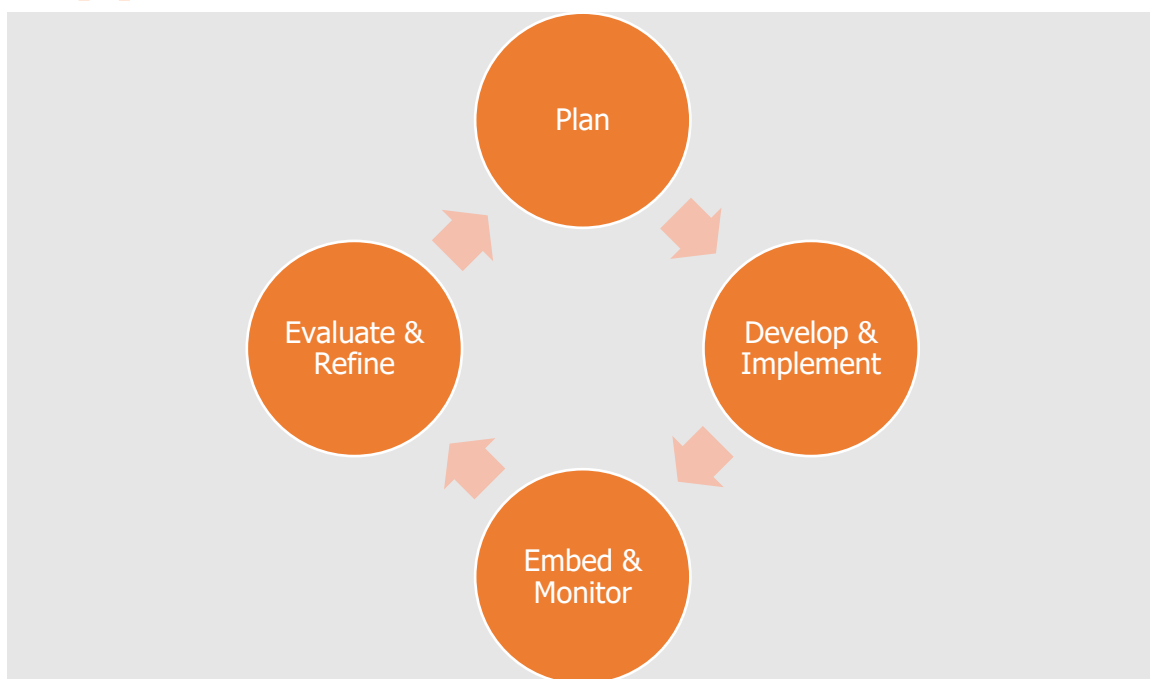
- The PPO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the way in which it has adapted to deliver services in the context of restrictions and manage the influx of COVID-19 related deaths.
- The ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the services in remit, to ensure the safety of staff and prisoners, residents or detained individuals as restrictions begin to ease.
- Continued change across the services in remit, including updated prison safety and security policies establishing their COVID-19 recovery programmes.
- Penal policy changes, particularly new developments in managing custodial sentences and categorisation as well as updates to probation policy.
- Policy changes, particularly in the areas of prisoners' property, visits, CCTV and use of force.
- Limited resource available to the Ombudsman's office which will mandate us to prioritise our workstreams and refocus our efforts to maximise our impact and maintain the quality and timeliness of our delivery.
- Ongoing relationships with investigation partners, for example NHS England and NHS Improvement clinical reviewers, who, at the time of writing, are also experiencing COVID-19 challenges and limitations on resources, requiring us to work together to accomplish our shared goals with maximum efficiency and to a high standard.

The Plan

The plan continues to refer to the strategic themes set out in the Strategic Plan 2019/2021 and extends to March 2022. The key activities for the Ombudsman's term are set out under each of these themes:

- Confidence
- Effectiveness
- Impact
- Efficiency

The Approach



PPO's Strategic Plan 2019-22

Confidence

Improve the confidence of our stakeholders in our role as an independent, impartial and fair investigative body and complaints resolution service.

Confidence in our independence, impartiality and fairness is essential to the acceptance and impact of our recommendations, as well as being crucial to encouraging complainants to raise concerns in the first place. It is therefore vital that we foster this confidence among all our stakeholders including complainants, bereaved families, staff and management in the services in remit, and other interested parties.

- We will seek opportunities to improve our relationships with services in remit in order to facilitate effective implementation of recommendations by frontline staff.
- We will conduct a review of relevant surveys to make sure we effectively seek and take account of our key stakeholders' opinions.
- We will continue to seek legislative opportunity for placing the Ombudsman's role on a statutory footing.
- We will implement a diverse communications plan that makes effective use of all channels available to us. We will execute a communications strategy that allows us to engage further with external stakeholders on our recommendations and investigative services.

Effectiveness

Empower staff to improve the quality and timeliness of our investigations and resulting reports ensuring a robust and proportionate approach.

Investigating all eligible complaints and fatal incidents in our remit in a timely and proportionate manner requires continual focus. It remains a priority area for the Ombudsman's tenure to identify ways to improve performance.

- We will work with staff to identify areas where productivity is blocked and adopt a continuous improvement methodology to remove those blockages, internally and externally, to maximise effectiveness across the office.
- We will promote diversity and inclusion, and support and empower our staff to develop professionally, achieve their potential and drive success.
- We will work with our partners to embrace digital working, ensuring our IT and structural resources are sufficient and that they are being used consistently, appropriately and effectively.

Impact

Focus on the outcomes of investigations and increase the impact of our work on the actions of services in remit and the day to day lives of those in custody.

A key concern of the PPO is that we have been identifying the same lessons and making the same recommendations to services in remit for many years and we continue to do so. If our investigations are to make a difference, we need to be even more outcome focused and identify actions we can take to ensure services in remit address the failings that we have identified.

- We will develop effective means of tracking repeat recommendations and holding services in remit to account for repeatedly failing to implement our recommendations.
- We will explore options for working collaboratively with HM Inspectorate of Prisons, the Independent Monitoring Boards and HMI Probation in order to magnify our voices and to increase our collective impact.
- We will adopt a strategic approach to ascertaining which services in remit and groups are most in need of our attention and adopt a proactive plan for engagement.
- We will apply our learning and extend our reach into investigations of post-release deaths.
- We will review our publicity materials to ensure those in custody have up-to-date information and knowledge of our services and how to contact us.

Efficiency

Use our resources efficiently and effectively.

As highlighted, we are a demand led organisation. To best navigate the unpredictable nature of our demand, we must work closely with our colleagues in MoJ to influence policies that will impact our workload.

We must also identify actions that will allow us to use our existing resources with maximum efficiency and support improvements in delivery. This will ensure that we remain resilient to shifting finances and can respond robustly to fluctuations in workload, particularly as we move through the pandemic.

- We will review our organisational structure to remove barriers to cross-office collaboration and ensure that we are facilitating performance improvement.
- We will establish a consistent and regular approach to engagement with the MoJ and HMPPS to influence policies that will impact our workload.
- We will execute regular internal communications to staff within the PPO and the wider Civil Service.
- We will adopt a focussed approach to knowledge management.

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman

Independent Investigations