

**Prisons &  
Probation**

**Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

# Independent investigation into the death of Mr John Peters, a prisoner at HMP Bure, on 18 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 John Peters died in Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital on 18 February 2021 of cancer while a prisoner at HMP Bure. He was 83 years old. I offer my condolences to Mr Peters' family and friends.
4. Full details of the clinical findings are in the clinical reviewer's report. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Peters received at Bure was of an acceptable standard and equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community. She made no recommendations.
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 Peters' clinical care at Bure.
7. The PPO investigator has investigated non-clinical issues, including Mr Peters' 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 Peters' next of kin, his daughter and granddaughter, to explain the investigation. They 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 Bure

10. Mr Peters was the seventh prisoner to die at Bure since February 2019. Of these deaths, five were from natural causes and two were self-inflicted. Since Mr Peters' death, there have been two natural causes deaths which are currently under investigation.
11. There are no similarities between our findings in the investigation into Mr Peters' death and our investigation findings for the previous deaths.

## Key Events

12. On 26 October 2016, Mr John Peters was sentenced to 20 years in prison for sexual offences and sent to HMP Bristol. On 12 July 2018, he moved to HMP Bure.
13. On 26 October 2020, Mr Peters told a prison GP that he had a persistent cough. The GP adjusted his blood pressure medication and arranged a chest x-ray.
14. Another prison GP reviewed the chest x-ray results. He told Mr Peters that the x-ray showed small masses of tissue in his lung, and he arranged for him to have a fast-track hospital appointment (which requires anyone suspected of cancer to be referred to clinic specialists under the NHS pathway within two weeks) at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital.

### 2021

15. During January and February, Mr Peters had several hospital tests. On 13 January, the prison GP told him that the test results showed cancer of the lymph nodes and that they had requested advice for his treatment options.
16. On 30 January, Mr Peters had a high temperature and told a prison nurse that he felt unwell and weak. She examined him and tested him for COVID-19. She arranged for an ambulance to take him to hospital with a suspected COVID-19 infection (the subsequent test result was negative).
17. Mr Peters was taken to the Emergency Department at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital. He was escorted by two prison officers and was not restrained. On 2 February, Mr Peters was discharged from hospital and he returned to Bure. However, later the same day, prison healthcare staff were concerned about his presentation and they sent him back to hospital.
18. Prison healthcare staff remained in regular contact with the hospital about Mr Peters' progress. On 8 February, Mr Peters was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (a type of cancer). He was considered to be too ill to commence chemotherapy, and his prognosis was possibly three days. The hospital palliative care team took over Mr Peters' care ensuring he was comfortable and pain free.
19. Release on compassionate grounds is a means by which prisoners who are seriously ill, usually with a life expectancy of less than three months can be permanently released from custody before their sentence has expired. On 10 February, the prison started an application for early release on compassionate grounds on Mr Peters' behalf. Mr Peters died before a final decision was made.
20. Mr Peters died on 18 February at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital.

## **Cause of death**

21. The Coroner accepted the cause of death provided by a hospital doctor and no post-mortem examination was carried out. The doctor gave Mr Peters' cause of death as non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (a type of cancer that affects the lymphatic system, a network of vessels and glands found throughout the body). He also had acute kidney injury which did not cause but contributed to his death.

**Lisa Burrell**

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**August 2021**

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