

**Prisons &  
Probation**

**Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

# Independent investigation into the death of Mr Bryan Handley, a prisoner at HMP Littlehey, on 27 June 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 Bryan Handley died on 27 June 2021 of cancer at HMP Littlehey. He was 75 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Handley's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Handley received at Littlehey was equivalent to that he could have expected to receive in the community. However, she made a recommendation about ensuring prisoners' health and social care needs are met overnight (as Littlehey does not have 24-hour healthcare).
5. We found no non-clinical issues of concern.
6. This version of my report, published on my website, has been amended to remove the name of staff and prisoners involved in my investigation.

## Recommendations

- The Head of Healthcare should ensure that the health/social care needs of prisoners can be met, including overnight access to health/social care (if indicated).

## The Investigation Process

7. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Handley's clinical care at Littlehey.
8. The PPO investigator has investigated non-clinical issues, including Mr Handley's location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
9. Mr Handley had no appointed next of kin, so the PPO did not carry out any family liaison.
10. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS pointed out a factual inaccuracy and this report has been amended accordingly.

### Previous deaths at HMP Littlehey

11. Mr Handley was the 27th prisoner to die at Littlehey since June 2019. Of the previous deaths, 25 were from natural causes and one was self-inflicted. There are no significant similarities between our findings in this investigation and our investigation findings from the previous deaths.

## Key Events

12. In January 2017, Mr Bryan Handley was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment for sexual offences. He was moved to HMP Littlehey on 27 December 2019.
13. On 26 March 2021, a prison GP made a suspected cancer referral to the hospital for an examination of Mr Handley's bowel due to persistent loose stools and weight loss.
14. On 28 March, a prison nurse saw Mr Handley (who had diabetes) to check his blood sugar and ketone levels (ketones are substances that your body makes if your cells do not get enough glucose) as he had not been eating. The nurse called for an ambulance as Mr Handley's ketone levels were high. Doctors found that Mr Handley had blood in his stool, and he was admitted to hospital with a suspected internal bleed.
15. On 1 April, after various scans and tests, a hospital doctor diagnosed Mr Handley with oesophageal cancer.
16. On 9 April, Mr Handley said he did not want anyone to resuscitate him if his heart or breathing stopped and signed an order to that effect. On 15 April, he was discharged to Littlehey. His discharge paperwork gave a prognosis of less than six months.
17. On 19 April, a prison nurse completed an NHS Fast Track CHC referral. (CHC refers to Continuing Healthcare and helps with people who have ongoing healthcare needs. Given that Littlehey does not have 24-hour healthcare facilities, this would have helped put additional support in place for Mr Handley.) It is unclear whether this was ever granted.
18. On 20 April, the prison clinical manager sent an email to Littlehey's Offender Manager Unit (OMU) asking them to start an application for Mr Handley's early release on compassionate grounds. This was never progressed as Mr Handley changed his mind about wanting to die in a hospice and said he was happy to die in prison.
19. At approximately 7.05am on 27 June, an officer found Mr Handley unresponsive in his cell. He was pronounced dead at 7.55am.

### Cause of death

20. The Coroner accepted the cause of death provided by a prison doctor, so no post-mortem examination was carried out. The doctor gave Mr Handley's cause of death as oesophageal cancer. The doctor noted that Mr Handley had type 2 diabetes, bipolar disease and chronic kidney disease which did not cause but contributed to his death.

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

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