

## The Investigator



**We carry out independent investigations  
to help make custody and community  
supervision safer and fairer**

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## Ombudsman's opening

### Welcome to the latest issue of The Investigator



As the Acting Prisons and Probation Ombudsman I am very pleased to welcome you to Issue 11 of The Investigator which focuses on awareness of the PPO. In my previous role as one of the PPO's Deputy Ombudsmen, I understood the importance of raising the PPO's profile. We want people in prison to know who we are, what we do and to know how to complain to us if they need to. We want families to know what and how we will investigate, and we want prison staff to understand our role, feel able to engage with us and learn from our investigations.

In Issue 11 we will look at some of the ways we are reaching out to people inside and outside prison, and staff. We work in partnership with organisations who help us to amplify our message. I remember how important this was at the start of the pandemic when we worked with National Prison Radio to let people in prison know swiftly that we would continue to investigate complaints.

One of the articles talks about the 'Insights' event, where the PPO spoke to staff from across the criminal justice system and I was pleased to be able to speak at it. I am looking forward to the launch of a training package for prison staff that will provide useful knowledge of the PPO's work and prepare them for what to expect from an investigation.

In addition to the awareness work highlighted in this issue, we have been going out to prisons in the women's estate. We know we receive fewer complaints from women than we would expect so it is important that we continue to raise our profile with them.

Thank you for reading The Investigator; as always, we welcome your interest and are happy to have your feedback.

**Kimberley Bingham, Acting Prisons and Probation Ombudsman**

## HMPPS Awareness Project for new prison staff

**"We wondered how we could reach more staff and this encouraged us to go back to basics."**

My name is Lisa, and I am an Assistant Ombudsman in the Fatal Incident Investigations team. I oversee fatal incident investigations and support my team throughout the course of the investigation process.

You might have read our previous article in [Issue 9](#) which talked about our Strategy Officer's remit which includes drawing up our 3-year [strategic plan](#) and yearly [business plan](#). One of our strategic plan objectives is to look at the ways in which we can improve our relationships with services in remit in order to facilitate effective implementation of our recommendations by frontline staff. We want to continue raising awareness of our work with external stakeholders and those in custody, and this is where I come in – it is my responsibility to bring this goal to life.

Feedback from the PPO's investigators and HMPPS staff tells us that some prison staff do not know much about the PPO. We wondered how we could reach more frontline staff and this encouraged us to go back to basics, leading to the creation and development of the Awareness Project, an e-learning training package designed to provide basic and relevant information about the PPO to frontline prison and probation staff.

The training package consists of:

- an introductory video about the PPO and our investigations;
- information about our fatal incidents and complaints investigation processes;
- case studies to bring our investigations to life;
- a quiz on our investigations; and
- frequently asked questions.

We are launching the training before the end of the year, so how will the e-learning training help and benefit frontline prison and probation staff? Well, I think it will benefit them in a variety of ways.

We hope that it will:

- give a better understanding of who we are and why we investigate deaths in custody and complaints;
- provide insight into the fatal incident and complaints investigation process;
- engage HMPPS staff in the investigation process as soon as possible when there is a death in custody or a complaint;
- prepare them for what to expect from a PPO investigation;
- explain why and when we might ask them to participate in an interview;
- what they should expect when being interviewed by a PPO investigator;

- who they can bring with them to interview; and,
- dispel some historical myths and taboos surrounding PPO investigations.

We hope that by making key information about the PPO accessible to all staff via the HMPPS training platform, prison and probation staff will feel more comfortable in engaging with us and the investigation process, which will in turn lead to both PPO investigators and HMPPS frontline staff having a positive experience throughout the course of the investigation.

If HMPPS staff are open and engage with us, it will result in a clearer understanding of events and better outcomes for the future. We will have better relationships and it will allow us to facilitate even more effective implementation of our recommendations.

**Author:** Lisa Burrell, Assistant Ombudsman, Fatal Incident Investigations

## Working with National Prison Radio and Inside Time

**“Raising awareness of the PPO’s investigative services is imperative to ensure those who can complain to us know how to.”**

Increasingly over the last few years, the PPO has forged closer working relationships with National Prison Radio (NPR), a radio station for people in prison, and Inside Time, the national newspaper for prisoners and detainees. We aim to maintain the confidence of our stakeholders in our role as an independent, fair investigative body, and we want to always increase our impact. Raising awareness of the PPO’s investigative services is imperative to ensuring those who can complain to us know how to. Partnering with as many prison media services as possible allows us to do this and enables us to be consistent and educate more people.

We have worked with NPR for the last three years and have produced many adverts which have been broadcast in over 110 prisons in England and Wales. Our adverts have consisted of short, sharp messaging which contains a simple call to action – for example, directing prisoners to our complaints materials for more information, or clearly stating our address so prisoners can write to us. We have also broadcast longer, more detailed adverts which have allowed us to talk listeners through the complaints process in a more detailed way. Having access to over 75,000 prisoners through NPR not only helps us raise awareness of our complaints investigations, but it also helps us reach new prisoners who may not know about who we are and what we do.

NPR have been a great partner for us to work with as they provide flexibility, reach and knowledge of the type and tone of content that will be most useful to listeners. We hope to continue working with them in the future. **Tim Colman, Director of Development at NPR said: “National Prison Radio’s partnership with the PPO is one of our most important. Over the last three years, we have worked together to ensure that prisoners are more aware of their rights, and how they can receive support when they have been treated unfairly. We value the PPO as a key partner, and we hope that we can continue to develop creative, impactful, National Prison Radio content together for many years to come.”**

Our Inside Time articles are featured in the paper, on their website and their app. Inside Time has an estimated monthly readership of 100,000, with roughly 55,000 papers printed each month and distributed to every prison in the UK<sup>1</sup>. The paper is

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<sup>1</sup> As well as Immigration Removal Centres, secure units at hospitals, GeoAmey transport vans, some courts, and a few Approved Premises.

read by prisoner's families, anyone with an interest in prisons, those on probation and predominantly prisoners, and so we continue to partner with them to keep raising awareness of the PPO inside and outside of prisons. We have used the articles as an opportunity to talk prisoners through exactly how to complain to us step by step, what happens with their complaints once we receive them, and how we try to get fairer and more decent outcomes for prisoners.

We know that Inside Time is one of the most popular ways in which complainants have heard of us, so this is another partnership that we want to continue. **Ben Leapman, Editor of Inside Time, said: "Our readers often have complaints about things that go wrong in prisons, so we are doing them a service by carrying articles which explain how the Ombudsman system works and how they can access it."**

We also plan to continue using other methods of raising awareness. We have written articles for Women in Prison's magazine and we are grateful to Prison Reform Trust for also helping us connect with those who might want to complain to us. We hope that continuously raising awareness of the PPO helps prisoners understand our remit and how to contact us easily, but also instils a greater confidence in our work.

**Author:** Ema Murphy, Communications Officer

## HMPPS Insights22 Festival

**"Staff from HMPPS were able to talk to our investigators about some of the challenges faced by operational staff and why it can sometimes be difficult to make the changes we recommend."**

The Ministry of Justice organises an annual 'Insights' event to enable colleagues across the criminal justice system to develop a deeper understanding of the work of other teams. We felt this year offered an excellent opportunity to increase awareness of our work and so we welcomed 30 members of staff from across the criminal justice system to our offices on 10<sup>th</sup> May.

We are an objective and independent investigatory service. However, our aims can often be best served by working in collaboration and partnership with both prisoners and prison staff. It is important that we are known by, and accessible to, the people who are affected by our service and our Insights Day event presented the perfect opportunity for guests to come and see how we work.

Delegates took part in a number of interactive workshops relating to both complaints and fatal incidents to give them a taste of the work we do. For example, delegates took part in simulated investigations into a death in custody from natural causes, a complaint relating to the use of force and a complaint relating to the provision of Kosher food, for a prisoner who self-identified as Jewish. This helped to raise awareness of both the breadth and depth of the work we do, and enabled us to have a useful conversation with our guests about the challenges faced on both sides. For their part, staff from HMPPS were able to talk to our investigators about some of the challenges faced by operational staff and why it can sometimes be difficult to make the changes we recommend.

Guests also heard from speakers on topics such as the role of the PPO's Family Liaison Officer and the impact of our Learning Lessons team and, valuably, they also heard video testimony from both prisoners and prison staff about the positive impact that the PPO has had on them. The highlight of the day was a Q&A session with the Ombudsman and the Complaints Deputy Ombudsman which gave guests the opportunity to discuss the issues that were of most interest to them.

We received fantastic, and overwhelmingly positive feedback from those who attended with many guests telling us that they were going to back to their teams to share what they had learned and to recommend that their colleagues visit us, so we look forward to welcoming many more of you to our offices in the future!

It is also equally as important to us that prisoners get the opportunity to interact with us too and we are running a number of discussion groups in prisons over the course of the year to ensure we are as accessible to prisoners as we are to staff.

**Author:** Mike Chinnick-Hughes, Assistant Ombudsman, Complaints

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