

**Prisons &  
Probation**

**Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

# **Independent investigation into the death of Mr Ronald Seymour, a prisoner at HMP Warren Hill, on 13 December 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 Ronald Seymour, who was 81 years old, died in a hospice of throat cancer on 13 December 2021, while a prisoner at HMP Warren Hill. We offer our condolences to Mr Seymour's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Seymour received at Warren Hill was equivalent to that he could have expected to receive in the community. She made no recommendations.
5. We are concerned that although the prison started a compassionate release application in June 2021, it had still not been completed by the time Mr Seymour died six months later.

## Recommendations

- The Governor should ensure that applications for compassionate release are progressed in a timely manner and submitted as promptly as possible.

## **The Investigation Process**

6. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Seymour's clinical care at HMP Warren Hill.
7. The PPO investigator has investigated the non-clinical issues in Mr Seymour's care, including his location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
8. The PPO's family liaison officer wrote to Mr Seymour's next of kin, a friend, to explain the investigation. He did not respond.
9. We informed HM Coroner for Suffolk of the investigation. We have sent the Coroner a copy of this report.
10. The initial report was shared with the Prison Service. The Prison Service did not find any factual inaccuracies and their action plan is annexed to this report.

## **Previous deaths at HMP Warren Hill**

11. Mr Seymour was the third prisoner to die at Warren Hill since December 2019. Of the previous deaths, one was from natural causes and one was self-inflicted. There are no similarities between our findings from the investigation into Mr Seymour's death and our investigation findings from the previous deaths.

## Key Events

12. In October 2010, Mr Ronald Seymour was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. In August 2014, he was moved to HMP Warren Hill.
13. In November 2018, Mr Seymour complained of a sore throat, loss of voice and coughing up blood at night. Hospital tests showed that he had a cancer on his left vocal cord. The cancerous cells were removed but when Mr Seymour returned for a follow up appointment in February 2019, a hospital consultant told him that the cancer in his throat had returned. The consultant said that any treatment may cause him to lose his voice. Mr Seymour said that he did not want to risk losing his voice, so declined any further investigations or treatment.
14. Over the next two years, Mr Seymour attended regular hospital appointments, however he maintained that unless the doctor could assure him he would not lose his voice, he did not wish to have any treatment for his throat cancer.
15. On 14 June 2021, prison staff started an application for Mr Seymour to be released on compassionate grounds. (This had not been completed by the time Mr Seymour died.)
16. On 30 June, Mr Seymour was told that the cancer had spread to his spine and on 7 July, he was told it had spread to his lymph nodes. He continued to refuse treatment.
17. On 14 July, Mr Seymour told healthcare staff that he did not want anyone to resuscitate him if his heart or breathing stopped and signed a Do Not Attempt Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (DNACPR) order to that effect.
18. On 15 November, Mr Seymour was struggling to swallow. He was taken to hospital, where he was admitted and given intravenous fluids and intravenous dexamethasone (a steroid used to reduce inflammation).
19. On 17 November, Mr Seymour discharged himself from hospital and was taken back to Warren Hill.
20. Over the next month, Mr Seymour's health deteriorated significantly and on 8 December, he was moved to a hospice. He died there on 13 December.

## Cause of death

21. The Coroner accepted the cause of death provided by the hospice doctor and no post-mortem examination was carried out. The doctor gave Mr Seymour's cause of death as cancer of the larynx (part of the throat).

# Non-Clinical Findings

## Compassionate release

22. 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 permanently be released from custody before their sentence has expired. A clear medical opinion of life expectancy is required. The criteria for early release for indeterminate sentenced prisoners are set out in Chapter 12 of Prison Service Order (PSO) 4700. The criteria include that the risk of reoffending is expected to be minimal, further imprisonment would reduce life expectancy, there are adequate arrangements for the prisoner's care and treatment outside prison, and release would benefit the prisoner and his family. An application for early release on compassionate grounds must be submitted to the Public Protection Casework Section of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service.
23. In June 2021, prison staff started an application for Mr Seymour to be released on compassionate grounds. Compassionate release applications can take some time because there are several different agencies that need to be part of the process. In Mr Seymour's case, it was complicated further because the area that Mr Seymour wanted to be released to was different to his existing probation area.
24. Staff had not completed Mr Seymour's compassionate release application before he died. While we appreciate that compassionate release can be a lengthy process and the prison were not in complete control of this process, it is still not acceptable for a compassionate release application to take six months to be completed. Therefore, we recommend:

**The Governor should ensure that applications for compassionate release are progressed in a timely manner and submitted as promptly as possible.**

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

**April 2022**

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Third Floor, 10 South Colonnade  
Canary Wharf, London E14 4PU

Email: [mail@ppo.gov.uk](mailto:mail@ppo.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.ppo.gov.uk](http://www.ppo.gov.uk)

T | 020 7633 4100