

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Michael Lawton, on 22 July 2022, following his release from HMP/YOI Stoke Heath

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

OGI

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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. Since 6 September 2021, the PPO has been investigating post-release deaths that occur within 14 days of the prisoner's release.
3. We carry out investigations to understand what happened and identify how the organisations whose actions we oversee can improve their work in the future.
4. Mr Michael Lawton died of bronchopneumonia (acute inflammation of the lungs, usually caused by an infection) on 22 July 2022 following his release from HMP/YOI Stoke Heath. He was 45 years old. I offer my condolences to those who knew him.
5. Mr Lawton died one day after his release from Stoke Heath while living in temporary accommodation. We investigated Mr Lawton's care in custody and preparation for release and found no issues of concern. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care that Mr Lawton received was equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community.

The Investigation Process

6. The PPO investigator obtained copies of relevant extracts from Mr Lawton's prison and probation records.
7. We informed HM Coroner for Staffordshire South of the investigation. They gave us the results of the post-mortem examination. We have sent the coroner a copy of this report.
8. The Ombudsman's family liaison officer contacted Mr Lawton's partner to explain the investigation and to ask if she had any matters she wanted us to consider. She had some queries and concerns relating to Mr Lawton's clinical care, which the clinical reviewer has addressed in her review.
9. Mr Lawton's family received a copy of our draft report. We did not receive a response.
10. The initial report was also shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), who did not identify any factual inaccuracies.

Background Information

HMP Stoke Heath

11. HMP Stoke Heath is a category C/D prison which holds up to 782 male prisoners who have been convicted. The healthcare provider is Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust.

Key Events

12. On 27 August 2021, Mr Lawton was convicted of drug offences and sentenced to two years in prison.
13. On 11 October, Mr Lawton transferred from HMP Dovegate to HMP Stoke Heath. At his initial healthcare screening, healthcare staff recorded that Mr Lawton had tennis elbow (pain around the elbow caused by overuse of the elbow), arthritis, asthma and depression. Ms Alison Wood was allocated as Mr Lawton's prison offender manager (POM).
14. On 2 April 2022, Mr Lawton was allocated a community offender manager (COM).
15. On 16 June, Mr Lawton attended an annual asthma review with a prison nurse. Mr Lawton had not been using his inhalers and did not know how to use them properly, so they talked about inhaler techniques. The nurse sent a request to the prison GP to prescribe a peak flow (a tool used to measure how open the lungs are) and an aerochamber (a tool used to aid the inhalation of asthma medication). Mr Lawton's medical record indicates that the GP prescribed them and Mr Lawton collected them soon after.
16. On 19 July, probation secured temporary accommodation that Mr Lawton could move into following his release.
17. At about 9.30am on 21 July 2022, Mr Lawton was released from Stoke Heath. A member of the substance misuse team saw him before he left, gave him advice about the dangers of using drugs on his release and recorded no concerns.
18. Mr Lawton reported to Stoke-on-Trent Probation for his first supervision appointment later that day. He said he was feeling well and glad about his release. Mr Lawton planned to go to his accommodation straight after his probation appointment.

Events of 22 July

19. On 22 July, Mr Lawton was spending time with his partner. At around 12.28pm he vomited, then collapsed and became unresponsive. His partner called an ambulance.
20. At 12.33pm, paramedics arrived and started cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Mr Lawton's condition did not improve and at 1.16pm, paramedics stopped CPR and pronounced Mr Lawton's death.
21. At 4.35pm, Mr Lawton's accommodation support worker informed his COM that Mr Lawton had died.

Post-mortem report

22. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Lawton died of bronchopneumonia, which involves the acute inflammation of the lungs caused by an infection.

Kimberley Bingham
Acting Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

May 2023

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