

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Charles Traverso on 9 March 2022, following his release from HMP Elmley

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



© Crown copyright, 2023

This report is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

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 a person's release from prison.
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 Charles Traverso died from an overdose of dihydrocodeine (an opioid painkiller) on 9 March 2022, the day after his release from HMP Elmley. He was 46 years old. I offer my condolences to those who knew him.
5. On the day of his release, Mr Traverso went to his partner's home and they consumed alcohol, crack cocaine, pregabalin (a prescription medication) and dihydrocodeine. His partner found him dead the next morning. Post-mortem toxicology results showed that he had a potentially fatal level of dihydrocodeine in his blood.
6. Mr Traverso had a history of substance misuse. Prison staff warned him of his reduced drug tolerance before his release.
7. Mr Traverso was released without any accommodation. Probation staff had identified that releasing Mr Traverso with no fixed abode was likely to lead to a relapse in his drug use and they made a housing referral to the local council. However, the local council was unable to provide accommodation for him.

The Investigation Process

8. The PPO investigator obtained copies of relevant extracts from Mr Traverso's prison and probation records.
9. We informed HM Coroner for Kent of the investigation. They gave us the results of the post-mortem examination. We have sent the Coroner a copy of this report.
10. The Ombudsman's family liaison officer contacted Mr Traverso's partner to explain the investigation and to ask if she had any matters she wanted us to consider. She did not respond to our letter.
11. We shared our initial report with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). Following their feedback, we removed the recommendation and associated findings.

Background Information

HMP Elmley

12. HMP Elmley holds around 1,100 prisoners, who have been remanded into custody or sentenced. Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust provides 24-hour primary healthcare services. Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust provides mental health services and the Forward Trust drug treatment services.

Probation Service

13. The Probation Service work with all individuals subject to custodial and community sentences. During a person's imprisonment, they oversee their sentence plan to assist in rehabilitation, as well as prepare reports to advise the Parole Board and have links with local partnerships to whom, where appropriate, they refer people for resettlement services. Post-release, the probation service supervise people throughout their licence period and post-sentence supervision

Key Events

14. On 22 July 2021, Mr Charles Traverso was recalled to prison due to domestic abuse allegations. On 8 March 2022, Mr Traverso was released from HMP Elmley.

Pre-release planning

15. On 25 June 2021, a community offender manager (COM) was allocated to Mr Traverso.
16. On 16 August, the COM completed an assessment of Mr Traverso's risks and needs in the community following his release. He assessed that given Mr Traverso's history of drug misuse, releasing him to no fixed abode may increase the likelihood of him gravitating back towards drug users and relapsing into drug use.
17. The COM submitted a Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS – probation system used to request support from external partnerships) referral on 28 January 2022 to assist with Mr Traverso's housing needs.
18. On 3 March, the COM had a telephone conversation with the prison's Resettlement Team. They said that Medway Borough Council may be more likely to offer Mr Traverso emergency accommodation if they were sent documentation of his medical conditions and prescribed medication. However, Medway Borough Council decided not to provide housing for Mr Traverso.
19. On 8 March, prison healthcare staff gave Mr Traverso a seven-day supply of his prescribed medication (quetiapine (an antipsychotic), pregabalin (used to treat epilepsy, nerve pain and anxiety), duloxetine (an antidepressant) and dihydrocodeine (an opioid painkiller)).
20. On 8 March, Mr Traverso was given a copy of his licence with the conditions of his release. The licence instructed him to attend a probation office and see his COM without delay.

Post-release

21. On 8 March, Mr Traverso called the Chatham Probation Office at 12.00pm and spoke to his COM who confirmed that Mr Traverso had to report to the office at 2.00pm.
22. Shortly after 5.00pm, Mr Traverso attended Chatham Probation Office with a dog. The reception staff explained he could not attend with a dog. Mr Traverso gave the reception staff his partner's phone number so his COM could contact him.
23. The COM called Mr Traverso to ask why he did not attend. Mr Traverso said it was because he was looking after his partner's dog. The COM told him that was not an acceptable excuse, and he was going to give him a warning.
24. On 9 March, the COM sent Mr Traverso a warning letter for failing to attend his supervision meeting. He told Mr Traverso that his next appointment was on 15 March.

25. As Mr Traverso did not attend for his appointment, his COM was unable to test him for drugs and as a result, no referral to Turning Point (the community-based drug and alcohol support service) was made.

Circumstances of Mr Traverso's death

26. On the evening of 8 March, Mr Traverso and his partner consumed alcohol, crack cocaine, pregabalin and dihydrocodeine.
27. When Mr Traverso's partner woke up in the morning, she found Mr Traverso had died.

Post-mortem report

28. Post-mortem toxicology results showed that Mr Traverso had a potentially fatal level of dihydrocodeine in his blood. There was also evidence of recent cocaine use and an elevated level of pregabalin. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Traverso died from significantly elevated levels of dihydrocodeine.

Findings

29. Mr Traverso had a history of substance misuse. Prison staff appropriately warned him that he would have a reduced tolerance to drugs when he left prison.

Accommodation

30. Homelessness on release from prison is a significant and complex challenge. His COM identified that Mr Traverso was more likely to relapse into taking drugs if released with no accommodation. The COM made a housing referral but unfortunately, the local council was unable to provide accommodation for Mr Traverso. The provision of suitable accommodation for people leaving prison is an issue that extends beyond the remit of HMP Elmley or local probation services, and the local authority may want to be aware of the issues raised in this case.

Kimberley Bingham
Acting Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

May 2023

Inquest

The inquest, heard on 18 July 2023, concluded that Mr Traverso's death was drug related.

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

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

Email: mail@ppo.gov.uk
Web: www.ppo.gov.uk

T | 020 7633 4100