

**Prisons &  
Probation**

**Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

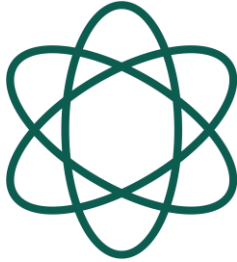
# **Independent investigation into the death of Mr Colin Moran on 25 May 2022, following his release from HMP Northumberland**

**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 person's release from prison.
3. If my office is to best assist His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in ensuring the standard of care received by those within service remit is appropriate, our recommendations should be focused, evidenced and viable. This is especially the case if there is evidence of systemic failure.
4. Mr Colin Moran died from the toxic effects of a mixture of drugs on 25 May 2022, following his release from HMP Northumberland on 24 May. He was 43 years old. We offer our condolences to those who knew him.
5. Mr Moran had a history of substance misuse. We found that Mr Moran received appropriate support for his substance misuse issues while he was at Northumberland. The prison substance misuse service (SMS) saw him regularly and warned him of the risks associated with drug taking. He remained under their care until he was released, when he was transferred to a community SMS team.
6. We consider that Mr Moran's Community Offender Manager (COM) appropriately prepared for his release. She liaised with external support agencies, completed a housing referral, and advised Mr Moran of his release date and licence conditions.
7. We found no issues of concern and make no recommendations.

## The Investigation Process

8. The investigator issued notices to staff and prisoners at HMP Northumberland informing them of the investigation and asking anyone with relevant information to contact her. No one responded.
9. We informed HM Coroner for Teesside & Hartlepool of the investigation. The Coroner 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 Moran's father to explain the investigation and to ask if he had any matters he wanted us to consider. He did not respond.
11. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS did not find any factual inaccuracies.

## Background Information

### HMP Northumberland

12. HMP Northumberland is a category C resettlement and training prison that holds up to 1,348 men. Their substance misuse treatment providers are Spectrum Community CIC and Humankind.

### HM Inspectorate of Prisons

13. The most recent inspection of HMP Northumberland was in September 2022. Inspectors reported that the drug and alcohol service provided clinical treatment and psychosocial support for patients with addiction problems, but significant staff shortages persisted. Those arriving on opiate substance treatment plans were seen and reviewed by the clinical team. Although their caseloads were high, the psychosocial team saw those on substance misuse treatments plans and offered harm minimisation advice and pre-release support. Pre-release planning was well coordinated and there were strong community links to make sure support was maintained after release. Treatment and training in naloxone (a drug that prevents an opiate overdose) was offered on an opt-out basis.
14. Inspectors also found that the demand for release planning was high. Handovers from prison to community probation usually happened through three-way meetings. Following the handover however, the prison probation practitioner often took a back seat, making little contact with the prisoner to keep them informed about the release plan or proposed licence conditions. The quality of resettlement release plans they reviewed were reasonably good. The resettlement team was commissioned to provide support to low- and medium-risk of harm prisoners. However, despite significant staff shortages, they often helped to prevent high-risk prisoners from being released without accommodation to go to, when the probation practitioner had been unable to find a place for them to live.

### Probation Service

15. 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. They have links with local partnerships to whom, where appropriate, they refer people for resettlement services. Post-release, the Probation Service supervises people throughout their licence period and post-sentence supervision.

## Key Events

16. On 29 October 2019, Mr Colin Moran was remanded in custody and sent to HMP Durham. On 26 November, he was convicted of burglary and sentenced to five years imprisonment.
17. On 17 January 2020, Mr Moran was moved to HMP Northumberland.

## Substance misuse services

18. Mr Moran had a long history of substance misuse, and when he arrived at Northumberland, he was already on a methadone (a heroin substitute) programme. The prison drug and alcohol team (DART) accepted him onto their service. They created a substance misuse care plan for Mr Moran, and he continued his methadone programme.
19. Over the next few years, the DART team saw Mr Moran for regular appointments during which they gave him advice on the risks related to drug use and overdosing, especially after a period of abstinence.
20. On 10 March 2021, Mr Moran completed a naloxone training programme, so that he could safely administer naloxone in the event of a drugs overdose. (Naloxone is a medication that can rapidly reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.) Mr Moran said that he would like to be released with a supply of naloxone.
21. On 18 December, a DART nurse saw Mr Moran to discuss his care plan. Mr Moran said that he had not taken any drugs since being in prison and had no intention of doing so. The nurse told Mr Moran about having a lowered tolerance level, and the risk of overdose and possible death if he took illicit drugs at the same time as taking methadone. Mr Moran said that he understood these risks.
22. On 17 May 2022, a DART nurse saw Mr Moran for a pre-release appointment. The nurse reminded Mr Moran of the risks associated with drug use after a period of abstinence. They also discussed how drug use can lead to a loss of control, which may lead to him taking drugs he may not usually use, or taking a bigger dose than usual, which can lead to overdose and death. Mr Moran agreed to be released with a supply of naloxone.
23. On the day of his release from prison, Mr Moran was given his dose of methadone for that day. A DART nurse reminded him about the risks of drug use given his reduced tolerance level and how this could lead to him overdosing. The nurse gave him a supply of naloxone, along with training information on how to administer this in the event of an overdose. The DART team arranged for his methadone prescription to be continued by a community substance misuse service (SMS) in Sunderland, where Mr Moran hoped to be released to.

## Housing

24. On 9 March 2022, a member of the prison resettlement team saw Mr Moran to talk about his release. Mr Moran said he did not want to return to Stockton-on-Tees as he believed he was at risk of violence from people living there. He said that he

would like to go to Sunderland, where he had the support of his family. The same day, She emailed Mr Moran's community offender manager (COM), to ask her if she knew why Mr Moran thought he was at risk from others in Stockton.

25. On 4 April, the COM told the member of the prison resettlement team saw Mr Moran to talk about his release. Mr Moran said he did not want to return to Stockton-on-Tees as he believed he was at risk of violence from people living there. He said that that she was not aware of any reason why Mr Moran could not return to Stockton. She sent an intelligence request form to Stockton Police, to check if Mr Moran was at risk of violence from others in the area. She did not receive a reply.
26. On 4 April, the member of the prison resettlement team saw Mr Moran to talk about his release. Mr Moran said he did not want to return to Stockton-on-Tees as he believed he was at risk of violence from people living there. He said that submitted a 'duty to refer' application (where certain public authorities must notify local authorities that a person who has engaged with them might be homeless or at risk of homelessness) to both Sunderland and Stockton Council. She told the investigator that Sunderland Council would not accept the application, as they did not have a duty to house him without any form of evidence that he was at risk in Stockton.
27. On 11 May, Mr Moran had a phone call with a housing officer from Stockton Council. He told them that he was fearful of returning to Stockton and would like to be released to Sunderland. As Mr Moran did not wish to live in Stockton, the housing officer closed the case.

## **Release from Northumberland**

28. On 24 May, Mr Moran was released from Northumberland. He went to Stockton Probation Office for his induction appointment. A probation practitioner reminded him of his licence conditions. These included a mandatory drug testing condition as well as a condition that Mr Moran engaged with local services to address his drug offending behaviour problems.
29. Mr Moran told the probation practitioner that he was surprised that he was told to attend Stockton Probation, rather than Sunderland, as this is where he believed he was going. She then rang Sunderland Council to see if they would be able to house him. While she was on hold, Mr Moran said that he felt it would be easier to go to Stockton Council. He said that he was no longer at risk in Stockton and had decided he would like to stay there. As a result, she rang Stockton Council, who agreed to have a call with him to discuss housing at 3.15pm that afternoon. Mr Moran agreed to this phone call. She told Mr Moran to come back to Stockton Probation Office the next day at 9.30am.
30. After the appointment, the probation practitioner contacted the Sunderland SMS and asked if Mr Moran's methadone prescription could be transferred to the Stockton SMS, as he was no longer going to be living in Sunderland. Sunderland SMS agreed to do this, and Stockton SMS confirmed that Mr Moran could collect his methadone prescription from them the next day. However, Mr Moran did not attend.

## **Circumstances of Mr Moran's death**

31. After he left Stockton Probation Office, Mr Moran went to the home of a friend, along with two others. The four of them were drinking and taking drugs until the early hours of 25 May. At around 8.45pm, a neighbour went to the property. The neighbour found Mr Moran unresponsive, so he called for an ambulance. Paramedics arrived at the address and pronounced Mr Moran dead at approximately 9.00pm.

## **Post-mortem report and inquest**

32. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Moran died because of central nervous system depression due to the toxic effects of a mixture of drugs. Central nervous system depression is a state that can result in a decreased rate of breathing, decreased heart rate, and loss of consciousness leading to coma or death.
33. The inquest, heard on 26 January 2023, concluded that Mr Moran's death was drug related.

# Findings

## Substance misuse

34. Mr Moran had a history of substance misuse. While he was in prison, he was seen regularly by the SMS team and warned about the risks and dangers of taking drugs. He was also trained in the use of naloxone and was released with a supply of this. We are satisfied that both the prison and probation services did all they could to manage the risks associated with his substance misuse.

## Pre-release planning

35. We consider that Mr Moran's COM appropriately prepared for his release. She liaised with external support agencies, completed a housing referral, and advised Mr Moran of his release date and licence conditions.
36. Mr Moran had asked to be released to Sunderland as he said he feared for his safety in Stockton. We found that his COM contacted the local police to verify if Mr Moran would be in danger if he returned to Stockton, however she did not receive a reply. As a result, there was no evidence to suggest that Mr Moran could not return to Stockton, and therefore Sunderland had no duty to house him.
37. Mr Moran was given a housing assessment with Stockton, however as he said he did not want to return there, they closed his case. As a result, Mr Moran was released to Stockton, homeless.
38. While we note that Mr Moran was offered a housing assessment with Stockton, he turned this down as it was not an area he wanted to go to. The provision of suitable accommodation for people leaving prison is an issue that extends beyond the remit of Northumberland and local probation services, and the local authority may want to be aware of the issues raised in this case.

**Adrian Usher**  
**Prisons and Probation Ombudsman**

**July 2023**

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