

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Christopher Walsh on 4 October 2022, following his release from HMP Parc

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 detained people in immigration centres.
2. 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.
3. Since 6 September 2021, the PPO has been investigating post-release deaths that occur within 14 days of the person's release from prison.
4. Mr Christopher Walsh died from previously undiagnosed heart disease on 4 October 2022, following his release from HMP Parc earlier that day. Mr Walsh was 43 years old. We offer our condolences to those who knew him.
5. We found no issues of concern and make no recommendations.

The Investigation Process

6. HMPPS notified us of Mr Walsh's death on 4 October 2022.
7. The PPO investigator obtained copies of relevant extracts from Mr Walsh's prison and probation records.
8. We informed HM Coroner for South Wales Central of the investigation. He gave us the results of the post-mortem examination. We have sent the Coroner a copy of this report.
9. The Ombudsman's family liaison officer contacted Mr Walsh's ex-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.
10. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS asked for a change to the final report regarding the description of the Probation Service in Wales.

Background Information

HMP Parc

11. HMP Parc is a medium security prison run by G4S. It holds around 1,600 adult and young adult prisoners who are either on remand or convicted. It also has a unit for up to 60 young people aged under 18. G4S Medical Services provides primary physical and mental healthcare services. There is 24-hour general healthcare and palliative care facilities. A local GP practice provides GP services, including a daily clinic and out of hours cover.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons

12. The most recent inspection of HMP Parc was in June and July 2022. Inspectors reported that release planning arrangements had deteriorated since the unification of probation services and were not good enough. Some commissioned service providers had not returned to the prison since the COVID-19 pandemic which weakened the resettlement service. The remaining resettlement team assessed prisoners' needs at 12 weeks and one month before release, providing support with DWP appointments, bank accounts and ID. The prison had no reliable data to show how many prisoners had been released to sustainable accommodation or employment.

Probation Service

13. The Probation Service work with all individuals subject to custodial and community sentences. HMPPS in Wales became an Early Adopter of the Resettlement Model in June 2021. In the Model, resettlement planning for all people in prison was brought to 7.5 months pre-release and included embedded dedicated resettlement staff into that journey. In line with the Early Adopter Model, band 3 Probation Service Resettlement Practitioner Staff would commence working with an individual from the point of the POM/COM handover at 7.5 months and would be a support to the COM and the Person in Prison through to release. In the event of recall the Probation Service Resettlement Practitioners reassess immediate resettlement needs and support with re-release planning. Post-release, the Probation Service supervise people throughout their licence period and post-sentence supervision.

Key Events

14. On 6 July 2020, Mr Christopher Walsh was convicted of sexual offences and remanded to HMP Parc. He was subsequently sentenced to 27 months in prison.
15. On 20 August 2021, Mr Walsh was released from prison on licence.
16. Following breaches of his licence conditions, Mr Walsh was recalled to prison on 13 October, and was sent back to Parc. He was moved to HMP Usk on 12 November.
17. On 4 April 2022, following non-compliance with his medications and concerns that he might have been selling them to other prisoners, Mr Walsh was returned to Parc.
18. Mr Walsh was released from prison at the end of his sentence on 4 October.

Healthcare

19. Mr Walsh had a long history of substance misuse but did not engage with the substance misuse services during his latest prison sentence.
20. Mr Walsh had epilepsy, depression and schizophrenia, and was prescribed medication for these conditions. On 30 August, Mr Walsh also began a prescription of dihydrocodeine (a strong opioid painkiller) for backache. The prison made arrangements for all these medications to be continued in the community following release.
21. Although Mr Walsh was clinically obese, he was at the lower end of the scale, and he said that he had no family history of heart disease. In January 2022, healthcare staff assessed Mr Walsh for his risk of a heart attack or stroke over the following ten years using the QRISK test (an algorithm which creates a score from a number of measurements), and the result was a very low risk score of 3.18%. Mr Walsh had his blood pressure measured several times in 2022, including just over a month before his release, and there was no evidence of any issues from this. He did not report any issues to healthcare staff that could give rise to any concern of cardiac problems.
22. One week before his release, Mr Walsh told his key worker that a recent change in medication had wiped him out and he had been sleeping a lot because he had no energy. He said he had started taking his antipsychotic medication in the evening instead and this had made him feel much better.

Circumstances of Mr Walsh's death

23. Following his recall to prison, Mr Walsh served out the remainder of his sentence, so was released with no licence conditions. His only reporting requirement was to report to a police station to sign the sex offender register.
24. Mr Walsh attended a police station on the day of his release, and while there complained of chest pains. He took a taxi to a hospital and collapsed at the entrance to the A&E department. Attempts by hospital staff to revive him were unsuccessful.

Post-mortem report

25. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Walsh died from a cardiac arrhythmia (an abnormal heart rhythm), which was caused by a stenotic coronary artery atheroma (a blockage of one of the arteries in the heart). Mr Walsh had traces in his body of all the medications provided to him by the prison, and none of these were in concentrations higher than would be expected from his prescriptions. No other drugs were detected.

Findings

26. Mr Walsh died on the day he was released from prison from previously undiagnosed heart disease. We note that a week before his release, Mr Walsh told staff that he had been feeling very tired but put this down to his antipsychotic medication. We are satisfied that he showed no obvious evidence of heart issues while he was in prison and that neither prison nor probation staff could have foreseen or prevented his death.
27. We make no recommendations.

Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

July 2023

28. The Coroner determined that the cause of death was from natural causes and that no inquest was required in this case.

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