

ADRIAN USHER: “THERE ARE SEVERAL RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH IPP SENTENCES”

Adrian Usher, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), has published a Learning Lessons Bulletin highlighting findings from 19 investigations into the self-inflicted deaths of IPP prisoners¹.

Prompted by the worrying increase in self-inflicted deaths of prisoners serving IPP sentences in 2022, the bulletin provides learning for HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to ensure the risk factors associated with IPP sentences are identified and acted upon.

Adrian Usher said: “We recognise HMPPS has suicide and self-harm monitoring in place to focus on identifying risks and triggers that might increase a person’s risk, but more needs to be done to consider a prisoner’s IPP status as a potential risk factor”.

In 2022 there were nine self-inflicted deaths of IPP prisoners – the highest number of self-inflicted deaths among the IPP prison population since the sentence was introduced in 2005.

Of the 19 self-inflicted deaths reviewed for the bulletin, only five prisoners were on ACCT monitoring² at the time of their death. The PPO stressed that ACCT documents should not be closed in the run up to events associated with an identified trigger and that HMPPS staff must consider these triggers when carrying out an ACCT review or considering whether to close an ACCT.

The bulletin presents 5 case studies from PPO investigations of prisoners who were serving IPP sentences, highlighting potential risks and triggers for suicide and self-harm including recall, parole hearings and setbacks in sentence progression. Following recall to prison, IPP prisoners are faced again with the uncertainty around their sentence and if they will be released. The bulletin also refers to the importance of the key work scheme and ACCT management in identifying and managing the risks associated with the IPP sentence.

“It is clear there are several risk factors and triggers associated with IPP sentences. HMPPS should use these findings to more clearly inform the risk profile of any individual, and therefore be able to better keep them from harm. It is imperative that HMPPS ensures these high levels of self-inflicted deaths do not continue.”

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¹ Deaths occurred between 1 January 2019 and 30 June 2023.

² ACCT – Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork Management – a multi-disciplinary case management approach used in prisons to support people at risk of suicide and self-harm.

Notes to editors:

1. The bulletin is available at www.ppo.gov.uk
2. Adrian Usher was appointed as Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) in April 2023.
3. The PPO is appointed by and reports directly to the Secretary of State for Justice. The Ombudsman's office is wholly independent of the services in remit, which include those provided by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Prisoner Escort and Custody Service, the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement), the Youth Custody Service, and those local authorities with secure children's homes. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).
4. The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the latest version of which can be found at <https://www.ppo.gov.uk/about/vision-and-values/terms-of-reference/>
5. The PPO has three main investigative duties:
 - complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention, offenders under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals)
 - deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and detained individuals due to any cause
 - deaths of recently released prisoners that occur within 14 days of release from prison (except homicide)
6. Please contact Ema Murphy the Communications and Media Manager at ppocomms@ppo.gov.uk if you require more information.