

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

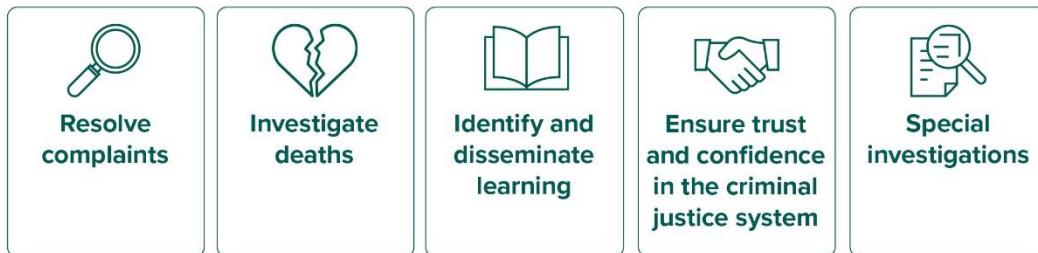
Independent investigation into the death of Mr John Sawyer, a prisoner at HMP Hull, on 3 January 2023

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

OUR VISION

To deliver high quality and timely independent investigations and work closely with partners to achieve tangible benefits for the safety and confidence of those in custody and under community supervision.

WHAT WE DO



WHAT WE VALUE



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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. If my office is to best assist HMPPS in ensuring the standard of care received by those within service remit is appropriate then our recommendations should be focussed, evidenced and viable. This is especially the case if there is evidence of systemic failure.
3. Mr John Sawyer died in hospital on 3 January 2023, following a heart attack while a prisoner at HMP Hull. He was 71 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Sawyer's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Sawyer received at Hull was equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community.
5. We found no non-clinical issues of concern. We make no recommendations.

The Investigation Process

6. HMPPS notified us of Mr Sawyer's death on 3 January 2023.
7. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Sawyer's clinical care at Hull.
8. The PPO investigator investigated the non-clinical issues relating to Mr Sawyer's care, including Mr Sawyer's location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
9. The PPO family liaison officer wrote to Mr Sawyer's next of kin, his ex-partner, to explain the investigation and to ask if she had any matters she wanted us to consider. She did not respond.
10. The initial report was shared with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS found no factual inaccuracies.

Previous deaths at HMP Hull

11. Mr Sawyer was the 16th prisoner to die at Hull since January 2020. Ten of the previous deaths were from natural causes, and five were self-inflicted.

Key Events

12. On 25 May 2017, Mr John Sawyer was remanded in prison custody at HMP Hull, pending his trial for sexual offences. On 11 July, he was sentenced to 16 years imprisonment.
13. When Mr Sawyer arrived at Hull, he already had several health problems. These included chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD - the term for a group of serious lung diseases), heart and circulation problems (he had coronary heart disease and had had strokes and heart attacks, and heart surgery in 2000), asthma, diabetes and hypertension (high blood pressure). A previous stroke had left Mr Sawyer partially paralysed on the left-hand side of his body and he had spinal problems. Mr Sawyer was a wheelchair user.
14. Despite his health problems, Mr Sawyer remained active and continued as a wing painter until shortly before he died. However, his longstanding heart and blood pressure problems remained challenging to manage. The clinical reviewer found that healthcare staff at Hull kept these under review and made appropriate hospital referrals. Following one of these in May 2022, a GP at Hull made adjustments to Mr Sawyer's medication to help control his symptoms. These included frequent angina attacks (chest pain caused by a restriction of oxygen to the heart's muscle). Further investigations into Mr Sawyer's heart function were scheduled by the hospital to take place towards the end of January 2023.
15. On 24 December, Mr Sawyer experienced difficulty with his breathing. This appeared to be an asthma attack and following the use of asthmatic medication, Mr Sawyer felt better.
16. On 26 December, Mr Sawyer complained about his breathing again, but then there was no further mention of any concerns until 1 January 2023, when he had difficulty with his breathing early in the morning. At around 3.35am, prison staff asked a nurse to check Mr Sawyer.
17. Initially staff thought that Mr Sawyer was having an asthma attack, but the asthma medication that he was given did not relieve his symptoms, and they called for an ambulance. Initially the staff at the prison were told that the ambulance would take an hour to arrive. Just after 4.00am, healthcare staff asked for a higher priority ambulance and an ambulance arrived at around 4.20am, followed by a second ambulance shortly afterwards.
18. Mr Sawyer arrived at hospital in an ambulance at around 5.00am. Hospital doctors said Mr Sawyer's outlook was very bad and asked for Mr Sawyer's family to be contacted. On the afternoon of his arrival at hospital family members visited him.
19. Mr Sawyer died in hospital on the morning of 3 January.

Post-mortem report

20. A post-mortem examination found that Mr Sawyer died from a recent myocardial infarction (heart attack) caused by coronary artery occlusion (graft) (the blockage of a coronary artery that previously had a procedure carried out on it to open it up), which was caused by severe coronary artery atherosclerosis (substantial blockage of the artery with fatty deposits).

Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

June 2023

Inquest

The inquest, held on 21 February 2024, concluded that Mr Sawyer died from natural causes.

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