

**Prisons &  
Probation**

**Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

# **Independent investigation into the death of Mr Michael Woodward on 8 April 2023, following his release from HMP Altcourse**

**A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman**

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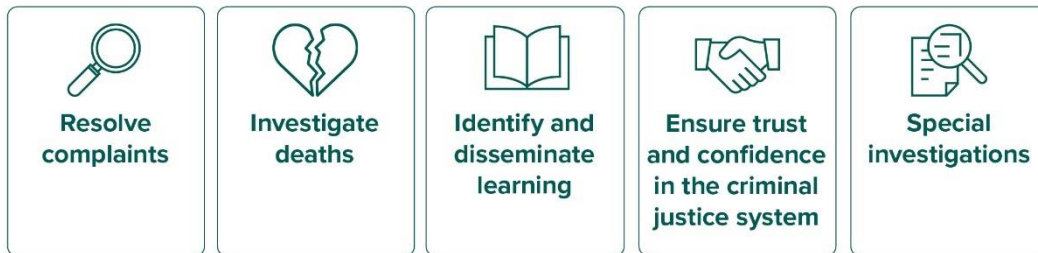
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## OUR VISION

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. 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 Michael Woodward died from cocaine misuse on 8 April 2023, following his release from HMP Altcourse on 30 March. He was 34 years old. I offer my condolences to those who knew him.
5. Mr Woodward had a history of substance misuse. However, he denied that he had current substance misuse issues while at Altcourse and so was not under the care of substance misuse services.
6. We are satisfied that Mr Woodward's community offender manager was aware of Mr Woodward's previous issues with substance misuse and put licence conditions in place to address this.
7. We make no recommendations.

## The Investigation Process

8. The PPO investigator obtained copies of relevant extracts from Mr Woodward's prison and probation records.
9. We informed HM Coroner for Derbyshire 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 Woodward's mother to explain the investigation and to ask if she had any matters she wanted us to consider. She 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 Altcourse**

12. HMP Altcourse is a category B local prison which holds up to 1,164 male prisoners who have either been convicted or are on remand. At the time of inspection, it was managed by G4S, and G4S were the substance misuse treatment provider. It is currently run by Sodexo, who took over management of the prison in June 2023.

### **HM Inspectorate of Prisons**

13. The most recent inspection of HMP Altcourse was in November 2021. Inspectors reported that all new arrivals were screened for alcohol and drug issues and if necessary, referred to the GP. Clinical assessments took place promptly and opiate substitution treatment was prescribed. Prisoners with drug or alcohol issues were placed on a detoxification wing. Inspectors reported that there were staff shortages within the substance misuse team, which meant there was limited access for prisoners who needed psychosocial support. The substance misuse team were unable to provide a holistic recovery service and the restricted regime limited the opportunities for group work. Prisoners received naloxone (a drug to manage a opiate overdose) and training in how to use it, and information was shared with community services to support them on release.

### **Probation Service**

14. 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

15. On 30 March 2022, Mr Michael Woodward was remanded to HMP Altcourse, charged with grievous bodily harm.
16. Mr Woodward told healthcare staff that he had been through phases of alcohol and cocaine misuse in the past. He said that he was not currently misusing substances, and that he was not addicted to cocaine.
17. On 24 January 2023, Mr Woodward was convicted and sentenced to 24 months in prison.
18. As he had already served most of his sentence on remand, on 30 March, Mr Woodward was released from Altcourse.
19. The same day, Mr Woodward attended his initial appointment at Ilkeston Probation Office. Mr Woodward's community offender manager (COM) completed Mr Woodward's induction and went through his licence conditions with him. He signed the licence to say that he understood the conditions. The licence included a condition to address his substance misuse issues, and a drug testing condition. When asked about current substance misuse, Mr Woodward told his COM that he did not drink alcohol, and that he was not currently misusing substances. The COM gave him his next appointment for 6 April.
20. On 6 April, Mr Woodward attended his appointment at Ilkeston Probation Office. When asked, Mr Woodward spoke positively about being in the community and told his COM about job opportunities, seeing his children and caring for his mother. He did not disclose any drug or alcohol misuse.

## Circumstances of Mr Woodward's death

21. Mr Woodward was living at his mother's address following his release from prison. On 8 April, Mr Woodward's mother returned from a holiday to find that he had barricaded himself in his room. She managed to make a hole in the door and saw that Mr Woodward was lying motionless on the floor, surrounded by drug paraphernalia. She called the emergency services and paramedics forced entry to the bedroom. They confirmed that Mr Woodward had died.
22. On 11 April, the police informed HMPPS that Mr Woodward had died.

## Post-mortem report

23. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Woodward died from cocaine misuse. The pathologist said that the blood cocaine concentration was very high and within the range encountered in deaths attributed to cocaine use only.

## Findings

24. As Mr Woodward denied that he had any substance misuse issues, he was not given support from the substance misuse service at Altcourse.
25. We are satisfied that Mr Woodward's community offender manager put appropriate measures in place to address his substance misuse issues when he was released from prison. This included a drug testing condition. Mr Woodward attended two appointments with his COM, and on both occasions, he denied misusing substances.
26. We make no recommendations.

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

**December 2023**

## Inquest

The inquest, held on 26 January 2024, concluded that Mr Woodward's death was drug related.

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