

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Investigation of fatal incidents

Information for families and friends

Foreword

“The death of a relative or friend is hard at any time. But when someone dies in custody, it can raise particular issues and questions. I hope that the information in this leaflet explains how you can be involved in the investigation and reassures you that your concerns will be taken seriously. It also tells you about other organisations, which can give support.

Bereaved families tell me that they hope that other people will not have to go through the same experience. These investigations also play an important part in making sure that any lessons are learned for the future.”



A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Nigel Newcomen". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Nigel Newcomen CBE
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

PPO's 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.

Introduction

This booklet is for family members and friends of someone who has died in prison, an immigration removal centre, court custody, youth detention, or in probation approved premises.

We will explain the role of the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman after a death and explain how we involve families or friends.

“Although it was heartbreaking to read I appreciate the detailed account of what happened.”

Anonymous comment from family feedback survey

Keeping in Touch

Family Liaison Officer

.....
Contact Number:

.....
Email:

.....
PPO Investigator

.....

Accessing information

PPO recognizes the need to provide information which can be accessed by all people, including those with a disability or special needs, or those for whom English is not their first language.

If you have any special communication needs, please speak to your family liaison officer. They will make sure you receive information in the format which is most helpful to you.

The Role of the Ombudsman

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman **independently** investigates deaths, due to any cause, of prisoners, young people in detention, residents of approved premises and detainees in immigration centres.

We carry out investigations to understand what happened and identify how the organisations whose actions we oversee can improve their work in the future.

Find out more about us

More information on our terms of reference can be found on our website:

www.ppo.gov.uk

“The recommendations have been put into practice and it is reassuring to know that things have already improved at the prison.”

Anonymous comments from family feedback survey

How do we carry out our investigation?

Interviewing staff and prisoners

The investigator will look at policies and relevant extracts of the individual's records. When they need to, the investigator may interview any person who may be able to give them more information about what happened.

Clinical review

In most cases, we also ask NHS England or the Health Inspectorate of Wales to review the deceased person's clinical care. This is to assess whether the care they received was up to the standard they could have expected to receive in the community. We attach the clinical review to the investigation report.

“Over the last 12 months I have been kept informed and received reports which has helped me cope with the death of my brother.”

Anonymous comments from family feedback survey

How can you be involved?

Answering your questions

In the weeks following the death, our family liaison officer will contact you, either by telephone or letter. The family liaison officer will offer you the chance to ask questions about your family member or friend's care, so that we can take into account relevant concerns as part of our investigation.

You may be concerned about some matters that do not relate directly to the circumstances of the death of your family member or friend, or about the actions of services that are outside our remit. Our family liaison officer will explain what we can and cannot investigate. Some issues might need to be addressed by the prison or the coroner.

The Ombudsman's family liaison officer may also contact other family members or friends who want to be involved in the investigation, where this is appropriate.

Meeting your investigator

We can arrange for you to meet our family liaison officer and the investigator if you would find this helpful.

Helping you through the investigation

The family liaison officer will remain your point of contact throughout the investigation. They will contact you when both initial and final reports are ready to share with you. You are also welcome to contact the family liaison officer at any time during the investigation with questions or concerns.

What happens at the end of an investigation?

After the investigation is finished, the Ombudsman will produce a report. This will outline our findings and recommendations.

How long will it take?

We aim to produce an initial report in 26 weeks. In some cases, we have to suspend our investigation because of other investigations by the police or the coroner. If the report is likely to take longer than 26 weeks, we will let you know as soon as possible.

Do you want to see the investigation report?

The family liaison officer will ask you whether you would like to receive a copy of the initial report. We send a copy to the relevant service and the coroner. The report will be accompanied by other documents (referred to as annexes). These can include the review of the healthcare by NHS England or the Health Inspectorate of Wales and records of our interviews. Both you and the service are given the opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of the initial report before it is finalised.

During the investigation

If you or your legal representative want to see other documents that we have considered during our investigation, please ask your family liaison officer. We do not usually disclose such documents until after the initial report, with our findings, is issued.

The final report

After we have considered suggested corrections from you and the relevant service, we will produce the final report. The family liaison officer will ask you whether you would like a copy. They will explain where and why we have changed the report.

Publishing the report

At the end of the investigation, usually after the coroner's inquest, we will publish the report on the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's website. All names, except the name of the deceased, will be removed.

“The communication was handled very sensitively. The process was explained in detail and the questions I had were answered.”

Anonymous comments from family feedback survey

The Coroner's Inquest

Who is the coroner?

In England and Wales, the coroner will normally hold an inquest into a death that occurs in a prison, immigration removal centre, court custody, secure training centre, or secure children's home. The coroner may also decide to hold an inquest after the death of a resident in a probation hostel.

The Ombudsman is independent

The Ombudsman's investigation is separate from the inquest process, but we send a copy of our investigation report to the coroner to assist with his or her enquiries. The Ombudsman has no influence over when an inquest will take place or the inquest process. For further information or advice about the inquest, you should contact the coroner's office.

Contact INQUEST for more help

The independent organisation INQUEST provides a free specialist advice service about deaths in custody. They can put you in touch with lawyers who are experienced in representing families.

INQUEST

89-93 Fonthill Road

London N4 3JH

Tel: 020 7263 1111

www.inquest.org.uk

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**Prisons &
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Ombudsman
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Please contact your family liaison officer if you would like this information in another language.