

Prisons &  
Probation

**Ombudsman**  
Independent Investigations

# Strategic Plan

**2019-21**

## 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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# Ombudsman's Foreword



We work in a complex and politically sensitive environment. Our Terms of Reference are very clear and we are proud of our independence and of the commitment of our staff to produce high quality reports at times of high demand. A number of factors have led to more violence in prisons and staff less able to care for prisoners in the way their own policies prescribe, often in spite of their best efforts. These include the influx of psychoactive substances into many prisons and reductions in the numbers of staff across the custodial estate (notwithstanding the recent recruitment drive). These are only two of the challenges whose impact can be seen in the number and nature of the complaints we receive and, we believe, in the persistently high number of deaths in our prisons.

As we begin the 2019-2020 business year, demand for our services remains high and we plan to address this, to do what we can to help reduce the number of people dying in detention, to support work to improve care for those whose deaths are not preventable and to play our part in making detention and community supervision safer and fairer.

The four strategic themes in our Strategic Plan for 2019-2021 have been chosen to contribute to those crucial outcomes. These are **confidence**, **effectiveness**, **impact** and **efficiency**

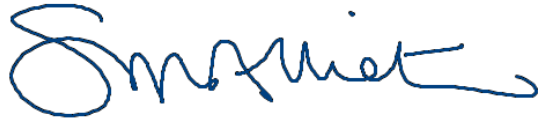
To improve **confidence** in our services, we will focus on the impact of our work and the improved outcomes to which we contribute. We will make the right recommendations, ones which reflect what needs to happen and we will do more to make sure that they result in action. We will get better at telling people what we are doing well and at working with all our stakeholders to understand how we can improve our contribution to safer, more decent, services.

On our **effectiveness**, we will build on the work we have already done to simplify our processes and increase our productivity. We will empower our staff and encourage and support their professional development so that we can be confident we are doing the right things, in the right way and that what we do can really make a difference.

Our focus on **impact** is probably the most important of our strategic themes. The **confidence** of our stakeholders, of other organisations, of those in detention and their families (and the families of those who have died in custody and secure accommodation) and of all staff is threatened if the work we do, the recommendations that we make, do not have **impact**. We will be working hard on this in the coming year and beyond, better to understand the barriers to our work

having the **impact** it should. We will work collaboratively and creatively on dismantling those barriers and we will focus on how what we do can really make a difference. We will challenge failure to implement our recommendations and we will celebrate and share the success of those who do act on them.

We will do all of that in the most **efficient** way, using public money responsibly and having the flexibility and resilience in the PPO team to respond to changes in the demand for our services.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sue McAllister". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S' and a long, sweeping tail.

**Sue McAllister CB**

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

## Statement of purpose

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's office exists to carry out independent investigations into deaths and complaints. Our service is in respect of prisoners, young people in secure accommodation, those supervised by probation and immigration detainees.

The purpose of our investigation is to understand what has happened, to correct injustices and to identify lessons to be learned for the organisations whose actions we oversee.

## Strategic Goal

Effective and independent investigations helping to make custody and community supervision safer and fairer.

## Values

- **Impartial:** We are independent and we do not take sides.
- **Respectful:** We are considerate and courteous to each other, the users of our service and wider stakeholders.
- **Inclusive:** We value diversity, so that everyone can give their best.
- **Dedicated:** We are determined and focused in our approach to our work.
- **Fair:** We are honest and act with integrity in all our dealings, both internally and externally.

## Function

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (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 Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the National Probation Service for England and Wales; the Community Rehabilitation Companies for England and Wales; Prisoner Escort and Custody Services; the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement); the Youth Custody Service; and those local authorities and voluntary organisations who administer secure children's homes. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).

The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in this office's Terms of Reference (ToR).

The PPO has three main investigative duties:

- Complaints made by prisoners, young people in secure accommodation,<sup>1</sup> offenders under probation supervision, and immigration detainees due to any cause.
- Deaths of prisoners, young people in secure accommodation, approved premises' residents and immigration detainees due to any cause.
- Using the PPO's discretionary powers, the investigation of deaths of recently released prisoners or detainees.

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<sup>1</sup> The PPO investigates complaints from young people detained in secure training centres (STCs) and young offender institutions (YOIs). Its remit does not include complaints from children in secure children's homes (SCHs).

## Resources

The work of the PPO is demand led and so the office must respond to all eligible complaints and deaths in remit. It is therefore difficult to predict the volume of work that will come into the office at any one time. This means the bulk of our budget pays for staff to support our operational delivery. Changes to financial allocation have a direct impact on the number and type of staff that we employ. This means we must prioritise our workstreams and potentially refocus our efforts to maximise our impact and maintain the quality and timeliness of our delivery.

## Context

This section makes some assumptions about the kind of environment the PPO will be working in over the period of this plan that would have a direct impact on the strategic priorities of the Ombudsman.

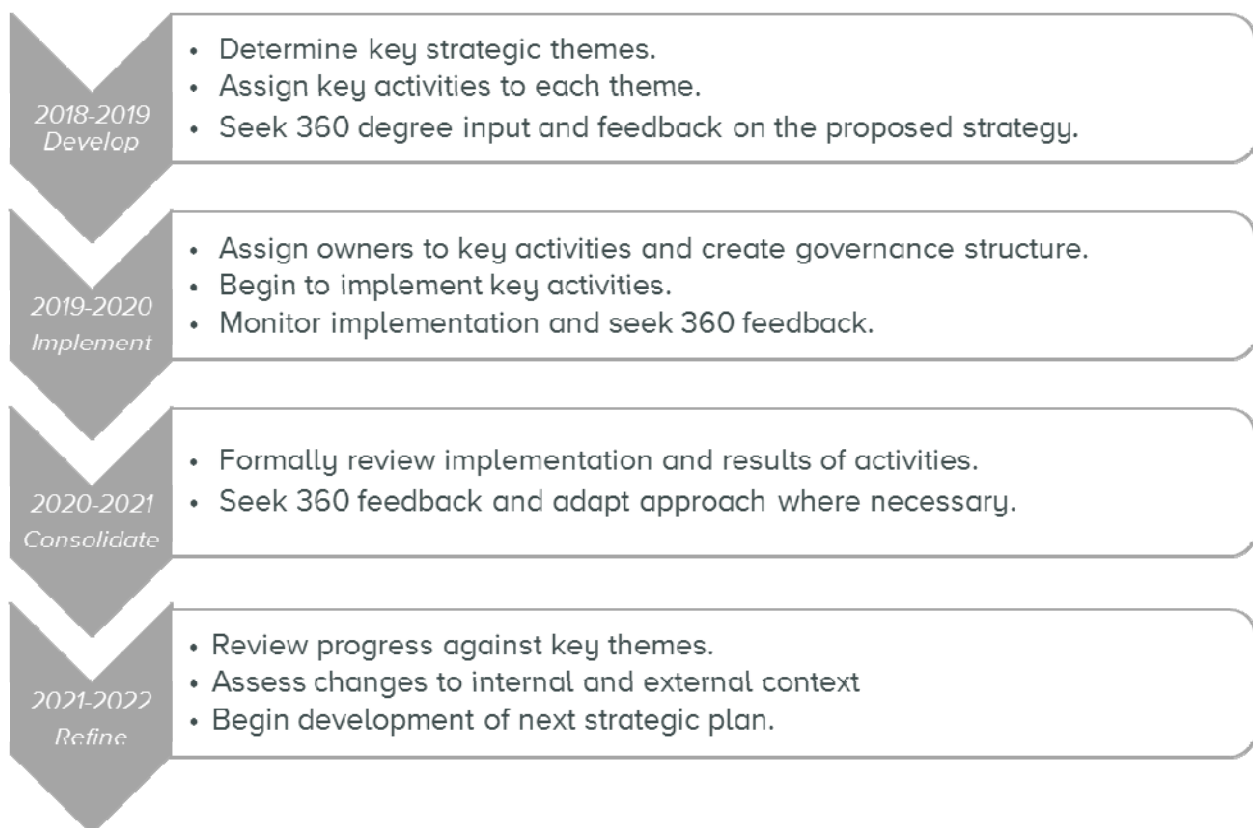
- Continued significant change across the services in remit, including changes to the system of Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) and updated prison safety and security policies.
- Partial reversal of some of the cuts to the resources of services in remit as part of the initial stages of the government's prison reform programme, which will impact on the day-to-day experience of those in detention and their reasons for complaint.
- Penal policy changes, particularly new developments in managing custodial sentences and categorisation as well as updates to probation policy.
- Policy changes, particularly in the areas of disciplinary procedures, adjudications, prisoners' property and the prison complaints process.
- A rapidly ageing prison population caused by lengthening sentences and more prisoners being sentenced later in their life, leading to a great proportion of deaths in custody due to natural causes.
- Limited resource available to the Ombudsman's office which will mandate us to prioritise our workstreams and refocus our efforts to maximise our impact and maintain the quality and timeliness of our delivery.
- Ongoing relationships with investigation partners, for example NHS England clinical reviewers, who are also experiencing major change and limitations on resources, requiring us to work together to accomplish our shared goals with maximum efficiency and to a high standard.

## The Plan

The plan is presented under the following strategic themes which describe the priorities of the PPO for the period 2019-2021. The key activities for the Ombudsman’s term are set out under each of these themes:

- Confidence
- Effectiveness
- Impact
- Efficiency

## The Approach



# PPO's Strategic Plan 2019-21

## Confidence

Improve the confidence of our stakeholders in our role as an independent, impartial and fair investigative body and complaints resolution service.

Confidence in our independence, impartiality and fairness is essential to the acceptance and impact of our recommendations, as well as being crucial to encouraging complainants to raise concerns in the first place. It is therefore vital that we foster this confidence among all our stakeholders including complainants, bereaved families, staff and management in the services in remit, and other external commentators.

- We will seek opportunities to improve our relationships with services in remit in order to facilitate effective implementation of recommendations by frontline staff.
- We will conduct a review of relevant surveys to make sure we effectively seek and take account of our key stakeholders' opinions.
- We will seek legislative opportunity for placing the Ombudsman's role on a statutory footing.
- We will implement an updated communications strategy that will allow us to engage with our external stakeholders and make effective use of all channels available to us.

## Effectiveness

Focus on the outcomes of investigations and increase the impact of our work on the actions of services in remit and the day to day lives of those in custody.

During 2017-2018, while we improved on our timeliness numbers we still fell short of some of the objectives we laid out in our business plan. This meant that the opportunity to learn timely lessons and mediate resolutions to complaints was often lost. It must be a priority area for the Ombudsman's tenure to identify the source of these delays and to empower staff to overcome them.

- We will work with staff to identify areas where productivity is blocked and adopt a continuous improvement methodology to remove those blockages and maximise effectiveness across the office.
- We will support and empower our staff to develop professionally, achieve their potential and drive success.
- We will improve our oversight of operational processes across the office to ensure that processes are being implemented consistently and effectively.
- We will embrace digital working, ensure our IT and structural resources are sufficient and that they are being used consistently and effectively.



## Impact

Focus on the outcomes of investigations and increase the impact of our work on the actions of services in remit and the day to day lives of those in custody.

A key concern of the PPO is that we have been identifying the same lessons and making the same recommendations to services in remit for many years and we are still doing so. If our investigations are to make a difference, we need to be outcome focused and identify actions we can take to ensure services in remit address the failings that we have identified.

- We will develop effective means of tracking repeat recommendations and holding services in remit to account for repeatedly failing to implement our recommendations.
- We will explore options for working collaboratively with the Inspectorate of Prisons, the Independent Monitoring Boards and HMI Probation in order to magnify our voices and to increase our collective impact.
- We will review our Learning Lessons products to ensure that our bulletins are having the desired impact.
- We will adopt a strategic approach to ascertaining which services in remit and groups are most in need of our attention and adopt a proactive plan for engagement.

## Efficiency

Use our resources efficiently and effectively.

The Ombudsman's office continues to operate in a challenging fiscal environment. This is not a surprise in the current context and we should all be held to account for how we spend public funds. Although we are a demand led organisation and it is difficult to accurately forecast what the demand is likely to be in the coming years, we must work closely with our colleagues in MOJ to influence policies that will impact our workload.

We must also identify actions that will allow us to use our existing resources with maximum efficiency and support improvements in delivery. This will ensure that we remain resilient to shifting finances and can respond robustly to fluctuations in workload.

- We will review our organisational structure to remove barriers to cross-office collaboration and ensure that we are facilitating performance improvement.
- We will establish a consistent and regular approach to engagement with the Ministry of Justice to influence policies that will impact our workload.
- We will establish a consistent and regular approach to internal communications and knowledge management.
- We will explore options for further resource generation.

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