

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

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PRISONS AND PROBATION OMBUDSMAN PUBLISHES FIRST ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS WORK DURING COVID-19

Sue McAllister, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), has published a '[Learning Lessons Bulletin](#)' analysing complaints to the PPO during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bulletin focuses on the effect of the beginning of the pandemic on PPO complaints work, and presents emerging findings based on analysis and case studies of complaints received or completed between April 2020 and September 2020.

Between April 2020 and September 2020, the PPO received 2,052 complaints and completed 641 complaint investigations. The PPO defines a COVID-19 complaint as one in which the complaint mentions COVID, COVID-19, coronavirus, pandemic or epidemic in the complaint forms, or if the complaint relates to changes in policy or practice due to COVID-19. The PPO investigates complaints that have already been through the prison service complaints process and remain unresolved.

Some complaints were found to be cases where complainants may have used the pandemic in the hope of escalating or speeding up the progress of the complaint. The PPO also found that some prisons may have used the effects of the pandemic as an excuse for not having resolved an outstanding issue.

Prisoners' messages on the PPO voicemail and email account reflected fears about catching COVID-19 and worry about inadequate social distancing, as well as concerns about access to showers and to appointments outside prison.

Sue McAllister added: "It is clear that the effects of the pandemic will be far-reaching and long-lasting." The PPO plans to publish further Learning Lessons Bulletins to track the longer-term impact on their complaints work, as well as reports focusing on fatal incident investigations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Notes to editors

1. The report is available at www.ppo.gov.uk
2. 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 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).
3. The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the latest version of which can be found in the appendices.
4. The PPO has three main investigative duties:
 - complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention, offenders under probation supervision and immigration detainees
 - deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, 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
5. The Learning Lessons Bulletin includes a number of complaints case studies.
6. Please contact John Steele on 07880 787452, or at john.steele@justice.gov.uk if you would like more information