

A guide to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's investigation of fatal incidents

Information for
family and friends



Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for family members and friends of someone who has died while in a prison, probation approved premises (often known as hostels), immigration centre or secure training centre.

Throughout the rest of this leaflet we will refer to these places as the service where the death took place.

The leaflet explains who the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman is and what his office does.



Who is the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman?

The Ombudsman is independent and not part of the Prison, Probation or Immigration Service.

What does the Ombudsman do?

The Ombudsman investigates complaints made by people in prison or immigration centres, or by those being supervised by the Probation Service.

All deaths, whatever the cause, in prisons, probation approved premises (often known as hostels), immigration centres and secure training centres are investigated. Sometimes we also investigate the death of someone recently released from prison. Some people

may have died of natural causes, others may have taken their own life, while for others the cause of death may initially be unknown.

The investigation tries to provide answers and information for families and friends about what happened. If failings are found, recommendations for improvements will be made. Good practice is also recognised.

How is the investigation carried out?

We are told of every death in a prison, probation hostel, immigration centre or secure training centre. The Ombudsman then appoints an investigator to look into the circumstances of the death.

The investigator will find out as much as possible about what was happening to the

person before their death. This includes examination of all the relevant documents and policies, together with interviews with relevant staff and prisoners or residents. We ask the local Primary Care Trust to consider any health issues as the commissioner of local prison health services.



The family liaison officer

The Ombudsman also appoints a family liaison officer to each case.

The family liaison officer will make contact by telephone or letter in the weeks following the death.

Your family liaison officer will offer you the opportunity to ask any questions and raise concerns about the death so they are considered as part of the investigation. A home visit by the family liaison officer and the investigator can be arranged if you would find this helpful.

Your family liaison officer will be available throughout the investigation to let you know what is happening. If you or your legal representative wants to see any of the documents the investigator collects during the investigation, please ask your family liaison officer.

Your family liaison officer is

and can be contacted on



What happens at the end of the investigation?

After the investigation is completed the Ombudsman will produce a report. This report will outline the investigation findings. It may also recommend changes to improve the quality of care given in the future.

Draft report

The report will first be produced as a draft. A copy will be sent to you and to the relevant service, accompanied by other documents which are annexes of the report. These will include the review of healthcare by the Primary Care Trust, records of interviews, and other relevant documents. The report will list other documents which have been considered in the investigation; these are available on request. Both

you and the service are given a time period to comment on the draft report before the final version is published.

Final report

After we have looked at any comments from you and the relevant service, the Ombudsman will produce the final report. We will send you a copy of this report and will tell you where and why any changes have been made.

Publishing the report

After the inquest the Ombudsman will publish the report on the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's website. Before this is done all names are removed so that no one can be identified. You can see this report before it is published if you would like.

Other helpful information

The inquest

A Coroner will normally hold an inquest into any death that occurs in a prison, probation hostel, secure training centre or immigration centre. An inquest is a special court hearing to find out how, when and where the death occurred. The inquest is a fact finding exercise and is not intended to apportion blame. The Coroner and jury cannot return a finding which indicates civil liability or the criminal liability of a named person.

If you would like advice and information about inquests, please ask your family liaison officer. You can also contact the organisation INQUEST, who provide a free advice service. They offer legal advice or can put you in touch with a lawyer.

INQUEST
89–93 Fonthill Road
London N4 3JH
www.inquest.org.uk
Tel: 020 7263 1111

Issues outside the Ombudsman's investigation

You may have concerns or complaints about services the Ombudsman cannot look at. The following organisations may be helpful:

For issues with the police:

Independent Police
Complaints Commission
90 High Holborn
London WC1V 6BH
www.ipcc.gov.uk
Tel: 08453 002 002
Email enquiries:
enquiries@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk

For issues regarding healthcare:

The Parliamentary and Health
Service Ombudsman
Millbank Tower, Millbank
London SW1P 4QP
www.ombudsman.org.uk
Tel: 0845 015 4033
Email enquiries: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk

For issues with lawyers:

The Law Society
www.lawsociety.org.uk
Tel: 020 7242 1222

Who else can help?

There are also a number of organisations offering support to bereaved families and friends:

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse is a national organisation offering help and support to anyone who is bereaved. It provides advice, counselling, befriending and groups where people can talk with people in similar circumstances. Cruse also provides information on practical matters and lists of useful books, publications and cassettes. It has 140 branches throughout the UK.

Cruse
Cruse House
126 Sheen Road
Richmond
Surrey TW9 1UR
www.cruse.org.uk
Tel: 020 8939 9530
Helpline: 0870 167 1677

Compassionate Friends

Compassionate Friends is a self-help organisation of bereaved parents and is open to parents who have experienced the loss of a child of any age and from any cause.

Compassionate Friends
53 North Street
Bristol BS3 1EN
www.tcf.org.uk
Helpline: 08451 23 23 04
(10am–4pm and 6.30pm–10.30pm 7 days a week)

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

SOBS is a self-help organisation providing emotional and practical support through telephone contacts, bereavement packs, group meetings (in some locations), conferences and residential events. It also offers information on practical issues and problems and one-to-one visits and home

visits in some areas. Many of their volunteers have been bereaved through suicide.

SOBS

Volsolve House
14–18 West Bar Green
Sheffield S1 2DA
www.uk-sobs.org.uk
National Helpline:

0870 241 3337 (open 9am to 9pm 7 days a week)

Welsh Helpline:

01792 774 646 (this helpline also has Welsh-speaking volunteers)

Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish is a service for bereaved children and young people and their families, including where a parent or sibling has died by suicide.

They run residential groups four or five times a year for bereaved children between the ages of 6 and 18, with a parallel group for the surviving parent. They also

run a group once or twice a year particularly for children bereaved through suicide and recently held a weekend group for children bereaved through murder. The residential groups are held in Gloucestershire but are open to people from across the UK.

Winston's Wish

The Clara Burgess Centre
Bayshill Road
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire GL50 3AW
www.winstonswish.org.uk
Helpline: 0845 20 30 40 5

(9.30am–5.00pm Monday to Friday)

Tel: 01242 515157

Email:

info@winstonswish.org.uk

Child Bereavement Network

The Child Bereavement Network is an online network of local services.
www.ncb.org.uk/cbn

Samaritans

The Samaritans offer 24-hour confidential emotional support.

The Samaritans

The Upper Mill

Kingston Road

Ewell

Surrey KT17 2AF

www.samaritans.org

Helpline: 08457 90 90 90

Email: jo@samaritans.org

This leaflet is available in a range of other languages including Welsh, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese. Please contact your family liaison officer if you would like a copy of the leaflet in another language.

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