



# 2022-23 BUSINESS PLAN

## Foreword

This business plan outlines the key activities and priorities for the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in 2022-23. Of the key tasks identified, the focus will remain on maintaining the core work of investigations, improving investigative processes, reducing backlogs and progressing towards Statutory Footing. The targets set out in the plan are challenging not least because the final budget allocation required to fully fund core and aspirational business activities has not yet been confirmed due to the absence of a sitting Executive. I am hopeful however that the funding position will be resolved in year and that steady progress against all targets can be achieved. As with last year, staff numbers remain under complement and resourcing remains stretched.

The plan supports the Prisoner Ombudsman's four year Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 and aims to ensure the delivery of evidence based outcomes from individual investigations and that the needs and concerns of persons in custody are brought to wider attention through these investigations. It also seeks to build on the learning culture now firmly embedded within the office and will provide clearer direction for staff as well as improved relationships with persons in custody and business partners.

Although the impact of Covid-19 continues to be felt, good progress has been made in terms of business recovery and this has been further helped by prison establishments reopening for visits. Hybrid working has become our new normal and works well for the office. We will continue to respond positively to challenges and ensure that an independent quality service is delivered to stakeholders. This is particularly important as confidence in the office will continue to be critical for those in custody and their families.

In closing, I want to take this opportunity to convey my thanks to staff and to commend them not only on the levels of resilience they continue to display but also on the professionalism, flexibility and support they provide despite the ongoing challenges faced.

**Dr Lesley Carroll**  
Prisoner Ombudsman

## The Prisoner Ombudsman's Office

The Prisoner Ombudsman investigates:

- a. Complaints submitted by individuals in custody, their visitors and, in certain circumstances, those formerly in custody who have been unable to resolve their concern through the Prison Service Internal Complaints Process. The Prison Service internal complaints process has two stages; both stages must be completed before a complaint can be brought to the Prisoner Ombudsman.
- b. Deaths in prison custody in Northern Ireland. This also includes the deaths of people formerly in custody occurring within 14 days after their release from prison and incidents of serious self-harm. The purpose of the Prisoner Ombudsman's investigation is to find out, as far as possible, what happened and why, establish whether there are any lessons to be learned and make recommendations to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (the Prison Service) and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) for improvement, where appropriate. By highlighting learning to the Prison Service, the Trust and others who provide services in prisons, the Ombudsman aims to promote best practice in the care of people in custody.

All investigations should meet the highest standards of independence, impartiality and professionalism.

## Corporate Governance

The Prisoner Ombudsman is an 'Independent Statutory Officer Holder' appointed by the Minister for Justice under Section 2(2) of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 as amended by Section 2 of the Treatment of Offenders Act (Northern Ireland) 1968. A Framework Document sets out the arrangements for the effective governance, financing and operation of the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office and reporting responsibilities in respect of the Department. Staff working in the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office are currently NICS civil servants and are subject to NICS HR policies and terms and conditions.

## Strategic Context

The 2022-23 Business Plan is aligned to the four year Strategic Plan which sets out a commitment to carrying out investigations in a way that improves the lives of those in custody by addressing the mission for the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office: developing a learning environment in which we challenge others and ourselves to achieve improvement. Our mission requires that process and practice are founded in a culture of collaboration, openness and readiness to change. The strategic priorities are designed to enable the change required to modernise the work of the Office and support the commitment to improvement. The Strategic Priorities are:

- ▶ **Improve investigative processes**
- ▶ **Safeguard and reinforce independence**
- ▶ **Prepare for and implement statutory footing**
- ▶ **Develop a learning environment that puts evidence to work**

This Business Plan sets out a programme of work that will address process, practice and culture within the office and between the office and our stakeholders and partners. The outcomes will contribute to improvement. The Business Plan is a live document and will be reviewed on a quarterly basis to ensure that work required to achieve key priorities is both named and monitored.

## Resources

### Financial Resources

The table below shows the contingency planning envelope for 2022-23 and how the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office plan to allocate the budget much of which is allocated to salary costs. This is a provisional position as a functioning Executive is not in place locally to set a final budget at this time. Any new or refreshed business needs will be appraised via the normal business case process and the funding for same will be from within the existing contingency planning envelope or bid for via the relevant financial exercises. Funding pressures and/or easements will continue be identified at an early stage and appropriately reported in financial exercises and returns.

#### PRISONER OMBUDSMAN RESOURCE DEL CONTINGENCY PLANNING ENVELOPE FOR 2022/2023

NON RINGFENCED COSTS	£
Resource Pay Costs	747,000
Resource Non Pay Costs	63,000
Capital Costs	4,000
<b>TOTAL NON RINGFENCED COSTS</b>	<b>814,000</b>

### Staffing Resources

Although good progress has been made to fill vacant posts, overall staffing remains under complement and this continues to adversely affect the delivery of core business. A new Senior Investigations Officer and an Investigations Officer have been separately recruited and both are expected to take up their posts by early summer at the latest. It was not possible to recruit a substantive Director of Operations and an Office Manager during 2021-2022 as had been planned therefore the temporary promotion arrangement for the Director of Operations post remains in place and will continue to be reviewed periodically pending a substantive appointment. A series of General Service recruitment competitions are to commence during 2022-2023 and this will pose a significant risk to the office in terms of the potential loss of experienced staff on promotion. Should this happen it will result in additional vacancies which the office can ill afford given the level of outstanding work at this time. Additionally the length of time to recruit replacement staff and the requirement for incoming staff to focus on training in the early days are likely to adversely impact on the office also.

## Resources

Staff continue to deliver a blended mix of working from home and in the office. This arrangement has been formalised under a New Ways of Working Policy and supporting Workstyle Agreements have been agreed with Line Managers.

As notified in last year's Business Plan, a comprehensive review of the adequacy of staff resources and workflow processes is planned for this year. Unfortunately this review cannot be commissioned as yet due to the absence of a confirmed budget allocation. As previously outlined the purpose of the review will be to ensure that processes are not only efficient but that staff are undertaking grade appropriate work and that the level of staff resources is sufficient to enable business objectives to be achieved. A commitment to ensuring all Investigation Officers are professionally qualified in Investigative Practice remains a key priority.

### **Business Planning for 2022-23**

A consultation process on the new Programme for Government Plan (PfG) took place January to March 2022. This Business Plan has been developed using the Outcome Based Accountability methodology in line with the commitment to support the DoJ in delivering the Executive's existing draft PfG and will be reviewed against any developments arising from the consultation process as required. The work of the Prisoner Ombudsman will contribute towards the achievement of Outcome 7, which is: we will work to ensure "we have a safe community where we respect the law and each other". Individual Personal Performance Agreements are linked to the achievement of business plan objectives which enables staff to clearly identify how what they do impacts on the achievement of higher level business objectives.

## Delivering the Plan

**KEY:**

On target for achievement

Lagging behind expected target

Target unlikely to be achieved

Progress against the 2022-23 Business Plan will be reviewed throughout the year and will be reported to the Department quarterly. Should resources either financial or otherwise be unavailable to achieve the objectives outlined then the office will continue to focus on conducting high quality investigations with more aspirational work deferred until 2023-24.

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: IMPROVE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES		BUSINESS OBJECTIVE: To conduct timely, thorough and proportionate investigations	
Actions	Indicators	Business Lead	Progress	Target	
Provide support for investigators to ensure timely, thorough and proportionate investigations	<b>Complaints:</b> Updated TOR issued	SIO Complaints		01/08/22	
	Manual redrafted and/or desk aids provided			31/12/22	
	<b>DiC:</b> Updated TOR issued	SIO DiC		30/09/22	
	Processes, targets, manual and/or desk aids updated			31/12/22	
	<b>Complaints and Admin:</b> Staff training in new processes and practices arising from updated TOR	SIO Complaints		30/06/22	
	<b>DiC:</b> Staff training in new processes and practices arising from updated TOR	SIO DiC		31/08/22	
	<b>Complaints and DiC:</b> Complete and Publish standalone Standards Document to underpin all investigations	DirOps		30/09/22	
	<b>Complaints and DiC:</b> Regular case conference model developed and applied appropriately	SIOs		Ongoing	

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Actions	Indicators	Business Lead	Progress	Target	
Investigative processes, practice and targets	<b>Complaints:</b> Milestone checks carried out for effectiveness and improvement and learning log updated	SIO		31/03/23	
	<b>Complaints:</b> Report templates completed and case activity log maintained for each complaint	SIO		31/03/23	
	<b>Complaints:</b> Decrease number of complaints outstanding to 30 by 31 December 2022	SIO		31/03/23	
	<b>Complaints:</b> Clear 280 complaints annually	SIO		31/12/22	
	<b>DiC:</b> New journey of an investigation agreed, applied and monitored	SIO and Dir Ops		30/09/22	
	<b>DiC:</b> Milestone checks carried out for effectiveness and improvement and learning log updated	SIO DiC		31/03/23	
	<b>DiC:</b> Report templates completed and case activity log maintained for each DiC investigation	SIO DiC		31/03/23	
	<b>DiC:</b> Publish 5 DiC investigation reports	SIO DiC		31/03/23	
	<b>DiC:</b> Complete the investigation phase of 3 DIC investigations			31/03/23	
	<b>DiC:</b> Issue 5 draft investigation reports for Factual Accuracy			31/03/23	
	<b>DiC:</b> Commission at least 3 clinical reviews			31/03/23	
	<b>DiC:</b> Finalise Disclosure for 3 DIC investigations			31/03/23	
	<b>Complaints and DiC:</b> Monthly reporting and response at SMT	SIOs		31/03/23	

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Actions	Indicators	Business Lead	Progress	Target
Improve quality assurance practice for handling complaints and DiC investigations	<b>Complaints &amp; DiC:</b> Case Activity Logs - maintained for individual investigations	SIOs		31/03/23
	<b>Complaints &amp; DiC:</b> Case Activity Logs - quality assurance checks carried out at the right level			31/03/23
	Professional investigator training for all relevant staff completed	DirOps		31/03/23
	Recruit DirOps - G7	Ombudsman		31/12/22
Information / education events with people in custody and others to inform about processes	Plan of engagement with partners, key and other stakeholders to increase knowledge of investigative work	SMT		31/03/23
	Plan of learning and improving knowledge through shared events relating to updated ToRs			30/09/22
	Review and improve use of the website for knowledge and information sharing and communicating the work of the Prisoner Ombudsman including complaints and evidence gathered in all investigations			30/09/12

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Actions	Indicators	Business Lead	Progress	Target	
Prison Officer training in addition to recruits	Ombudsman participation in information sessions to new PS recruits	Ombudsman		31/03/23	
	Deliver targeted training to other PS staff (good complaints handling and PO complaints processes)			31/03/23	
Communications with people in custody including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Feedback</li> <li>▶ Website - update and use of Twitter</li> <li>▶ Improve reporting on website</li> <li>▶ Advertising, complaints processes</li> </ul>	Visible IO presence in prisons	SIOs		30/09/22	
	Website overhaul including new information regarding post release investigations	SIO		30/09/22	
	Social media platforms developed with PR/Media service provider (including Twitter)	SMT		31/03/23	
	Quarterly Performance information published on website	Office Manager		31/03/22	
	Time efficiency achieved through use of up to date technology for written text/voice translation for upload to text	SIOs		31/03/23	

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: IMPROVE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES	BUSINESS OBJECTIVE: To conduct timely, thorough and proportionate investigations	
Actions	Indicators	Business Lead	Progress	Target
Partner / stakeholder engagements to improve business relationships and increase efficiency	Ombudsman's engagement with partners and key stakeholders	DirOps		31/03/23
	Recovery period (post-Covid) review of current promotional material for individuals in custody, e.g. at induction, on landings, at transfer, etc			31/12/22
	Protocols with key stakeholders updated			31/12/22
	DSA/ISA/MoUs in place with key partners			31/12/22
Monitoring and improvement	Issues based database developed including categorisation of complaints			

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: SAFEGUARD AND REINFORCE INDEPENDENCE	BUSINESS OBJECTIVE: To Increase confidence in the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office		
Actions		Indicators	Business Lead	Progress	Target
Ensure standards as set out in the Framework Document have been completed		Business Plan published	DirOps		30/06/22
		Annual Report published	DirOps		30/09/22
		Financial probity demonstrated	Office Manager		31/03/23
		Dedicated Health & Safety staff resource trained	Office Manager		30/09/22
		Internal audit actions completed	DirOps		31/03/23
		Risk register maintained and monitored monthly by SMT	SMT		31/03/23
		Framework Document redrafted into a new Partnership Agreement with DOJ	DOJ and DirOps		31/03/23
Prisoner Ombudsman programme of regular engagement		Review for staff involvement, regularity and range of stakeholders engaged with	Ombudsman		31/03/23

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PREPARE FOR STATUTORY FOOTING	BUSINESS OBJECTIVE: To achieve a Statutory Footing Workplan		
Actions	Indicators	Business Lead	Progress	Target	
Carry out a review of staffing structures and adequacy of staff resources within the office	Within the constraints of the Contingency Planning obtain Business Case and funding approval to carry out review (Apr-June 2022)	DirOps		30/09/22	
	Review carried out (Aug-Oct 2022)			31/10/22	
	Outcome of review considered (Nov-Dec 2022)			31/12/22	
	Implement agreed staffing structures (Jan-Mar 2023)			31/03/23	
	Training programmes developed and rolled out			Phased	
New Case Management System to support delivery of quality, timely and effective investigations	Workflows and processes identified	SIOs and DirOps		30/09/22	
	Work with IT Assist or other service provider to scope needs and develop specification for new CMS			31/12/22	
	Business case approval and bid for funds to meet specification, development and procurements costs of new CMS obtained			31/12/22	
	Procure and award contract for new CMS through CPD	DirOps		31/03/23	
	Project initiation commenced	DirOps		31/03/23	
Follow up actions required to achieve Statutory Footing	Follow up Review on creation of the office of Prison Ombudsman; action plan agreed and implemented	DirOps		31/03/23	

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: DEVELOP A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT PUTS EVIDENCE TO WORK	BUSINESS OBJECTIVE: To deliver a data driven evidence base	
Actions	Indicators	Business Lead	Progress	Target
Review monitoring of recommendations	Proactive review of existing process and proposals for improvement to check for implementation	Office Manager		30/09/22
Monitor and improve use of learning log	Quarterly review of learning log entries at SMT	SMT		31/03/23
	Learning environment that puts evidence to work, promotes adaptability and encourages concerns to be raised	SIOs		31/03/23
Staff training programme (additional to professional investigator training)	Identify training / information sessions required	All staff		31/03/23
	Plan and implement learning opportunities			31/03/23
	Mandatory E-learning completed			31/03/23
	Training recorded in PDPs			30/06/22
Quality Assurance as learning	Consider and present proposals for peer working and review of reports	SIOs		30/09/22

## Organisation Chart At 31 October 2022

