



***ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGY
2025-2028***



The
Prisoner
Ombudsman
for Northern Ireland

Engagement Strategy 2025-2028

The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is responsible for providing an independent and impartial investigation into complaints from prisoners, former prisoners and visitors to Northern Ireland Prisons.

The office is also responsible for investigating deaths in prison custody in Northern Ireland. This includes the deaths of people shortly after their release from prison (usually within 14 days) and serious adverse incidents. The Prisoner Ombudsman (Ombudsman) is independently appointed by the Minister of Justice. The staff of the Office of the Prisoner Ombudsman are completely independent of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) who provide Healthcare in Prisons.

OUR VISION

To be a trusted, independent and transparent voice for fairness, accountability and learning in Northern Ireland's prisons – ensuring dignity, justice and continuous improvement in the treatment of prisoners.

Our Purpose:



To complete timely, professional, evidence based independent investigations that contribute to a learning environment, challenging both ourselves and others.



To deliver high quality, timely, independent investigation reports.



To protect the rights of prisoners and, when a death occurs, provide a transparent report to their families which will be published on our website.



When appropriate, we will make recommendations to the NIPS and the Trust to influence meaningful change.



INDEPENDENCE

Acting with integrity, transparency, fairness and respect to build trust and ensure impartiality.



ENGAGEMENT

Removing barriers, fostering accountability and strengthening relationships through collaboration.



PEOPLE CENTRED

Treating each individual interaction respectfully.



PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY

Being professional, compassionate, patient & honest in all dealings.

What is engagement?

Engagement as defined within this strategy consists of 5 distinct elements

- ▶ Internal engagement with our team of investigators and administrators.
- ▶ Engagement with prisoners and their families or legal representatives.
- ▶ Engagement with NIPS, the Trust and the Coroners Service.
- ▶ Engagement with other organisations who operate within the custodial environment.
- ▶ External engagement with the wider public and other outside services.

Purpose of engagement strategy

The purpose of this engagement strategy is to create and grow confidence in the office, generate greater transparency and legitimacy and to create effective, trust-based relationships with partners and stakeholders. This strategy is directly linked to the objectives outlined in the strategic plan 2025-2028, specifically:

Objective 2

Reinforce independence, and

Objective 3

Improve visibility and Accessibility



Who will we engage with?

Our engagement will be far reaching to deepen our teams understanding of the complexity of the prison environment and the societal issues that cause people to commit crime. It is hoped that this strategy will strengthen relationships with stakeholders, improve collaboration and information sharing and generate mutual respect and trust.

We aim to engage with the following stakeholders (not exhaustive):



How will we engage

Strands of engagement activity



01

Internal engagement

- Professional training to equip team with skills and tools to conduct investigations.
- Reciprocal presentations with other organisations to create awareness of services and challenges within the custodial environment.
- Benchmarking of best practice with other organisations to share learning and improve standards.



02

Engagement with prisoners, their families and/or legal representatives

- Commission of survey to benchmark understanding of our role. Provision of marketing materials to inform and advise prisoners of our service.
- Regular complaints clinics and attendance in prisons to advise and inform prisoners on the complaints procedures. Training of a mentor cadre within the prisons to advise fellow prisoners on complaint procedures.
- Provision of regular meetings and updates to families to keep them informed of the progress and of the investigations.
- Publish reports on website.



03

Engagement with NIPS, the Trust and the Coroners Service

- Presentations to Prison staff and new recruits to create greater awareness of our role.
- Discussions on recommendations made by the Ombudsman in the interest of no surprises policy.
- Regular meetings with senior teams within the NIPS and Trust.
- Exposure of staff to NIPS training methods to understand decision making and operational protocols.
- Track and trend complaints to align evidence base for change where appropriate.
- Develop and agree data sharing protocols and memorandums of understanding.



04

Engagement with other organisations who operate within the custodial environment

- Work closely with the Department of Justice and other Government Agencies to support the delivery of Programme for Government and contribute to better collaboration and multi-agency working. Presentations to external agencies to raise awareness of our role. Guest speakers from other agencies to inform us of their remit, and how we can collaborate.
- Develop and agree information sharing agreements where appropriate. Identify areas of collaboration in initiatives to improve awareness and delivery of welfare services.



05

External engagement with the wider public and other services

- Creation of social media presence to share information and publish reports. Review and revamp public facing website.
- Use of mainstream media outlets to create awareness of what we do and highlight any issues or best practice we identify in our investigations. Develop a network of agencies and academics who will assist in our development.