

PRISONER OMBUDSMAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR INVESTIGATION OF DEATHS IN PRISON CUSTODY

1. The Prisoner Ombudsman will investigate the circumstances of the deaths of the following categories of person:
 - **Prisoners (including persons held in young offender institutions). This includes persons temporarily absent from the establishment but still in custody (for example, under escort, at court or in hospital). It excludes persons released from custody, whether temporarily or permanently. However, the Ombudsman will have discretion to investigate, to the extent appropriate, cases that raise issues about the care provided by the prison.**
2. The Ombudsman will act on notification of a death from the Prison Service. The Ombudsman will decide on the extent of investigation required depending on the circumstances of the death. For the purposes of the investigation, the Ombudsman's remit will include all relevant matters for which the Prison Service, is responsible, or would be responsible if not contracted for elsewhere. It will therefore include services commissioned by the Prison Service from outside the public sector.
3. The aims of the Ombudsman's investigation will be to:
 - Establish the circumstances and events surrounding the death, especially as regards management of the individual, but including relevant outside factors.
 - Examine whether any change in operational methods, policy, and practice or management arrangements would help prevent a recurrence.
 - In conjunction with the DHSS & PS, where appropriate, examine relevant health issues and assess clinical care.
 - Provide explanations and insight for the bereaved relatives.
 - Assist the Coroner's inquest in achieving fulfilment of the investigative obligation arising under article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, by ensuring as far as possible that the full facts are brought to light and any relevant failing is exposed, any commendable action or practice is identified, and any lessons from the death are learned.

4. Within that framework, the Ombudsman will set terms of reference for each investigation, which may vary according to the circumstances of the case, and may include other deaths of the categories of person specified in paragraph 1 where a common factor is suggested.

Clinical Issues

5. The Ombudsman will be responsible for investigating clinical issues relevant to the death where the healthcare services are commissioned by the Prison Service. The Ombudsman will obtain clinical advice as necessary, and may make efforts to involve the local Health Care Trust in the investigation, if appropriate. Where the healthcare services are commissioned by the DHSS & PS, the DHSS & PS will have the lead responsibility for investigating clinical issues under their existing procedures. The Ombudsman will ensure as far as possible that the Ombudsman's investigation dovetails with that of the DHSS & PS, if appropriate.

Other Investigations

6. Investigation by the police will take precedence over the Ombudsman's investigation. If at any time subsequently the Ombudsman forms the view that a criminal investigation should be undertaken, the Ombudsman will alert the police. If at any time the Ombudsman forms the view that a disciplinary investigation should be undertaken by the Prison Service, the Ombudsman will alert the Prison Service. If at any time findings emerge from the Ombudsman's investigation which the Ombudsman considers require immediate action by the Prison Service, the Ombudsman will alert the Prison Service to those findings.
7. The Ombudsman and the Inspectorate of Prisons will work together to ensure that relevant knowledge and expertise is shared, especially in relation to conditions for prisoners and detainees generally.

Disclosure of Information

8. Information obtained will be disclosed to the extent necessary to fulfil the aims of the investigation and report, including any follow-up of recommendations, unless the Ombudsman considers that it would be unlawful, or that on balance it would be

against the public interest to disclose particular information (for example, in exceptional circumstances of the kind listed in the relevant paragraph of the terms of reference for complaints). For that purpose, the Ombudsman will be able to share information with specialist advisors and with other investigating bodies, such as the DHSS & PS and social services. Before the inquest, the Ombudsman will seek the Coroner's advice regarding disclosure. The Ombudsman will liaise with the police regarding any ongoing criminal investigation.

Reports of Investigations

9. The Ombudsman will produce a written report of each investigation which, following consultation with the Coroner where appropriate, the Ombudsman will send to the Prison Service, the Coroner, the family of the deceased and any other persons identified by the Coroner as properly interested persons. The report may include recommendations to the Prison Service and the responses to those recommendations.
10. The Ombudsman will send a draft of the report in advance to the Prison Service, to allow the Service to respond to recommendations and draw attention to any factual inaccuracies or omissions or material that they consider should not be disclosed, and to allow any identifiable staff subject to criticism an opportunity to make representations. The Ombudsman will have discretion to send a draft of the report, in whole or part, in advance to any of the other parties referred to in paragraph 9.

Review of Reports

11. The Ombudsman will be able to review the report of an investigation, make further enquiries, and issue a further report and recommendations if the Ombudsman considers it necessary to do so in the light of subsequent information or representations, in particular following the inquest. The Ombudsman will send a proposed published report to the parties referred to in paragraph 9, the Inspectorate of Prisons and the Minister for Justice (or appropriate representative). If the proposed published report is to be issued before the inquest, the Ombudsman will seek the consent of the Coroner to do so. The Ombudsman will liaise with the police regarding any ongoing criminal investigation.

Publication of Reports

12. Taking into account any views of the recipients of the proposed published report regarding publication, and the legal position on data protection and privacy laws, the Ombudsman will publish the report on the Ombudsman's website.

Follow-up of Recommendations

13. The Prison Service will provide the Ombudsman with a response indicating the steps to be taken by the Service within set timeframes to deal with the Ombudsman's recommendations. Where that response has not been included in the Ombudsman's report, the Ombudsman may, after consulting the Service as to its suitability, append it to the report at any stage.

Annual, Other and Special Reports

14. The Ombudsman may present selected summaries from the year's reports in the Ombudsman's Annual Report to the Minister for Justice. The Ombudsman may also publish material from published reports in other reports.
15. If the Ombudsman considers that the public interest so requires, the Ombudsman may make a special report to the Minister for Justice.
16. Annex 'A' contains a more detailed description of the usual reporting procedure.

REPORTING PROCEDURE

1. The Ombudsman completes the investigation.
2. The Ombudsman sends a draft report (including background documents) to the Prison Service.
3. The Service responds within 28 days. The response:
 - (a) draws attention to any factual inaccuracies or omissions;
 - (b) draws attention to any material the Service consider should not be disclosed;
 - (c) includes any comments from identifiable staff criticised in the draft; and
 - (d) may include a response to any recommendations in a form suitable for inclusion in the report. (Alternatively, such a response may be provided to the Ombudsman later in the process, within an agreed timeframe.)
4. If the Ombudsman considers it necessary (for example, to check other points of factual accuracy or allow other parties an opportunity to respond to findings), the Ombudsman sends the draft in whole or part to one or more of the other parties. (In some cases that could be done simultaneously with step 2, but the need to get point 3 (b) cleared with the Service first may make a consecutive process preferable.)
5. The Ombudsman completes the report and consults the Coroner (and the police if criminal investigation is ongoing) about any disclosure issues, interested parties, and timing.
6. The Ombudsman sends the report to the Prison Service, the Coroner, the family of the deceased, and any other persons identified by the Coroner as properly interested persons. At this stage, the report will include disclosable background documents.
7. If necessary in the light of any further information or representations (for example, if significant new evidence emerges at the inquest), the Ombudsman may review the report, make further enquiries, and complete a revised report. If necessary, the revised report goes through steps 2, 3 and 4.
8. The Ombudsman issues a proposed published report to the parties at step 6, the Inspectorate of Prisons and the Minister for Justice (or appropriate representative).

The proposed published report will not include background documents. The proposed published report will be anonymised so as to exclude the names of individuals (although as far as possible with regard to legal obligations of privacy and data protection, job titles and names of establishments will be retained). Other sensitive information in the report may need to be removed or summarised before the report is published. The Ombudsman notifies the recipients of the intention to publish the report on the Ombudsman's website after 28 days, subject to any objections they may make. If the proposed published report is to be issued before the inquest, the Ombudsman will seek the consent of the Coroner to do so.

9. The Ombudsman publishes the report on the website. (Hard copies will be available on request.) If objections are made to publication, the Ombudsman will decide whether full, limited or no publication should proceed, seeking legal advice if necessary.
10. Where the Prison Service has produced a response to recommendations which has not been included in the report, the Ombudsman may, after consulting the Service as to its suitability, append that to the report at any stage.
11. The Ombudsman may present selected summaries from the year's reports in the Ombudsman's Annual Report to the Minister for Justice. The Ombudsman may also publish material from published reports in other reports.
12. If the Ombudsman considers that the public interest so requires, the Ombudsman may make a special report to the Minister for Justice. In that case, steps 8 to 11 may be modified.
13. Any part of the procedure may be modified to take account of the needs of the inquest and of any criminal investigation/proceedings.
14. The Ombudsman will have discretion to modify the procedure to suit the special needs of particular cases.