



The
Prisoner
Ombudsman
for Northern Ireland

insideissues

INDEPENDENT, IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION



Who Are We?

Our phone number if you need assistance with any of your cases is 0800 783 6317

Prisoner Ombudsman
Brian Coulter

**Chief Administrative
Operations Officer**
David McCall

Senior Investigator
Paul Bullick

Investigators
Karen McAfee
Geraldine Lennon
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MESSAGE TO PRISONERS FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

“OMBUDSMAN’S COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATIONS NOW FASTER”

This issue of Inside Issues is important because it responds to the findings of my recent prisoner survey on access to my Office and to the complaints service which I offer.

The Prisoner Survey is reported on in summary in this issue but I want to make clear my determination to ensure that all prisoners are clear both **about their right to complain** to myself and **about how to do so**.

It remains the case that the Prison Service Internal Complaints Process should be used before referring a complaint to me. I am independent of the Prison Service and although I am not an advocate for prisoners I will always initiate a full impartial investigation of any complaint referred to me. Prisoners complaining will always receive a report of my investigation including my findings.

The good news is that I am now able to respond to complaints much faster than before.

If you are in any doubt either about the Prison Service Complaints process or about my service use the FREEPHONE 0800 783 6317 and my staff will be pleased to provide advice to you.

A REVIEW OF THE USE OF PASSIVE DRUGS DOGS BY NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE

I had agreed in the previous Inside Issues to provide you with an update on my findings after carrying out a detailed Review of the use for Passive Drugs Dogs. On 1 June 2006 the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) requested that I carry out an independent Review of the use of Passive Drugs Dogs. It was essential that the approach to this Review demonstrated the impartiality and independence which is central to my work as Prisoner Ombudsman.

The aims of the Review were to:

- Establish the use made by NIPS of Passive Drugs Dogs at all prisons and the Young Offender Centre in Northern Ireland including arrangements for the training of dogs and their handlers.
- Consider the arrangements for monitoring of the dogs and handlers' performance and training, including record keeping.
- Report on trends emerging from an analysis of data in relation to performance together with a comparative assessment of good practice elsewhere.
- Examine whether any change in operational methods, policy and practice or management arrangements would improve the use of Passive Drugs Dogs by NIPS.
- Establish whether there is evidence to support allegations that an indication on any particular visitor by a Passive Drugs Dog has been contrived in some way either by NIPS management or by an individual member of NIPS staff to exclude a particular visitor from being granted an "Open Visit".

As part of the Review, site visits were carried out to a broad range of establishments and other organisations that make use of Passive Drugs Dogs. I also consulted with a wide range of interested parties to include prison and other service provider groups, prisoners and prisoner representative groups. It was important to invite submissions from these interested parties and for these to be considered as part of the overall Review. My Review Team also carried out extensive analysis of Prison Service Dog Section Records, Training documentation for dog and handler, Licensing documentation, Medical and Vet records, Validation checks and records held on a computer database of all dogs and all positive indications by the dogs on visitors and prisoners within the prison.

It was also necessary to obtain records held on drug finds throughout prisons in Northern Ireland to include trends of drug use and type. My team examined positive indications on prison visitors to identify if there was evidence of equal treatment with regard to religious make up or community background. As part of this analysis I was also interested to establish the rates of positive indications on 'Separated Prisoners' held at Maghaberry Prison.

At the time of writing I have just published the full report on my Review. In general I concluded that Passive Drugs Dogs play an important role in protecting prisons from antisocial and criminal behaviour. I believe the use of Passive Drugs Dogs by NIPS, assisted by the various other measures in place certainly contribute to the overall battle against prohibited drugs in our community. I did however make a total of 20 recommendations all of which are aimed to assist the Northern Ireland Prison Service in the proper and efficient use of Passive Drugs Dogs and in the overall battle against the significant drug problem within prisons in Northern Ireland.



How does the Prisoner Ombudsman System Work?

Whatever your complaint is about, you should use the Prison Service complaints system first to try and deal with the problem.

If after exhausting the internal prison complaints' system you are still not happy and think that you have been dealt with unfairly, you can complain to the Prisoner Ombudsman. You must do this within 30 days of getting a final reply from the Prison Service.

- Talk to staff on the wing and see if they can sort the matter informally;
- If they can't help, make a formal complaint through the Prison Service internal complaints process;
- If you are not satisfied with the answer, you can write to me.

The Ombudsman will not normally investigate a complaint before you have had a final reply to your complaint, but if you have not had a response from the Prison Service within 6 weeks, you can complain to us.

To make an application to the Prisoner Ombudsman, you should write to us or fill out an application form. These should be readily available in your Wing/House. If you have any difficulties with this you can phone us using the Freephone number 0800 783 6317.

When you send your application to us, we will decide whether we are able to investigate your complaint. We will tell you if you need to pursue your complaint further with the Prison Service. If appropriate we will begin an investigation.

A Prisoner Ombudsman investigator will look carefully at all the facts and will report to the Ombudsman. They may:

- try to seek a local resolution to your complaint; or
- write a letter or short report; or
- draft a longer report that will be sent to the Prison Service for comment.

Once we have their comments to the longer report we will send the draft to you. You will be given the opportunity to comment on the report at this stage. Once everyone has seen the report, the Ombudsman will formally approve it and make recommendations if appropriate. Where the Ombudsman makes recommendations, he will also then follow up and check that these have been acted on.

THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

STAGE 1

Complaint to staff
Not satisfied

STAGE 2

Complaint to staff
Not satisfied

STAGE 3

Complaint to staff
Not satisfied

Complaint to Prisoner Ombudsman
for Northern Ireland

CASE EXAMPLES

EXAMPLES OF SOME RECENT
INVESTIGATIONS INTO COMPLAINTS

“SO YOU DON’T THINK MAKING A COMPLAINT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE?”

I had discussed in the previous Inside Issues my concerns around the reduction in complaints received from prisoners. To that end I considered it important to communicate some of the cases where I have upheld complaints for prisoners and made recommendations to the Prison Service. I have selected a few more recent examples to illustrate how making a complaint to the Ombudsman can make a difference.

EXAMPLE 1 - LEGAL PRIVILEGE

MR H’S COMPLAINT RELATED to the confiscation of legal papers prior to his attendance at a meeting with his solicitor through the Video Link. Mr H also complained that his Internal Complaint Form relating to this incident was missing.

My Investigator visited Mr H to clarify his complaint. Mr H stated:

“I was called for a legal visit and I put my legal papers in an envelope - signed SO 5.3.05. I went through 2 search boxes and I handed the legal envelope over. One officer queried the envelope and took it off me. I went to the VCR room and had a video link with my solicitor and told the solicitor what happened. They had no right to take it off me. I went back through the search box and I asked why he didn’t let me hold on to the legal document for my interview with the solicitor and his reply was “it was only a video link” and he was aggressive and abusive towards me. I can’t remember the name of the officer. I got my papers back later that day. My complaint forms also disappeared.”

In my consideration of this complaint, I examined Northern Ireland Prison Service Standing Orders in particular, **5.3.5 - Legal and Privileged Correspondence which states:**

“Correspondence between a prisoner and his or her legal advisor or any of the statutory bodies... is privileged and shall be treated as private and confidential provided the envelope is clearly marked ‘Legal Correspondence’ where it contains correspondence between a prisoner and a legal advisor ...”.

“Where a governor believes that any envelope marked either ‘Legal Correspondence’ or ‘Privileged Correspondence’ contains material to which legal privilege does not attach or which does not relate to the function of one of the statutory bodies, he may direct that it be opened, in the presence of the prisoner where reasonably practicable and examined by staff to the extent necessary to ascertain whether it should be properly afforded confidentiality. Where an

envelope is opened in accordance with the order, the correspondence shall be withheld from the prisoner on the direction of the Director of Operations or his authorised representative”.

I also took into account the Prison and Young Offenders Centres Rules (Northern Ireland) 1995

72 - Correspondence in connection with legal matters:

- (1) A prisoner who is a party to any legal proceedings may correspond with his legal adviser or any court, national or international, in connection with those proceedings.
- (2) A prisoner may correspond with a solicitor for the purpose of obtaining legal advice concerning any matter in relation to which he may become a party to legal proceedings or for the purpose of instructing the solicitor to issue proceedings, or to allow him to conduct any legal business.
- (3) A prisoner shall on request be provided with any writing materials necessary for the purpose of paragraph (1).
- (4) No letter to which this rule applies shall be opened by the governor unless he has reason to believe that it contains matter not related to actual or potential legal proceedings or other legal business.
- (5) Subject to any directions given in the particular case by the Secretary of State, a registered medical practitioner selected by or on behalf of a prisoner to whom paragraph (1) applies shall be afforded reasonable facilities for examining him in connection with the proceedings and may do so out of hearing but in the sight of an officer.

In my consideration of this complaint, and in the absence of his Internal Complaint Forms, I accepted that the envelope which Mr H was carrying to the Video Link meeting with his solicitor did, in fact, contain 'legal papers'. NIPS did not dispute this. Unfortunately I was unable to corroborate exactly what happened in the Search Box area that day, other than to confirm that the papers that Mr H had in his possession for the Video Link meeting with his solicitor were, indeed, confiscated, even if only temporarily.

Nonetheless, I accepted that this may have placed Mr H in a disadvantaged position as he had no longer any notes or papers to refer to in the Video Link meeting with his solicitor. I concluded, in line with Prison Service Standing Order 5.3.5 and Prison Rule 72, that Mr H should have been afforded the opportunity to retain his legal papers on 20 December 2006 for the Video Link meeting with his solicitor. I upheld this aspect of Mr H's complaint. I also included the following recommendation.

I recommend that the Prison Service apologises to Mr H for the temporary confiscation of his legal papers in the Search Box area whilst he was on his way to a Video Link meeting with his solicitor.

In relation to the missing Internal Complaint Form my Investigating Officer examined and copied the register from the Residential House. This indicated that it had been returned to Mr H following a response from NIPS at Stage Three. However, Mr H stated that he never received the Complaint Form following Stage Three. I was

unable to make a conclusion either way about whether Mr H did or did not receive his Internal Complaint Form following Stage Three. What I could be certain of is the fact that the Residential House did not hold copies of any responses to Mr H's complaint, other than what was recorded on the Internal Complaints Register. In accordance with Prison Rule 79D, it is the responsibility of "all those who deal with a complaint" on behalf of the Prison Service to "keep an appropriate record of the completed complaint form, the response to the complaint and the investigation of the complaint". I regard the use of the Internal Complaints Register as an appropriate record of the whereabouts of the completed Internal Complaint Form. However, I did not regard it as an appropriate record of the actual response to the complaint or the action taken or outcome of the investigation of that complaint.

I concluded that on this occasion the Prison Service has not acted appropriately in compliance with the complaint recording requirements set out in Prison Rule 79D. and for that reason I also upheld this aspect of Mr H's complaint. I made the following recommendation.

I recommend that the Prison Service reinforces the need for staff, through an Instruction or Notice, to comply with Prison Rule 79D to ensure they keep "an appropriate record of the completed complaint form, the response to the complaint and the investigation of the complaint".

EXAMPLE 2 - WHAT NOT TO WEAR

MR X WROTE TO MY OFFICE stating that he wished to be given an explanation as to why his son was asked to remove his top - a "Henley" brand which he did not consider to be sports top. Mr X also stated that his son had worn the top on a previous occasion and had gained access to the prison.

The Prison Service responded to Mr X's complaint by stating that staff in the visits area deemed the top to be a sports top and explained that where there is doubt as to whether or not a top is considered to be a sports top they will err on the side of caution and ask the visitor to change the top or leave. The Prison Service also referred to Notice to Prisoners 4/05 issued on 15/3/05 which states "any visitor wearing any form of sports team clothing and regalia (eg: Soccer, Rugby and Gaelic) will not be allowed to enter the prison".

My Investigating Officer met with Mr X to discuss the complaint. During the meeting Mr X showed my Investigating Officer a photo of his son wearing the top and the style was identified on a printout of the latest "Henley" clothing range which my Investigating Officer had obtained from the internet. The top was made from grey and pale yellow striped sweat material, with the "Henley" logo across the chest area and a hood. My Investigating Officer did explain to Mr X that under current instructions his son would now not be permitted into the prison wearing the top as it had a hood. Notice to Prisoners 8/07 "Clothing not permitted in visits" would apply where it states that "With effect from Monday 12 February 2007

the wearing of hoodie type clothing, or any form of cap/ hat by visitors aged 11 and over will not be permitted in the visits area".

I believe the restriction of wearing sports tops and tops with hoods is reflective of normal society, where increasingly decisions are being taken to restrict the wearing of sports tops and hooded tops in social and public places such as recreation complexes and public houses.

In my consideration of this complaint I understood that Mr X's son did not consider his garment a sports top especially as he had previously gained access when wearing it. I also established from my investigations that Mr X's son proceeded to the visit bare chested wearing a relative's jacket. I can fully appreciate how embarrassing this could be and I hope it did not detract from his visit. I took the view, having seen similar Henley tops, that a commonsense assessment of what the garment represented should have led prison staff to the conclusion that it could not be identified with any of the sporting teams or bodies which could cause offence to others within the Prison. I therefore upheld Mr X's complaint and made the following recommendations:

The Northern Ireland Prison Service should forward a written apology to your son for the confusion and embarrassment this incident caused him.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service should ensure staff working in visits area on a regular or temporary basis are clearly advised and regularly updated on current clothing restrictions within the prison visits area.

EXAMPLE 3 - CELL SEARCHING

MR N COMPLAINED to me about the confiscation of items following a search of his cell by the Standby Search Team. Mr N submitted Stage One of his Internal Complaint Form to the Prison Service on 25 May 2007. In his complaint he stated that during a search of his staff had removed 2 sheets of plywood and 1 sheet of hardboard which he had made into pen, video, paint and CD holders. The prisoner stated that his cell had been searched on previous occasions and that these items had not been removed.

An Officer of the Standby Search Team replied to Mr N advising that the items had been removed because they were made from his cell furniture.

Mr N proceeded to Stage Two and Three of the Internal Complaints Process stating that this was not the case and that the items had been made from plywood purchased in the tuck-shop. Mr N also requested that these items be shown to a Governor for clarification and advised that he had never damaged cell furniture.

The Prison Service replied to Mr N stating that they had confirmed that he bought plywood from the tuck-shop, however this had no relevance to the fact that the item removed was made from his cell furniture. Mr N advised at this stage that the item had been destroyed due to the fact it contained no handicraft material.

The Prison Service also replied at Stage Three stating: "I have spoken to the staff involved... I am happy that this matter has been investigated. Members of the Search Team behave in a professional manner. I have nothing further to add".

Mr N subsequently referred his complaint to me as he remained unsatisfied with the replies provided to him by the Prison Service. I established that the confiscated items were two rectangular 'desk ties', each consisting of three square holders, which he kept on top of his cell table to store a range of small items. All relevant records were retrieved from the Prison Service to include the tuckshop purchase records for Mr N. The records clearly showed that Mr N had purchased "1 sheet of plywood 2 x 2 square" at a cost of £3.30. Also retrieved were all the records from the Standby Search Team for the cell searches carried out on that day. The records showed that "shelving" was confiscated from the cell where Mr N resided.

My Investigating Officer inspected Mr N's cell and observed that everything in the cell appeared to be old cell furniture and none, particularly the cell locker base, appeared to have been replaced.

The Standby Search Team who dealt with Mr N's complaint at Stage Three were asked for further information on this case. They advised that the matter had been fully investigated and had made reference to this in the reply to Mr N at Stage Three. The Trades and Stores Departments in Maghaberry Prison were also contacted to establish if any repairs had been made or replacement furniture ordered for Mr N's cell. It was confirmed from records that no cell furniture was repaired or replaced in Mr N's cell.

I found the following Standing Orders relevant to Mr N's complaint:

Northern Ireland Prison Service Standing Orders

4.8 - Cell Craft Activities

4.9 - Personal Possessions

In particular I took cognisance of Standing Order 4.8 (d) relating to cell craft activities. It states: "the use of any material belonging to the prison is expressly forbidden. Such articles will be confiscated and disciplinary action may be taken against offenders". It was clear from this investigation and, in particular, the comments made throughout the Internal Complaint Process, that the Standby Search Team used Standing Order 4.8 (d) as the sole basis for their decision to confiscate the 'box ties' in Mr N's cell.

I also took cognisance of another reference in Standing Order 4.8: "The Governor may impose such conditions on the manner in which the cell craft is undertaken and on the nature of the final product, as he thinks necessary in the interests of the security, good order or discipline of the prison". I believe that the words "security, good order or discipline of the prison" are the paramount determining factors when making a decision as to whether a prisoner can retain a finished article in his cell, which he had made from cell craft material.

I asked myself two questions in this case, which are directly relevant to the Standing Orders I have quoted above:

Were the 'box ties' actually made from Mr N's cell furniture, as the Standby Search Team had repeatedly reported; and

Could the 'box ties' be viewed as compromising the "security, good order or discipline of the prison".

Due to the fact the confiscated items were immediately destroyed I was unable to prove or disprove whether or not the desk ties were made from cell furniture. However the weight of the evidence available supported the fact that Mr N made his 'box ties' from the plywood he purchased from the tuck shop and not from 'cell furniture. I also could not comprehend how anyone could view that having a small number of 'box ties', such as Mr N had, would, in any way, breach the conditions in Standing Order 4.8, namely that they would compromise the "security, good order or discipline of the prison".

Furthermore, I considered that the Prison Service had failed to carry out a proper investigation to establish the facts as part of the Internal Complaint Process.

I therefore upheld Mr N's complaint and included recommendations for the Prison Service to ensure that items confiscated by the Standby Search Team should not be immediately destroyed and to ensure thorough investigation of all prisoner internal complaints.

EXAMPLE 4 - PAPER BACK BOOKS

MR K WROTE TO MY OFFICE asking me to consider the decision by the Prison Service not to allow visitors to leave books for prisoners at the Visitors' Reception area. Mr K also highlighted the increasing charges associated with posting books into the prison.

I was firstly interested in establishing, from a visitor's perspective, what information is in the public domain advising which items a visitor could leave in Visitors' Reception for onward transmission to a prisoner. My first enquiry was to the Prison Service website. Although there was a substantial amount of information for visitors on the website, including details of visiting times and the ability to book a visit, I was disappointed that there was no specific information about what a visitor could leave at Visitors' Reception for a prisoner.

In consideration of the complaint my Investigating Officer contacted all the relevant personnel in Visitors' Reception who play a part in the supply chain for a prisoner receiving items into the prison. My investigation examined the current procedures in place and the operation of those procedures. I took cognisance of the Notices for Visitors displayed in the Visitors' Reception area, particularly Notice 08/07 which states: "With effect from 01 August 2007 clothing parcels will only be accepted for prisoners from their visitors".

My Investigating Officer also retrieved the following instructions relevant to this investigation:

Notice to Prisoners 65/04: which lists the clothing allowance for each prisoner, including the maximum permitted value, and a description for each item. This list also shows some additional items, including watches and jewellery, allowed in with the express permission of a Governor by way of request docket.

Governor's Order 13-1 issued on 7 September 2005: Letters and Parcels Entering the Prison (see Annex D) which outlines the items of clothing not allowed to be handed in at Visitors' Reception.

Notice to Staff 61/07 issued on 31 May 2007: (see Annex E) which advises staff that the prisoner clothing store was moved from the main Reception area to the Visitors' Reception area on 7 May 2007.

During a walk-through of the Visitors' Reception process my Investigating Officer noted the 'post box' which was referred to in this complaint. This is a square style post box, about 1 foot square, sitting on the floor of the Visitor's Reception area, with a smaller than normal post slot. My Investigating Officer confirmed from staff that this 'post box' was only designed to accept letters no wider than about one half inch. A normal paper back book would not fit into the post slot. I also confirmed that although the odd newspaper usually got through for onward transmission to the letter censors and then the prisoner, books are not allowed to be handed in at the Visitors' Reception area. The only alternative for visitors is to use the external Royal Mail service to post books into prisoners.

I can fully understand the security reasons as to why the decision to stop visitors bringing food parcels in for prisoners was taken. I can also appreciate why electronic storage media, such as CDs, is not allowed. However, I could not understand the reasoning behind refusing paperback books to be accepted at Visitors' Reception. It was encouraging to note that the staff spoken to in the course of this investigation would concur with my point of view. I took into account that many families of prisoners have to cope with limited financial resources and that the cost of posting items into prison places an additional and avoidable burden on them. I therefore concluded that visitors should be allowed to hand deliver paperback books at Visitors' Reception, in addition to the normal clothing parcels. I upheld Mr K's complaint and made the following recommendation:

I recommend the Prison Service should allow visitors to hand deliver paperback books at Visitors' Reception for onward transmission via the Letter Censors to their respective prisoner. Attached to this recommendation I suggest an allowance of 1 paper back book per visit. This allowance should be reviewed in six months with a view to increasing the allowance to 4 books per visit.

EXAMPLE 5 - PROPERTY AND CASH

IN HIS COMPLAINT MR G STATED that when he was transferred from a prison in England he was told he could not take all his property with him due to airline weight limit restrictions. It was agreed that his remaining property would be sent on at a later date. Unfortunately there was some confusion over who was responsible for the cost of sending the remaining property and this caused a delay. The Northern Ireland Prison Service agreed to meet the cost and three parcels containing Mr G's property were sent from England. Mr G said when his property arrived at Maghaberry Prison some items were missing and he asked for the property to be found or replaced.

My investigator visited the Reception in Maghaberry Prison to obtain a copy of Mr G's property card, however despite several searches

by staff Mr G's property card could not be located. Its whereabouts remain a mystery. A duplicate property card was produced, however this did not help in establishing what property Mr G brought with him to Maghaberry Prison from England. My investigator corresponded with the prison in England in an effort to locate a property card for Mr G. It was confirmed at this stage that all such records usually accompany the prisoner on transfer. However a copy of the Reception Property Book was confirming that Mr G signed for two pairs of trainers.

My investigator remained in communication with the prison in England where they managed to locate a list of items belonging to Mr G in storage. My investigator then wrote to the Governor outlining the circumstances and arranged that the property be released and forwarded to Mr G at Maghaberry Prison. My Investigator met again with Mr G at which point he advised that he was still missing some items of clothing.

When Mr G transferred from England to Maghaberry a property card should have been created listing all the property he brought with him. However despite several searches by staff in Maghaberry Reception the original property card could not be found. I therefore had no way of establishing what property Mr G brought with him. However, based on the previous detailed information provided by Mr G which I was able to corroborate with the English Prison Service I concluded that Mr G did have the missing items while in England. Also, as Mr G's property card was misplaced in Maghaberry I believed the Northern Ireland Prison Service should consider reimbursement for the missing items of clothing.

I upheld this complaint and recommended Mr G be compensated for the items of missing clothing. I also made a recommendation for the Northern Ireland Prison Service to exercise the necessary diligence with regard to the completion and retention of prisoner's property records.



PRISONER SURVEY

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM YOU?

IN MY LAST EDITION OF 'INSIDE ISSUES' I ASKED YOU TO COMPLETE A SURVEY TO HELP MY OFFICE GATHER INFORMATION ON HOW WE CAN IMPROVE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF AND ACCESSIBILITY TO OUR SERVICES. I AM NOW PLEASED TO REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THIS SURVEY.

Of the total responses 95% were received from male prisoners and 5% from female prisoners. In addition 71% of respondents were aged between 30-59, 19% aged between 21-29 with 5% aged between 18-20 and 5% aged 60 years or over.

The majority of respondents (71%) were housed at Maghaberry Prison with a further 14% being from 'Separated Accommodation' at Maghaberry Prison. The remaining 15% of respondents were spread evenly from Hydebank Wood Female Prison, Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and Magilligan Prison.

43% of respondents had submitted a complaint to my office. With regard to the total number of respondents who did not complain to my office I can confirm that;

- 10% were not aware of the role of the Ombudsman;

- 10% reported that they did not think it was worthwhile complaining to the Ombudsman;
- 17% Reported that they did not know how to complain to the Ombudsman or would need help in doing so;
- 25% did not have access to Ombudsman material;
- 38% felt that they did not have any reason to complain to the Ombudsman, with either the Prison Service resolving the complaint internally or not having a complaint at all.

Of those who had submitted a complaint 63% reported they would use the services of the Prisoner Ombudsman again, 26% said they would not and 11% reported that they were unsure.

On reflecting on some of the outcomes of this survey it is clear that we need to address some of the issues highlighted. As part of our communication strategy fresh information packs about the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office are to be provided to the Prison Service for distribution to all new prisoners during induction. We are also in the process of designing information for prisoners with special needs to include Foreign Nationals, Young Offenders and those with literacy problems or learning difficulties. I also believe it is important for my investigators on occasions to 'walk around' prison landings to allow prisoners ad hoc opportunities to discuss issues informally or bring to their attention matters of concern without always in the first instance having to submit a formal complaint.



PLEASE CONTINUE TO TELL US

The Prisoner Ombudsman is always interested to find out how accessible his service is to prisoners. For this reason please take the time to contact us using our Free Phone number **0800 783 6317** to tell us:

1. DO YOU HAVE EASY ACCESS TO PRISONER INTERNAL COMPLAINT FORMS ON THE LANDINGS?
2. DO YOU HAVE EASY ACCESS TO PRISONER OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT FORMS ON THE LANDINGS?
3. CAN YOU SEE ANY PRISONER OMBUDSMAN POSTERS OR INFORMATION LEAFLETS DISPLAYED ON THE LANDINGS?
4. IS THE PRISONER OMBUDSMAN FREE PHONE TELEPHONE NUMBER **0800 783 6317** DISPLAYED NEAR THE TELEPHONE YOU USE?

OVER TO YOU...

Contributions, comments and suggestions for future issues are always welcome. If you have any that you would like us to consider before the next issue please write by the end of April (marking your envelope 'Inside Issues') to:

David McCall (Editor), The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 22nd Floor, Windsor House, Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7FT

Making A Complaint to the Northern Ireland Prisoner Ombudsman

The Prisoner Ombudsman, Brian Coulter is independent of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). His job is to consider complaints made by prisoners who remain unhappy with the answer they have received from the Prison Service.

He can help all prisoners (including former prisoners, in certain circumstances) sentenced and remand. Men and women, adults and young prisoners can complain to him. Before the Ombudsman can investigate a complaint, a prisoner must have exhausted the Prison

Service 3 stage internal complaints process. The Prisoner Ombudsman will take a fresh look at the complaint and decide whether it has been dealt with fairly. If the Ombudsman upholds the complaint, he will make recommendations to the Prison Service to put things right.



The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

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