

Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

Business Plan 2017-18

The strategic aims and objectives of the Prisoner Ombudsman are described in the 2014-17 Corporate Plan. A fresh Corporate Plan for 2018-21 will be developed by the new Ombudsman and in the meantime specific targets for 2017-18 are set out below. The intention is that they will be completed by the end of the financial year.

1. Statutory Footing

1. Subject to legislation being in place, identify issues to be addressed in the underpinning Regulations; and update Terms of Reference for investigating deaths in custody and complaints;
2. Contribute to the Department of Justice Statutory Footing Working Group;
3. Address staffing implications for current PO staff;
4. Deliver all aspects of the new offices remit as provided by statutory footing, including name change, rebranding and new website;
5. Communicate and promote the new office of Prison Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

2. Complaints and Death in Custody Investigations

1. Produce investigation reports which are evidence-based and impartial;
2. Ensure full compliance with Complaints and Death in Custody (DiC) Terms of Reference by Investigators;
3. Adhere to timescales (nine months to factual accuracy stage for draft DiC reports, and 18 weeks from complaint allocation to IO) in all investigations;
4. Ensure an Investigator is on site within four hours of being notified about a death in custody;
5. Conduct dip samples in each prison of accepted recommendations made in complaint reports;
6. Conduct dip-samples in each prison of complaints that were finalised at internal NIPS Stages 1 & 2;
7. Assess implementation of accepted Death in Custody recommendations in conjunction with other oversight bodies e.g. Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB), Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI), Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA);

8. Maximise accessibility for everyone who has contact with our services. Ensure low user groups - such as foreign national prisoners, young offenders and visitors - have opportunities to understand the role of the Prisoner Ombudsman.

3. Support for NIPS Complaints Handling

1. Assist the NIPS to improve local resolution of complaints. In 2017-18 this will include comparison against previous years;
2. Contribute to relevant consultation exercises, conferences and other events to share the findings of Complaint and DiC investigations.

4. Support for NIPS & SEHSCT Partnership Working

1. Meet monthly with the Director of the Reducing Offending Division, and quarterly with prison governors to share feedback from investigations and other matters of mutual interest;
2. Meet regularly with South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) senior managers to share feedback from DiC investigations and other matters of mutual interest;
3. Meet regularly with other stakeholders including CJI, Independent Monitoring Boards, the Coroner, RQIA, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman to share feedback from investigations and other matters of mutual interest;
4. Contribute to training of NIPS and SEHSCT staff if requested.

5. Corporate Affairs

1. Prepare a 2018-2021 Corporate Business Plan
2. Adapt to budgetary reductions and associated changes;
3. Prioritise investigative capacity in event of further staff reductions;
4. Communicate implications of staff changes clearly to all stakeholders;
5. Publish annual report by September 2018;
6. Issue two editions of "Inside Issues" magazine to prisoners.