



2021-22 BUSINESS PLAN

Foreword

This Business Plan outlines the key activities and priorities for the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in 2021-22. It 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 collation of data to identify any thematic issues arising from those investigations. It also aims to develop a stronger learning environment that will better support the work of the office and provide clearer direction for staff as well as improved relationships with prisoners and partners.

The impact of Covid-19 continues to be felt and key priorities for the forthcoming year will remain business recovery and reducing backlogs. Although the pandemic has impacted on the way the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office traditionally conducts its business, we have developed new ways of working to ensure that we continue to deliver an independent quality service to stakeholders. We will continue to review business recovery plans against central and public health guidance to ensure longer term business recovery can be achieved.

I am mindful of the commitment given to the Justice Minister to reduce the level of outstanding complaints to just 30 by 31 December 2021. This will be the overriding focus for my office over the course of the 2021-22 year.

Additional plans for the period include the following key areas of work:

- ▶ **Tackling and reducing outstanding Death in Custody investigations**
- ▶ **Updating Standards for Complaints and Deaths in Custody to best shape how we deliver business**
- ▶ **Staff Development and Training, including the attainment of a professional qualification in investigative practice for Investigation Officers**
- ▶ **Promoting a culture of continuous learning for staff and external partners**
- ▶ **Commissioning a review on the adequacy of internal workflow processes and staff resources**
- ▶ **Preparing for Statutory Footing**

Another key area of work envisaged for the 2021-22 business year had been the implementation of a new electronic case management system, however in giving priority to reducing backlogs, plans to roll out this project have been deferred until 2022-23.

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 displayed during unprecedented times but also on the professionalism and support they continue to display despite the ongoing challenges faced as a result of Covid-19.

Dr Lesley Carroll
Prisoner Ombudsman

The Prisoner Ombudsman's Office

The Prisoner Ombudsman investigates complaints submitted to the Office by individual prisoners, visitors and, in certain circumstances, former prisoners who have failed to resolve their problem or concern through the Prison Service Internal Complaints Process. The Prison Service internal complaints process has two stages and both stages must be completed before the prisoner, visitor or former prisoner, can bring their complaint to the Prisoner Ombudsman.

The Prisoner Ombudsman is also responsible for providing an independent and impartial investigation of deaths in prison custody in Northern Ireland. This includes the deaths of people shortly 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 prisoners.

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 Sponsor Department. Staff working in the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office are currently civil servants and are subject to NICS HR policy and guidance.

Strategic Context

The 2021/22 Business Plan is aligned to the four year Strategic Plan which sets out a commitment to carrying out investigations in a way that improves prisoners' lives by addressing ourselves to our mission: developing a learning environment in which we challenge others and ourselves to achieve improvement. A commitment and mission such as this 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

Progress on the procurement, development and rollout of a new case management system has been delayed and is not expected to commence before 2022. Consequently, the estimated capital costs of delivering this project will instead be bid for over the two financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24.

The table below shows the current resource budget allocation for 2021-22 for the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office much of which relates to salary costs. Any new or refreshed business needs will be appraised via the normal business case process and the affordability of such funded by the existing budget allocation or bid for via the normal monitoring round process. Funding pressures and/or easements will continue be identified at an early stage and appropriately reported in Monitoring Round returns.

PRISONER OMBUDSMAN APPROVED OPENING BUDGET POSITION FOR 2021/2022

NON RING-FENCED COSTS	£
Resource Pay Costs	747,000
Resource Non Pay Costs	63,000
TOTAL NON RING-FENCED COSTS	810,000

Resources

Staffing Resources

The office has been carrying a number of unfilled vacancies for some considerable time and this has adversely impacted on the delivery of core business activities. However, it is expected that the vacant Director of Operations (G7) and a Senior Investigations Officer (DP) posts will be filled substantively in the next number of months following separate recruitment exercises. In line with current NICS and Public Health Agency guidance, staff continue to deliver a blended mix of working from home and in the office.

As referred to earlier, a comprehensive review of the adequacy of staff resources and workflow processes is planned however this is not expected to commence until early 2022. 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 2021-22

A consultation process on the new Programme for Government Plan (PfG) took place during January to March 2021. 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 2021-22 Business Plan will be reviewed throughout the year and will be reported to the Sponsor Department quarterly.

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: IMPROVE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES	Business Objective: To conduct timely, thorough and proportionate investigations	
Actions		Indicators	Owner	Target
<p>Work with the Ombudsman and staff to agree and implement measures to address and reduce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The number of complaints awaiting allocation to 30 ▶ Reduce the number of outstanding Death in Custody Investigations not yet published 		<p>Measures to reduce complaints awaiting investigation to 30 implemented through the provision of overtime, additional hours and in-house assistance if required (overtime available Apl to Oct 2021 and again from Dec 2021)</p> <p>The appointment of a Senior Investigations Officer for the Death in Custody team (vacancy raised on iRecruit July 2021 and competition initiation meeting held in December 2021)</p> <p>Monthly monitoring by SMT (includes updates and action points)</p> <p>Revise and update ToRs for investigation of complaints and DiC to apply powers effectively</p>	Director of Ops and SIOs	<p>Complaints-December 2021</p> <p>DIC- 31 March 2022</p>
<p>Recruit a Director of Operations to deliver good governance, provide assurance to the Sponsor Branch and to demonstrate leadership and direction.</p>		<p>Temporary promotion arrangements in place pending substantive appointment (from June 2021)</p> <p>Consultation with NICS HR to commence recruitment process (tba)</p>	NICS HR and Prisoner Ombudsman	March 2022

Delivering the Plan

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: IMPROVE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES	Business Objective: To conduct timely, thorough and proportionate investigations	
Actions		Indicators	Owner	Target
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit 1 additional substantive Senior Investigations Officer Address the Death in Custody caseloads including reducing the overall caseload by 12 within a one year period 		<p>External Recruitment exercise commenced (July 2021)</p> <p>Complete 6 post-release death investigations (4 closed up to December 2021) Agreed format for publishing completed post release investigations</p> <p>Complete and finalise report /or finalise to publication stage 6 death in custody investigations (2 issued up to October 2021)</p> <p>Issue 4 Death in Custody investigations for factual accuracy (additional to 6 above) (2 issued up to November with a further 2 to issue in January 2022)</p> <p>Commission 2 clinical reviews (planned for January 2022)</p>	Ombudsman, Director of Ops and SIO	March 2022
<p>Improve the office structure by directing administrative tasks to the Admin Support Unit for action</p>		<p>Administrative tasks identified for reallocation</p> <p>Tasks allocated on a priority basis</p> <p>Targeted training delivered</p> <p>Oversight by Office Manager</p>	Office Manager and SIOs	December 2021

Delivering the Plan

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: IMPROVE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES	Business Objective: To conduct timely, thorough and proportionate investigations	
Actions		Indicators	Owner	Target
Develop a communications strategy for better reporting to partners, stakeholders, public and staff		<p>Supports strategic and business objectives</p> <p>Key stakeholders, appropriate communication channels and timeframes for the delivery/ receipt of information clearly identified</p> <p>Web-ex/Zoom technology used to improve direct communication with stakeholders</p> <p>Website updated to develop stakeholder awareness of current practices, performance results, published DiC reports and new initiatives</p> <p>Social media platforms used to establish and maintain stakeholder confidence in the Prisoner Ombudsman</p> <p>Two way communication flow during in-person meetings with interagency partners/ bereaved family members/solicitors and Sponsor Branch</p> <p>Inside Issues magazine issued to prisoners</p> <p>Learning Log maintained to assist staff</p> <p>Monthly SMT Meetings and Team Briefs</p> <p>Recovery period post-Covid to consider effectiveness of current promotional material for prisoners, e.g. at induction, on landings, at transfer, etc.</p>	Ombudsman and SMT	February 2022

Delivering the Plan

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: IMPROVE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES	Business Objective: To conduct timely, thorough and proportionate investigations	
Actions		Indicators	Owner	Target
Develop a strand within the Stakeholder Engagement plan that encourages staff to learn from stakeholders		<p>Supports strategic priorities for 2020-2024</p> <p>Enable staff to identify who key stakeholders are to support resolution of complaints and effective investigations</p> <p>Targeted information sessions with key stakeholders to learn more about they do</p> <p>Learning environment that puts evidence to work, promotes adaptability and encourages concerns to be raised</p> <p>Prepare for Statutory Footing</p>	Ombudsman and SMT	February 2022
Develop a digitisation strategy for technology roll out to support transparency and efficiency		<p>Improved access to the Prison Service Business Objectives on PRISM</p> <p>TRIM records compliant with DOJ retention and disposal requirements</p> <p>Time efficiency by use of up to date technology for written text/voice translation for upload to text</p> <p>Development of specification document for a new electronic case management system commenced</p>	Ombudsman and SMT	March 2022
Roll out of improved investigative processes flowing from standards and ToR review		<p>Complete revision of ToR for complaints</p> <p>Set of published standards for all investigations that promote best practice</p> <p>Learning from Exceptional Assessment Investigations Process (EAIP) gathered and recorded in Learning Log</p> <p>Staff feedback</p> <p>Return to normal business</p>	Ombudsman and SMT	March 2022

Delivering the Plan

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	Owner	Target
Compliance with all corporate, business planning, risk management, internal audit and other compliance & governance requirements		Strategic & business plans published Annual report published Internal audit and actions completed GDPR requirements in place Risk register	Director of Ops	March 2022
DPIA, ISA's, etc. updated.		Data Protection Officer appointed DPA/GDPR requirements met Protective Government Marking Scheme appropriately applied File retention and disposal schedules updated and agreed Information Sharing Agreements and Protocols updated and agreed Confidentiality maintained	Director of Ops / Office Manager	March 2022
Develop a strand within the Staff Engagement plan that promotes the independent work of the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office		Open information sessions with a range of stakeholders Staff presence in prison establishments more visible and accessible to improve prisoner understanding of complaint processes Investigator and other training to increase impartiality and professionalism	Ombudsman and SMT	March 2022
Regular meetings between the Prisoner Ombudsman and stakeholders to build on collaborative working		Monthly meetings with Director General of the Prison Service Quarterly meetings with Prison Service Governors, Trust, International Committee of the Red Cross, CJINI and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Annual meetings with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Coroners, NIACRO, NIPSO, Police Ombudsman, PBNI, RQIA and with DOJ Sponsor Branch	Ombudsman and SMT	Ongoing

Delivering the Plan

Programme for Government Outcome 7	Indicator 38	STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PREPARE FOR AND IMPLEMENT STATUTORY FOOTING	Business Objective 1: To achieve a Statutory Footing Workplan	
Actions		Indicators	Owner	Target
Agree a follow up plan of work required to ready the office for statutory footing i.e. build on the original review carried out in 2019 to ensure that earlier recommendations, new tasks and updated action plans are completed		G7 appointed to carry out follow up review (Dec 2021) Follow up review completed and updated action plans developed Time framed work plan agreed for action by SMT Investigation Officers undertaking professional qualification in investigative practice Review of workflow processes and office structure to be commissioned Review regulations as currently agreed in light of Venice Principles and any other pertinent issues	Ombudsman and SMT	March 2022

Delivering the Plan

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	Owner	Target
<p>Bring information from investigations, recommendations and phone call information together to form one evidence base to drive impact</p> <p>A new approach to recording recommendations / categories recorded against, etc.</p>		<p>Robust accessible data set categorised to inform public and internal discussions and bring trends to light</p> <p>New set of agreed recording categories</p> <p>Improved electronic record keeping including a new approach to recording and monitoring recommendations made</p> <p>Specification being developed for a new CMS that can store, connect, collect, interrogate and present data across a wide range of parameters</p> <p>House style formats introduced</p>	Ombudsman and SMT	March 2022
<p>Embed the learning approach into all office working and engagements</p>		<p>Training plans developed</p> <p>Learning circle approach in place with the Prison Service & Trusts i.e. interagency meetings</p> <p>Learning Log included as a standing agenda item for SMT and team meetings</p> <p>Quality assurance processes to be reviewed</p> <p>Team meetings as a forum to share knowledge</p> <p>Staff achievement of professional qualification in investigative practice</p>	Dir of Ops and SMT	March 2022

Organisation Chart At 31 October 2021

