

The Forum for Preventing Deaths in Custody

*A joined-up approach to learning lessons
and reducing avoidable deaths in
England and Wales*

***Stephen Shaw, Prisons and Probation
Ombudsman for England and Wales***

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's Office

Complaints handling –
Prison
Probation
Immigration

Death in custody investigations –
Natural causes
Accidents
Homicides
Self-inflicted

The Joint Committee on Human Rights

“The number of people dying in custody, particularly by their own hand, is extremely shocking and concerning. The number attempting suicide is on average twice that of those dying in custody, and the number carrying out incidents of self-harm should be a cause of huge concern.”

The extent of the problem

- Prisons – one self-inflicted death every four days
- Secure psychiatric facilities – 80 people die each year
- Police custody – 38 deaths in 12 months
- Offenders in the community – death rate double that of prisoners
- Immigration detention – death rate rising

Risk of suicide in prisons

- Previous history of self-harm
- History of mental illness/drug abuse
- First days/weeks in custody
- Detoxing from alcohol/illicit drugs
- Offending history
- Prison-related factors: clustering

Core membership of the Forum

- Senior representatives of the service agencies
- Senior representatives of the accountability agencies
- Other stakeholders: Coroners, NGOs

How will the Forum work?

- ToR, membership and work programme agreed
- Meets three times a year, but with much done in between
- Independent of Government but funded by Government
- No formal powers. Will effect change through support of Ministers and credibility of the Forum's membership

Some of the subject areas

- Information sharing
- Management of potentially violent detainees
- Good practice in investigations and statistical analysis
- Managing self-harm and learning from near deaths
- Engagement with families
- Peer support schemes
- Staff training
- Aspects of institutional culture

The Joint Committee on Human Rights

“... the issues surrounding deaths in custody are similar, regardless of whether they are being faced by our prisons, our hospitals, our police stations or our inquiry bodies. This applies to healthcare, physical or mental, risk assessment and management, dealing with violent behaviour, training staff, or devising satisfactory procedures for inquests.”

Further information

- www.preventingcustodydeaths.org.uk
- www.ppo.gov.uk

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