

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Leslie Moulden, a prisoner at HMP Northumberland, on 26 March 2022

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

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OUR VISION

To deliver high quality and timely independent investigations and work closely with partners to achieve tangible benefits for the safety and confidence of those in custody and under community supervision.

WHAT WE DO



WHAT WE VALUE



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Summary

1. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman aims to make a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and community supervision. One of the most important ways in which we work towards that aim is by carrying out independent investigations into deaths, due to any cause, of prisoners, young people in detention, residents of approved premises and detainees in immigration centres.
2. We carry out investigations to understand what happened and identify how the organisations whose actions we oversee can improve their work in the future.
3. Mr Leslie Moulden died in hospital of oesophageal cancer on 26 March 2022, while a prisoner at HMP Northumberland. He was 62 years old. We offer our condolences to Mr Moulden's family and friends.
4. The clinical reviewer concluded that the clinical care Mr Moulden received at Northumberland was equivalent to that which he could have expected to receive in the community.
5. We found no non-clinical issues of concern. We make no recommendations.

The Investigation Process

6. NHS England commissioned an independent clinical reviewer to review Mr Moulden's clinical care at HMP Northumberland.
7. The PPO investigator investigated the non-clinical issues relating to Mr Moulden's care, including Mr Moulden's location, the security arrangements for his hospital escorts, liaison with his family and whether compassionate release was considered.
8. The PPO family liaison officer wrote to Mr Moulden's next of kin, his daughter, to explain the investigation and to ask if she had any matters she wanted us to consider. She did not respond.
9. We shared our initial report with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). They identified one minor factual inaccuracy, which has been amended in this report.

Previous deaths at HMP Northumberland

10. Mr Moulden was the eleventh prisoner to die at Northumberland since March 2020. Of the previous deaths, six were from natural causes, three were self-inflicted and one was drug related.

Key Events

11. In January 2019, Mr Leslie Moulden was sentenced to 16 years in prison for drug offences. On 9 March 2020, he was moved to HMP Northumberland.
12. On 14 July, a prison GP saw Mr Moulden as he was having difficulty swallowing certain types of food. She increased his medication to reduce stomach acid and noted she would review him again in two weeks.
13. The next day, Mr Moulden told staff he had been coughing up blood and they made him an urgent appointment with a nurse. She arranged urgent blood tests. A prison GP reviewed the blood test results the next day. He noted they were normal and asked for them to be repeated in a week. He referred Mr Moulden for a chest X-ray.
14. On 17 July, Mr Moulden attended hospital for his chest X-ray. The hospital also carried out a procedure to examine his oesophagus (also called the gullet or food pipe, it connects the mouth to the stomach). The results showed that Mr Moulden was likely to have cancer. Mr Moulden discharged himself from hospital that evening. When he returned to Northumberland, he told staff he had been diagnosed with stomach cancer, did not have long left to live and would not be having any treatment.
15. In August, Mr Moulden agreed to attend a hospital appointment to discuss his treatment. He was formally diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus, and it was agreed that he would have a course of chemotherapy followed by surgery. He started chemotherapy treatment on 19 November.
16. Mr Moulden was given a pre-operative assessment appointment for 11 February 2021, but the prison healthcare department only received the appointment letter that morning. Mr Moulden already had a hospital appointment at another clinic at a different hospital, which he was taken to as scheduled. The pre-operative assessment appointment was rearranged for 17 February, which Mr Moulden attended.
17. On 26 February, Mr Moulden had surgery to remove some of the cancer in his oesophagus. He was discharged back to Northumberland on 6 April. The plan had been for him to be discharged to HMP Holme House, which has 24-hour healthcare, but Mr Moulden wanted to go back to Northumberland as it was easier for his family to visit him there.
18. Mr Moulden had a feeding tube in place and could eat a soft diet, which the prison kitchen provided. However, Mr Moulden struggled to eat much.
19. On 16 April, a prison GP sent Mr Moulden to hospital as he was dizzy, short of breath and had diarrhoea. He was admitted. On 26 April, a hospital consultant told Mr Moulden that further chemotherapy was not an option due to the progression of the cancer. He returned to Northumberland the same day.
20. On 4 June, Mr Moulden was admitted to hospital after his feeding tube had come out during the night while he was asleep. He was discharged on 1 July to HMP Holme House as he had lost a considerable amount of weight. Mr Moulden returned to Northumberland on 7 September, following a small improvement in his weight.

21. On 31 January 2022, a prison nurse completed observations on Mr Moulden, as he had been feeling unwell over the previous few days. She spoke with the prison GP, who agreed that Mr Moulden should be taken to hospital for further assessment. Mr Moulden was taken to hospital that morning and admitted.
22. On 1 February, a hospital consultant told Mr Moulden that he had widespread cancer and it was likely that he had less than three months to live.
23. On 10 February, the prison submitted an application for Mr Moulden's early release on compassionate grounds to the Public Protection Casework Section (PPCS) of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). PPCS refused the application due to security concerns.
24. Mr Moulden's condition continued to deteriorate while in hospital. On 22 March, the prison resubmitted Mr Moulden's application for release on compassionate grounds, with an updated statement from a hospital doctor saying that Mr Moulden likely had a few weeks left to live. This was not processed before he died.
25. Mr Moulden died in hospital on 26 March at 6.27am.

Post-mortem report

26. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Moulden died of bronchopneumonia caused by adenocarcinoma (cancer) of the oesophagus.

Louise Richards
Assistant Ombudsman

April 2023

Inquest

The inquest, held on 18 June 2025, concluded that Mr Moulden died of natural causes.

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