

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Independent investigation into the death of Mr Samuel Richards on 20 February 2025, following his release from HMP Elmley

A report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Third Floor, 10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf, London E14 4PU

Email: mail@ppo.gov.uk
Web: www.ppo.gov.uk

T | 020 7633 4100

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



© Crown copyright, 2025

This report is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

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. Since 6 September 2021, the PPO has investigated post-release deaths that occur within 14 days of the person's release from prison.
3. If my office is to best assist His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in ensuring the standard of care received by those within service remit is appropriate, our recommendations should be focused, evidenced and viable. This is especially the case if there is evidence of systemic failure.
4. Mr Samuel Richards died from multidrug toxicity on 20 February 2025, the day after his release from HMP Elmley. He was 43 years old. We offer our condolences to those who knew him.
5. We found that Mr Richards was offered appropriate support for his substance misuse issues while at Elmley and after his release.
6. We make no recommendations.

The Investigation Process

7. HMPPS notified us of Mr Richards' death on 24 February 2025.
8. The PPO investigator obtained copies of relevant extracts from Mr Richards' prison and probation records.
9. We informed HM Coroner for Mid Kent and Medway of the investigation. They gave us the results of the post-mortem examination. We have sent the Coroner a copy of this report.
10. The Ombudsman's office contacted Mr Richards' next of kin, his father, to explain the investigation and to ask if he had any matters he wanted us to consider. He did not respond.
11. We shared our initial report with HMPPS and the prison's healthcare provider, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. They pointed out a factual inaccuracy which has been amended in this report.

Background Information

HMP Elmley

12. HMP Elmley, located on the Isle of Sheppey, is a category B local prison which serves the courts of Kent. It holds both remand and convicted men, over the age of 18. It has six house blocks with a mixture of single and double occupancy cells. Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust is the primary healthcare services provider, and Change Grow Live provide psychosocial substance recovery services.

Probation Service

13. The Probation Service works with all individuals subject to custodial and community sentences. During a person's imprisonment, they oversee their sentence plan to assist in rehabilitation, prepare reports to advise the Parole Board and have links with local partnerships to which they refer people for resettlement services, where appropriate. Post-release, the Probation Service supervises people throughout their licence period and post-sentence supervision.

Key Events

Background

14. On 5 June 2023, Mr Samuel Richards was sentenced to a 12-month suspended sentence order (SSO) for assault and battery. On 10 November, after breaching the conditions of his SSO, a judge activated the SSO. Mr Richards was sent to HMP Elmley.
15. On 4 December, Mr Richards was released from Elmley under the End of Custody Supervised Licence (ESCL) scheme. The next day, his community offender manager (COM) initiated recall procedures after he breached his licence conditions. A warrant was issued for his arrest and on 26 December, Mr Richards was located and returned to Elmley.

Pre-release planning

16. When Mr Richards arrived at Elmley, he told a nurse that he was not dependent on drugs or alcohol, although he said he had taken crack cocaine a few days before. When asked, Mr Richards said he did not want to be referred for substance misuse support at that time (as he was awaiting the outcome of his upcoming court date).
17. On 3 January 2024, Mr Richards attended an initial substance misuse assessment with a recovery worker from Change Grow Live (CGL), the substance misuse service at Elmley. Mr Richards told the recovery worker he first started taking drugs when he was 14 years old and that five years ago, he started using heroin and crack cocaine. Mr Richards said that when in the community, he would drink alcohol daily. Mr Richards told the recovery worker that he would consider attending substance misuse support groups, however, he was unsure how long he would be in prison for as he was due in court the next day. When asked, Mr Richards said he did not want to be referred for substance misuse support at that time. However, Mr Richards said that he had been working with CGL in the community and would like support from them after release from prison.
18. The next day, Mr Richards attended court and was convicted of additional violent offences. He remained in prison while he awaited a date to be sentenced.
19. On 9 October, Mr Richards attended his sentencing hearing and was sentenced to 12 months in prison. Although he had already served the custodial element of this sentence, he remained in prison under recall procedures relating to a previous offence.
20. On 10 October, Mr Richards was released from Elmley.
21. On 7 November, Mr Richards was recalled to prison after breaching the conditions of his alcohol monitoring tag. He was returned to Elmley.
22. When Mr Richards arrived at Elmley, he told a nurse that he had relapsed into substance misuse on his release and had been using crack cocaine, heroin and alcohol. The nurse referred him to CGL who saw him for initial assessment later that day. A recovery worker and a GP assessed that he did not require a prescribed

drug or alcohol detoxification programme. However, they agreed to monitor him over the following five days, with a follow-up review scheduled for 13 November.

23. On 13 November, Mr Richards attended his follow-up assessment with a recovery worker. Mr Richards told his recovery worker that he would like help with his alcohol misuse and would like to attend an alcohol intervention programme. He said he would like to attend group work sessions and complete in-cell workbooks.
24. On 10 January 2025, staff suspected Mr Richards was under the influence of an illicit substance after he was found on the floor of his cell surrounded by vomit. Mr Richards denied taking or smoking any illicit substances. Staff placed him on a welfare log and a nurse said she would review him the next morning.
25. The next morning, Mr Richards told the nurse that there was a lot of 'Spice' (a type of psychoactive substance, PS) on his houseblock which he was struggling to resist. When asked, Mr Richards said he did not want support from CGL at Elmley but would like to engage with the community SMS service, Forward Trust, after his release. He was added to CGL's Connecting Communities service (who support prisoners prior to release and through to the community for up to three months after release).
26. On 24 January, a Connecting Communities recovery worker met with Mr Richards to complete his release plan. Mr Richards told the recovery worker that although he occasionally used PS in prison, he only used cocaine and alcohol in the community. Mr Richards said he would like to be referred to Forward Trust based in Canterbury for ongoing substance misuse support in the community. Staff subsequently actioned this.
27. As Mr Richards was due to be released from prison homeless, his COM completed a CAS3 housing referral (a scheme providing temporary accommodation and support to prison leavers at risk of homelessness) on 14 February. She also completed a duty to refer application (DTR - where certain public authorities must notify local authorities that a person who has engaged with them might be homeless or at risk of homelessness) to Canterbury City Council.
28. On 17 February, Mr Richards was accepted onto the CAS3 scheme. His COM was notified that temporary accommodation had been secured for him for a period of 84 days at an address in Westgate-on-Sea.

Release from HMP Elmley

29. On 19 February, Mr Richards' Connecting Communities recovery worker saw him prior to his release from prison. She gave him details of his appointment with Forward Trust for 12.00pm on 20 February along with the name of his recovery worker. Mr Richards was thankful for her help and said he was looking forward to being released and addressing his issues with alcohol.
30. At 2.30pm, Mr Richards attended his initial appointment at Canterbury Probation Office. His COM completed his induction, went through his post-sentence supervision requirements, and Mr Richards signed a copy to say that he understood them. Mr Richards' COM gave him the address of his temporary accommodation, reminded him of his Forward Trust appointment the next day, gave him a food bank

voucher, and issued his next probation appointment. She issued him with three separate travel warrants to ensure he could attend all three appointments.

31. At approximately 4.30pm, Mr Richards arrived at his temporary accommodation in Westgate-on-Sea where he collected his keys and completed his induction.
32. The next day, Mr Richards did not attend his Forward Trust appointment.

Circumstances of Mr Richards' death

33. On the afternoon of 20 February, Mr Richards met up with a friend in Canterbury. They attended an address where they purchased crack cocaine and heroin before returning to the friend's home address in Canterbury West. At approximately 7.00pm, the friend noticed that Mr Richards was having difficulty breathing and was grunting. Shortly afterwards, he became unresponsive, so his friend called the emergency services. At 7.27pm, paramedics arrived and started CPR but resuscitation attempts were unsuccessful, and they pronounced life extinct at 8.20pm.

Post-mortem report

34. The post-mortem report concluded that Mr Richards died from multidrug toxicity.

Findings

35. Mr Richards was offered appropriate support with his substance misuse issues while at Elmley. He was also appropriately referred to Forward Trust prior to his release so he had access to substance misuse support after release.
36. We are satisfied that Mr Richards' COM took appropriate measures to address his substance misuse following his release from prison, which included appropriate post-sentence supervision conditions. She reminded him of his upcoming appointment with Forward Trust and gave him a travel warrant to ensure he could attend. She had also arranged CAS3 accommodation for him.
37. We are satisfied that both the prison and probation services did all they could to manage the risks associated with Mr Richards' substance misuse.
38. We make no recommendations.
39. At the inquest, held on 30 July 2025, the Coroner concluded that Mr Richards' death was drug related.

Adrian Usher
Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

July 2025

**Prisons &
Probation**

Ombudsman
Independent Investigations

Third Floor, 10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf, London E14 4PU

Email: mail@ppo.gov.uk
Web: www.ppo.gov.uk

T | 020 7633 4100