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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SIX PRISON HOMICIDES IN ONE YEAR REFLECT UNACCEPTABLE LEVEL
OF PRISON VIOLENCE, SAYS OMBUDSMAN**

Homicides in prison are still rare but the number has increased, vividly illustrating the unacceptable level of violence in prisons in England and Wales, said Nigel Newcomen, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO). Today he published a bulletin on lessons that can be learned from his investigations.

The PPO investigates all deaths in custody and his remit is to examine the circumstances surrounding the death and establish whether anything can be done to help prevent similar tragedies in the future. In December 2013 he published a bulletin which looked at 16 prison homicides investigated from 2003-4 to 2012-13, an average of 1.6 per year. The 2013 bulletin identified a number of concerns, in particular the need to improve the management of risk that vulnerable prisoners pose to one another. It led to operational changes in high security prisons.

In the three years that followed, from 2013-14 to 2015-16, another 13 prisoners were killed by another prisoner or prisoners (an average of 4.3 homicides per year). This bulletin considers the learning from six of those 13 homicides where investigations have been completed, and another two from the beginning of 2013.

The bulletin highlights the need for:

- prisons to have a coordinated approach to identifying indicators and risks of bullying and violent behaviour, including the impact of new psychoactive substances and associated debt, and taking allegations of intimidation seriously;
- prisons to have an effective security and cell-searching strategy, enabling weapons to be found and removed;
- concerns about potentially vulnerable prisoners to be properly recorded and action taken to ensure prisoners are located in a place of safety; and
- the police to be notified without delay when a prisoner appears to have been seriously assaulted, evidence preserved and all prisoners involved in an incident to be held separately until police arrive.

Nigel Newcomen said:

“The killing of one prisoner by another in a supposedly secure prison environment is particularly shocking, and it is essential to seek out any lessons that might prevent these chilling occurrences in future.

“The cases we studied had little in common beyond their tragic outcome. Nevertheless, what is clear is that the increased number of homicides is emblematic of the wholly unacceptable level of violence in our prisons.

“The bulletin does identify a number of areas of learning: the need to better manage violence and debt in prison, not least that associated with the current epidemic of new psychoactive substances; the need for rigorous cell searching to minimise the availability of weapons; the need for careful management of prisoners known to be at risk from others and the need to ensure prisons know how to respond when they have an apparent homicide.”

- ENDS -

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. A copy of the bulletin can be found on our website. Visit www.ppo.gov.uk.
2. The PPO investigates deaths that occur in prison, immigration detention or among the residents of probation approved premises. The PPO also investigates complaints from current and former prisoners, those on probation, residents of approved premises and immigration detainees.
3. The PPO's first bulletin on homicides was published in December 2013 and can be found [here](#).
4. The PPO investigation is not a criminal investigation and can only take place once the criminal process has been completed.
5. Please contact Jane Parsons, PPO Press Office, on 07880 787452 if you would like more information, or email mail@ppo.gsi.gov.uk.