

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman Bereaved Families' Feedback Survey 2009

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Foreword

When we were first asked to conduct independent death in custody investigations and established the fatal incidents investigations team in 2004, a key objective – perhaps *the* key objective – was to provide a better, more sensitive, more inclusive, service for bereaved families. We have tried to put the family at the heart of the investigation, and pioneered radical approaches to family liaison and disclosure.

Until now, we have had only anecdotal evidence as to the difference these approaches have made in practice. However, this paper presents the findings of a scientifically robust survey of bereaved families with whom the PPO office has worked.

Having never asked families for formal feedback before, we had no idea what level of response we would get. The challenges in setting up a telephone and postal survey speak for themselves. It was likely that some families would find the whole idea of answering questions about the investigation upsetting. And there were practical questions to answer: how many families could we successfully trace and who should conduct the interviews with them? In fact, we have achieved a response rate of over 40 per cent – which I believe to be very creditable. Indeed, others who provide services to bereaved people may be able to learn from our experience.

So far as the results are concerned, I was delighted – although not surprised – that the work of our family liaison officers (FLOs) is so appreciated. The FLOs have to manage large caseloads, and are asked to support families in very sad and stressful circumstances. I am pleased to share this recognition of their kindness and professionalism with a wider audience.

But not all the feedback was so positive and there are a number of learning points for the fatal incidents investigations team to consider. There was concern about the time taken to complete investigations, and families would have liked more information about timescales. They would also have liked more contact from the PPO between our issuing the final report and the Coroner's inquest.

As part of the survey, we also asked families how they would have felt had they received an evaluation form at the end of the investigation. The generally positive reaction to this question means that we can now collect feedback on an ongoing basis, using the results of this initial survey as a baseline.

I am grateful to a number of my colleagues for making this survey possible: Sue Gauge for coordinating the whole project, Laura Spargo for her help with the administration of the survey, Trish Taylor and Mark Judd for attending the familiarisation session with Victim Support, David Ryan-Mills for the analysis, and all the FLOs for their help in designing the questionnaire. I would particularly like to thank Victim Support (Yorkshire), and the volunteers who work for them, for coordinating the telephone survey and making the calls, some of which were clearly upsetting.

Stephen Shaw
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Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Background	2
3. The survey	2
3.1 Sample	3
3.2 Pilot survey	4
3.3 Response Rate	4
4. Results	5
4.1 The Family Liaison Service.....	5
4.2 The PPO Investigation.....	10
4.3 The PPO Reports	14
4.4 The inquest and the anonymised report	16
4.5 Barriers	17
4.6 General experience of dealing with the PPO.....	18
5. Possible implications for practice	22

Bereaved Families' Feedback Survey 2009

Executive Summary

- This report summarises the results of a survey of bereaved families who have been involved in a Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) investigation following a death in custody. There were 56 replies to the survey, a response rate of 42 per cent. 34 surveys were completed by post, 19 by telephone and 3 online.
- Over 90 per cent of respondents agreed that their PPO Family Liaison Officer (FLO) showed sensitivity, listened to their concerns, summarised their concerns accurately and helped them understand the investigation process.
- The majority found the information provided by the PPO very helpful. Letters and telephone calls were recalled more than the PPO leaflet, 'A guide to how we investigate fatal incidents'.
- A large number hoped the investigation would provide a full and thorough explanation of the events prior to death. Others hoped that it would lead to prevention and service improvement. Several respondents hoped for 'the truth' and 'justice'.
- A third said their expectations for the investigation were fully met, and half that they were partly met. Those whose expectations were not met had hoped for 'justice', 'the truth' or answers to specific questions from the investigation.
- Three-quarters thought the investigation covered everything, but only two thirds thought it was conducted fairly. Respondents were least likely to agree that the time taken for the investigation was reasonable, and there was evidence that they would have liked more information about timescales.
- Over half said they understood all of the draft report, and a third most of it. All those who asked for help understanding the report found the PPO FLOs helpful. The clinical review was considered the least useful part of the report and some thought there was too much medical information that was hard to understand.
- At the time of the survey, inquests had been held in 22 cases. Less than half said they were in contact with the PPO in the stage between final report publication and the inquest. Comments suggested that more contact in this period would have been appreciated.
- Respondents were mainly receptive to the idea of an evaluation form at the end of the investigation, though some suggested it should be optional.
- Over half the respondents said that their overall experience of dealing with the PPO was 'very good' and just over a quarter said it was 'good'. They were more satisfied with the family liaison element of the service than investigation processes and outcomes.

PPO Bereaved Families Feedback

1. Introduction

In 2008 the Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) started a series of surveys to collect feedback from its stakeholders. There were three distinct groups of stakeholders identified – people who are eligible to make complaints to the PPO, people who have been bereaved following a death in custody, and stakeholders such as the Prison Service and those involved in the wider criminal justice system.

This paper reports on the strand looking at feedback from bereaved families. Feedback from other stakeholders is reported separately.

2. Background

Since the PPO's remit was extended to investigate deaths in custody in April 2004, it has opened investigations into over a thousand deaths. These include deaths of all prisoners, residents of probation Approved Premises and immigration detainees.

The PPO's terms of reference state that one of the aims of the investigation is to provide explanations and insight for the bereaved relatives. In order to do this, a team of Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) contact the next of kin to make them aware of the PPO investigation and guide them through the process.

Although there has been a family liaison service since the PPO started investigating deaths, there has never been any feedback collected from those who experience it. This project was the first attempt to find out what bereaved families and friends of the deceased think about the PPO and the services it provides.

3. The survey

When planning how to collect feedback from bereaved families, it was clear that sensitivity was paramount. As a starting point, one of the FLOs conducted a short study of other members of the Forum for Preventing Deaths in Custody¹ to find out whether they had collected feedback from clients who had been bereaved.

Most other organisations had carried out surveys of those they worked with; some had carried out extensive interviews whilst others had used simple evaluation forms. There were a number of suggestions for how to collect feedback from such a sensitive group as those recently bereaved. Recommendations included using an independent agency to carry out a survey and offering people different methods of participating, such as face-to-face or by phone.

The PPO decided that a survey would be the best way to collect feedback from its large number of bereaved families. It was felt that families should be offered the choice of a telephone or postal survey, as it would be impractical to conduct face-to-face interviews.

A questionnaire was designed to ask about families' experiences of the PPO investigation, the liaison service they received and what they thought about the PPO reports. As this was

¹ The Forum ceased to exist in April 2009 when new arrangements were introduced including the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

the first time any feedback from families had been collected, the questionnaire asked quite detailed questions about practical details as well as more general issues. This would provide feedback on current ways of working as well as a baseline for potential future evaluations.

The PPO invited two independent agencies to tender for the contract to conduct the telephone survey. Both had been used to collect feedback by other members of the Forum for Preventing Deaths in Custody, so had understanding of dealing sensitively with people who had experienced a traumatic event. Victim Support was selected as they had greater experience of conducting telephone surveys of a sensitive nature.

This would be the first time families had ever been asked for feedback about the PPO, so there was concern about phoning them out of the blue, as they would not have expected to be contacted for this purpose. A letter from the Ombudsman was sent to everyone in the sample, telling them about the survey and advising them that they would receive a phone call in the next few weeks to ask if they would be prepared to take part and if so how they would like to do so.

A pilot survey was conducted to check whether the questions were understandable and to gauge the likely response rate. The pilot is described in Section 3.2.

Following the pilot, the full sample was passed to Victim Support to contact the families, and a familiarisation session was held for their volunteers. A PPO investigator and FLO explained what happens during a PPO investigation, then the practicalities of the survey were described by the PPO senior researcher. Any questions were answered and the volunteers were provided with questionnaires and contact sheets in order for them to record the outcomes of their calls.

Families were contacted by Victim Support in September and October 2009. If the next of kin preferred to complete the survey by post or on-line, a message was sent to PPO to post or email a survey to them.

3.1 Sample

PPO investigations take many months to complete and can often be held up by external factors. Even once the draft report is finished, there is further period waiting for comments from the family and the Prison Service before the final report can be prepared. In some cases it can be several years before the inquest, but it is not until after the inquest that the final report is anonymised and published on the PPO website.

This long time span was critical in deciding the sample of cases to be included in the survey.

It was important to ask for feedback about the whole PPO service, therefore only cases which had received their final report could be included. Cases where the final report had been issued between April 2008 and March 2009 were chosen.

As there is sometimes a very lengthy delay between the final report and the inquest, it was felt that cases should be included in the survey irrespective of whether the inquest had been held or not.

However, we decided that cases should not be included if the anonymised report had been issued, as this was the final contact with the family and the FLO would have told them they would not be contacted again.

It was also felt that it would be inappropriate to include cases that had gone on for a very

long time, as renewed contact could have been experienced as insensitive and, in any event, memories were likely to have faded. For this reason only deaths after 1 January 2007 were included.

There were some cases where the family had expressly requested no further contact from the PPO. These cases were also excluded.

Table 1 shows how the sample cases were split fairly evenly between deaths by natural causes and those which were apparently self-inflicted, with a few by other non-natural causes.

Table 1 – Sample Cases

Natural causes	50
Self-inflicted	47
Accidental	1
Drug overdose	2
Unclassified	2
Total	102

The PPO policy is to be as inclusive as possible, so if FLOs are made aware of more than one set of family members, they will attempt to contact them all. This meant that in the survey sample of 102 cases there were 133 family and friends who had been contacted by the PPO and so were included in the survey.

3.2 Pilot survey

A pilot was conducted with 19 people from the sample. They were sent a letter explaining that the PPO was conducting a survey and that they would be contacted by phone to ask whether or not they wanted to take part.

It turned out to be harder than expected to get in touch with people by phone and, despite many attempts, only ten were contacted in this way. Of these, seven said they would prefer to do the survey by post and, of these, five surveys were completed. Three surveys were completed over the phone.

The pilot demonstrated how difficult it would be to make contact by phone, and also highlighted a few questions that were unclear. These were adjusted in the final survey. The pilot surveys took about 30-40 minutes to complete by phone.

As a result of the pilot, Victim Support volunteers were asked to make a maximum of five attempts at different times of the day to contact people by phone.

3.3 Response Rate

In total 56 surveys were completed, making the overall response rate 42% (including the pilot). Table 1 shows the different responses received by the various methods.

Table 2 – Responses received

	Number	Proportion of total	Surveys completed	Response rate
Telephone survey	19	14%	19	100%
Postal survey	53	40%	34	64%
Email survey	7	5%	3	43%
Refusal	16	12%	0	0%
No contact made	38	29%	0	0%
	133	100%	56	42%

As expected from the pilot, there was some difficulty in making contact with the families. Twenty-nine per cent of the sample was unreachable, either due to wrong numbers or no answer. The refusal rate was surprisingly low at 12 per cent, with most just saying that they did not want to take part in the survey. One said he:

has had too much upset and wants to get on with things,

and another said they did not want to:

wake up the past.

Most people (40 per cent) opted to complete the survey by post as they wanted to be able to think about it and do it in their own time. Of these, 64 per cent did complete the survey and return it to PPO in the prepaid envelope provided.

Completing the survey by telephone was less popular, with only 14 per cent opting for this method. However, as all of these did actually complete the survey, they make up a third of the actual responses.

As expected, not many families chose to do the survey on-line. Only seven people asked for the link to be sent to them and only three actually completed it.

The 56 completed surveys came from family members associated with 52 investigations, split evenly between natural cause (25 cases) and self-inflicted deaths (27 cases).

Fifty-six is a relatively small number of responses for a survey and this must be born in mind when looking at the results. It is certainly too small a number to split into further subgroups, so all the analysis is for the sample as a whole. It should also be borne in mind that in some cases the final report was issued in April 2008 and some working practices may have changed since then.

The questionnaire allowed for some free response answers and these are included in the report for illustrative purposes only. They are not representative of all responses.

4. Results

4.1 The Family Liaison Service

Making contact

Over half the respondents (32) remembered being informed of the PPO investigation by a family liaison officer. There were equal numbers hearing from PPO FLOs and Prison Service FLOs, plus two via FLOs from the local police. Thirteen respondents could not remember who first told them of the PPO investigation. Six heard from the Coroner's office, three from prison chaplains and seven from other people including solicitors and family members.

PPO FLOs try to contact family and friends within four weeks of the death, although they would usually wait until after the funeral has taken place unless it is delayed for any reason. Over half (34) agreed that contact within four weeks is 'about right', whilst the rest appeared to favour speed over caution: 17 said that four weeks is too long and that within three weeks would be better, whilst only three said that four weeks is too soon and that within six weeks would be better.

Respondents were asked whether they thought it best to wait until after the funeral to make contact. Just over half (29 respondents) agreed that after the funeral is best:

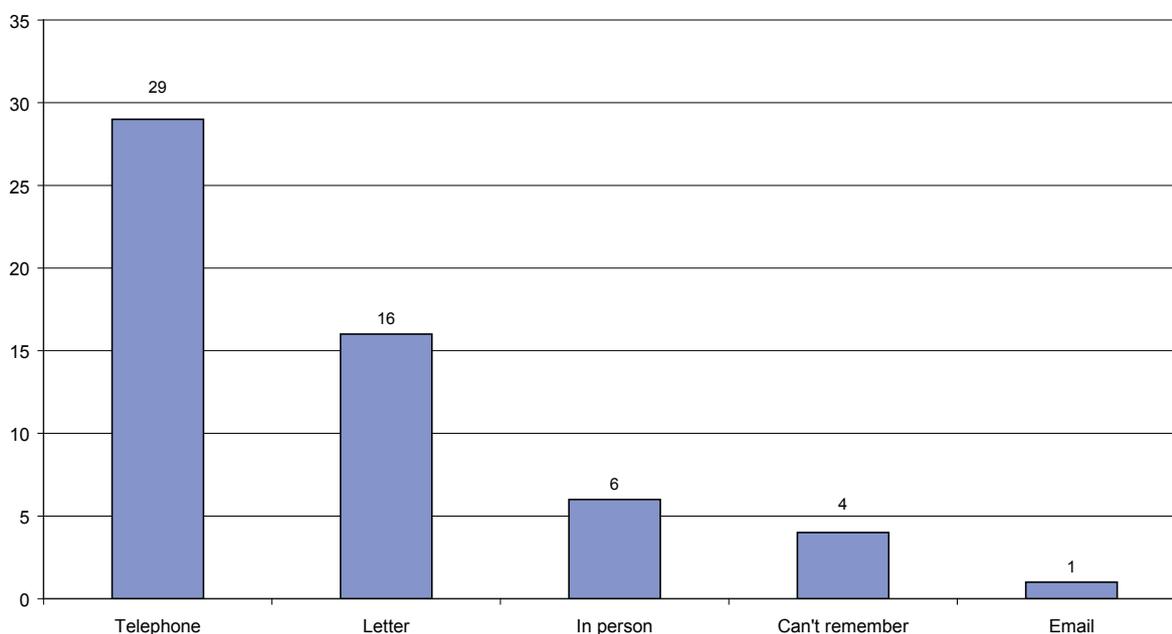
So much on my mind prior to the funeral.

Seventeen disagreed and thought contact should be made before the funeral. Ten respondents did not think it mattered whether contact is before or after the funeral.

PPO FLOs usually try to contact the next of kin by phone, but will write to them if they are unable to make telephone contact.

Fifty-two respondents remembered the method by which the PPO first contacted them. Chart 1 shows how first contact was usually by phone (29 responses) or by letter (16). Only six were initially contacted in person.

Chart 1 - Method of first PPO Contact (N=56)



Only two respondents were not happy with the method by which they were first contacted by the PPO. One had been contacted by letter but would have preferred contact by phone, while the other heard by phone but would have preferred a letter.

One respondent praised the letter they received:

A nice letter with explanation of what was going to happen.

After a death in custody, families may be contacted by liaison officers from various organisations including the PPO, the Prison Service, Coroner's office and sometimes the police. In many of the cases in this survey the bereaved families were in contact with a variety of liaison officers. When asked whether it was clear which one was from the PPO, the majority (44) knew exactly who was from the PPO. Seven were 'a bit confused' and two were 'totally confused' by all the different liaison people.

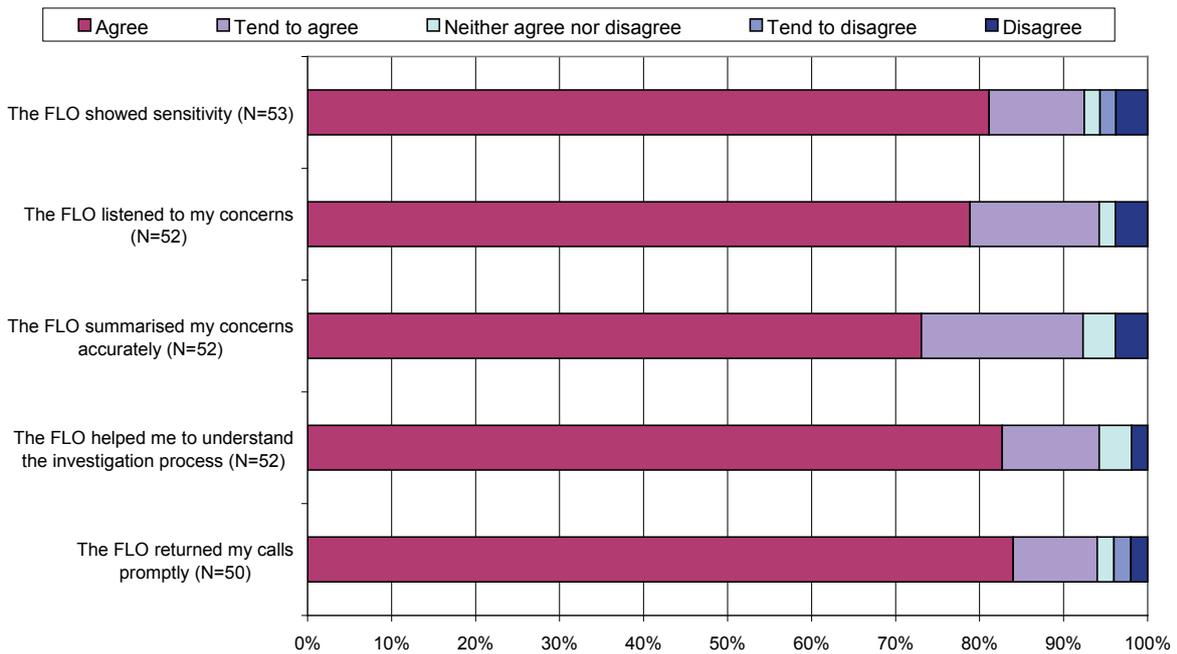
Respondents were slightly more confused about the distinction between the PPO family liaison officer and the PPO investigator. Three-quarters of the respondents (40) said that the differences were clear, with 10 'a bit confused' and four 'totally confused' by the different roles of PPO staff.

Another potential source of confusion could have been when the families had more than one FLO from PPO. Just over half the respondents (29) remembered having only one FLO from the PPO, while 22 remembered having more than one. Although four were unsure as to why their FLO had changed, most knew whether it was due to staff changes (11) or annual leave (7).

PPO Family Liaison Officers

Chart 2 shows the extent to which the families surveyed agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the FLO. Over 90 per cent of the families surveyed agreed or tended to agree that the FLO showed sensitivity, helped them to understand the investigation process, listened to their concerns and summarised them accurately. Only one or two people disagreed with these statements.

Chart 2 - The families views on PPO FLOs



Although the PPO family liaison officers generally only make contact with family members at certain times during the investigation process, families are told that they are welcome to contact the PPO at any time. The survey asked about whether they had tried to contact PPO during the investigation.

Over 90 per cent of respondents said they felt able to contact their PPO FLO outside of routine times, although less than half said they had tried to do so. The majority of respondents who had contacted the PPO during the investigation found it either 'quite easy' or 'very easy' to do so. Only three respondents found it 'quite difficult' and one 'very difficult'.

All but three people agreed that the FLO returned their calls promptly. Comments suggested although there had been occasions where PPO staff could not easily be contacted by phone, any messages were responded to:

Left messages as couldn't get through at most times.

Left message on answer phone which was promptly returned.

One said that they could not make contact because they:

Did not have contact numbers.

The majority (49 respondents) thought that the amount of contact they received from the PPO was about right, though seven thought that there was not enough contact. No one thought there was too much contact from PPO.

One reported having to chase staff:

We had to contact them.

One said they:

Would have liked more contact with updates on timescales.

There were eighteen other comments about PPO FLOs, all but one of which were positive. Respondents were particularly pleased with the professionalism and sensitivity of the PPO FLOs:

The way the PPO FLO dealt with all my concerns made the whole heartbreaking experience much easier to bear for the whole family.

The PPO FLO we had was very helpful, very empathetic and nothing was too much trouble for her.

Really, really impressed with her. Really went beyond her job to ask about things and make sure I was OK.

Only one said they were not happy with the service at all.

Visits

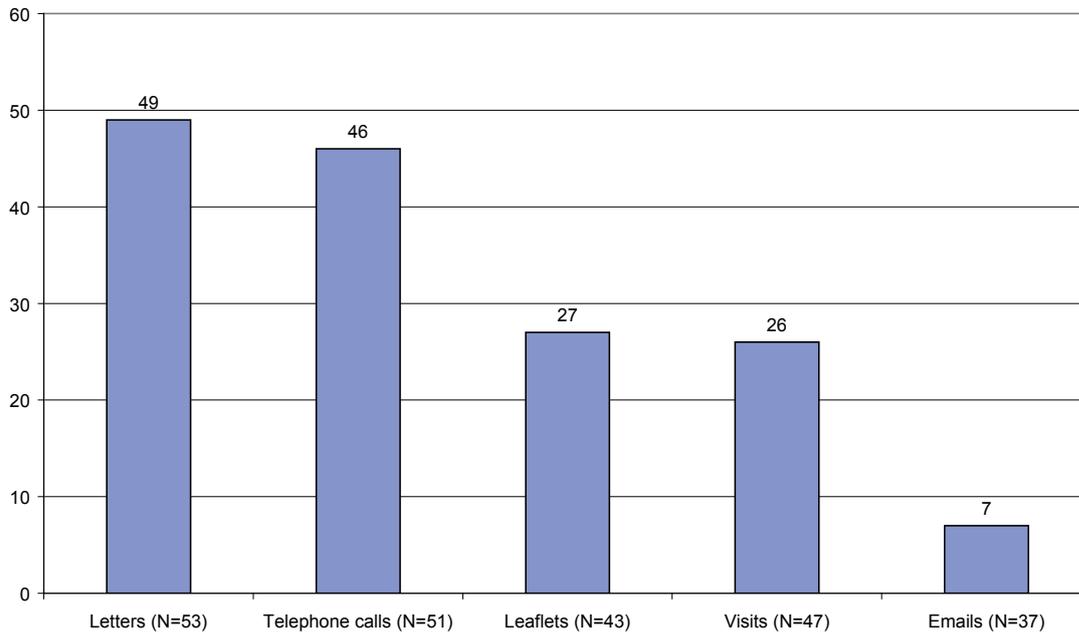
All families are usually offered the opportunity to meet with the FLO and investigator to go through what will happen during the investigation. Although the majority of the people surveyed (36) remembered being offered a visit or meeting, ten could not remember and ten said a visit had not been offered.

Just under half (25) said they did not have a visit from the PPO. Most of these (14) had declined the offer as they thought talking on the phone was fine. One did not want a visit for personal reasons; while the others said a visit had not been offered.

Twenty-eight said they had had a visit or meeting with the PPO. They all agreed or tended to agree that the PPO was flexible in arranging a meeting and that the location was convenient. Only one respondent disagreed that the time/date of the meeting was convenient. Everyone agreed that the PPO staff were courteous and professional.

Information Provided

Chart 3 - Information received



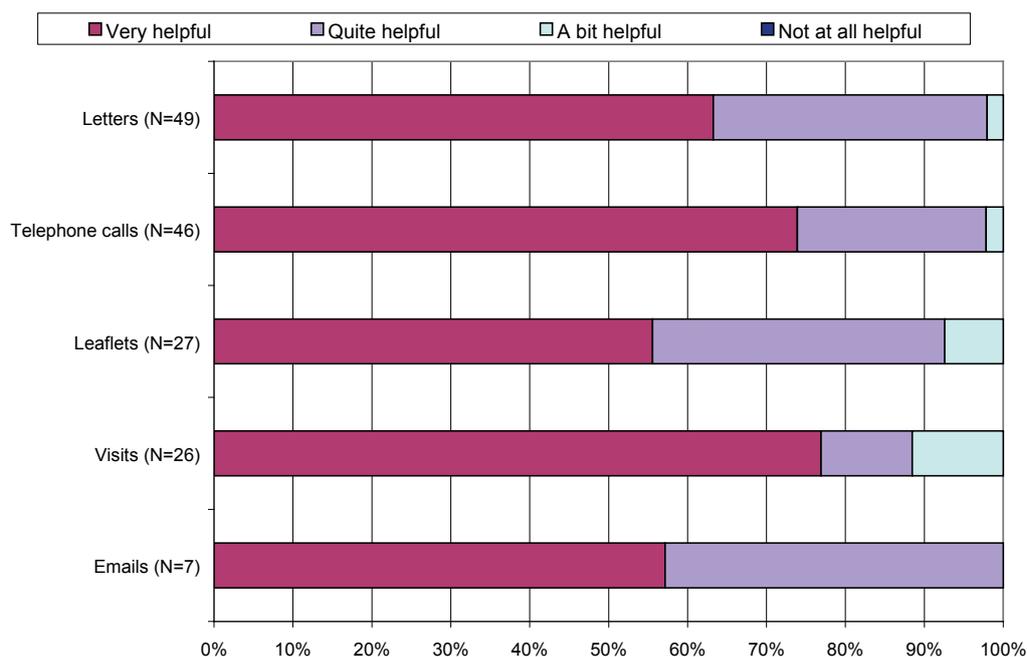
The PPO uses a variety of communication methods to tell bereaved families about what will happen during the investigation. Not all families would receive all types of information. Chart 3 shows that most received letters and phone calls, as would be expected, but very few received emails.

Only four respondents said they had received no letters from the PPO and four no phone calls. For the other types of information there were a number of missing responses, possibly because they had not received them or did not recall receiving them. The PPO communicated with seven of the families via email.

The PPO issues a leaflet to all bereaved families called 'A guide to how we investigate fatal incidents'. It appears that at least 16 of the respondents did not receive it. The number of missing responses to this question (13) could indicate that even more families may not have received the leaflet. However, some respondents may not have remembered receiving the leaflet amongst the large volume of other information received from the PPO and other organisations (such as the prison and the Coroner's office).

Chart 4 shows how helpful they found the information they received.

Chart 4 - Families views on types of information they received from PPO



None of information received was rated as ‘not at all helpful’. On the basis of ‘very helpful’ ratings, it would appear that the most helpful information was received during visits, so it is a shame that only half the respondents had a visit. Fortunately, it appears that telephone calls were almost as good as visits for imparting information.

The information provided is intended to help the bereaved family members understand the investigation process. Families were asked whether the information received was what they required. The majority said that the information met their needs (44) and most thought they knew what to expect from the investigation (39). However, quite a few felt that the information did not meet their needs (5) or were unclear of what to expect (9).

One said they would have liked:

More information about timescales for the inquest and how the coroner’s office works.

Only two thirds of respondents (38) remembered being told how long the investigation would be likely to take. Ten said they had not been told and four could not remember if they had or not. Although investigations take a varying amount of time, making it difficult to be precise, it is of concern that a third of respondents were unsure whether they were informed how long the investigation was likely to take.

4.2 The PPO Investigation

Families’ concerns and expectations

During contact with the PPO (either in writing, over the phone or in person), the bereaved family members are invited to raise any issues or concerns that they would like the investigation to consider.

The vast majority (49 respondents) thought they had been given enough opportunity to ask questions and express concerns during the investigation. Those who thought that they had

not had enough opportunity to ask questions would have liked more contact:

Not given the opportunity to speak personally. The investigation was conducted by letter.

Others said that whilst there was enough opportunity, taking it was difficult:

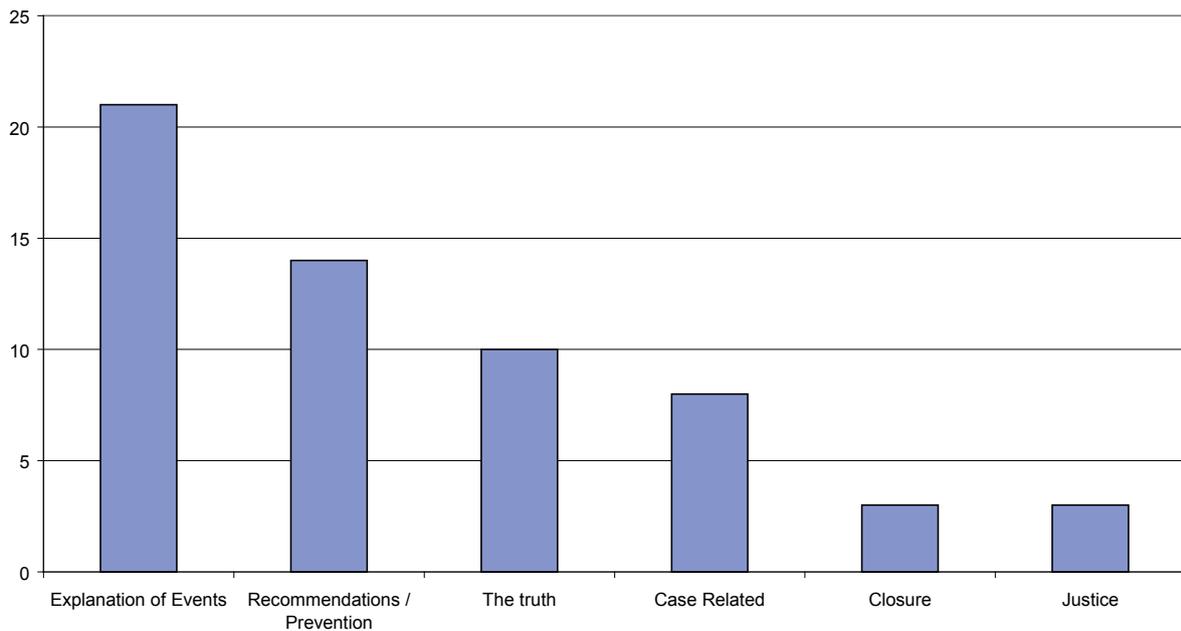
[You are] so emotionally upset that you don't raise everything, don't think about it until months later.

After the family has raised any concerns, the FLO sends the family a written summary of the issues they have highlighted. Forty-two of the respondents remembered receiving a letter that summarised their concerns.

The majority of those who had received a summary said that it accurately reflected the concerns they had raised either 'totally' (24) or 'mostly' (14).

The survey asked people to express in their own words what they hoped to get out of the investigation. Nearly everyone (49 out of 56) replied to this question; their responses have been grouped and are shown in Chart 5.

Chart 5 - What families hoped to get out of the investigation (Free response)



A full and thorough explanation of events was the most common answer, with 21 replies of this sort:

The events that led up to my father's death in custody.

Rigorous review of factors surrounding death.

A large number of the responses (14) focused on learning lessons in order to prevent further deaths in the future:

Recommendations to prevent another tragedy occurring.

These expectations are consistent with the aims of the PPO investigations. Other expectations may be harder to meet. Given the often traumatic nature of many of the deaths the PPO investigates, several families perceived a conspiracy or injustice and hoped the investigation would back this up. Themes of 'truth' (10) and 'justice' (3) accounted for almost a quarter of the expectations held:

The whole truth.

Justice for our son.

Other expectations were case-related (such as on a specific issue within the investigation), with a small proportion saying that they hoped the PPO investigation would provide a sense of closure.

The majority said that their expectations had been met to some extent (80 per cent), with a third saying the investigation met their expectations fully. Seven said that their expectations were not met at all. Looking closely at these seven cases, their expectations were all either case related or themed upon 'justice' and 'the truth'.

There were some explanations why some expectations were only partly met:

A few things weren't covered which I thought should have been.

I'm not sure whether the outcome will prevent the same happening to someone else.

Positive responses indicated how highly the investigation was valued by many families:

To hear what the people involved had to say was very important to my family.

Having read the report several times I would like to say thank you for a very thorough investigation.

The PPO Investigation

Chart 6 shows the extent to which respondents agreed whether the investigation covered everything and was conducted in an open and fair manner.

Around three-quarters of respondents agreed or tended to agree that the investigation covered everything (40) and was conducted openly (38). Slightly fewer (35) agreed to some extent that the investigation was conducted fairly.

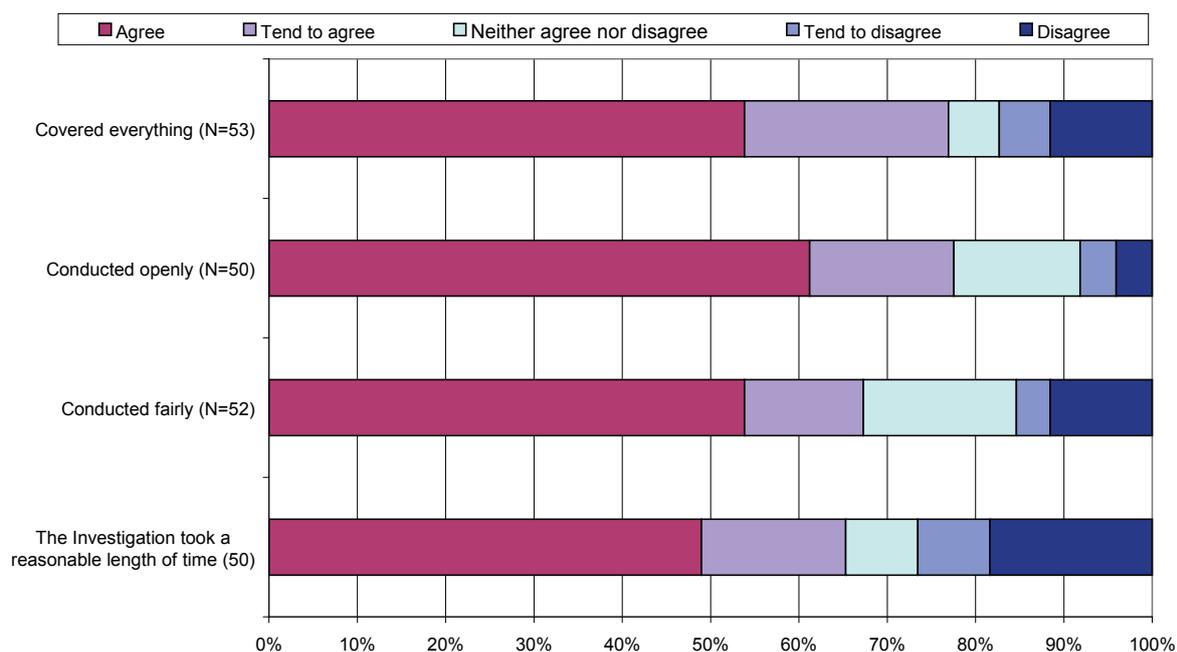
Some people thought some aspects of their case were omitted:

Didn't cover the marks to [the deceased's] legs and face and the availability of drugs in prison.

A few thought investigators were too close to the Prison Service:

Tendency to accept views of prison staff without factual proof.

Chart 6: Families' views on PPO investigations



Timeliness

Many factors can influence the time it takes to conduct an investigation into a death in custody. These factors frequently fall outside of the PPO's control, such as the involvement of the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, or the time it can take for Primary Care Trusts to appoint a clinical reviewer. However, as the Ombudsman acknowledged in his 2008-2009 annual report, whilst timeliness of reports continues to improve it remains below the standards expected.

As shown in Chart 6, respondents were least likely to agree that the investigation took a reasonable length of time than with the other statements. Less than half (24) agreed that the investigation took a reasonable length of time, and nearly 20 per cent disagreed (9) or tended to disagree (4). In fact, more people disagreed with this statement than any other in the survey, with comments providing context to such opinions:

The investigation took too long - two years and three months between death and final report.

Seemed too long, believe the interviews could have been conducted in shorter time frame.

Others indicated poor communication of expected timescales:

I was informed the draft report could be expected in January 2008, I received it January 2009.

However, other comments acknowledged the boundaries within which the PPO operates:

The police investigation took a very long time, which naturally affected the [timeliness of the] PPO investigation

Although there are many factors that can influence the time it takes time to conduct an

investigation into a death in custody, generally speaking the more thorough the investigation, the longer it will take. Respondents were asked, on balance, which was more important to them. The vast majority (over 90 per cent) said that, on balance, thoroughness was more important than speed:

The investigation should be done thoroughly which would take time ... it shouldn't matter how long it takes.

4.3 The PPO Reports

The draft report

PPO family liaison officers ask the bereaved families if they wish to see the draft report of the investigation. Respondents were asked whether the draft report dealt adequately with the issues they had raised:

Seventeen respondents thought that the draft report dealt completely with the issues they had raised and 27 thought they were mostly dealt with. Four respondents said that the draft report did not deal with their concerns at all, although no details were given.

The majority either agreed (34) or tended to agree (9) that the level of detail was about right.

The PPO tries to avoid unnecessary jargon and make the reports readable by those with no knowledge of the services in remit. Over 90 per cent said they understood all (31) or most (18) of the report. Four said they only understood some of the report and one respondent that they understood none of it.

Comments suggested that it was the medical aspects of the report that were difficult to understand:

Too much waffle on medical side ...

There were no comments that suggested that complex prison or probation service policy was not clearly explained. Whilst two-thirds (37) said that the reports did not contain any jargon, 14 said that there was either some (13) or lots (one respondent).

Thirteen respondents asked their PPO FLO for help understanding aspects of the report. All of these found their FLO either 'very helpful' (12) or 'quite helpful' (one respondent) in doing this. However, not all realised that help was available:

Thought it was down to you to read it on your own. Didn't read much, too upset.

Respondents were asked whether they would have preferred to receive the PPO reports in paper copy, on a CD-rom, by email or not at all.

The vast majority of respondents were happy with paper copies of everything: draft reports, final reports and annexes. A couple would have liked a CD-rom, but no one would have preferred anything by email. One respondent would have rather not had the annexes at all.

Commenting on the PPO draft report

Family members are given 28 days to read and respond with comments to the draft report should they wish to do so.

The majority (44) agreed or tended to agree that it was clear what they were expected to do with the draft report and thought they were given enough time to respond. Six people disagreed that they had enough time to comment:

Could have done with a bit longer.

28 days is not really long enough.

Two said that the PPO accommodated their need for more time:

It took forever to come and then [it was] thrown at [me] to comment. [It was] difficult to read it all and accept it all within deadline - they said it was ok to get back when ready.

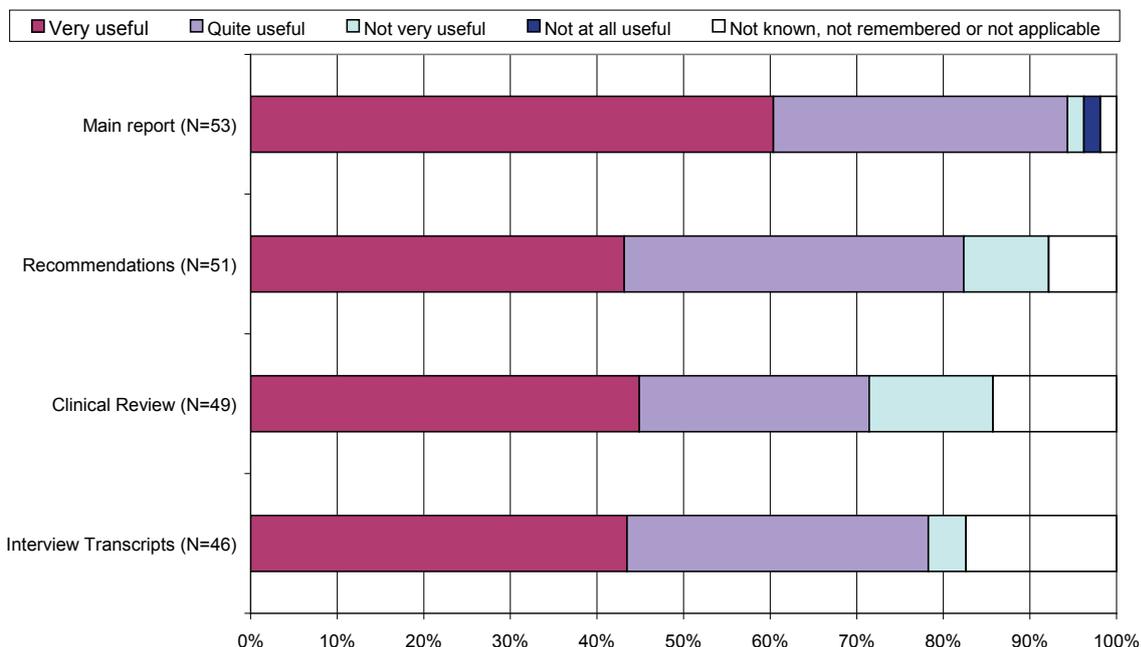
I needed and was given more time than the 28 days to comment.

The majority (43 of the 56 respondents) said they had commented on the draft report. All agreed that their comments were taken into account to some extent with 21 thinking their comments were completely taken on board.

Usefulness of the PPO report

Providing a report that the bereaved families find useful is a principal aim of the PPO fatal incidents team. The draft report is made up of four parts: a main report, the recommendations (if any), the clinical review and transcripts of interviews. Chart 7 shows how useful respondents found the different parts of the report.

Chart 7 - Usefulness of PPO reports



The main report was considered the most useful part of the bundle received by the bereaved families. Over 90 per cent found this 'very useful' (32) or 'quite useful' (18). Just one respondent found it 'not very useful' and one 'not at all useful':

It was very helpful to the family to get a really clear picture of events leading to the death.

The recommendations and transcripts were considered very or quite useful by about

three quarters of those surveyed. Several commented about the recommendations in particular:

Other prisoners will receive much improved systems as most of the recommendations were adopted.

There were, however, concerns over the whether the recommendations would be implemented:

The report did not list all recommendations at the back as one had been previously made in another report and therefore was just referred to. This was very disappointing as we felt, rightly or wrongly, that the issue would be overlooked by the prison.

Prisons should be compelled to implement recommendations ...

The clinical review received the lowest ratings for usefulness, although there were still over 70 per cent who thought it was quite or very useful. Comments to earlier questions suggest that complexity and medical jargon may have been a factor.

Other comments highlighted concerns over the volume of information:

There was too much at the time.

One comment suggested the information contained within the main report could have been broken down more effectively:

There were no sub-headings.

4.4 The inquest and the anonymised report

The inquest

At the time of the survey, inquests had been held for 22 of the 56 family members surveyed. Respondents were asked if they were in contact with the PPO after they received the final report and before the inquest.

Less than half (9) of the families who had already had the inquest were in contact with the PPO during this period, with contact initiated by the respondent in one of these cases. The majority (12) were not in contact with the PPO at this point. Comments on inquests in general suggested that more contact during this period would have been appreciated:

Not a lot of contact from PPO.

The FLO promised to contact me before the inquest, but did not do so.

I would like to be contacted before the inquest is held and made aware of what is likely to happen at the inquest.

Other remarks referred to PPO representation at the inquest:

I understand the PPO are not being called to the inquest, I feel they should be present.

The investigator who came to the inquest was not the one who conducted the investigation. This was unfortunate since he did not have first hand knowledge of the investigation.

Publishing the anonymised report

After the inquest, anonymised versions of the PPO fatal incident investigation reports are published on the PPO website, with all the identifying details removed. Respondents were asked whether this was explained to them, and whether they had ever looked at any of these reports themselves.

Only two thirds of the respondents said that the anonymisation process had been fully explained to them (35). Only six said that they had looked at anonymised reports themselves. In the few comments received on this subject, conflicting opinions on the value of the process were expressed:

I hope they are utilised by other departments either for statistical purposes or to check whether improvements have been implemented.

Don't know why or understand why the reports have to be published on website.

Removing the deceased's name

PPO reports have always been published with all names and identifying details removed, but the PPO have never asked families whether this is actually what they would prefer. As part of the review of the PPO's service families were asked their opinion about this.

The majority of respondents said that the deceased's name should be removed (38):

I think it is very important they remain anonymised.

Only six thought the name could remain in the report, one remarking that to remove the names would be a:

waste of resources.

A further six did not have an opinion on the matter.

Some responses suggested that it may be best left at the family's discretion:

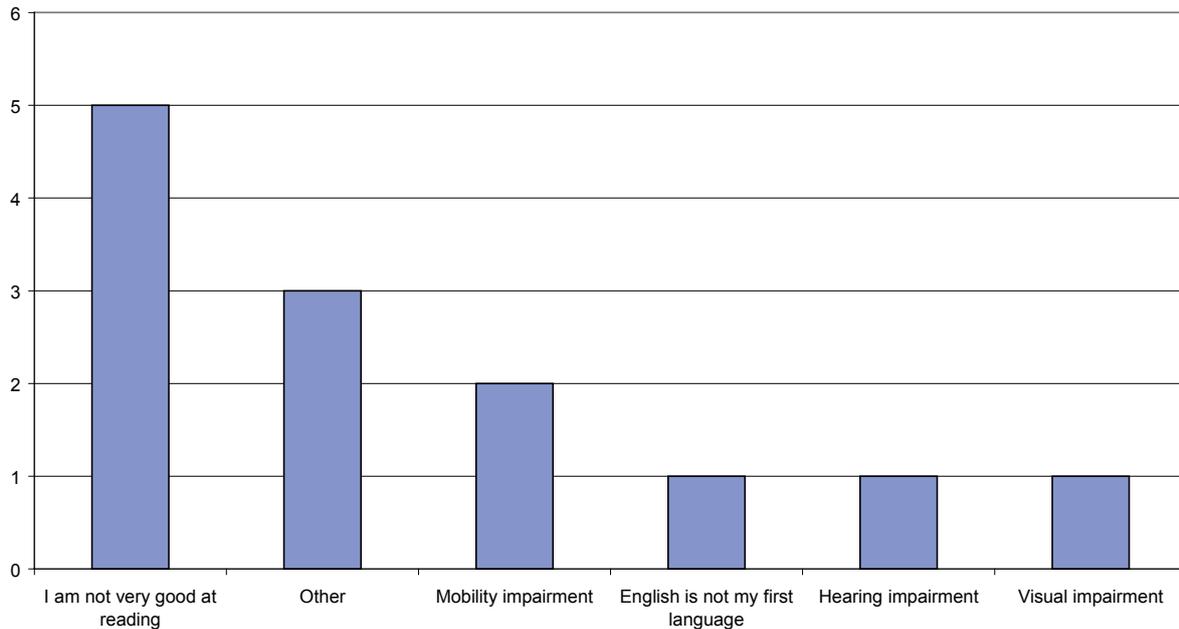
It should be up to the next of kin whether details should be disclosed.

The family should be asked for their permission for [the name to be included] as it could be a little upsetting and disturbing for them

4.5 Barriers

Respondents were asked whether there was anything that could have made it difficult for them to contribute to the investigation process. Three-quarters of respondents said that there were no barriers to their involvement in the investigation process. There were thirteen people who did feel that there had been some barrier to their involvement. These are illustrated in chart 8.

Chart 8 - Barriers to involvement in the investigation process



The most common difficulty was not being able to read very well (in five cases). There was only one respondent for whom English was not their first language.

Whilst respondents were given the option of completing the survey by phone, it is likely that reading and language barriers may have been a factor in the composition of the sample. The existence of such barriers should therefore not be underestimated on the basis of these survey results.

Those who said that there had been barriers to their involvement in the process were asked whether enough was done to overcome these problems and help them contribute to the investigation. Only two respondents said that the PPO could have done more to accommodate their needs, and no further details were given.

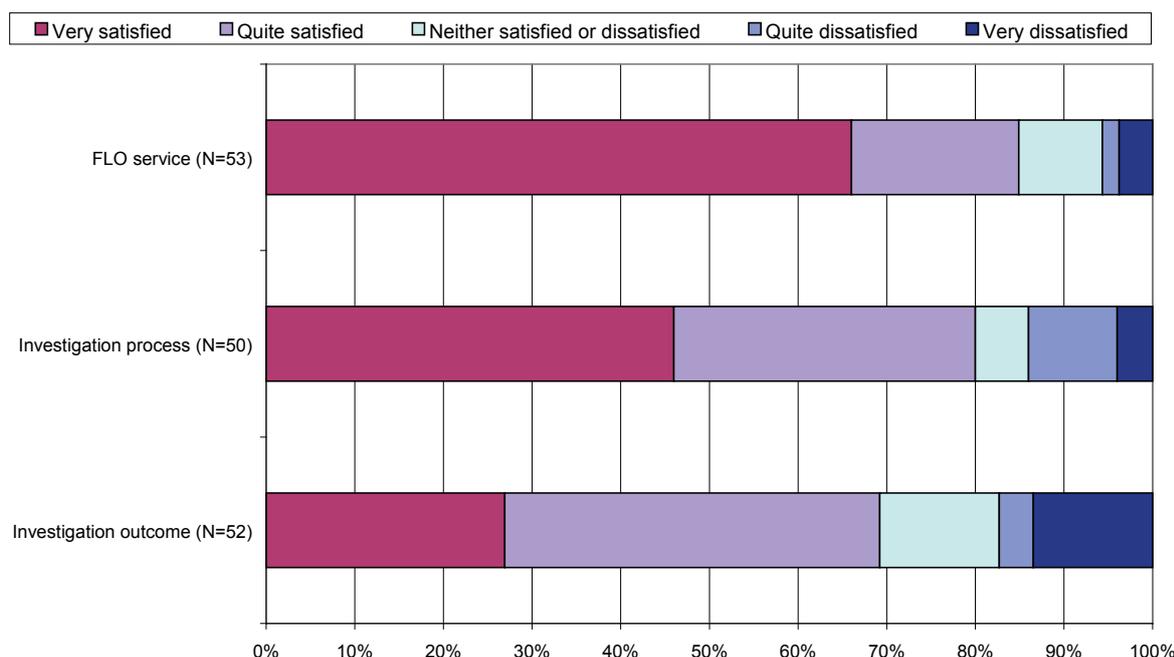
4.6 General experience of dealing with the PPO

Overall Satisfaction

Half of all respondents (28) rated their overall experience of dealing with the PPO as 'very good'. A further quarter (13) rated it as 'good' and eight said it was 'satisfactory'. Only four rated their overall experience as poor.

Chart 9 shows how satisfied they were with three aspects of the investigation process.

Chart 9 - Satisfaction with PPO investigation



The respondents were most satisfied with the family liaison service - two-thirds (35) were very satisfied and a further ten were quite satisfied. Only one respondent was ‘quite dissatisfied’ and two ‘very dissatisfied’ with the liaison service. Thinking about the investigation process, nearly half (23) were very satisfied, plus seventeen quite satisfied. Respondents were least satisfied with the investigation outcome: only a quarter (14) was very satisfied, although a further 22 were quite satisfied.

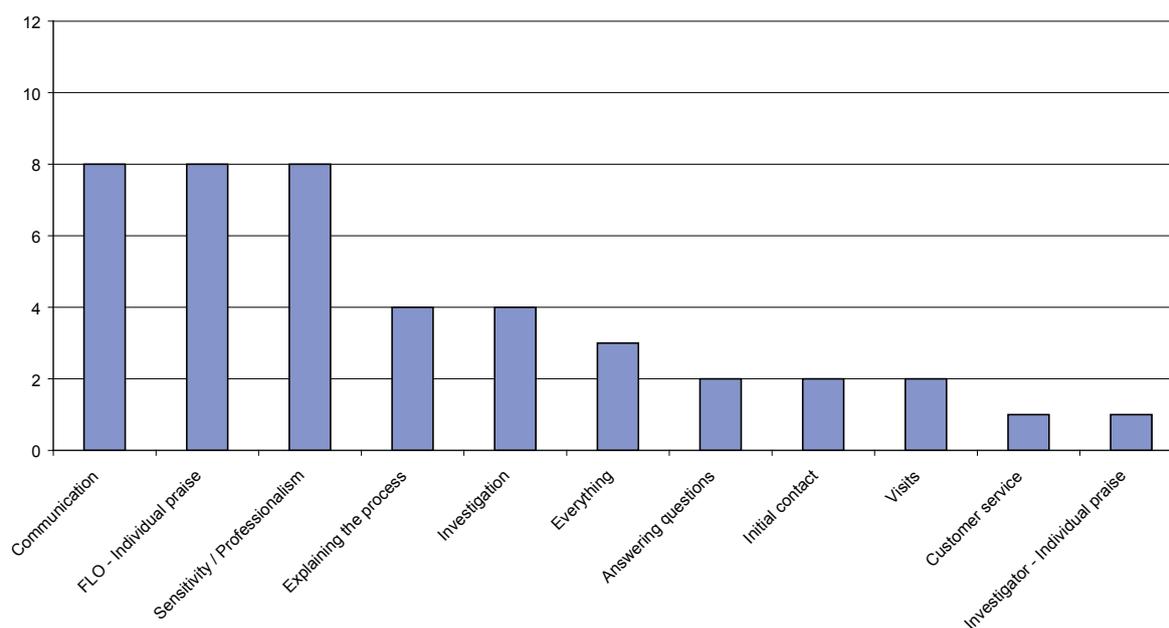
Although the groups are too small for any meaningful comparisons between natural causes and self-inflicted deaths, there did appear to be a slight difference in their satisfaction levels. The combined ‘very’ and ‘quite’ satisfied ratings were the same between the groups, but within these there were consistently more rating ‘very satisfied’ amongst the natural causes cases than those which were self-inflicted.

These ratings will act as a benchmark for future evaluations.

What the PPO did particularly well

Respondents were asked to express in their own words whether there was anything in particular that the PPO did well. Just over half of those surveyed (30) gave a total of 42 examples of what the PPO did particularly well. Chart 10 shows how many responses were received about different topics.

Chart 10 - What the PPO did well (free response)



Praise was largely directed towards both the PPO's family liaison functions (such as general communication with the families, initial contact and explaining the investigation process) and the individual Family Liaison Officers themselves. Eight comments praised liaison officers directly, and a further eight comments referred to the sensitivity and professionalism of PPO staff in general (it was unclear whether these comments were directed towards liaison officers or investigators).

Comments about the FLOs included:

The FLO was very good - taking our emotions and views (and frustrations!) into account.

The FLO was excellent and explained everything and was brilliant.

Kept me informed at all times. Very kind over the phone. Thought of my family's feelings at all times.

It appears from the comments that it is the comfort and reassurance provided by the family liaison function that is most valued by the families surveyed. Fewer respondents referred to investigation processes or outcomes as things the PPO did particularly well - perhaps as the investigation report has a wider audience whilst family liaison is solely for the individual(s).

There was also praise for the investigation itself:

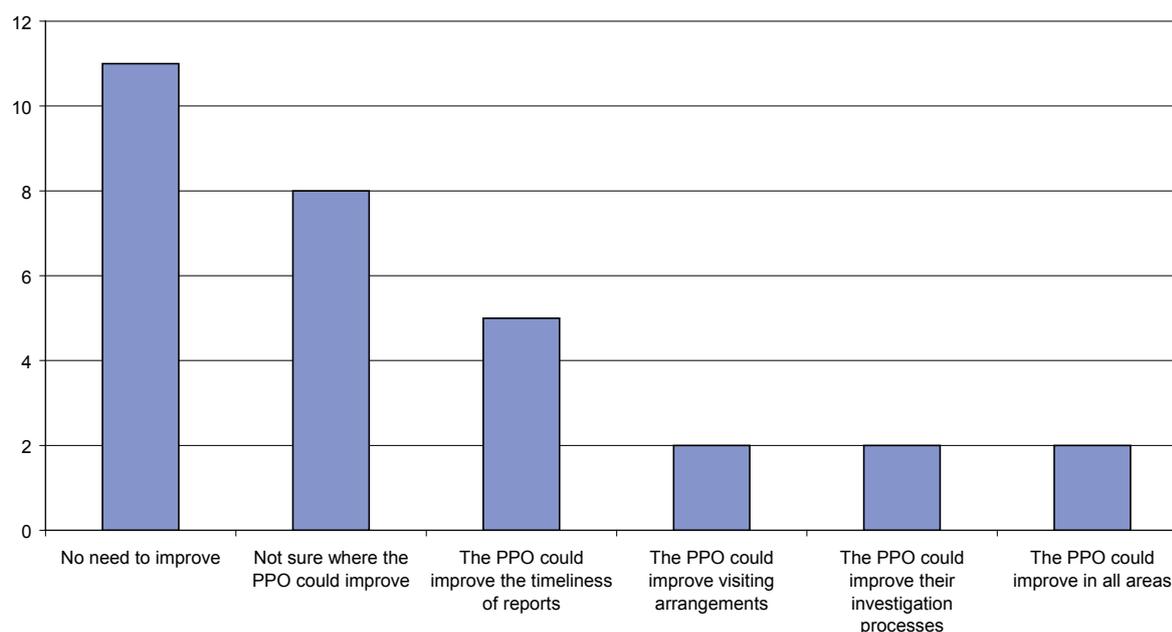
The PPO asked questions which were not addressed in the police witness statements

Ombudsman has been very fair and answered questions. Loved the way he questioned people, he knew what we wanted to get out of the investigation.

Room for improvement

Respondents were also asked if there was anything in particular that the PPO could do better. Again, just over half (30) of those surveyed offered a response and these have been grouped by topic in Chart 11.

Chart 11 - Where the PPO could improve (free response)



The most common answers suggested that there was nothing in particular that the PPO could do better:

No, I would give her 10/10!!

Actual suggestions for improvement focused primarily on the timeliness of reports. This ties in with Section 4.2 where it was noted that more people disagreed with the statement 'the investigation took a reasonable length of time' than any other statement offered in the survey:

Produced report earlier, waiting for two years after death for report does not show timeliness.

The investigation took too long. It seemed to me that this reflected a lack of resources.

Could have written final report quicker. Staffing needs to be looked at. It seemed that staffing levels are inadequate for the amount of work, increase of number of deaths in custody ...

Other suggested improvements included more face-to-face meetings. This is consistent with section 4.1, where it was noted that seven of those surveyed said they were not offered a visit. Two respondents suggested that the PPO could improve the way that visits are offered, particularly where different branches of next of kin are involved:

Would have accepted personal visit if offered.

I wasn't contacted for some of the meetings that took place and I was a little upset by this.

In section 4.3 it was noted that the families found the recommendations useful, and how some families commented that the services in remit should be 'compelled' into implementing recommendations. One suggestion for improvement appeared to imply that when good practice is acknowledged, it should be shared and implemented across the service in remit in

the same way that a recommendation for action would:

If you recommend for the POSITIVE or BETTER aspect of the investigation, you should evaluate or update if it is implemented for the purpose of PREVENTION in general.

Evaluation Forms

This survey was the first time that PPO had ever collected feedback from families. The final section of the questionnaire asked families for their opinions about PPO sending evaluation forms to families at the end of their investigations in the future. Of the 39 responses received, 22 supported the idea:

Would have felt fine, just helps to put our opinion across on the things that were investigated and helps you to recognise what you could do as a company to make things better.

Several thought the evaluation form should be optional and suggested families be asked whether they would mind being sent one:

It's best to ask first, then send a form.

Four thought it may be better to conduct an evaluation over the phone:

[If it] came in post I'd have put it in the bin. Phone call would be better, less paper work.

Three were unsure about how they would have felt and four thought it would be a bad idea:

I would question its value.

There was no consensus as to the best time to ask families for their opinions. A third (19) thought it should go with the final report, but nearly as many (16) thought a few weeks after the anonymised report would be better. Twelve had no preference.

5. Possible implications for practice

The following list has been compiled from the survey and the comments received. It should be borne in mind that some of the cases date back to April 2008 since when practices may have changed:

- Continue to contact within four weeks of the death and wait until after the funeral unless it is delayed.
- Continue to contact next of kin initially by phone or by letter.
- Think about how to help families understand the differences between the FLO and the investigator.
- Keep up the good work already done by FLOs.
- Provide families with an indication of likely timescales.
- Try to cover all the family's concerns in the report and explain why any have not been covered.
- Speed up the investigation process and produce reports more quickly
- Maintain or improve the clarity of reports
- Continue to send reports in hard copy

- Make sure families know that assistance is available to help them understand the contents of the report if they need it.
- Encourage clinical reviewers to avoid medical jargon in their reports.
- Contact from PPO between the final report and the inquest would be appreciated by families.
- Families would appreciate the investigator's attendance at the inquest.
- Ensure that families understand the anonymisation process and that their report will be published on the PPO website.
- Continue the practice of removing the deceased's name from the reports, but ask families whether they would prefer it to remain.
- Be more proactive at offering assistance to overcome any barriers to the family's involvement in the investigation.
- Encourage families to have a visit from the PPO as those that did have a visit really appreciated it.
- Send evaluation forms either with the final report or a few weeks after the anonymised report, but consult families before doing so.

The Ombudsman and colleagues will be considering these proposals, and other findings from the survey, with a view to developing an action plan and further improving the service offered to bereaved families.