

# Hundreds of deaths of offenders on probation

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“COMPLETE institutional indifference” shrouds the deaths of hundreds of offenders who died while under the supervision of North-East probation services, experts say.

Ten people were murdered while another 158 killed themselves while on probation between 2015 and 2017/18.

During that period, up to 468 people died while on the books of the four organisations managing probation services in the region.

Natural causes accounted for 132 of those deaths while 26 were accidental, 132 unclassified and ten were recorded in Ministry of Justice data as “other”.

Research by the BBC’s Shared Data Unit found that the number of people dying while under supervision has risen by almost a third nationally since arrangements for managing offenders were overhauled by the Government in 2014, from 752 in 2015/16 to 966 in 2017/18.

The introduction of the Transforming Rehabilitation Programme saw the probation service split in two, with the National Probation Service and its eight divisions now supervising high risk offenders, while 21 privately run companies work with those deemed low and medium risk.

Darlington’s MP Jenny Chapman, who was Shadow Prisons Minister at the time, said the latest research raised questions over “whether the supervision provided under the new privatised arrangement is sufficient”, adding: “The programme was opposed by Labour and the Probation Service itself at the time.



**QUESTIONS:** Darlington MP Jenny Chapman

“Because offenders can have issues around addiction, mental health and relationships, you could expect there to be a higher rate of early deaths than for the rest of the population.

“But if the numbers are increasing, it could point to there being problems with the service itself.

“When you put this with recent inspection reports, it makes Transforming Rehabilitation look like a very expensive mess and the Government needs to bring the contracts back together.

“Offenders can change and we need to have supervision of a high enough quality so that risks can be anticipated and appropriate support put in place. It’s about public protection.”

Ms Chapman added: “Probation officers work hard doing one of the most difficult jobs there is in increasingly difficult circumstances – they are as sad as anybody about what’s happened to their service in recent years.”

A Ministry of Justice spokesman highlighted the difficulties in obtaining conclusive information about



**PROBATION:** Reforms introduced by former justice secretary Chris Grayling have been criticised

an offender’s cause of death and said probation services do not have sole responsibility for their care.

He said a significant increase in the volume of offenders supported through probation meant caution should be applied when analysing data on deaths.

However, caseloads for the services operating across the North-East – NPS North East, Durham Tees Valley CRC, Northumbria CRC and Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire CRC – collectively dropped between 2015 and 2018.

NPS North East’s caseload increased and it was one of two services in the region that saw an increased number of its supervised offenders dying – from 64 people in 2015/16 to 95 in 2017/18.

Durham Tees Valley’s caseload decreased but the service saw an increase in deaths from 21 to 34 people.

The MoJ spokesman said an extra £22m was being invested into helping offenders find support on issues such as housing, health care and employment and said probation reforms had been a positive change for public

safety. The National Probation Service is working on a suicide prevention strategy to help staff identify and support vulnerable offenders.

Rebecca Roberts, from charity Inquest, called for deaths of those leaving prison to be scrutinised in the same way as those who die following police custody, adding: “There’s been complete institutional indifference towards the lives and deaths of people following release from custody and a total lack of visibility and investigation.”

## Police investigate football disorder

POLICE have launched an investigation after Sunderland supporters had objects thrown at them during Saturday’s 5-4 home defeat to Coventry City.

Officers were forced to deal with outbreaks of disorder during and after the match at the Stadium of Light, and are looking into reports of objects being thrown from the away end into the stand below.

A number of Sunderland supporters have alleged that glass bottles were flung into the lower tier of the North Stand, and Northumbria Police have confirmed they are working with officials from Sunderland and Coventry as they investigate what went on. Match commander, chief inspector Jamie Pitt said: “While the majority of fans who attended the match behaved incredibly well, the actions of a small minority have spoilt the day for many and this is totally unacceptable.

“Notwithstanding there was a notable steward and police presence at the ground for the match we are aware of the issue of objects being thrown from the away end. There is absolutely no place in football for this sort of behaviour and we are working closely with both clubs to help locate those responsible.”

A spokesperson from Sunderland said: “Sunderland AFC is disappointed by the disrespectful behaviour of many away fans. Several Sunderland fans were either injured by the projectiles or had property damaged by smoke bombs thrown from above.

“In response, Sunderland fans demonstrated admirable restraint in the circumstances, for which the club is grateful.”

Police made eight arrests, resulting in one man being charged with breaching a football banning order and two men facing charges of public order offences. Three men were released under common law, while two men will face no further action. A further five people were ejected from the Stadium of Light for breach of ground regulations.

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### TODAY’S TIDES

**Sunderland:** High 00:18 Low 06:48  
High 12:46 Low 19:25 **Middlesbrough:** High 00:35 Low 07:01 High 13:03 Low 19:38 **Scarborough:** High 01:08 Low 07:36 High 13:30 Low 20:18 **Holy Island Safe Crossing Times:** 01:55-10:15 14:30-22:50



## The Northern Echo Weather Watch

### TODAY'S OUTLOOK

**Summary:** Variable cloud, sunny periods and showers. Heavy, especially across western hills.  
**Climate:** Further cold, with overnight frosts inland.

**Maximum temperature:** 8°C  
**Minimum:** 4°C  
**Wettest time:** 4:00pm

### TEMPERATURES

09:00	☁	5
12:00	☁	8
15:00	☁	9
18:00	☁	7

### 5 DAY FORECAST

		MAX	MIN
Monday	☁	9	5
Tuesday	☁	9	5
Wednesday	☀	11	6
Thursday	☁	11	7
Friday	☁	14	7