

Submission to the PPO’s call for evidence on Medomsley Detention Centre

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Abstract This submission responds to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman’s call for evidence for Operation Deerness, its investigation into historic abuse allegations against detainees at Medomsley Detention Centre. Drawing on research conducted in 2016-17 for a project funded by HM Prison & Probation Service, which examined safeguarding in youth custody between 1960-2016, the document provides methodological guidance and substantive insights regarding historical institutional abuse. The submission addresses specific questions about oversight mechanisms, leadership structures, complaint systems, and abuse of power within detention centres. It offers detailed reflections on the challenges of using archival materials to investigate historical institutional abuse, including the limitations of documentary evidence and strategies for interpretation. The document includes comprehensive references to relevant archival sources at The National Archives and provides practical recommendations for accessing and analyzing these materials. Three annexes supplement the main text with additional research resources, including a historical timeline and details of relevant archival records.

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Availability

Originally submitted to the PPO in September 2024 in response to its call for evidence relating to its special investigation into historical abuses at Medomsley Detention Centre, which concluded with the publication of its report on 12 November 2025.

Our submission is available here. We have removed identifying references to specific PPO staff members we consulted with while preparing the submission.