I made a complaint as the prison laundry lost my clothes.

Basically, I complained because I wanted a laptop in my cell to aid me in my studies and I was told I couldn't have one.

I complained because every time I was going to get my meds, because everybody was queuing up one behind the other, people were overhearing what meds I was on.

It made life difficult for me and that's why I complained.

We consider complaints from anybody who's in custody.

What we hope to do is to provide a service to complainants, so they feel that their complaints are considered by an outside body.

If you've got a case that you want to be heard,
and you want it to be dealt with objectively

by somebody who won't be biased or take sides,

then you would go to somebody like the Ombudsman.

That's exactly what they do. They look at things fairly.

It's not like us against them.

You can only use the Ombudsman after you have actually exhausted all the other complaints processes.

Whenever a prisoner complains in an establishment and remains dissatisfied,

it comes to us to look at and to consider.

And we put a fresh pair of eyes on it just to see whether the decision that the prisoner's made is fair,

reasonable and the right one.

I would describe the Ombudsman as people who are prepared to listen to you.

They are neutral. They don't take sides.
They look at each case for what it is and will deal with it on its merit.

I filed a complaint because I took my clothes, yeah, my outside clothes, my personal belongings, to the laundry to be washed. So, when I have visits, I can look fresh and clean. They told me to come back for my stuff during afternoon association.

So, I've gone to pick up my clothes and I've got there, and they tell me my clothes are not there. I said, "You're responsible because I'm giving you my clothes."

"You tell me they're not there, so what happens next?"

And there's... there was no answer.
I need my clothes, do you understand? So I filed a complaint.

Although this was a relatively small amount of clothing, it was very important to the prisoner because it was his identity, if you like, within the prison.

The governor said, "Well, there's nothing we can really do. If you've handed in your clothes, it's your responsibility."

I thought, "How is it my responsibility? "I've got no control over what happens in the laundry."

I phoned the Ombudsman and they said they would investigate the case.

I contacted the wing manager who explained it was a private arrangement between prisoners because it was their own clothing and they could not be responsible if one prisoner had lost another prisoner's clothing.

Really, he had no alternative but to use the wing laundry.

There simply weren't enough machines
for prisoners to wash their clothes themselves.

By coming to the Ombudsman, they had the benefit of an outside person judging what was reasonable.

And in this case, it was not reasonable to require prisoners to use the prison laundry without any sort of guarantee that they would get their clothes back.

They upheld my case, so I was victorious in that.

They said what they were going to do is that the prison are going to reimburse me for the worth of my clothing, which was great.

What that meant is the prison started taking more care of people's clothes as they don't want to be forking out money every week for clothes that go missing.

So, it didn't just help me.

I like to think I've made a change for the whole prison.
When I walk around the wing now everyone gives me a high five because they know their clothes are safe. So it's good, man. I'm happy.

My complaint was about the usage of an in-cell laptop computer. I'm studying Computer Animated Design, and I feel I could put my time to better use if I had the use of a laptop in my cell to forward my career, basically, when I leave prison. It was a genuine complaint.

The prisoner had a valid reason for wanting the laptop in his cell. His request was supported by the Education department and he secured the funds himself to procure a laptop.
I thought it would be a great idea if I could get a computer in my cell and with all the modifications to it that I can get - it's got no Wi-Fi, it's got no internet access, and which I've paid for myself through funding and charities. I presented that to the prison and the prison wasn't happy with it.

I made a complaint through the formal complaint system to no avail. I spoke to wing governors and nothing came of it. Eventually, I found out about the Ombudsman and made my complaint.

When I visited the prisoner who made the complaint, I was very impressed by his attitude to his studies and was left in no doubt that he would have made good use of the laptop if one had been allowed.
- Got lots of it.
- That would be OK?

I also visited and spoke to his tutor in the Education department who was very impressed with the work that he's been doing and I also spoke to the tutor about the desktop equipment that was available to him.

The prison authorities had carried out a risk assessment and made a decision that they wouldn't change their policy allowing laptops in cells for all the prisoners. The prison themselves said on this particular occasion they didn't have the resources to ensure that the laptops were being used appropriately.

For security reasons, he wouldn't be allowed the use of that laptop. I made my complaint to the Ombudsman and it wasn't upheld. I wasn't happy about it,

but, I think... it was definitely worth doing
because through doing it,

I've got a better understanding as to why I'm not allowed to have it.

And that's, you know...

that helps me a lot with how I feel in my head.

It was a finely balanced call.

In many ways,

I would have liked to have supported the prisoner in his grievance.

I decided that we couldn't

and we had to support the prison's stance.

I sent a letter out explaining that decision,

explaining the rationale to the prisoner.

Hopefully, he could get a good appreciation

why on this occasion, we couldn't support his complaint.

You've got to have one rule for everyone

and if I had been given a computer, other people might have wanted one.
I understand that in prison, you have to do things equally, fairly...

so that's how they've done it.

What I would say to that prisoner is if he had other grievances about different things in the future, don't hesitate to come forward to us again.

When I was receiving my medication at the same time every night, because there's no privacy and everybody just queues up together, the people behind me heard what medication I was taking, and therefore, knew what illness I was suffering from.

Her complaint was as simple as when she was being administered medicine from Health Care,
that it wasn't confidential.

And therefore, I was ridiculed, made fun of, talked about, which was quite distressing.

It's distressing enough being in prison, without going through that as well.

The Ombudsman came to see me quite quickly, told me that they would get back to me, and they would look into the situation, which they did.

I did actually go to the wing and saw that there was no privacy line. And it was as simple as asking the prison to draw a line on the floor, but whilst that may seem almost trivial, but from a prisoner's point of view, it was important because it put confidentiality back.

I can speak freely to the nurse without any fear of being heard.
and being ridiculed for it,

so it was a simple thing, but it made a big difference.

And I'm not the only one who's happy about it.

A lot of women are very happy about it.

..communicate that to the prisoner if you put that in writing.

Often, the complaint to us

is the prisoner's last way of expressing their voice

and it's very important from their point of view

that they've got someone else to look at this complaint on their behalf.

I did have to go through a few generals to get an end result,

but in the end, I did get a result

and it's nice to know that there's somebody

that you can go to who will fight on your behalf

and take your complaint seriously.

Now that something has been done about it,
I'm very glad about that.

If I had one piece of advice to prisoners making complaints

I would say be honest, upfront.

Wherever possible, try to be concise.

We deal with a lot of complaints here.

It would help us to look at the case that you're making

in your complaint,

and deal with it more speedily and more effectively.

I think you need the Ombudsman to be fair, reliable,

and you need them to listen.

And they've done all of those things with me.

Sometimes, it can be dealt with by landing staff, POSO,

but if it does have to go to the Ombudsman,

they do look into it and if your case is valid,

then something is done.
This gives you self-esteem in a funny kind of way.

It gives you confidence as well to be able to communicate and know that you can go through those channels and be heard and your voice can make a change.

To contact the Ombudsman, please write to this address.

Remember, before the Ombudsman can consider your problem, you must first have completed the prison service's own complaints procedure.

Further information about the Ombudsman should be available on wing notice boards or in the prison library.