

FRIDAY JANUARY 21st 2005

ANOTHER CHILD DIES IN PRISON – GOVERNMENT MUST HOLD PUBLIC INQUIRY

16-year-old Gareth Price died yesterday after being found hanging in his cell at HMYOI Lancaster Farms.

Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST said: “The tragic death of yet another child in state custody means the government must set up a comprehensive public inquiry to learn the lessons about the treatment of children in the criminal justice system. We continue to call on the government to set up an inquiry into the death of 16-year-old Joseph Scholes that would be able to examine the fundamental flaws in our system for dealing with children who break the law – flaws which have led to 28 children aged 15 to 17 dying in penal custody since 1990.”

On December 14th 2004 the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights published the report of a year long inquiry – Deaths in Custody. The report expresses serious concern about the numbers of deaths in custody, highlighting “someone is either killed, kills themselves or dies in otherwise questionable circumstances - every other day. That - quite frankly - is shocking”

Amongst their recommendations they said:

“There has never been a public inquiry into the death of a child in custody. We recommend that the Home Secretary order a public inquiry into the death of Joseph Scholes in order that lessons can be fully learnt from the circumstances that led up to his tragic death. We also recommend that local authority secure accommodation should be used wherever possible for children, with use of prison service custody reduced to an absolute minimum.”

The government is due to respond to the Report of the JCHR in late February.