

For immediate release 12 November 2007

INQUEST OPENS INTO THE DEATH OF LOUISE GILES AT HMP DURHAM

**10.00am Wednesday 14 November 2007 (formal evidence to commence)
Before HM Coroner for County Durham Andrew Tweddle
Sitting at Chester-le-street Magistrates Court, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-street,
Co. Durham DH3 3UA**

The inquest into the death of 20 year old Louise Giles will open for formal evidence on 14 November 2007. The hearing is expected to last four weeks.

Louise Giles, who died from strangulation by a ligature on 21 August 2005, had been transferred to HMP Durham on 30 March 2005 following her re-categorisation to “restricted status”. At the time of her death she was just one of six women held in high security conditions on I Wing.

In 2004, following a highly critical report by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspectorate of Prisons (HMCIP) the Prison Service announced it would close HMP Durham women’s prison and by the end of the year the vast majority of women had been relocated to other establishments. However, in June 2005 HMCIP carried out a further inspection of I Wing which now held just six women, including Louise Giles. Their report noted “*distress levels were very high among the women and there was a real risk of suicide unless significant changes were made quickly. Urgent action is needed to ensure that women prisoners are no longer held in such isolated and alienating conditions*”.

Louise was a young prisoner with complex mental health problems. She was a prolific self harmer and during her time at Durham there were 23 reported incidents of self harm. The hearing will look at the management of Louise’s mental state in the month before her death and the method by which prison staff attempted to modify Louise’s behaviour by withdrawing privileges and the effect this had on her subsequent state of mind.

The family’s main areas of concern which they hope the inquest will examine are:

- The suitability of I Wing at HMP Durham for a vulnerable 20 year old woman;
- how Louise’s known vulnerability, propensity to self harm and mental health problems were managed in the last few months of her life;
- management of the F2052SH self harm monitoring procedure including levels of observations;
- the treatment of Louise by individual officers whilst on I Wing;
- the adequacy of communication between prison officers and healthcare professionals.

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Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST said:

“ This inquest will raise serious questions about the failure of the Prison Service to act on well documented concerns about the ability of Durham prison to keep women in its custody safe. The Prison Service must explain why Louise Giles was allocated to a jail where six women took their own lives in two years between 2002 and 2004 ”

The family are being represented INQUEST Lawyers group members barrister Nick Stanage from Garden Court Chambers instructed by Fiona Borrill of Lester Morrill Solicitors

Notes to Editors

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the coroner’s courts.

Louise was the seventh woman to take her own life at the Women’s Unit in Durham between August 2002 and 2005. In September 2005, following Louise’s death and a call from the Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers for all the remaining women to be moved as a matter of urgency, the unit was closed and all remaining prisoners in the unit were transferred to HMP Bronzefield.

Deaths of women in HMP Durham 1990-2005

Name	Date of Death	Ethnicity	Age	Cause of death
Louise Giles	21/08/2005	UK White	20	Hanging
Sharon Miller	08/05/2004	UK White	45	Hanging
Wendy Booth	12/11/2003	UK White	35	Hanging
Jayne Buck	01/05/2003	UK White	28	Hanging
Sue Stevens	21/02/2003	White	48	Hanging
Beverly Fowler	02/10/2002	Black Caribbean	32	Hanging
Diana Schooling	19/08/2002	UK White	52	Hanging
Linda Tandy	04/06/1990	UK White	35	Hanging

Source: INQUEST Casework and monitoring

Further Information	
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