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NEW BOOK UNLOCKS THE TRUTH ABOUT FAMILIES' EXPERIENCES FOLLOWING DEATHS IN CUSTODY

Launched today, INQUEST's new book *Unlocking the Truth: Families' Experiences of the Investigation of Deaths in Custody* by Helen Shaw and Deborah Coles concludes that:

"Unlocking the truth about deaths in custody sheds light on the way we treat some of the most vulnerable men, women and children in society. It is important that we recognise, scrutinise, criticise and argue for reform of the way the state deals with deaths in custody as these processes are an indicator of the condition of its democracy."

At a time of increasing public and political concern about deaths in custody this evidence based report gives voice to bereaved families in their own words. It argues that the current investigation and inquest system is still insufficiently resourced and is failing to perform its preventative function to reduce deaths in custody. Making 80 recommendations and two key proposals, Shaw and Coles argue for improvements to improve accountability and learning and for the creation of a Standing Commission on Custodial Deaths.

Helen Shaw and Deborah Coles are co-directors of INQUEST, the only non governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families and friends of those who die in custody. They are available for interview.

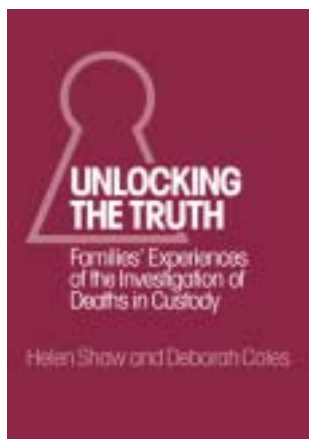
An executive summary which gives an overview of the report's contents and also includes details of the two key proposals and eighty recommendations made in the book can be downloaded from the link below.

For a review copy of *Unlocking the Truth* please contact Richard Fontenoy at the INQUEST office - communications@inquest.org.uk

Further Information	www.inquest.org.uk
Executive summary	www.inquest.org.uk/pdf/unlocking_the_truth_executive_summary.pdf
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Notes to Editors



a) *Unlocking the Truth* is a thoroughly researched and extensively referenced report which:

- Describes the issues that have emerged since the early 1980s which have shaped public, family and state perceptions about deaths in custody.
- Makes 80 detailed recommendations and presents families' suggestions for changes in practice.
- Demonstrates how all agencies involved following a death in custody have a crucial role to play in supporting bereaved people.
- Shows how current systems are failing through basic lack of provision and poor implementation of existing protocols.
- Argues that scrutiny, criticism and proposals for reform of the way the state deals with deaths in custody are a crucial contribution to the health of its democracy.

Unlocking the Truth is essential reading for researchers, policy makers, penal reformers, family liaison officers from the police, Prison Service and those working for the independent investigation bodies, human rights specialists, legal professionals, coroners, voluntary sector bereavement agencies, bereavement counsellors, academics, students and all those with an interest the mechanisms that follow contentious deaths.

£10 paperback 160 pages ISBN 9 780 9468 5821 7

b) 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.

c) [See here for statistics of deaths in prison and in police custody on the INQUEST website.](#)