

PRESS RELEASE

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INQUEST CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION FOLLOWING INSPECTORATE REPORT INTO HMP STYAL

INQUEST calls on the government to take urgent and immediate action following the criticisms in the report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons into the care of vulnerable women at Styal prison.

The report identifies significant failings in the care and management of some of the most vulnerable women in the prison system, with six women dying at the prison since the last inspection, four of those deaths being self-inflicted. Yet again it is evident that there is a failure at the highest levels of the Prison Service to learn the lessons arising from the deaths of women in their care or to recognise the resources and regime necessary to ensure that women are kept safe.

The Keller Unit, previously the segregation unit, is the subject of particular concern, being described as "not an appropriate therapeutic environment" for the women it houses, many with complex mental health problems and serious patterns of self-harm. The criticisms include:

- the lack of training, support and leadership for the unit and staff;
- high levels of self-harm and use of force;
- the lack of proper action plans following previous deaths;
- weak and ineffective case planning.

Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST said:

"HMP Styal continues to be a prison that gives serious cause for concern. As the report demonstrates, the response of the Prison Service does not reflect the seriousness of the failings that have been exposed both by inspection reports and inquests into the deaths of vulnerable women.

How often does it need to be demonstrated that this prison cannot provide a safe environment for some of the most damaged women in society who quite frankly should not be in prison at all? What is needed is a fundamental rethink, not only about Styal but in the whole approach to women who offend, and the provision of alternatives to custody. The government must take urgent action – unless they do so, another preventable death is inevitable."

continues...

John Gunn, the brother of Lisa Marley who died at HMP Styal in January 2008, said:

“The people in charge of Styal have a duty of care to these women, no matter why they are there. If this was any other sort of business with this record, people would be out of their jobs and the place would be shut down – how many more women need to die before something is done?”

Notes to editors:

Lisa Marley aged 32 was found hanged in her cell at HMP Styal on 19 January 2008 and died in hospital on 23 January. At the time of her death she was on an open ACCT form (suicide and self harm system) and was on remand for common assault. She had been in the prison just two days.

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 and conducts policy work on the issues arising.

INQUEST is campaigning to ensure that the Coroners and Justice Bill 2009 results in fundamental reform of an inquest system currently hampered by delay, inconsistency of approach and lack of resources and unable to fulfil its vital function of preventing unnecessary deaths.

The government must also make changes to ensure that bereaved families can participate effectively in inquest hearings by having equal access, alongside the police and Prison Service, to non means-tested public funding for their legal representation. [INQUEST's briefing on the Coroners & Justice Bill](#)

Deaths at HMP Styal since the previous inspection report in 2006					
Name	Date Of Death	Age	Ethnicity	Classification	Verdict
Alison Colk	08/01/2009	36	UK White	Self-Inflicted	Awaited
Kirsty Davies	08/05/2008	32	UK White	Non-Self-Inflicted	Awaited
Liana White	28/04/2008	42	UK White	Non-Self-Inflicted	Awaited
Lisa Marley	23/01/2008	32	UK White	Self-Inflicted	Awaited
Helen Cole	03/06/2007	48	UK White	Self-Inflicted	Awaited
Valerie Hayes	10/05/2006	42	UK White	Self-Inflicted	Narrative

Source: INQUEST Casework and monitoring

Further Information	www.inquest.org.uk
INQUEST	office 020 7263 1111
INQUEST's book <i>Dying on the Inside</i>	http://www.inquest.org.uk/dying_on_the_inside.html
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