

PRESS RELEASE 17 JUNE 2005
INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF SUE STEVENS – DEATH AT HMP DURHAM – TO
BEGIN ON MONDAY

HM Coroner Andrew Tweddle
Sitting at: Chester-le-street Magistrates Court.
Newcastle road,
Chester-le-street,
Co Durham.
DH3 3UA
20th June 10.00 am

The inquest into the death of Sue Stevens, who died after she was found hanging at HMP Durham on 21 February 2003, will begin on Monday 20 June and is expected to last five days.

Sue Stevens was a 48-year-old woman who had spent long periods of her adult life in prison and special hospitals. She had just entered the eighth year of a discretionary life sentence. Sue had a long history of serious self-harm and suicide attempts and she had recently spent 18 months on constant suicide watch at Holloway prison. She was moved during an operational emergency at Holloway prison to Durham via Foston Hall and had been at Durham only two days when she was found hanging.

The Coroner for North Durham has recognised Jo Opie, Sue's only close attachment outside prison as a properly interested person. Ms Opie has serious concerns about the transfer of Sue to Durham prison, the appropriateness of that transfer, the failure of communication between prisons and the failure of Durham to implement its self-harm and suicide prevention procedures.

Sue Stevens was the third woman to die at HMP Durham within six months. Following a further two deaths, in January 2004, HM Inspectorate of Prisons recommended that the female centre at HMP Durham be closed down.

The family are represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Harriet Wistrich, Solicitor, Birnberg Peirce and Jonathan Glasson of Doughty Street Chambers.

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.