

For immediate release - 25 November 2005

## INQUEST OPENS INTO THE DEATH OF WENDY BOOTH AT NOTORIOUS HMP DURHAM

HM Coroner Mr Tweddle  
Sitting at:  
Chester-le-Street magistrates Court  
Newcastle Road,  
Chester-le-Street,  
Co Durham  
DH3 3UA

Date 29 November 2005  
Time: 10am

**The inquest into the death of 35 year old Wendy Booth is due to start on 29 November 2005.  
The hearing is expected to last 5 days.**

Wendy Booth was found hanging in her cell in HMP Durham on 12 November 2003. She had been placed on 'suicide watch' on numerous occasions since arriving at the troubled prison in February 2002. Wendy had been described as withdrawn and very down and had not been eating properly. Towards the end of life she had also written to another prisoner indicating she wanted to take her own life but despite her clear vulnerability the observations by prison staff on her were reduced to two hourly checks on the day of her death.

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

- *How Wendy's known vulnerability was managed in the last few weeks of her life,*
- *Management of the self-harm monitoring procedures including levels of observations,*
- *The location of Wendy, an at risk prisoner, in a cell with clear ligature points,*
- *The failure to act upon recommendations from previous inquests and investigations into previous deaths,*
- *Denial, against medical advice, of Wendy's request to share a cell,*
- *The adequacy of staff training and whether staffing levels played a contributing part in Wendy's death.*

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."*

David Booth, Wendy's father commented:

*"It is now over 2 years since my daughter's untimely death and the family have been deeply concerned over the period that has elapsed prior to the inquest being held. This has been a very traumatic time for all of us. Since Wendy's conviction, she had always maintained her innocence, and the family fully believed and supported her in this.*

*We hope the inquest will explore our belief that those who were entrusted with Wendy's care and well being did not apply the full duty of care that she was entitled to. We want to know if her right to life could have been more adequately safeguarded with proper consideration to and management of her vulnerability."*

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

Wendy Booth was the fifth woman to take her own life at the Women's Unit in Durham from August 2002 to November 2003. Prior to August 2002 there had been no recorded deaths there for twelve years. However these deaths coincided with a massive 150% increase in female prisoners at HMP Durham and in September 2005 Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, called for the remaining women prisoners in Durham to be moved as a matter of urgency. A number of prisoners had already been moved after a previous inspectorate report in May 2004 recommended the closure of Durham's women's unit. Ms Owers urged urgent action to ensure 'that women prisoners are no longer held in such isolated and alienating conditions'.

### Deaths of women in HMP Durham from 1990 to date

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

Source: INQUEST Casework and monitoring

Further Information	
INQUEST website	<a href="http://www.inquest.org.uk">www.inquest.org.uk</a>
Deborah Coles, Co-Director	Office 020 7263 1111
Gilly Mundy, Senior Caseworker	Office 020 7263 1111
Fiona Borrill, Lester Morrill Solicitors	Office 020 7359 5700

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.