

PRESS RELEASE

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JURY RETURNS CRITICAL VERDICT AT INQUEST INTO THE DEATH IN POLICE CUSTODY OF ADRIAN COLDWELL

Sitting before HM Coroner for West Yorkshire, David Hinchliff
Wakefield Coroner's Court, 71 Northgate, Wakefield WF1 3BS

Today the jury at the inquest into the death in police custody of Adrian Coldwell returned a critical narrative verdict citing numerous failures at Pontefract police station where Adrian died.

Adrian Coldwell was found partly suspended by a cord from his track suit bottoms in a cell in Pontefract police station on 17 December 2004. He had a history of self harm and was already known to police as presenting a suicide risk. Adrian had twice been arrested and taken to the police station as a place of safety under section 136 of the Mental Health Act, the most recent occasion only three months before his death.

The jury agreed that:

- mistyping Adrian's last name resulted in his previous custody records not being available;
- there was a failure to ensure a doctor examined Adrian in person;
- Adrian was given medication without direct supervision by a doctor which may have had a detrimental effect on his mind;
- warnings about the cord in Adrian's tracksuit bottoms were not acted upon;
- there was an unsatisfactory level of supervision of Adrian by the police;
- there was a failure to increase the level of Adrian's supervision after he was given medication;
- there was a failure to carry out adequate checks on the condition of his cell.

Adrian's sister, Jane Sharp said:

"I thank the coroner and the jury for their careful and caring investigation. My brother should never have died. He should never have had a Class A drug – morphine sulphate – given to him by a PC whilst in custody, without a medical examination. I think the dosage he received scrambled his mind. 58 tablets of the same dangerous drug were handed back to me by police from Adrian's property, after he died, when I was in a highly emotional state through grief and pregnancy. That alone could have led to another tragedy."

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Jayne's solicitor, Ruth Bunday added:

"Ironically the very custody sergeant on whose watch Adrian died had admitted him to the police station three months before his death, after he had attempted suicide with a pipe attached to his car exhaust. With only the slightest further effort all custody staff could have checked on Adrian's past history of self harm and taken greater care of him. "

Notes to editors:

1. 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.
2. Adrian's sister Jayne Sharp was represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group member Ruth Bunday.

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