

Bhatt Murphy Solicitors

PRESS RELEASE

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Jury returns a highly critical narrative verdict following the inquest into the death of Peter Murphy at HMP Swansea.

The death of Mr Murphy aged 21 years at HMP Swansea was contributed to by serious failures and inadequacies on the part of both South Wales Police and HMP Swansea according to the verdict returned at the conclusion of an inquest into his death before HM Coroner for the City and County of Swansea.

Peter Murphy died on 12 May 2009 aged 21 at HMP Swansea. Prior to his remand he had been in the custody of South Wales Police since his arrest on 8 May. Upon his arrival at Swansea Central Police Station Mr Murphy was conveyed to Morriston hospital due to concerns about the level of his intoxication - he had suffered for many years from opiate and benzodiazepine dependency. He was thereafter remanded in custody to attend Swansea Magistrates court on 11 May 2009 and during the evening of 9 May 2009 Mr Murphy, who was under 30 minute observations and in a CCTV camera cell, was seen attempting to strangle himself with a bed sheet. A Custody Sergeant and Civilian Detention Officers¹ entered his cell. Mr Murphy was placed in an anti rip suit and provided with an anti rip blanket and frequent observations continued. A police doctor attended and prescribed Mr Murphy with medication.

On 11 May 2009 Mr Murphy was released into the custody of Reliance custodial services at Swansea Magistrates Court. A Prisoner Escort Record (PER) form accompanied him, however this form had been completed and signed by a Civilian Detention Officer and had not been checked by the Custody Sergeant from whose custody Mr Murphy had been released.

The inquest heard that the PER form contained ticks indicating risk markers for suicide/self harm and drugs/alcohol, however did not contain any further information about either the self strangulation attempt in the police station or the fact Mr Murphy had been to hospital and been seen by a doctor and prescribed medication. The jury found that the fact this information was not passed to the prison was a "serious failure" on the part of police. They found that the failure was due to a lack of adherence to policies and guidance which state that custody sergeants have responsibility for checking and signing PER forms and furthermore that there was inadequate monitoring and auditing of the completion of PER forms by police management.

Mr Murphy was transferred to the custody of HMP Swansea without prison officers and/or medical staff being aware of his recent self strangulation attempt at the police station. The jury further found that the failure of the police to provide the information lead to prison staff not acting upon the risk at HMP Swansea, including ensuring appropriate measures were put in place. Mr Murphy was placed in a single cell and was found hanging in the early hours of 12 May 2009.

The jury strongly criticised the healthcare assessment carried out upon Mr Murphy's arrival at HMP Swansea in light of his substance misuse, concluding that the clinical assessment and subsequent treatment plan was inadequate and that there had been a serious failure in fully completing the first reception health screen.

The inquest had heard that despite guidance issued to staff by the prison in March 2008 and following a previous death at HMP Swansea the incomplete PER form was not seen by healthcare staff. The jury found that it was "inappropriate" for health care staff to conduct the clinical assessment without the PER form in accordance with the instruction previously given to staff.

Since Mr Murphy's death there has been an overhaul of the procedures in place regarding the PER form and following the verdict the Coroner announced his intention to make recommendations regarding the policies and procedures at HMP Swansea.

Megan Phillips of Bhatt Murphy, solicitor for Mr Murphy's family said, "Peter's family are pleased that there has been had a thorough inquiry into the circumstances surrounding his death and that the serious failures on the part of South Wales police have been thoroughly examined. They have had an opportunity to learn about the new policies and procedures put into place and hope that these will be thoroughly monitored and audited to ensure the serious failings identified in this case are not repeated. They further hope that the recommendations to be made by the Coroner will ensure that the inadequacies in the prison system, particularly in relation to the healthcare assessments of people arriving at HMP Swansea, are robust and are firmly adhered to by those responsible at the prison and look to the relevant authorities to ensure the serious failings on the part of the prison service are not repeated."

Note:

**Mr Murphy's family was represented by:
Ms Megan Phillips of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors &
Ms Alison Gerry of Doughty Street Chambers**

For further information, please call Megan Phillips on 020 7729 1115 or e-mail on m.phillips@bhattmurphy.co.uk .

Note to editors

1 Civilian Detention Officers are civilian staff employed by Group 4 Care and Justice Services and contracted to South Wales Police custody suites.