

PRESS RELEASE

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INQUEST JURY FINDS GROSS FAILINGS BY GWENT POLICE

FAMILY CALLS FOR OFFICERS TO BE PROSECUTED

25 May 2011 before HM Coroner for Gwent District, David T Bowen, sitting at Newport Civic Centre, Newport, South Wales, NP20 4UR

A jury at Newport Coroners Court has concluded that a 22 year old local man, Andrew Sheppard, died on 1 October 2006 after being detained in Newport police station, as a result of failings by Gwent Police. The jury found gross failings both by individual police officers and the systems operated by Gwent Police for supervising vulnerable detainees. The inquest commenced on 10 May 2011 and concluded on Wednesday 25 May 2011.

On 30 September 2006 Andrew was removed by police to Newport Police Station and held in a police cell as a 'place of safety' under section 136 of the Mental Health Act. Police involvement followed calls for urgent help from Andrew's family due to his vulnerability. Despite the police being on notice that Andrew was at risk of drugs overdose, he was not properly searched or checked whilst being detained overnight at the station. As a result, medical experts have concluded that Andrew probably took an overdose of painkillers whilst in a CCTV observation cell at the police station. Four Gwent Police custody sergeants have admitted in misconduct proceedings that Andrew was not properly checked in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. As a result he slipped into a coma and had to be rushed to the Royal Gwent Hospital on 1 October 2006, where he died later that morning.

Mr Sheppard's family said:

We are relieved that the jury has recognised how badly Andrew was failed by Gwent Police. The police officers who let Andrew down should now face criminal prosecution on the basis of the new evidence heard at the inquest. Andrew was much loved.

The family's solicitor Tony Murphy of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors said:

Newport police station was a very dangerous place to be detained in 2006. The evidence heard at the inquest questions whether it is a safe place of detention for vulnerable detainees in 2011.

Victoria McNally the INQUEST caseworker who is supporting the family said:

Vulnerable people have been dying in police custody due to the failure to make basic checks for decades. How long before changes on the ground are made, so that more needless deaths can be avoided.

Notes to editors:

- The family now ask for privacy to be allowed to grieve. Any requests for information should be directed to t.murphy@bhattmurphy.co.uk or to INQUEST.
- Andrew Sheppard's family is represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Paul Bowen of Doughty Street Chambers, instructed by Tony Murphy of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors.
- INQUEST provides a general telephone advice, support and information service to any bereaved person facing an inquest and a free, in-depth complex casework service on deaths in custody/state detention or involving state agents and works on other cases that also engage article 2 of the ECHR and/or raise wider issues of state and corporate accountability. INQUEST's policy and parliamentary work is informed by its casework and we work to ensure that the collective experiences of bereaved people underpin that work. Its overall aim is to secure an investigative process that treats bereaved families with dignity and respect; ensures accountability and disseminates the lessons learned from the investigation process in order to prevent further deaths occurring.
- Please refer to INQUEST the organisation in all capital letters in order to distinguish it from the legal hearing.

Further Information	www.inquest.org.uk
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