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INQUEST OPENS INTO DEATH OF YOUNG MAN AT HMYOI BRINSFORD

10.00am Monday 15 January 2007

Sitting before HM Coroner for Staffordshire, Andrew Haigh,
Staffordshire Crown Court, Victoria Square, Stafford ST16 2QQ

The inquest into the death of 19 year old remand prisoner Lee McArdle is due to begin on Monday 15 January. The jury inquest, which is sitting before Staffordshire coroner Andrew Haigh, is expected to last five days.

Lee McArdle, who had a history of poly drug use, was remanded on 27 January 2005 to HM Young Offender Institution Brinsford for allegedly stealing three bottles of shampoo. In addition to his drug use he also had a history of self harm and attempts to take his own life. On 28 January Lee started a fourteen day detoxification programme. Concerns have been raised by his family about whether this was properly managed and if staff shortages had led to Lee's mental health assessment being cancelled during this period.

Lee was found hanging by his cellmate two days after the completion of the drug detoxification programme. Following the end of the treatment it is believed that Lee was still suffering from the effects of drug withdrawal.

The family hope the coroner will look into a number of key areas including:

- Whether the detoxification programme was adequate to support Lee;
- what effect Lee's withdrawal from drugs and the ending of the detoxification programme had on his mental state just before his death;
- whether Lee's hanging was a cry for help in regards to his withdrawal from drugs;
- whether the response to finding Lee hanging was appropriate and timely.

The fact that Lee's body was left on the prison landing for a number of hours by police officers investigating his death was the subject of a complaint by the family to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. They ruled that this was inappropriate and insensitive.

Lee's mother Sally Lorenzo said:

"I just want the truth about what happened to my son in the short time he spent at the prison. I want to know why he died in a place that I thought he could get help and would be safe. Lee was planning to come out of prison and marry the mother of his two young children and they will never see their father again."

Gilly Mundy of INQUEST added:

“We hope that the coroner will examine the serious issues raised by Lee’s death in detail. INQUEST has highlighted concerns on many occasions about the treatment and care of vulnerable prisoners and the ability of the prison system to properly assist prisoners through the process of withdrawal.”

Lee McArdle’s mother is being represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Hannah Chambers of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors and barrister Alison MacDonald of Matrix 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.

The local police force will conduct an initial investigation when there is a death in prison, and any concerns the family have with their conduct are raised with the IPCC.

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