
MEDIA RELEASE

Statement by Philip Goldberg, Managing Director of Minton Morrill Solicitors on behalf of the family of Vikki Thompson (deceased)

Vikki's case is a deeply tragic one. She is one of three transgender women to die within the male prison estate since November 2015.

Yes, Vikki was a transgender woman housed in a male prison but like many others in prison her vulnerability did not make her unique. It was the responsibility of HMP Leeds to ensure she was properly looked after and safe. The jury heard that Vikki experienced bullying and sexual harassment on E-Wing that caused her to self-harm before she was moved to the Vulnerable Prisoner's wing. HMP Leeds has the second-highest number of self-inflicted deaths in the UK and an inability to learn from their mistakes.

Vikki's mother remains deeply distressed by the loss of her daughter. Yet hopes that if any good is to come of her death, it's that the Ministry of Justice also undertakes a complete overhaul of HMP Leeds.

Vikki identified as a woman from a young age and was vulnerable because her complex history of sexual and violent abuse, drug use and mental health problems. Vikki's vulnerabilities echo many of those experienced by women who find themselves in the criminal justice system.

Just a few months before she was remanded into HMP Leeds for the first time in March 2015 for offences of theft, she had provided evidence to WYP to support three allegations of sexual offences against her, which at the time of her death were still being investigated.

When Vikki went into HMP Leeds in October 2015 she told staff that she would “come out in a box”.

Her death echoes the experiences of other vulnerable prisoners who have died whilst in custody at Leeds. This is yet another Inquest that has identified the serious failings both on the ground and in the management at the prison.

Vikki’s death has led to a review of the Prison Service Instruction that governs the management of Transgender Prisoners. Whilst we welcome the policy reform, what really matters is that prisons protect those prisoners in real terms. This will require a radical shift in prison staff culture and training.

Can I thank you for respecting Vikki’s mother’s wish for privacy at this upsetting time. Thank you.

END

Notes to editors

1. Key information

West Yorkshire (Eastern) Coroners Court: 2-19 May 2017

Coroner: Jonathan Leach

Deceased: Vikki Thompson

Died: 13th November 2015 whilst on remand at HMP Leeds

Mother: Lisa Harrison

Counsel for Lisa Harrison (mother of the deceased): Anna Morris, Garden Court Chambers

Solicitor for Lisa Harrison: Philip Goldberg and Gemma Vine, Minton Morrill Solicitors

2. Relevant Links

- ***Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) – Learning Lessons – Transgender Bulletin January 2017**
<http://www.ppo.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/PPO-Learning-Lessons-Bulletin-Transgender-prisoners-Final-WEB-Jan-17.pdf>
- **2016 the worst ever recorded for Prison Suicides**

<http://howardleague.org/news/suicidesinprison2016/>

- **Leeds HMP the most overcrowded in the UK 2015/2016**
<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/crime/leeds-prison-report-most-overcrowded-and-one-of-the-worst-performers-in-england-1-8277435>
- **First Parliamentary Report on Transgender Equality**
<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmwomeq/390/390.pdf>

3. About the Inquest team at Minton Morrill Solicitors

Minton Morrill has a national reputation for representing bereaved families at an inquest with particular expertise in representing families whose loved one have died in prison, police custody or psychiatric detention.

The firm's aim is to ensure that the bereaved family's voice is heard throughout the inquest process and that they are able to obtain the answers they need in relation to the death of their loved one.

Minton Morrill represented the parents of Christi & Bobby Shepherd at the highly publicised inquest in May 2015 into their deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning on a Thomas Cook holiday in Corfu, following which she continued to work closely with the parents, Coroner, Counsel and Thomas Cook advising on changes to systems, policies & procedures to protect holidaymakers abroad.

4. For more information contact

PR Enquiries can also be directed to: Natalie Rodgers, MCIM, MCIPR and non-practising Solicitor
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