

Vigil held for service user as family's questions over his death in custody go unanswered

By Staff writer

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A vigil for the service user, Sean Rigg, 40, who tragically lost his life after he was taken into police custody, was held outside Brixton Police Station this week.

Silent vigil outside Brixton Police station

Thursday's silent vigil marks the 28th week that Rigg's friends and family have gathered outside the police station where their loved died, on Thursday 21st August last year.

Concerns around the circumstances surrounding his sudden death and what his family say has been the lack of transparency around the subsequent, Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) investigation, is the driving force behind these solemn assemblies, which have been held every week over the last seven months.

'There is a significance in having a constant presence at the station, it and sends a message to the police that we will not allow our brother to be forgotten, nor allow them to sweep the issues of his death under the carpet. A lot of people in Brixton do not know that our brother died right here at Brixton police station. There are so many questions that have not yet been addressed and until we get satisfactory answers that can take us to the next stage of getting justice, we will continue to hold the vigils,' a member of the Rigg family told Black Mental Health UK.

Service users death damages community relations

The lack of information that has been forthcoming around Rigg's last moments has raised alarm bells within the many sections of the community.

Mental health experts point out that such a serious incident will have irreparable damage on community relations and calls in to question the role of the police when dealing with those in need of urgent mental health care.

The former musician and producer had used mental health services for much of his adult life. On the 21st August Rigg began to have a crisis. The staff at the hostel where he lived called the police six times asking for help to get him to a place of safety, but officers did not turn up.

Rigg then left the hostel in a disturbed state and the police arrested him after a member of public also called the police. Within 91 minutes to being taken into custody he was dead. Seven months later his family are still no closer to finding out how their loved one died.

'We not aware as to how long and what methods they used to restrain Sean, all we know is that he died suddenly and within a very short time, after having no previous heart condition, disease, intake of drugs nor alcohol in his system. Sean was physically healthy and had everything to live for', a family member said.

Family call on IPCC for a fair and independent investigation

The media attention this case attracted earlier this year, brought to light widespread concerns the Rigg family have over ensuring that there is a fair and independent investigation into this sudden fatality.

The Independent on Sunday, The BBC as well as local and community press all reported on the failure of the IPCC to conduct what the family say is a fair and open investigation. Issues surrounding failure to gather critical evidence within the 24 hours of the incident at the scene of the arrest and vital CCTV evidence are among a catalogue of concerns. The Rigg family told BMH UK that they were informed that their essential footage from the police yard has reportedly gone missing.

The family have recently been informed that the team of officers responsible for the arresting of Rigg on the day that he died will be interviewed

'It's been seven months since Sean's death, and the IPCC are only just now talking about interviewing the police officers involved in the arrest. It's ludicrous there should be a greater onus of responsibility on police as they are supposed to be the guardians of public safety and hold a position of public trust,' a family member said.

Black deaths in custody a growing community concern

All too often deaths in custody cases are made even more painful for families who are forced to spend their time and energy to uncover exactly how their loved one's lost their lives.

A new play entitled the 'Hounding of David Oluwale', showing in London this week, has again made black deaths in custody headline news.

Oluwale, is the only case in British history where a black man's death in custody led to the prosecution of the officers responsible.

Reports indicate that there have been over one thousand deaths since Oluwale who died in 1969, community leaders are clear that essential lessons have not been learnt.

Cases like Mikey Powell, Roger Sylvester, Christopher Alder, Andrew Rose and of late Sean Rigg, mean that this is an issue that will not go away until there is justice for those who no longer can speak out for themselves.

The Sean Rigg silent vigil takes place outside Brixton police station on Thursday evening from 7.30pm.