

PRESS RELEASE

18 December 2025

“HIGHLY INAPPROPRIATE FORCE” BY POLICE CONTRIBUTED TO DEATH

A Lincoln inquest jury has returned a damning verdict concerning the death of Robert Gracey in the early hours of 29 September 2021.

Rob had attended Gainsborough Police Station less than 2 hours prior seeking help, at a time when cocaine intoxication had left him paranoid, delusional and distressed. Officers from the station followed Rob to a nearby address, where they quickly placed him under forceful restraint involving the use of incapacitant spray, double leg restraints, handcuffs, ground pins, and a “distraction strike” to the leg. Further force was then used to push him into a cage in the back of a police van, including punches and pressure point pain techniques.

The senior officer at the scene recorded that Rob had been detained for a breach of the peace and should be taken to custody. He remained restrained in the back of the police van. Just over 20 minutes later, he was noted to be unresponsive. The van pulled over and the two officers present pulled him out of the cage and commenced CPR on the tarmac. Paramedics attended but Rob could not be saved.

The inquest concluded that Rob’s condition was evident, such that police should have treated him as a medical emergency; that police attempts to de-escalate the situation were inadequate, and that Rob was the victim of unreasonable and disproportionate force. They found that opportunities for medical intervention were missed and that monitoring was “seriously insufficient” and in particular that it was “unacceptable” not to have an officer monitoring Rob in the back of the police van. They found that Lincolnshire Police training was inadequate in terms of managing people suffering an acute behavioural disturbance and recognised that Rob’s cocaine use increased the risk he faced.

Rob’s wife Zoe Gracey said: *“Rob was a good man - loved and missed by his family - and we have been heartbroken to learn that in the last hour of his life police officers called him all sorts of awful names and subjected him to a great deal of violence. He was scared, and a human being in need of help. Lessons must be learned from our loss. We would like to thank the jury for considering matters so carefully and would also like to thank INQUEST and our legal team for their support in the years since Rob died”.*

Carolynn Gallwey, solicitor for Zoe Gracey, said: *“It has, for a great many years, been a feature of police training and guidance that acutely agitated people face a risk of death if they are then also restrained. It is also known that cocaine intoxication increases the risk of restraint. We should simply not still be seeing deaths like Rob’s occur.”*

Jodie Anderson, Senior Caseworker at INQUEST, said: *‘There are longstanding and well documented concerns around the police use of force against vulnerable people in the midst of a highly vulnerable and agitated state. The responsibility of Rob’s death rests ultimately with Lincolnshire Police Force who failed in every respect – not only to treat him as a human deserving of basic decency and dignity – but as somebody requiring urgent medical attention. Yet again we see police officers defaulting to force and control over*

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common sense and care. The way the force acted throughout this process exposes a broken system that prioritises self-protection over learning from and preventing future deaths.'

Zoe Gracey and her children are represented by **Emily Hobhouse** and **Carolynn Gallwey** of Bhatt Murphy, and Raj Desai of Matrix Chambers.

For further information or request for comment please contact **Carolynn Gallwey** at Bhatt Murphy on 020 7729 1115 or c.gallwey@bhattmurphy.co.uk