

H.M CORONER Darlington & South Durham / North Durham Districts



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Homes and Community Agency
Central Business Exchange
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MK9 2ES

29th May 2013

Dear Sirs

Re: Ann Bradshaw deceased

On the 21st May 2013 the Inquest into the death of Ann Bradshaw was concluded.

The cause of death was Smoke Inhalation and the Verdict was Accidental Death.

I also announced my intention to make a Report under Rule 43 of the Coroners (Amendment) Rules 2008.

This Rule provides that where the evidence at an Inquest gives rise to concern that circumstances creating a risk of other deaths will occur or will continue to exist in the future, and in the Coroner's opinion, action should be taken to prevent the occurrence or continuation of such circumstances, or to eliminate or reduce the risk of death created by such circumstances, the Coroner may report the circumstances to a person who may have the power to take such action.

I am therefore reporting this matter to you in accordance with Rule 43, a copy of which I enclose.

The deceased was a hoarder. Her house was literally full of accumulated items. There was some eighteen months accumulation of human waste stored in the property. Items were piled in some rooms so that there was only a gap of less than one foot to the ceiling. Items were piled on the staircase to above banister level. The surviving son of the deceased said it took two hours to get to the front door to go out of the property to carry out some shopping. There

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was only left in the house sufficient room for both occupants to sleep together in one single bed. In short, there was quite a staggering amount of goods, rubbish etc. hoarded in the property. The protective covers on electrical cable were worn away, at least in part as a result of the items placed upon it and as a result, heat from the exposed copper cable caused the surrounding items to ignite and a major fire was quickly raging in the property. Due to the huge amount of flammable material the risks to fire fighters was considerable. They found it very difficult to gain access to the property and when, having done so, very difficult to move around it and get upstairs to try and effect a rescue of the deceased. The firefighters were at grave risk of death themselves. Clear evidence was given that had the property been "normal", i.e. not full of accumulated items, then it would have been much easier for a rescue to be effected and in all probability, the deceased's life would have been saved.

These dreadful living conditions were known to the Landlord of the property and it appears that some efforts had been made to engage with the deceased and her son to try and deal with the problem. However, it is abundantly apparent that little or no progress had been made in this regard and the property was a significant risk not only to the occupants, but also to neighbours and members of the emergency services, such as fire fighters who might have to enter the property. I take note that hoarding is now becoming better publicized and indeed it is now the subject of television programmes. There seems to be a lack of appreciation of the enormous risk that such hoarding poses to occupants, neighbours and members of the emergency services. It is very likely that had there been earlier and more effective intervention, Mrs Bradshaw would not have died.

It is a matter of deep concern therefore that similar houses may be in such a similar condition and where several lives may be put at risk as a direct result. Thus, an urgent review needs to be undertaken to ensure that all tenanted properties are in a fit and proper condition to be occupied (so far as hoarding is concerned) and immediate steps taken to rectify problems where they exist and remove the risk of similar fatalities in the future.

I am writing to the Agency so that this information can be considered on a national basis and the appropriate steps taken.

In accordance with Rule 43, a copy of this Report is being sent to the Lord Chancellor and all of the other properly interested persons identified at the Inquest together with other people I believe may find it useful or of interest. A list of copy recipients can be found in the Schedule attached. Your response to this Report will also be shared with those listed.

The Lord Chancellor may send a copy of the Report and response to any person who the Lord Chancellor believes may find it useful or of interest. In addition, the Lord Chancellor may publish a full copy or a summary of the

Report and response (unless I have decided otherwise in response to a written representation about the release and publication of your response). Rule 43A requires that you give a written response within 56 days of the day that the Report is sent. If you are unable to respond within that time, you may apply to me for an extension. The response is to contain details of any action that has been taken or which it is proposed will be taken whether in response to this Report or otherwise, or an explanation as to why no action is proposed.

If there are circumstances where you do not want your full response to be shared with the copy recipients listed in the Schedule attached, or for a copy of it to be published, you may make a written representation to me at the time of giving your response. Instead of releasing or publishing your full response it may be possible to share or publish a summary in accordance with Rule 43A.

I look forward to hearing from you by Wednesday 24th July 2013.

Yours faithfully

ANDREW TWEDDLE LL.B.
H.M. Coroner for the
North and South Districts of
Durham and Darlington

SCHEDULE OF RECIPIENTS

Addressee (s) :-

*Cestra
Bowes Offices
Lambton Park
Chester Le Street
County Durham
DH3 4AN*

*Dale & Valley Homes
Dale & Valley House
27 Longfield Road
Southchurch Enterprise Park
Bishop Auckland
County Durham
DL14 6XB*

*DAMHA
PO Box 31
The Grove
Front Street
Chester Le Street
County Durham
DH3 3YH*

*DerwentsideHomes
Greengates House
Amos Drive
Greencroft Industrial Park
Stanley
County Durham
DH9 7YE*

*Durham City Homes
Lumley House
Whitefield Court
St Johns Road
Meadowfield Industrial Estate
County Durham
DH7 8XL*

*East Durham Homes
2 Meridian Court
Whitehouse Business Park
Peterlee
County Durham
SR8 2RQ*

*Living
Farrell House
Arlington Way
Durham Gate
Spennymoor
County Durham
DL16 6NL*

*North Star Housing Group
14A Redwell Court
Harmire Enterprise Park
Barnard Castle
County Durham
DL12 8BN*

*Railway Housing Association and Benefit Fund
Bank Top House
Garbutt Square
Neasham Road
Darlington
DL1 4DR*

*Sherburn House Charity
Sherburn Hospital
Durham
DH1 2SE*

*Three Rivers/4HG
Three Rivers House
Abbeywoods Business Park
Pity Me
County Durham
DH1 5TG*

Interested Persons:-

*Mr I Bradshaw
c/o Lynn Raymer
Rosslyn House
Oakley Green
West Auckland
Bishop Auckland
County Durham
DL14 9JF*

Others:-

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