

Press release: Charity Commission opens inquiry into care charity following Coroner's report

The Charity Commission has opened a statutory inquiry into Richmond Psychosocial Foundation International ([registered charity number 1116206](#)), a charity with objects to provide therapeutic care for adults suffering from mental health and other problems. Its activities include the provision of residential care.

Following the death in May 2016 of Sophie Bennett, a young woman in the charity's care, an inquest was opened. In February 2019, that inquest found that leadership and oversight of the charity's board was "grossly inadequate". The Coroner identified serious failings by the trustees to keep their beneficiaries safe from harm.

After the publication of the Coroner's report, the charity regulator swiftly opened a statutory inquiry on 5 March 2019. Whilst other statutory agencies lead on the safety and quality of care activities provided by the charity, the Charity Commission's focus is on governance and compliance under charity law.

The inquiry is considering:

- the trustees' compliance with their duties and responsibilities under charity law; in particular their oversight and governance of safeguarding arrangements
- the trustees' response to the Coroner's report into the death of Sophie Bennett and the governance changes that are necessary as a result.

The Charity Commission has worked closely with the Adult Social Services team at the London Boroughs of Richmond upon Thames and Wandsworth and the Care Quality Commission. As the relevant statutory agencies on safeguarding and the quality of care provision respectively, they are overseeing the safety and wellbeing of the vulnerable people who are using the charity's services. The Charity Commission inquiry will continue to liaise closely with these bodies as necessary.

Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations, Monitoring and Enforcement at the Charity Commission said:

This Coroner's report made for highly distressing reading. Those that run charities must put the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people in their care first at all times.

The Coroner found that governance failings at the charity directly contributed to Sophie's death. We want to see the charity address

those failings as a matter of urgency.

The opening of this inquiry reflects the seriousness of the Coroner's findings and our concerns.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of previous inquiries are available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Ends.

Notes to editors

1. The Commission has been engaging with the charity on a number of matters since 2016, however scrutiny of the trustees' safeguarding governance and decision-making had to be placed on hold pending action by other agencies, including the inquest.
2. Sophie Bennett died at Lancaster Lodge, a residential home run by Richmond Psychosocial Foundation International. The last resident moved out during the summer of 2016.
3. The charity currently runs a residential home and supported living service collectively known as the 'White House'. At its last inspection of this service, the Care Quality Commission, found that the service was "good" in each of the 5 key outcomes. The inquiry is liaising with relevant authorities who are responsible for ensuring that there are no current risks to the charity's beneficiaries.
4. The Commission is not a statutory safeguarding agency. Further information on the Commission's remit in relation to safeguarding can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).
5. Section 46 of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission the power to institute inquiries. The opening of an inquiry gives the Commission access to a range of investigative, protective and remedial legal powers.
6. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see the [about us](#) page on GOV.UK.
7. The Care Quality Commission is the independent regulator of all health and social care services in England. For more information please contact their press office on: 020 7448 9401.
8. For more information from London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Adult Social Services please contact their press office on: 020 8487 5182.