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Andrew Watson's mum says 'he deserved the chance to survive'

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By **Olivia Howlett**Reporter

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A heartbroken mum has said her son 'deserved the chance to survive' after a coroner ruled ambulance delays contributed to his death.

Andrew Watson, died on October 10, 2019, at his supported living complex Cecil Court in Langley Moor. He suffered respiratory failure caused by airway obstruction from quinsy, a rare complication of tonsillitis.

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The 32-year-old's death was originally ruled to have been from natural causes at an inquest in 2020.

But the case was reopened after internal investigations by the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) were not disclosed to his family and only came to light in 2023 after a whistle blower contacted journalists.

Following a five-day inquest, Senior Assistant Coroner Crispin Oliver, concluded Andrew's death was "a natural death to which the delayed arrival of an ambulance contributed."

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Speaking after the conclusion of the inquest, Andrew's mother Liz Watson said: "For almost seven years, our family has lived with the devastating loss of Andrew while also fighting for answers about the circumstances surrounding his death. Nothing can bring Andrew back.

"He was only 32-years-old and had his whole life ahead of him. He was funny, intelligent, kind and full of life. Andrew brought warmth, laughter and energy wherever he went. He was deeply loved by his family and friends, and he is missed every single day.

"We are grateful that the inquest has finally been able to examine what happened and establish the facts surrounding Andrew's death.

"It has been acknowledged by North East Ambulance Service that the delay in getting an ambulance to Andrew contributed to his death. We also acknowledge the apology that has now been offered to our family, which came after many years of unanswered questions and after we had to fight for this inquest to be reopened.

"No family should have to spend years searching for the truth about how their loved one died. We hope this inquest helps ensure there is greater openness, accountability and learning so that other families are spared the pain we have experienced.

"Andrew deserved the chance to survive. We hope the lessons identified through this inquest, together with the changes the ambulance service says it has made, mean that others facing a medical emergency receive the care they need in time.

"We would like to thank everyone who has supported us throughout this long process, including our legal team and counsel, as well as the coroner for the careful consideration given to the evidence."

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Representing the family, Matthew Westlake from law firm Leigh Day said no legal process can undo Andrew's tragic death, but his family's determination has ensured the circumstances have been fully examined and lessons can be learned.

He added: "The family hope the findings of this inquest, together with the changes described by the ambulance service, will help prevent other families experiencing a similar tragedy."

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As previously reported, Andrew attended his GP on the morning of his death and was diagnosed with tonsillitis before his condition rapidly deteriorated hours later.

He made three 999 calls while struggling to breathe. Despite being told an ambulance would arrive within 18 minutes, paramedics did not reach him for 67 minutes.