

## Sophie Walker

Call: 2016

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**Specialist in:**

- Personal Immigration
- Business Immigration
- Prison Law
- Inquests & Public Inquiries Team
- Civil Actions Against Public Authorities
- Family Law – Private
- Family Law – Public
- Modern Slavery & Trafficking Team
- Specialist Family & Immigration Team

## Experience

Sophie is an experienced human rights practitioner, having spent five years as a US Attorney representing death row prisoners, and three years as a solicitor specialising in criminal appeals, before being called to the Bar in 2016. Sophie's harnesses these past experiences in criminal law to inform her civil practice. For example, she represents victim of domestic violence, bereaved families in prison and probation inquests, and those challenging deportation decisions.

In 2024, Sophie joined the sub-committee of the Online Procedure Rules Committee. In 2025, she was appointed as a fee-paid judge to the Mental Health Tribunal.

## Inquests

Sophie has a flourishing inquest practice, where she acts exclusively for bereaved families. She is regularly instructed in jury inquests involving death in police custody, police deaths and deaths in prison.

Her knowledge of criminal and prison law is also utilised when representing families where the deceased was subject to probation supervision at the time of death. Sophie was part of the successful team in bringing the first reported case of the application of Article 2 to a death in an Approved Premises *Devall v Ministry of Justice* [2022] EWHC 1608 (QB).

Sophie has become increasingly called on for community mental health cases, where the person was discharged from in-patient settings shortly before their death. Notably, in 2024 she obtained a conclusion of neglect in a community mental health case, due to the repeated failure of staff to consult with family members leading to ineffective care and discharge planning.

Sophie works on a pro bono basis representing trans-led charities following the death of service users. In 2022, she represented the Kite Trust in the inquest into the death of Danny France, and along with Liam Evans, represented the Clare Project in the inquest of Matty Sheldrick in 2024. Unusually, both charities were awarded Interested Person status, allowing them to fully participate in the inquest process.

### **Civil Actions against Public Authorities**

From the start, Sophie has put state accountability at the centre of her practice. Early in her career she was part of a systemic challenge following the illegal strip search of three Claimants at HMP Peterborough. The High Court held that the failings were serious, systemic and widespread, and the legal framework relied on by the Secretary of State was ineffective to ensure that Sodexo had adequate systems in place, in breach of Article 8. *LW, KT, MC & Faulder v Sodexo Ltd & Secretary of State for Justice* [2019] EWHC 367 (Admin). Since then, she has built a practice representing bereaved families through the inquest process to the civil claim, bringing damages claims under the Fatal Accident Act and the Human Rights Act.

Sophie is increasingly sought for her experience bringing failure to investigate challenges against police forces and the Crown Prosecution Service. These includes the failure to investigate cases of forced prostitution, serious sexual assault and an attack targeting a disabled person.



## Immigration

Sophie practices asylum and immigration law, appearing regularly in the First-tier and Upper Tribunal of the Immigration and Asylum Chamber. She represents those facing deportation, with particular experience on cases where the person arrived in the country as a child and has been convicted of drug related offences.

Sophie also works on public and civil challenges to immigration decisions. She has brought successful challenges to the imposition of an Electronic Monitoring condition on foreign national offenders, and trafficking decisions. She has achieved settlements for those unlawfully detained by the Home Office.

## Family

Sophie has many years of experience representing victims of domestic violence in Private Children proceedings and Family Law Act cases. She receives regular instructions to represent parents at complex fact-finding hearings.

## What the directories say

“Sophie is passionate about her work and the families she represents. Sophie is confident in her advocacy”

Legal 500 (2026) Inquests and inquiries, Tier 4

“Sophie’s strengths and qualities include her warm client manner, her ability to build relationships with clients and her oral advocacy”

Legal 500 (2025) Inquests and inquiries, Tier 4

Rising Star

Legal 500 (2023) Civil Liberties

## Education

Oxford University, BA in Jurisprudence (2003)

New York University School of Law, LLM (2006)



## Memberships

Inquest Lawyers Group

Bail for Immigration Detainees

Immigration Law Practitioners Association

## Awards

Margaret Pollock Scholarship (Oxford University 2006)

## Cases

### **Inquest reveals “shambolic” firearms operation after Giedrius Vasiljevas was fatally shot by the police**

Sophie Walker was instructed in a four-week inquest before Senior Coroner in East London Coroners Court into the death of Giedrius Vasiljevas. Giedrius was fatally shot by a Metropolitan Police firearms officer on the doorstep of his home after he called the police for help.

The Senior Coroner had earlier determined that there was sufficient evidence for a conclusion of unlawful killing to be left to the jury in relation to the justification put forward for the firing of the fatal shot by a firearms officer, known in the inquest as MY78.

While the jury concluded that Giedrius had been lawfully killed, they found failings in the firearms operation which possibly contributed to his death.

After the jury had delivered their conclusions Mr Graeme Irvine, Senior Coroner for East London, seriously criticised the armed operation. He called it “at times shambolic” and observed that there was a “critical breakdown in communication” between the different teams involved. He described the evidence he heard from the police to be “quite shocking”

The Coroner was also critical of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). The IOPC had failed to secure Ring doorbell footage which would have provided crucial evidence.

Following evidential discrepancies, we successfully argued on behalf of our clients that a conclusion of unlawful killing should be left to be considered the jury.



The officer that fired the fatal shot, MY78 claimed that when Giedrius emerged at the door for the second time he saw a black handgun in his left hand which he raised in the direction of himself and another officer MY27. This caused him to fear there was an immediate risk to their lives.

Despite there being seven other officers surrounding the front of the house, not one of them had seen Giedrius pointing a gun. This was highly suspect given that they were there to provide firearms cover, meaning that they were focused on the very spot where Giedrius was stood in order to assess whether he was posing a threat.

MY27 wrote in his initial statement that he saw Giedrius fall to the ground after MY78 shot him. However, he then claimed he could not recall this.

Another officer, TP21, could be heard on the radio saying “he’s waving something orange”. Giedrius was found to have a cigarette he had been smoking in his right hand. TP21 accepted he had seen Giedrius waving something orange just before he had been shot.

Expert analysis of the video footage, carried out by Forensic Architecture on behalf of our clients, confirmed it was not possible to say whether Giedrius had anything in his hands (other than a cigarette in his right hand) during the crucial moments.

Sophie was led by Una Morris at Garden Court Chambers. And instructed by Jag Bahra, Emily Hayman and Cyrilia Knight of Saunders Law.

## **R v D**

Following a successfully application to exclude ABE interviews of child-complainants due to late disclosure, the CPS offered no evidence.

## **R (Coll) v Secretary of State for Justice**

**[2017] UKSC 40**

The Supreme Court unanimously allowed the appellant’s appeal and granted a declaration that the provision of Approved Premises constitutes direct discrimination against women.

## **Publications**



## **Chapter: Investigation in Criminal Appeals Cases, Book: Criminal Appeals Handbook (Bloomsbury Professional)**

Criminal Appeals Handbook provides practical assistance to legal representatives of clients who are seeking to challenge convictions or sentences in the Court of Appeal and beyond.

### **Protecting inferences of fact in defamation law: Fair Comment and Honest Opinion**

Analysing the treatment of comments, facts and factual inferences and explaining how a better approach is possible for English courts.

Pub: Cambridge Law Journal

