

Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) – Key Learning Points

What happened?

This review concerns a 29-year-old woman who was killed by her ex-partner in 2011. At the time, the perpetrator was on police bail and on a suspended prison sentence for a violent offence towards the victim. He was jealous, paranoid and had a history of mental health issues. He self-harmed and had taken overdoses. He intermittently engaged with mental health services. He was on a Probation Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) when he committed the murder.

They had a young child. After an assault on the victim whilst holding the child, Children's Services were briefly involved with the family. Following a violent attack where the perpetrator broke into her home, the case was considered by MARAC. However, the MARAC safety plan was not detailed or based on an understanding of the perpetrator's offending history. He had a history of violent offending and had also been violent and abusive towards a previous partner. The child was subject to a Child Protection Plan. However, Children's Services closed the case without gaining information regarding the perpetrator's history of mental health issues. There was also limited engagement and information sharing between mental health and probation services regarding the perpetrator.

The perpetrator repeatedly refused to take responsibility for his violent and abusive behaviour, often triggered by disputes about separation and child custody. He started IDAP late and missed sessions.

The perpetrator was convicted of the victim's murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, with a minimum tariff of 23 years.

For a copy of the report contact domesticabuse_admin@sandwell.gov.uk

What were the main issues?

- **Perpetrator's controlling, coercive, violent and abusive behaviour**
- **Domestic abuse exacerbated by perpetrator's mental health and substance misuse issues**
- **Separation and conflict regarding child contact can increase risk of harm or homicide**
- **Lack of appropriate information sharing between agencies meant that no agency had a complete picture**
- **Child Protection Plan closed without knowledge of father's mental health issues**
- **MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) safety plan not detailed or well informed about perpetrator history**

What are the lessons to be learned?

- *Information on perpetrator/father's mental health issues needs to be sought and this should inform Child Protection Plans / Offender Management plans*
- *Previous history of controlling and coercive behaviour is a strong predictor of the risk of serious harm or homicide*
- *Victims who wish to remain in their own home need to be listened to and supported and have access to emergency refuge accommodation if risk escalates*

DHR report recommendations

That the Safer Sandwell Partnership:

Supports initiatives by CAADA to have the multi-agency risk assessment conference process placed on a statutory basis to ensure sustainable local funding and high-quality intervention which supports high risk victims of domestic abuse

Re-affirms its commitment to domestic abuse services locally and supports adequately resourcing the necessary activity

Reviews current plans to provide domestic abuse services locally to ensure that they have a clear strategic direction, are adequately resourced, are robustly managed and that operational staff are appropriately trained and supported to provide a high-quality protective service

Takes measures to satisfy itself that the MARAC process is working effectively in Sandwell and, in particular, that robust Action Plans are routinely produced to safeguard high-risk victims of domestic abuse

Undertakes an audit of partner agencies written policies and procedures in respect of domestic abuse to ensure that they reflect current research and best practice, and that staff of partner agencies are familiar with those procedures whereby they know how to act when they become aware of potential victims

That West Midlands Police reviews its training programme for custody staff to ensure that bail decisions in cases of domestic abuse take full account of all safeguarding issues

Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust reviews its guidance regarding criteria/thresholds for withdrawing offenders from IDAP

SSP ensures that all the DHR recommendations are fully implemented and lessons learnt