

Sandwell Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) – Key Learning Points

What happened?

“Eve” was a warm and caring 54-year-old white British woman who was murdered by her long-term partner.

She was a grandmother who had tried hard over the years to provide a loving home to her children and step-children despite her partner’s abusive and controlling behaviour to her and the children as they grew up.

During their relationship of some 20 years, she had experienced repeated physical, emotional and psychological abuse at his hands but did not report him to the Police for fear of his retribution on her and their family.

The perpetrator was described as an ‘explosive man’ known to others to be violent. He had an established history of the strategic use of violent and unpredictable behaviour to other partners. He used economic abuse to further control Eve, changing the locks on her home to exclude her, adding his details to her tenancy agreement and preventing her from working outside the home.

Under the pressure of managing his abuse, Eve’s health suffered and she frequently sought help from professionals, disclosing once her fear that he may kill her.

The DHR recognised that there were a number of missed opportunities to offer help and support to Eve.

The perpetrator was convicted of the victim’s murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, with a minimum tariff of 24 years.

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

What did we learn?

- That many victims of domestic abuse are too fearful to disclose the abuse they are experiencing
- Opportunities were missed to ask about domestic abuse by health professionals involved, although Eve presented frequently with low mood, anxiety and depression and injuries known to indicate abuse
- A domestic abuse risk assessment was never completed. Repeated referrals for counselling were not appropriate and Eve should have been referred to specialist support for domestic abuse
- No assessment of the perpetrator’s behaviour change was made before Probation discharged him early
- That decisions made by Housing about joint tenancies require robust checks with other agencies about risk of harm. Eve’s vulnerable status as a victim of domestic abuse did not lead to Housing providing any additional support

What can we do now?

- *Make every contact count – all professionals need to know how to ‘ask and act’ about domestic abuse*
- *All agencies should make sure their domestic abuse policies and procedures are easy to access for the public and professionals alike with simple flow charts and referral pathways, so victims can get specialist help quickly and staff are clear about responsibilities*
- *Ensure that children in Sandwell are offered, through their education, the knowledge and understanding of what a healthy relationship is so they can recognise and disclose domestic abuse*

DHR report recommendations

The Ministry of Justice reminds the CRCs and the National Prisons and Probation Service to undertake appropriate multi-agency checks prior to decisions on early discharge of orders

The NPPS explores a technological solution which ensures that the risk assessments in OASys and Sara are linked to ensure when one is updated the other is flagged to the officer for an update

The Ministry of Justice reviews the storage policy for WSW records

The Ministry of Justice review the effectiveness of the Bad Character Guidelines in domestic abuse cases

All GP surgeries adopt an evidence-based approach to the identification and management of domestic abuse

The Safer Sandwell Partnership is reassured by the Sandwell Safeguarding Children’s Board that the management of domestic abuse perpetrators by health professionals complies with current guidance

Improved identification and a systemic response to domestic abuse by the Housing and Communities Directorate

A review of current multi-agency domestic violence and abuse training to be carried out to identify impact on early identification and referral pathway for victims of domestic abuse

The Sandwell Safeguarding Children’s Board audit the current uptake of healthy relationships awareness raising work delivered in schools