

WIRRAL COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW

'Bethany'

Date of death: May 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July 2024

Chair and Author: Carol Ellwood-Clarke QPM
Support to Chair and Author: Ged McManus

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CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
1. The Review Process	3
2. Contributors to the Review	4
3. The Review Panel Members	5
4. Chair and Author of the Overview Report	6
5. Terms of Reference for the Review	7
6. Summary Chronology	9
7. Key issues arising from the review	12
8. Conclusion	13
9. Learning	14
10. Recommendations	15

1. The Review Process

1.1 This summary outlines the process undertaken by Wirral Community Safety Partnership [the statutory Crime and Disorder Partnership] in reviewing the death of 'Bethany', who was a resident in their area.

1.2 The following pseudonyms have been used in this review. These were chosen by panel.

Name	Relationship	Age	Ethnicity
Bethany	Victim	62	White British female
Jack	Husband	52	White British male

1.3 Bethany had been married to Jack for 10 years. Bethany and Jack were both employed and lived in social housing within Wirral. Bethany had two adult children, from a previous relationship. In May 2022, Bethany was found deceased at her home address. The medical cause of death was:

1a Blunt Head Trauma.

1.4 Neither the criminal nor DHR processes have identified any knowledge or indication that agencies knew of domestic abuse within the relationship prior to Bethany's death.

1.5 Jack was arrested and charged with the murder of Bethany. In August 2023, Jack pleaded guilty to the murder of Bethany. Jack was later sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 15 years and 10 months.

1.6 The first meeting of the DHR panel was held on 23 November 2023. Thereafter three further meetings were held, and a draft report written. The meetings were held using online video facilities.

1.7 The final overview report was agreed by Wirral Community Safety Partnership on 7th November 2024.

2. Contributors to the review

2.1 Contributors to the review/agencies submitting written information.

Agency	Summary report
GP Practice	•
Magenta Living	•
Wirral University Teaching Hospital	•
Leeds City Council	Physical access to archived records

2.2 The authors of the reports included in them a statement of their independence from any operational or management responsibility for the matters under examination.

3. Review Panel Members

3.1 The Review Panel Members were:

Review Panel Members		
Name	Job Title	Organisation
Lynn Campbell	Head of Safeguarding and Quality	Wirral Children's Social Care
Holly Chance	Detective Inspector	Merseyside Police
Justin Danher	Head of Specialist Housing Services	Magenta Living
Carol Ellwood-Clarke	Independent Chair and Author	
Susan Fogarty	Designated Nurse, Safeguarding Adults	Wirral Place NHS Cheshire and Merseyside
Emma Graham	Business Manager	Wirral Domestic Abuse Hub
David Holmes	Project Manager/Designated Safeguarding Lead	Wirral Ways to Recovery
Gillian Jones	Operations Manager	Wirral Domestic Abuse Hub
Anthony Mullarkey	Senior Probation Officer	Probation Service North West
Ged McManus	Support to Chair and Author	
Jo Welsh	Safeguarding Adult Lead	Wirral Community Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust

3.2 The Panel Chair was satisfied that the members were independent and did not have operational and management involvement with the events under scrutiny.

4. Chair and Author of the Overview Report

- 4.1 Sections 36 to 39 of the Home Office Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews December 2016 sets out the requirements for review Chairs and Authors.
- 4.2 Carol Ellwood-Clarke was appointed as the DHR Independent Chair and Author. She is an independent practitioner who has chaired and written previous DHRs and other safeguarding reviews. Carol retired from public service (British policing – not Merseyside), in 2017, after 30 years, during which she gained experience of writing Independent Management Reviews, as well as being a panel member for Domestic Homicide Reviews, Child Serious Case Reviews, and Safeguarding Adults Reviews. In January 2017, she was awarded the Queens Police Medal (QPM) for her policing services to safeguarding and family liaison. In addition, she is an Associate Trainer for SafeLives.¹
- 4.3 Carol was supported in her role by Ged McManus. He is an independent practitioner who has chaired and written previous DHRs and Safeguarding Adults Reviews. He has experience as an Independent Chair of a Safeguarding Adult Board (not in Wirral or an adjoining authority). Ged served for over 30 years in different police services in England (not Merseyside). Prior to leaving the police service in 2016, he was a Superintendent with particular responsibility for partnerships, including Community Safety Partnership and Safeguarding Boards.
- 4.4 Between them, they have undertaken the following types of reviews: child serious case reviews; Safeguarding Adults Reviews; multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs) serious case reviews; Domestic Homicide Reviews; and have completed the Home Office online training for undertaking DHRs. They have both completed accredited training for DHR Chairs, provided by AAFDA.
- 4.5 Both have previously completed DHR's in Wirral.

¹ <https://safelives.org.uk/>

5. Terms of reference

5.1 These were set as -

The purpose of a DHR is to:

- establish what lessons are to be learned from the domestic homicide regarding the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard victims;
- identify clearly what those lessons are both within and between agencies, how and within what timescales they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result;
- apply these lessons to service responses including changes to inform national and local policies and procedures as appropriate;
- prevent domestic violence and homicide and improve service responses for all domestic violence and abuse victims and their children by developing a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to ensure that domestic abuse is identified and responded to effectively at the earliest opportunity;
- contribute to a better understanding of the nature of domestic violence and abuse; and
- highlight good practice.

(Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews [2016] Section 2 Paragraph 7)

5.2 Extensive research was undertaken with all agencies within Wirral, Merseyside, and other areas of the country where Bethany and Jack had lived. This included a search of agencies' records with Bethany's previous surnames. This resulted in no reported incidents of domestic abuse, and a lack of information/contacts held by agencies.

5.3 The panel concluded that, with so little information known about the family prior to Bethany's murder, the best approach was to set out themes for the review to examine. The panel decided on the following areas:

Domestic abuse (including coercive control).

Barriers to accessing support or being offered help regarding domestic abuse.

Finance.

Health (including mental health).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Substance and/or alcohol use.

Knowledge that family, friends, and work colleagues held.

Potential impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Learning from previous DHRs in Wirral.

5.4 **Timescale**

The DHR covers the period from 1 January 2020 to May 2022. The start date was chosen by the Review Panel to capture relevant information in the two years prior to the death of Bethany so as to inform present and contemporary learning. All agencies were asked to consider and analyse any significant contacts prior to these dates, and this has been included within the review where relevant.

6. Summary Chronology

The Review Panel wanted to highlight that there was limited information in the below section about Bethany, which is attributed to the limited contact that Bethany had with agencies.

6.1 Bethany

6.1.1 Bethany was born in Leeds into a large family. Bethany had limited contact with her siblings and other family members. Bethany had had no contact with her mother since the late 1980s. Bethany's mother is now deceased.

6.1.2 Bethany enjoyed reading and was studying for a carer's qualification at the time of her death. Bethany loved to go to Florida on holiday. It was her favourite place and where she felt alive. Bethany last went to Florida in 2018.

6.1.3 Bethany had two children, from two previous relationships. Neither father had any involvement in their child's lives. Bethany brought the children up as a single parent. None of Bethany's family or extended family members helped her to care for her children.

6.1.4 Bethany was described in records, held by Leeds City Council, as a 'woman of extra ordinary intelligence, insight and determination'.

6.2 Jack

6.2.1 Jack was employed as an assistant manager in a local department store and had worked for the company for 18 years.

6.2.2 Bethany's son described Jack as a strange man who was almost too nice to be true. Bethany's son further stated that he thought Jack was a people pleaser who would do or say what he thought people wanted to hear.

6.2.3 Jack was not known to the police or other criminal justice agencies.

6.3 Bethany and Jack's relationship

6.3.1 Bethany and Jack met through work. Bethany was in another relationship when they first met, but when this ended, Bethany and Jack formed a relationship, eventually moving in together in 2009.

6.3.2 In April 2012, Bethany commenced a tenancy with Magenta Living.

6.3.3 In 2014, Bethany and Jack got married.

6.4 Events prior to the timescales of the review

- 6.4.1 In 1983, Bethany sought help from Leeds City Council Children's Social Care. This support took place in the form of parenting skills, and Bethany successfully completed a number of courses.
- 6.4.2 Over the following years, Bethany and her children were engaged with Leeds City Council Children's Social Care. In November 1990, Bethany asked for both of her children to be placed into voluntary care, as Bethany stated that she was 'unable to be an adequate parent'. Following a period of assessment, the children remained in the care of the local authority, until they reached adulthood/school leaving age. Bethany had no contact with her children until 1998.
- 6.4.3 In August 2000, Bethany's children moved to London to live with Bethany. Bethany was married at this time. Two years later, Bethany, and her children, moved to Wirral.

6.5 Events within the timescales of the review

2020 and 2021

- 6.5.1 In 2020 and 2021, Bethany was seen by a GP for a routine health matters.

The following information was provided by Jack during contact with the Chair.

- 6.5.2 Since October 2021, Jack said that he had been receiving letters from debt collectors. Jack stated that he did not seek advice from any agency on what to do about the debt but had spoken to a friend who had told him about an Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA).²

6.6 2022

The following information has been taken from statements provided during the homicide investigation.

- 6.6.1 In the months prior to Bethany's murder, her work colleagues had noticed a change in Bethany. Jack had stopped walking her to and from work. Bethany had described how she and Jack were sleeping in separate bedrooms, which she attributed to Jack's snoring.
- 6.6.2 On 15 April, Bethany had gone to a local betting shop to place a number of bets, as it was Grand National Day. On her return to work, Bethany told a

² [https://www.gov.uk/options-for-dealing-with-your-debts/individual-voluntary-arrangements#:~:text=An%20Individual%20Voluntary%20Arrangement%20\(%20IVA,of%20your%20assets%20than%20bankruptcy.](https://www.gov.uk/options-for-dealing-with-your-debts/individual-voluntary-arrangements#:~:text=An%20Individual%20Voluntary%20Arrangement%20(%20IVA,of%20your%20assets%20than%20bankruptcy.)

colleague that a male inside the betting shop had paid her a compliment and asked to take her for a drink. Bethany was described as seeming to be happy and had gained confidence from the encounter. Bethany stated that Jack would not like the fact that another male had given her a compliment and some attention. Bethany then stated that Jack did not like it if other men looked at her when they were out.

- 6.6.3 In April, Bethany had two appointments with a GP for routine health matters.
- 6.6.4 On a date in May, Bethany was found deceased at her home address. Jack was arrested and later charged with the murder of Bethany.

7. Key issues arising from the review.

- 7.1 This review was unique in that there had been no reported incidents of domestic abuse. The victim and perpetrator had little contact with agencies – and of those contacts this related to routine health matters.
- 7.2 In the months prior to the murder, the perpetrator had started to receive letters from debt collecting agencies. These letters and the debt incurred by the perpetrator were not known to the victim. The financial element of the relationship was subject of the homicide investigation which concluded that the victim had no knowledge of the financial situation of her husband.
- 7.3 Work colleagues of the victim provided the homicide investigation and DHR with information on the victim and perpetrator's relationship. The review panel considered if this information identified indicators of domestic abuse, including coercive control and based on the information provided were unable to reach a definitive conclusion.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 Bethany had been married to Jack for 10 years. In May 2022, Jack killed Bethany.
- 8.2 There were no reports of domestic abuse to the police or other agencies during their relationship prior to Bethany's murder. As a couple, Bethany and Jack were unknown to agencies in Wirral and other local authorities.
- 8.3 Bethany and Jack were both in employment. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Jack's working hours were reduced, and Jack's financial income reduced. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, Jack's financial income did not increase, and he resorted to loans and credit cards to sustain his finances, which resulted in Jack becoming in debt to numerous lenders.
- 8.4 The impact of Jack's finances was investigated during the homicide investigation and subsequent court case, which established evidence that Bethany was not aware of Jack's debt. This fact was supported by Bethany's son.
- 8.5 The Review Panel considered a range of themes whilst analysing the limited information known, and, despite the extensive research undertaken and analysis of information, the Review Panel did not identify any learning arising from this case. This was also the outcome of agencies' individual analysis of their involvement.
- 8.6 Bethany's son contributed to the review process. The Review Panel extends its thanks to him for his contribution and support during the completion of the review.

9. Learning

9.1 The Review Panel did not identify any learning from this review.

9.1.2 From this review, individual agencies did not identify specific learning for their agency.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Panel and Agency Recommendations

10.1.1 There were no panel and single agency recommendations identified.