

OVERVIEW REPORT of the Domestic Homicide Review relating to the death of Mrs A

This report is restricted to:

Members of the Kent Community Safety Partnership

Members of the Medway Community Safety Partnership

The Home Office Quality Assurance Group

February 2012

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR)

On the 1st August 2011, Mrs A was found deceased in her bed at home, having been strangled. Mr A her husband had left the house and the circumstances surrounding the death caused the police to conclude that Mrs A had been killed by Mr A.

As this was an incident of domestic violence it was decided that a DHR should be established in line with the Home Office Guidance that came into Force in April 2011.

1.2 Commissioning this DHR

This DHR was commissioned by the Kent and Medway Community Safety Partnership. The final report of the DHR panel will be presented to the Kent and Medway Community Safety Partnership.

Agencies from Kent and Medway have been involved in the DHR. Agencies were keen to be involved in this new process, and by participating to understand the process and how it can be used to improve services and working with and between agencies.

The initial meeting relating to the DHR was convened on the 18th August 2011, when a number of representatives of local agencies attended. At this meeting the panel agreed that this case would not be subject of a DHR as there had been no partner agency involvement with the family since they had moved to the UK in April 2011. After consultation with the Home Office the panel were asked to review this decision and the panel met again on the 8th December 2011.

It was agreed at this meeting that there would be a benefit in reviewing this case. The composition of the panel and the scoping of the work was agreed at this meeting.

We drew on the Home Office Guidance in framing our purpose in conducting this DHR:

Taken from the Multi agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide review, 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 policies and procedures as appropriate and

- Prevent domestic violence homicide and improve services responses for all domestic violence victims and their children through improved intra and inter-agency working.

1.3 Terms of Reference

1. Why no contact was made with agencies;
2. If there were any barriers to victims accessing services (even though contact may not have been established, attempts may have been made);
3. The isolation of the victim; how it was that the victim did not come to the attention of any services;
4. The availability of local services; and what further services may need to be considered;
5. Were there any language or cultural barriers to accessing services;
6. What was their immigration status and for what reason did they come to the UK;
7. Were there any disclosures made to a friend, family member or community member and as such the involvement of these people should be considered in a review, providing that it is appropriate to do so.

1.4 Methodology

The initial DHR panel met on the 18th August 2011, there were subsequent meetings of the DHR panel on the 8th December and the 19th January 2012.

Due to there being no contact between the family and partner agencies prior to the murder, Individual Management Review Reports (IMR) were not requested from the partner agencies, but agencies were asked to scope and research the points raised in the terms of reference. The agencies were –

- Kent Police
- Health - Kent and Medway PCT Cluster
- Medway Children's Services

There had been no contact with any of the voluntary agencies within the Medway area.

1.5 DHR Panel

The panel was made up of senior people from the following agencies:

Jim Parris – Independent Chair – Kent Community Safety Unit
Alison Gilmour – Kent & Medway Domestic Violence Co-ordinator
Maria Shepherd – Kent Police, Public Protection Unit
Jon Clayden – Kent Police Major Crime Department
Clare Wilkes – Medway Children's Services
Cathy Ross – Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children Medway, NHS Kent & Medway
Tim England – Medway Council

Kent County Council Community Safety Unit provided secretarial support.

The Independent Chair of the panel has written this Overview Report in discussion with the panel and the views of the family.

2. The Facts

2.1 Mr and Mrs A are both from Latvia and they moved to the UK in April 2011. Mrs A's mother and her sister were already in the UK, as was Mr A's brother. The brother of Mr A is in a relationship with the sister of Mrs A and they have a daughter who was born in 2008. Mr and Mrs A married three years ago and had been together approximately one year prior to the marriage. Both had spent their lives in Latvia until the move to the UK. They had one daughter who was born in 2008.

2.2 At the date of the death of Mrs A, she was living with her husband and their child at a private rented house in Rochester, Kent. Also living at the premises were Mrs and Mr A's siblings and friends of the couple. Although Mr and Mrs A resided together they were estranged but due to the other people living in the house they shared the same bedroom but had separate beds.

2.3 Both Mr and Mrs A were in full time employment at a fruit packing company in Kent. The child care for their daughter was carried out by family.

2.4 There was previous history of domestic violence between the couple, whilst they lived in Latvia but this was never reported and there were no known incidents in Kent. The previous violence only came to light at the time of the murder when officers spoke to family members. The violence had been disclosed by Mrs A to her Grandmother when she lived in Latvia. Mrs A had disclosed that Mr A had made previous attempts to strangle her.

2.5 On the 31st July 2011, Mr and Mrs A had a conversation and agreed that the marriage was over. Mr A had been drinking and was aware that Mrs A had started a relationship with another male. The couple had been seen around about midnight and all appeared to be alright between them and there were no concerns from family members. Since the murder it has transpired that Mrs A had sent a text to her new partner and said that she expected to be beaten that evening. No action was taken by the new partner.

2.6 The following morning the daughter of the couple was found wandering round the house, which was unusual, on checking the couples bedroom Mrs A was found deceased and Mr A was missing. A murder investigation commenced and Mr A was arrested and charged with murder a few days later. Although the daughter would have been in the bedroom when the murder took place, she had no injuries.

2.7 Post mortem examination was carried out and the cause of death was asphyxia.

2.8 There had been no contact between the family and any partner or voluntary agencies, and no agency was able to provide any information on the family prior to the murder. There has been engagement with the family since and support has been provided.

2.9 On the 31st January 2012 Mr A pleaded guilty to the offence of murder and was sentenced to life imprisonment, and will serve a minimum of 13 years in prison before he is eligible for parole.

3. Analysis

3.1 Due to there being no contact with the family prior to the murder the panel has concentrated on each of the points raised in the terms of reference. Consultation has taken place with the family of Mr and Mrs A and each of the points has been researched and scoped and the findings are as follows –

3.2 Why no contact was made with agencies;

Mr and Mrs A had no need or desire to make contact with any agencies in the Medway area, they were self supporting, receiving an income through work and lived in a privately rented house with their daughter who was pre-school age. Childcare was provided by relatives who were already resident in the UK and lived locally.

The sister of Mrs A had taken her child to A&E in Medway when the child was ill, so the family knew how to access medical care should they have required assistance.

It was agreed language could have been a possible barrier to them accessing services and it was acknowledged that Kent Police took some time to locate a Latvian speaking officer once the murder had been reported. Neither of the siblings spoke English but the other male residing in the house, had basic spoken English.

Medway Children's Social Services confirmed that Mrs A would have had access to the community interpreting service had she approached the service.

A question was raised regarding whether there was a large Latvian community within the Medway area and whether there were any services specifically focused on this minority group. It was confirmed community surgeries were held in the area and the community interpreter had also advised she was not aware of any specific Latvian groups; the main focus of most groups appears to be for the Polish community with a link into Kent and Medway European Network (KAMEN). There is a group of Russian speakers within Medway which would include Russians speaking Latvians.

Approximate numbers for foreign nationals living in Medway are as follows:
6,000 foreign nationals in total - 80% Romanian/Slovakian/Russian and 20% Bulgarians and other former Soviet states.

The exact percentage of Latvian's living in Medway is unknown, but is believed to be very small: there are only 20 children of school age in Medway who are recorded as being Latvian speakers, out of a school age population of approximately 39,000 children aged between 4 and 16 years old.

3.3 If there were any barriers to victims accessing services (even though contact may not have been established, attempts may have been made);

Barriers the family may have faced if they had decided to contact services were discussed and agreed as follows:

Language – although through use of the community interpreter service this would have been overcome.

A cultural distrust of services such as the Police.

Family members were already aware of the Domestic Abuse between the couple but perhaps not the severity of it and therefore felt there was no need to involve outside agencies. Mr and Mrs A despite being estranged had lived together, without any problems for the last three months. No attempts had been made by Mrs A to access support despite previous attempts to strangle her whilst residing in Latvia.

3.4 The isolation of the victim; how it was that the victim did not come to the attention of any services;

Mrs A had a good family support network with childcare for her daughter provided by relatives. She was part of a small Latvian community where she lived and where she worked. She lived within a multi occupancy house and also had other relatives living in the same area. Mrs A socialised with friends she had made through her work. Mr A was more isolated with just his brother in the same household and no other family living in the UK.

3.5 The availability of local services; and what further services may need to be considered;

- A directory of Domestic Abuse services available in Medway can be found attached as **appendix A**.
- Services are advertised in libraries and other public places however it is acknowledged that you would have to be looking for these types of services in order to find any related documentation.
- Local GP services were available within walking distance of the family home as was a Health Living Centre.
- The child of the Mr and Mrs A would have accessed the school/education system in a year's time and therefore the family would have become known to local services at that point.
- Domestic Abuse services are advertised in the Medway Council publication sent to each household; however this is printed in English.
- A one stop shop of services within Medway is available which, is mainly manned by volunteers. An interpreter wouldn't have been available due to a lack of funding for this one stop shop however one of the services would have followed up the request from Mrs A and ensured she received the necessary assistance had they been approached.
- All staff members of Medway Council undertake an e-learning training package on Adult Safeguarding.
- New funding has been secured resulting in an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) attached to A&E at Medway Maritime Hospital as well as within Medway Council Housing Department.
- It is well documented that there is a potential issue around translator availability for smaller minority groups, however should an agency be approached and unable to provide interpretation to assist an individual, the agency would look to statutory partners to help them in fulfilling their role.

3.6 Were there any language or cultural barriers to accessing services;

This has been covered in the above.

3.7 What was their immigration status and for what reason did they come to the UK;

Mr and Mrs A were from Latvia which is a member of the European Union and they would have had free access to the UK. There was no requirement for them to apply for a work permit or to apply to live in the UK. Access to the UK would be granted by means of a current passport. Mr and Mrs A were living and working lawfully in the UK with plans to settle on a permanent basis due to other family members already residing in the same area.

3.8 Were there any disclosures made to a friend, family member or community member and as such the involvement of these people should be considered in a review, providing that it is appropriate to do so.

Disclosures had previously been made to Mrs A's Grandmother in Latvia. All previous incidents of domestic violence had occurred whilst the couple lived in Latvia. Close family members accepted the couple were estranged, and had no concerns that there was any violence taking place.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Although there was no involvement with partner agencies Mrs A was not alone; she had the support of a strong family network and the family was self sufficient. There were no signs or symptoms during the period that Mr and Mrs A were in Kent that there was any violence in their relationship and certainly no escalation of violence was identified that could have helped in preventing this murder.

The following recommendations have been made –

Recommendation 1

Consideration should be given to the provision of national advice and guidance regarding how soon and through what mechanisms foreign nationals relocating to the UK should become known to local agencies.

Recommendation 2

Medway Community Safety Partnership to facilitate an invite for KAMEN to attend future meetings of the Medway Domestic Abuse Forum (MDAF), to make them aware of the gap in service provision for the Latvian community.

Recommendation 3

Medway Community Safety Partnership to ensure Luton & Wayfield Strategic Partnership is made aware of the gap in service provision for the Latvian Community.

Publishing of the DHR

The panel request that the outcomes of this case are not published due to the small Latvian community living within the Medway area which could lead to the family being identifiable.

GLOSSARY

A&E	Accident and Emergency department
CSP	Community Safety Partnership
DHR	Domestic Homicide Review
GP	General Practitioner
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Advisor
IMR	Independent Management Review
KAMEN	Kent and Medway European Network
MDAF	Medway Domestic Abuse Forum
NHS	National Health Service
PCT	Primary Care Trust

Restricted

Action Plan

Recommendation	Scope of recommendation i.e. local or regional	Action to take	Lead Agency	Key milestones achieved in enacting recommendation	Target Date	Date of final completion and expected Outcome
Consideration should be given to the provision of national advice and guidance regarding how soon and through what mechanisms foreign nationals relocating to the UK should become known to local agencies.	National	Home Office to consider if needed	Home Office	To be determined	To be determined	To be determined
Medway Community Safety Partnership to facilitate an invite for KAMEN to attend future meetings of the Medway Domestic Abuse Forum (MDAF), to make them aware of the gap in service	Local	Medway Community Safety Partnership to issue invite to KAMEN and liaise with the Chair of the MDAF regarding meeting dates for the MDAF	Medway Community Safety Partnership	To establish when MDAF due to meet during 2012	April 2012	September 2012 KAMEN to have been offered opportunity to join and/or attend a MDAF meeting to discuss needs of Latvian Community with domestic abuse service providers

<p>provision for the Latvian community.</p>	<p>Local</p>	<p>Medway Community Safety Partnership to liaise with Luton & Wayfield Strategic Partnership</p>	<p>Medway Community Safety Partnership</p>	<p>To establish future meeting dates of the Luton & Wayfield Strategic Partnership</p>	<p>April 2012</p>	<p>September 2012</p>
<p>Medway Community Safety Partnership to ensure Luton & Wayfield Strategic Partnership is made aware of the gap in service provision for the Latvian Community.</p>						<p>Representative of Medway Community Safety Partnership has attended a meeting of Luton & Wayfield Strategic Partnership to facilitate discussion on needs of Latvian Community.</p>