

STOKE-ON-TRENT COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW

LAURA

Died November 2020

29 years of age

OVERVIEW REPORT

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Independent Chair & Overview Report Author:**

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1. CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DHR

- 1.1 Laura was murdered by Bradley at her home on 6th November 2020.
- 1.2 Laura and Bradley had commenced a relationship 9 weeks earlier which had developed in unusual circumstances. Whilst on holiday in Turkey, Bradley had met Adam, the father of Laura's baby who told Bradley about the relationship he had with Laura and borrowed Bradley's phone to call her. After Adam and his family had returned home, Bradley contacted Laura as he now had her number in his phone and the intensive contact over the next few days led to him visiting Laura immediately on his return to the UK and moving in to live with her.
- 1.3 However, after about 9 days, there were recurring arguments which revolved around Laura's unhappiness with Bradley's behaviour when he was drunk and his suspicions that Laura was continuing to see Adam. Although Laura denied this, Bradley's suspicions were correct as in mid October Laura and Adam had resumed their relationship.
- 1.4 At the end of October Laura tried to end the relationship with Bradley and with the help of members of the family managed to get Bradley to leave the house. She then travelled to join Adam in Jersey who was working there for the week without his family. Laura had told Bradley that she was staying with a family member but he did not believe this and constantly requested photographic proof that she was there which she was unable to do.
- 1.5 Bradley then pressured Laura into agreeing to a face to face meeting on her return ostensibly so they could discuss if they might have a future together. Laura gave permission to a family member to allow Bradley into the house while she was travelling back from the airport. Once in the house Bradley found that Laura's passport was missing and challenged her during her journey from the airport as to why she had taken it.
- 1.6 Within minutes of arriving home with her baby, Laura suffered several stab wounds and sought help from neighbours to rescue her baby from the house. Sadly Laura died soon after admission to hospital.
- 1.7 Bradley who had fled the scene in Laura's car, was later apprehended in Northamptonshire. He subsequently pleaded guilty to Laura's murder following the police investigation and was sentenced to 16 years and 3 months imprisonment in May 2021.

Condolences

- 1.8 The author and members of the Stoke-on-Trent Domestic Abuse Board wish to extend our sincere condolences to Laura's family and friends for their sad loss, and hope that they can take some comfort from the work that has taken place through this review to establish the circumstances leading to Laura's murder, and to identify the learning to improve the prevention of future domestic homicides.

2. THE DECISION TO COMMISSION THE DHR AND TIMESCALES

- 2.1 Although the DHR Panel meeting held on 15 February 2021 concluded that Laura's murder met the criteria for a DHR, it noted that there had been little agency involvement during the period of Laura's involvement with Bradley. Therefore given the potential for further information to emerge from the imminent criminal proceedings, the Chair of the Stoke-on-Trent Community Safety Partnership accepted the panel's recommendation that a decision on whether to proceed with a DHR should be deferred until these were completed. Accordingly, the Home Office was informed of this on 4th March 2021.
- 2.2 After the completion of the trial, the decision to defer was revisited when it was confirmed that no additional information had emerged. Consequently a detailed letter was sent to the Home Office on 13th August 2021 explaining that the CSP Chair had endorsed the recommendation that a DHR should not be established as it was unlikely that any learning would be identified concerning the way in which agencies had worked, both together and individually, to support Laura.
- 2.3 The response from the Home Office received on 4th January 2022 recommended that the CSP reconsider this decision citing 4 possible areas of learning which did not directly concern agency practice. Members of the DHR Panel were consulted on these and concluded that these did not give grounds to reconsider the original decision. Accordingly a detailed explanation was sent to the Home Office on 10th May 2022 using the template provided by the Home Office.
- 2.4 The then Home Secretary personally reviewed this response and subsequently wrote to the Chair of the Stoke-on-Trent CSP on 17 February 2023 to direct that a DHR must be commissioned. This was because notwithstanding the limited scope of agency involvement, conducting a DHR would enable an understanding to be gained of Laura's life. In addition, the review would enable exploration of whether Laura's mental health and / or her being a new mother, had been barriers to her reaching out for support or reporting domestic abuse. Notwithstanding the limited agency involvement, there was the possibility that family and friends might be able to provide important information.
- 2.5 In considering how best to progress the DHR, it was concluded that a helpful start would be apply the 'Intimate Partner Homicide Timeline' developed by Professor Jane Monkton-Smith. The latter was approached for advice on this given that she had recently provided training on the timeline to Staffordshire Police, and she expressed a willingness to carry out this piece of work by viewing all the material gathered by the police during its investigation.
- 2.6 However, over the following months it became apparent that Professor Monkton-Smith's other commitments was going to prevent her from completing the work without causing further delay. Therefore the decision was made that the work would be carried out by the DHR Independent Chair who had previous experience of applying the timeline in previous reviews.

3. SUBJECTS OF THE REVIEW

The focus of the DHR is on the following subjects:

	Victim	Perpetrator
Name	Laura	Bradley
Date of Birth	1991	1991
Date of Death	06/11/2020	n/a
Ethnicity	White British	White British

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 4.1 The time period covered by the DHR was from 1st January 2019 in order to gain an understanding of Laura's situation prior to her becoming pregnant later that year, and to consider the agency involvement both during, and after her pregnancy.
- 4.2 In addition to the standard questions to be considered as set out in the Home Office Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews, the main focus of this DHR was to draw out the learning around the following issues:-
- (i) Whether Laura's mental health was as a barrier to her disclosing domestic abuse;
 - (ii) Whether Laura being a new mother was a barrier to reaching out, or reporting domestic abuse, including any fear that this might lead to the involvement of children's services and the possible implications that might flow from this;
 - (iii) Whether family and friends identified any concerns about Laura being at risk of domestic abuse from Bradley, including coercion and controlling behaviour. If so, what was their response to this, and were they aware of how any concerns could be reported.

5. METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The DHR was conducted in accordance with the Home Office Statutory Guidance which explains that the purpose of the review 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 service responses for all domestic violence victims and their children through improved intra and inter-agency working.

Confidentiality

- 5.2 At the outset of the review, and at each panel meeting, members signed the confidentiality agreement that information must only be shared with officers/professionals and their line managers who participated in the DHR.
- 5.3 To maintain confidentiality within the overview report, pseudonyms are used to refer to Laura, the perpetrator and other males she had involvement with during the review period. Given that Laura's parents expressed no preference as to the name to be used for Laura, the pseudonyms were chosen carefully by the author ensuring these avoided using names that featured among the extended family or known friends.
- 5.4 Given the need to maintain the confidentiality of the large number of family members and friends whose evidence is referred to within the report, it was felt best to avoid the use of pseudonyms for the following reasons. The first was that family members and friends may not have been aware of others' involvement and advice that was given to Laura. Second, the use of pseudonyms had the potential to create difficulty for the reader to remember who each pseudonym referred to.
- 5.5 Therefore the report uses the generic description of either 'family member' or 'friend' when referring to their involvement as the precise nature of the relationship to Laura was not perceived to be relevant in presenting their involvement in events.
- 5.6 Professionals are referred to by their job role, and with the exception of the victim and the perpetrator, all other references to people and professionals are gender neutral.

6. INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILY, FRIENDS, WORK COLLEAGUES, NEIGHBOURS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

- 6.1 Following Laura's murder, her parents were provided with information via the Police Family Liaison Officer about the possibility that a DHR might be held. Following the panel meeting in June 2024 that considered the interim report covering the application of the Intimate Partner Homicide Timeline, a letter providing full details about the review and the offer to contribute was discussed with the parents by the police family liaison office. However, the parents' decision was that they did not feel able to contribute. In respecting this decision, this meant that it was not possible for their views to be taken into account in drawing up the review terms of reference.
- 6.2 A further approach was made to the parents in December 2024 through the Family Liaison Officer, prior to final approval of the report. In this subsequent contact, there was no change in the parents' decision and they expressed no preference for the pseudonyms to be used in the report.
- 6.3 The possibility of approaching other family members and friends was considered but felt to be unnecessary because the review already had full information about their involvement and perspectives from 2 sources. The first were the very detailed witness statements provided during the police investigation. The second were the transcripts of Laura's communications with family and friends. In addition, the DHR Panel agreed that an approach at this stage, almost 4 years after Laura's murder, could cause them unnecessary distress in having to revisit events that would have been upsetting for them.

7. CONTRIBUTORS TO THE REVIEW

7.1 During the scoping of the review, all relevant agencies were approached to establish whether they held information on either Laura or Bradley. These included agencies operating within Stoke-on-Trent and also the Bournemouth / Dorset area where Bradley had been living. With the exception of Dorset Police, the enquiries with agencies in the Bournemouth area did not reveal any significant information about Bradley. In addition, Laura was not known to agencies there.

7.2 As a consequence, Individual Management Reviews were provided by the following agencies:

University Hospitals North Midlands (UHNM)
Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust (MPFT)
GP Practice
Staffordshire Police
Dorset Police
Stoke-on-Trent City Council Children's Services
New Era Domestic Abuse Support Service (victim service)

7.3 Although not having had any direct involvement, it was agreed that both Stoke-on-Trent Children's Services and the New Era service for victims of domestic abuse would provide summary reports. The aim of these was to explain their general approach had either received referrals in respect of Laura and / or her child.

7.4 The author was allowed to view relevant documents generated through the complex police investigation. The author wishes to express his gratitude for being allowed access to these, and the opportunity to discuss the findings of the investigation with a member of the investigation team. The key documents from the investigation that were drawn on in carrying out the review were:-

- (i) Storyboard that drew all the evidence together;
- (ii) The prosecution's opening note at the sentencing hearing;
- (iii) Laura's messages / phone calls with Bradley, Adam, family and friends,
- (iv) 14 statements taken family members and friends.

DHR Panel Membership

7.5 The DHR Panel comprised the following people who were independent having had no responsibility in the management of staff involved in the case:-

Senior Investigating Officer	Staffordshire Police
Detective Sergeant	Staffordshire Police
Family Liaison Officer	Staffordshire Police
Statutory Review Team Member	Staffordshire Police
Named GP for Safeguarding	Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Commissioning Board
Safeguarding Practitioner	Midland Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT)
Domestic Abuse Lead	Midland Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT)
GP	Victim's GP Practice (Stoke-on-Trent)
Named Midwife for Safeguarding	University Hospital North Midlands (UHNM)
Head of Service	New Era Specialist Domestic Abuse Victim Services – (Specialist Advisor)
Safeguarding Manager	Stoke on Trent City Council Children's Services (Specialist Advisor)
Domestic Abuse Lead Officer	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Community Safety Partnership

- 7.6 The panel met on 2 occasions. The first meeting in June 2024 completed the scoping of the review, and the second in September 2024, considered the draft overview report. Agreement to the minor changes made in the final version of the report following that meeting was gained through email contact with panel members.

Independent Chair and Overview Report Author

- 7.7 The independent chair of the DHR panel, and report author, was Chris Brabbs, who is a qualified social worker whose career saw him holding the post of Director of Social Services in 3 local authorities. He has been an independent safeguarding and social care consultant, since 1999, and from 2006 has specialised in carrying out the role of independent chair and overview report author for DHRs, safeguarding adult reviews, and child serious case reviews (now child practice reviews) – having completed the approved national training in respect of the latter. He had no connection with any of the agencies involved in this case.

Specialist Advice

- 7.8 Specialist advice was provided by representatives of the New Era specialist domestic abuse service and Stoke-on-Trent Children's Services.

8. PARALLEL PROCESSES

- 8.1 A Home Office Pathologist had previously carried out a post mortem in November 2020 which concluded that the cause of death was stab wounds to the face and chest. Laura also had multiple defence wounds to both hands.
- 8.2 In May 2021, the inquest was adjourned, and not resumed, in accordance with the family's wishes that had been sought in the light of Bradley's conviction.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 9.1 The victim and perpetrator were both white British. The review identified that Laura's circumstances fitted four of the nine protected characteristics listed within the Equality Act 2010.
- 9.2 The first protected characteristic was Laura's sex which was a relevant factor in this case as the statistics relating to domestic abuse provided in the Annual Crime Surveys for England and Wales continue to show that women are disproportionately represented among victims of domestic abuse-related crimes. This latest survey published in November 2023 shows that 73.5% of all victims of domestic abuse were female.¹

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2023#:~:text=The%20Crime%20Survey%20for%20England%20and%20Wales%20estimated%20that%202.1,compared%20with%20the%20previous%20year.>

- 9.3 Laura's circumstances also fell within both the disability and the pregnancy / maternity protected characteristics. In respect of the former, Laura suffered from asthma and experienced ongoing mental health issues. A key issue that the review set out to explore was whether the mental health issues Laura had been experiencing during her pregnancy were later exacerbated following the birth of her child by the situation she found herself in respect of her relationships with Adam, the child's father, and later the perpetrator Bradley.

10. DISSEMINATION

- 10.1 A copy of the final overview report has been shared with all organisations and people who participated in the review. The report will also be shared with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Domestic Abuse Commissioning and Development Board and the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership so that the learning can be shared with relevant organisations. The report will also be sent to the Staffordshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales.
- 10.2 The decision was made that out of respect for the decision made by Laura's parents that they did not wish to engage with the review, they would not be approached again to ask if they wished to receive a copy of the report. However, mindful of the potential for upset to be caused to them through publication, checks were made publication around any key milestones in Laura's life. No request was received from the family to withhold publication

11. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 11.1 At the start of the DHR review period, Laura had been in a relationship for 5 years with Robert. Laura was also having a relationship with Adam who was had been a work colleague since 2017. He was married and living with his wife and son.

12. CHRONOLOGY

- 12.1 In January 2019, the start of the DHR period, Laura was still living with Robert but there were problems in the relationship mainly because of Robert's heavy drinking.
- 12.2 In August 2019, Laura and Adam resumed their relationship after a gap of a few months which had stemmed from Adam going on holiday with his family without telling Laura.
- 12.3 In early November, after discovering she was pregnant, Laura requested an urgent GP consultation as she did not know if she wanted to continue with the pregnancy. Laura was provided with the contact details for the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS).
- 12.4 Although Robert was upset about the pregnancy, he was also happy for her as he knew how much Laura wanted a child after being told a year earlier after fertility tests that she was unlikely to conceive. During Laura's pregnancy she and Robert remained good friends and he continued to support her.
- 12.5 In mid November, following an initial consultation with the community midwife, Laura was referred for Consultant Led Care due to her diabetes. Laura subsequently attended all pre-arranged ante-natal appointments. Laura was also referred to the hospital Perinatal Mental Health Team after disclosing to the midwife that she was experiencing anxiety and depression.

2020

- 12.6 In January 2020, the assessment by the Perinatal Mental Health Team concluded that the anxiety and depression Laura was experiencing were of a long standing nature and not related to the pregnancy. Laura was also experiencing stress because of financial worries, the search for new accommodation and the lack of support at work. Laura agreed to self-refer to Healthy Minds ² and approach the GP for a medication review. During that assessment, routine enquiry was made in relation to domestic abuse but none was disclosed.
- 12.7 6 days later, Laura arranged a same day consultation with the GP who prescribed anti-depressant medication after Laura had explained how she had been struggling with her mental health since becoming pregnant and was waiting for contact from Healthy Minds. Laura described how she felt tearful all the time, was not sleeping, and her appetite was poor. Laura said that she was not speaking to Adam and was currently living with her former partner Robert who was supportive. Although Laura admitted to having had thoughts of 'not wanting to be here anymore' the baby she was expecting was a protective factor.
- 12.8 In February, Laura and Robert moved into separate accommodation as their rented accommodation was being sold, but continued to have daily contact.
- 12.9 In early March 2020, Laura telephoned the police to report that she had received numerous abusive messages from Charlotte, Adam's wife, threatening to assault Laura and the unborn child. When seen the following day, Laura explained that the threats stemmed from Laura sending a message to Charlotte saying that she was pregnant and that Adam was the father of the child. Following a discussion about the circumstances, Laura decided not to make a formal complaint but did want Charlotte to be seen and the threats to stop. A crime report of malicious communications was generated resulting in Charlotte being advised about her behaviour. The matter was then filed with a note made that this was in accordance with Laura's wishes.
- 12.10 In the light of these threats Laura had a security camera fitted, and she downloaded an app to record all her phone calls. On occasions she stayed with her former partner Robert when she was feeling particularly vulnerable.
- 12.11 Between April and June 2020, Laura attended 7 pre-natal assessments which identified that the fetal presentation was in the breach position. Laura's baby was subsequently delivered in June by an emergency caesarean section.
- 12.12 Prior to discharge 3 days later, when UHNM staff checked with Laura about her social situation, Laura stated that she was no longer residing with her former partner but she was well prepared for the baby, and had live in support from a female friend. She was also adamant that she was safe when the routine enquiry was made about domestic abuse. Laura was given information about services available for new and lone parents.
- 12.13 Later that day after returning home, Laura again contacted the police to report having received a text message from Charlotte stating that a DNA test kit would be delivered to her home address. Although no additional threats had been made since the previous crime report in March 2020, Laura was fearful that Charlotte would visit her. The following day, a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) visited Laura which resulted in the domestic abuse incident being updated and then closed as advice had been given to Laura about what to do in the event of any further harassment.

² 'Healthy Minds' is a confidential talking therapy service provided by the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust. <https://staffsandstoketalkingtherapies.nhs.uk/>

- 12.14 Following discharge from hospital, Laura was visited by the community midwife and had an initial contact from the health visitor. The latter was a telephone call because of Covid restrictions. The universal perinatal mental health questions were asked but no concerns were reported by Laura in relation to anxiety or low mood. A routine appointment was planned for 6-8 weeks time, and in the meantime Laura was advised to contact the Families Health & Wellbeing Hub as needed.
- 12.15 At the start of July 2020, Laura was seen by a nurse associate at the GP Practice for a diabetic check when it was discovered that her blood pressure was elevated which Laura said was because she had just had an argument. A plan was made to recheck this in a week's time.
- 12.16 2 weeks later, Laura had a telephone consultation with the GP who approved Laura's request to be restarted on anti-depressant medication because she felt drained, emotional, and lacking motivation. Laura denied having any suicidal thoughts or any intention of harming the baby and a review in one month was planned.
- 12.17 At the end of July, when the health visitor carried out the 6-8 week review, Laura explained about the outcome of the recent GP consultation. Laura also disclosed that the baby's father, Adam, appeared to be checking up on her as he had been driving past her house and also sending Laura text messages. Laura had then blocked his phone but he had then used another to continue messaging her. Laura made the observation that he only asked her about the baby in order to 'get to her'. The health visitor advised Laura to contact the police, or seek legal advice, if Laura thought this amounted to harassment. Laura declined the offer of a perinatal mental health assessment and was advised to contact the Families Health and Wellbeing Hub as needed.
- 12.18 In mid August, when Laura saw the GP for her 6 week post natal examination, Laura reported that she had developed good attachment with her baby. It was agreed that Laura would stay on the anti-depressant medication as she was feeling stressed because the baby was due to have leg surgery the following day. A review was planned for 2 to 3 weeks time.

Circumstances leading to Laura meeting Bradley

- 12.19 Just prior to leaving to go on holiday to Turkey in mid August 2020, Bradley told his mother that he did not wish to return to Bournemouth afterwards, and asked her to cancel the tenancy on his flat there. Soon after, Dorset police received a report from Bradley's employer that telephone threats had been made by a male who wanted to check Bradley's employment status as Bradley owed him money. Police enquiries established that Bradley was on holiday, he was safe, and the debt of £80 to a friend had been paid.
- 12.20 Two days later, Adam flew to Turkey with his family where they stayed at the same hotel as Bradley. From day one, Bradley quickly latched onto the family resulting in their including him in everything they did during the rest of the holiday, and Bradley extending his holiday by a further week. According to what Adam and Charlotte later told the police, Bradley became 'a bit of a nuisance' and they were unable to get rid of him.

12.21 The couple noticed that Bradley was spending cash 'like confetti' and Bradley told Adam that he was a cocaine drug dealer and he had fifteen thousand pounds in cash buried at his mother's home. Bradley drank alcohol heavily throughout the day from midday which they considered was excessive even for holiday drinking. They noted how by the end of the day, this led to Bradley first becoming neurotic and hyperactive, to then slumping in his chair like a zombie. Charlotte later told the police that she felt uneasy when Bradley was in this state because he presented as extremely angry with an 'evil frown' on his face.

Author's comment

Detailed enquiries during the DHRDR found no evidence to substantiate Bradley's claims of being a drug dealer in Dorset and the conclusions reached will be covered later in the report.

12.22 During the holiday, Adam had been maintaining contact with Laura using pay phones as his mobile would not work. However, near the end of the holiday, Adam went out to a few bars with Bradley and having told him about his involvement with Laura, asked to borrow Bradley's mobile phone which he used to have several conversations with Laura. Adam also showed Bradley a photograph of Laura that was on her social media site.

12.23 When the couple's holiday came to an end, Bradley told them that he was fed up of Bournemouth, and that after he had sorted out his drug charges, he would visit them in Stoke-on-Trent in a couple of weeks time. Bradley then entered into WhatsApp conversations with Laura as her number was now in his phone, and when shared his plan to visit Stoke-on-Trent, they agreed to meet up as soon as he returned to the UK 4 days later.

12.24 After Bradley had booked into a hotel in Stoke-on-Trent, Laura took Bradley to her home before returning him to the hotel later that evening. The next day Bradley began staying at Laura's home. Laura then sent a photo of her with Bradley to Adam with the message 'thank you for introducing me to Bradley'. Adam and Charlotte later told the police that they were shocked to discover Bradley was with Laura.

12.25 A few days later, the health visitor carried out the 3-4 month review, Laura presented as much brighter than the previous visit which Laura explained was partly because she was continuing with the medication, but also she felt better because she had cut all contact with the baby's father. Laura was again advised to contact the Families Health & Wellbeing Hub as needed, and that the next contact would be at the 9-12 month review.

12.26 Although Laura and Bradley had quickly become very close at the start of what developed into a very intense relationship, within 9 days they had started to have arguments. These stemmed from Laura being unhappy about Bradley's heavy drinking and Bradley telling Laura about his insecurity and fears of being hurt because he suspected that Laura was continuing to maintain a relationship with Adam which she continually denied explaining that her contact with him was just in relation to their baby. On one occasion, in mid September, Laura packed Bradley's bag and told him to leave but later relented.

12.27 During this period, Laura was receiving messages from Adam who wanted to rekindle the relationship. However, Laura told a friend that she had resisted Adam's overtures because of her feelings for Bradley whom she 'adored', and that she needed to cut Adam out of her life.

- 12.28 The pattern of circular arguments about Bradley's drinking and his lack of trust continued during October leading to Laura explaining that she was 'in 'a dark corner' at that time because she had not been taking her anti-depressant medication. On several occasions, Laura told Bradley that she was not sure how much more she could take of his constant need for reassurance that he was the one she wanted, and that she had done nothing to make him feel that way. Bradley's response was to challenge Laura on how she would feel if he were to lock his phone every time he walked into the room which was what she was doing. Around this time, Bradley made internet searches on how to stop paranoia, bi-polar symptoms, anxiety and whether bad weather can affect mental health.
- 12.29 By mid October, Laura told a friend that the constant arguments were getting her down, and she had started to meet up with Adam again. Laura said she was feeling confused and did not know what to do. Laura agreed with her friend's suggestion that it might be time to end the relationship with Bradley.
- 12.30 During the third week of October, Laura tried to end the relationship but Bradley refused to leave telling her that she would have to phone the police to remove him. Laura later explained to a friend that she could not do that in case social services became involved and removed the baby from her because of Bradley's drug use. The friend questioned why asking the police to remove Bradley would result in social services involvement as this would have nothing to do with Laura's care of the baby, and if anything, Laura would be viewed as trying to protect her child.
- 12.31 Over the next 4 days, Bradley continually complained that Laura now rarely spent any time with him, that when she came home she only wanted to sleep, and he demanded that she spend a whole day with him. Laura pushed back on this request saying that they both needed some time away from each other given how much they had been arguing.
- 12.32 One evening near the end of October, Laura again attempted to end the relationship, but when Bradley refused to leave, she successfully enlisted the help of a family member to achieve this. After Bradley had left, Laura explained how Bradley had been drinking since 3pm and the pattern of his paranoia that she was cheating on him. This had led to Bradley regularly checking the milometer in her car to work out where she might have been, and removing her phone from her to see who she had been in contact with. When Laura explained why she could not call the police, the family member gave the same reassurance as her friend had done previously that social services would not remove her baby. However, Laura could not be convinced because she dare not take that risk.
- 12.33 After leaving the house, Bradley kept messaging Laura to tell her that he was going to kill himself because there was nothing left to live for and he was making her unhappy. Laura told Bradley to go back to a hotel as killing himself would not help anyone and she would talk to him in the morning as she would not rest until she knew he was safe. The suicide threats continued after Bradley arrived at the hotel saying he had bought 32 paracetamol tablets.
- 12.34 The meeting the following morning resulted in agreement that he would return to Bournemouth to visit family and friends. During that time away, there was constant contact resulting in Laura agreeing to his return. However, after Bradley's return, the arguments quickly resumed with Bradley complaining about the state of their relationship.

- 12.35 The following day, the atmosphere between Laura and Bradley became more strained and after Laura had gone out, Bradley kept sending messages challenging Laura about his belief that she was having an ongoing relationship with Adam. This led to Laura being scared to return home and again she enlisted the help of another family member who noted that Laura was tearful, nervous and not her usual self.
- 12.36 When they arrived at Laura's home, Bradley appeared to be ready for a fight but agreed to leave. However, during the continuing argument between Laura and Bradley, he took a step towards Laura who then punched him on the chin - the family member telling Laura she should not have done that. Bradley immediately rang the police to report the assault but quickly ended the call. The after leaving the house, he rang again to say that he was now fine and did not need police assistance. However he was informed that he would need to be spoken to which he was happy to do on the telephone over the following few days.
- 12.37 Later that evening, in a series of abusive phone calls Bradley was overheard to be making repeated threats of physical violence towards both Adam and Laura. He also repeated the threat to kill Adam in a phone call with Charlotte when he rang to share his suspicions that Laura and Adam were still seeing each other.
- 12.38 The following day, Laura told some of her friends and family that she was going to Jersey with her baby to spend some time with Adam who was working there for a week. Laura told a friend that the relationship with Bradley was over, and that she and Adam had never been in a better place – the latter having agreed to pay for her trip.
- 12.39 Later, while Laura was packing, Bradley rang several times and was overheard being verbally abusive towards Laura. When Laura told Bradley he could collect his belongings from the garden, he responded by saying that he would get into the house to fetch them by any means possible, and if Laura would not let him in, he would cause a scene. When the call ended, Laura told her friend 'Bradley now knows about me and Adam - what is the worst he can do?'
- 12.40 At the start of November, Laura flew to Jersey with her baby, having told Bradley that she was first going to visit a friend and then stay with a family member in order to give herself some space. When Laura got to the airport she realised she had forgotten her anti depressant medication, and told a friend that she was now thinking she had made a bad decision in going to Jersey fearing that Adam was going to let her down again. In addition, she was 'getting stick' from some of the family about her decision to go, and nobody was talking to her.
- 12.41 Laura's fears soon proved to be the case as within a day of her arrival she and Adam were arguing because Laura discovered that under pressure from Charlotte, Adam had been sending messages to Charlotte saying that he only wanted to be with her he had changed his WhatsApp profile picture to one of him and his family. Laura told a friend that she was just counting down the days until she could return home and was mentally preparing herself to live on her own.
- 12.42 In the meantime, on the day that Laura went to Jersey, Bradley having returned to Bournemouth in a hired car, told a friend of his suspicion that Laura was with Adam and that he was going to drive back to Staffordshire to kill them both. The friend noted that Bradley was 'in a state', scruffy and appeared to be drunk. Bradley returned to Stoke the following day but quickly left again intending to return to Bournemouth but crashed his hire-car whilst drunk on the M6 toll motorway.

- 12.43 Bradley was charged with driving with excess alcohol and released to appear in court later in November. He then returned to a hotel in Stoke-on-Trent where he waited for Laura's return home. It was at this point, after several previous abortive attempts, that officers from Staffordshire Police were finally able to speak to Bradley about the assault by Laura which was then filed as Bradley did not support any further action being taken.
- 12.44 Throughout the time Laura was in Jersey, Bradley had been constantly messaging Laura. Within these he made several threats to harm Adam, including one threat to kill. Bradley also kept repeating his suicide threats which caused Laura to be anxious for his welfare. Although Laura refused Bradley's requests to stay in her house when he said he was running out of money to pay for the hotel, she did send him a small amount of money to buy food. Bradley then repeatedly pressed Laura to send him photos to prove she was staying with a family member - requests that Laura batted away with various explanations for not doing this - telling Bradley that if they were to have a future together he needed to trust her.
- 12.45 Bradley also communicated with Charlotte to ask where her husband was and gained confirmation that Adam was in Jersey. This led him to make an internet search on whether a passport was needed to travel there. He then sent Laura's mobile number to Charlotte in what seemed an attempt to provoke an argument between the two women.
- 12.46 Amidst the recriminations in his communications with Laura, Bradley also said that he wanted the chance to resurrect the relationship because the previous few weeks had been the best in his life. Bradley was persistent in demanding that Laura meet him face to face to talk things through as soon as she returned home which Laura agreed to.
- 12.47 On the day of Laura's murder, Bradley had kept checking with Laura when she would be arriving home, and pestered her to get a family member who had been house sitting for Laura to let him into the house. Bradley arrived at the house around midday after buying some alcohol, and was let into the house after Laura assured the family members that she would be safe meeting Bradley because he only wanted to talk with her, and he would not do anything as she would have her baby with her.
- 12.48 Immediately on gaining access to the house after the family members had left, Bradley searched for Laura's passport and on discovering it was missing, sent messages to Laura questioning why she had taken it with her if she had only gone to stay with a relative. Laura's explanation was that she had taken all her valuables with her, including her passport, to avoid any risk of these being stolen. Bradley then downloaded a flight checker app and bought another half bottle of vodka from a nearby store.
- 12.49 Laura and her baby were collected from the airport by family members. On arrival home Laura declined their offer to go in with her telling them that Bradley just wanted to talk.
- 12.50 Soon after neighbours saw Laura in the street screaming for help saying she had been stabbed. When Laura expressed her fear that Bradley would stab her baby, one of the neighbours, in a moment of great bravery, went with Laura into the house and found the baby unhurt. Hearing a sound upstairs they quickly returned to the neighbour's house – Laura managing to retrieve her mobile phone on the way out. After making a 999 call, with Laura's help, a family member was contacted to fetch the baby. Laura was taken to hospital by paramedics where she died soon afterwards despite the best efforts of the hospital trauma team.

- 12.51 Immediately after stabbing Laura, Bradley had been seen driving off at speed in Laura's car. He first stopped at Stafford services on the M6 motorway where he bought a half bottle of vodka and cigarettes before being apprehended by the police at a service station on the A14. When arrested, Bradley immediately said "I've done what I've done, it's as simple as that." A partially drunk bottle of vodka was discovered on the front passenger seat of the car.
- 12.52 During the explanation given to him at the custody suite in Northampton as to why he had been arrested for murder, Bradley said "Is she dead, I didn't mean for that to happen". Officers noted that Bradley appeared to be 'truly horrified' and upset that Laura had died from her injuries - crying and complaining of feeling sick. The following day, Bradley was interviewed twice but replied 'no comment' when questioned about the offence, and was subsequently charged with murder.

13. OVERVIEW

- 13.1 During the DHR timeframe, several health professionals had involvement with Laura. Hospital maternity services and community midwifery services were involved from November 2019 when she became pregnant. Health visiting services later became involved after the birth in June 2020. The GP Practice had several contacts in relation to review of her type 2 diabetes, post natal checks, and the help Laura sought in respect of her low mood and anxiety.
- 13.2 The DHR established that none of the above services had gathered much information about Laura's social situation and living arrangements. The identity of both the father of Laura's child, and also her previous partner, who were referred to by Laura during some of her contacts, remained unknown.
- 13.3 Laura had two contacts with Staffordshire police when she reported the text messages received from Charlotte, the wife of the father of Laura's child in March and June 2020. The police were therefore aware of the context to these messages being sent that Adam's wife was angry when she discovered her husband had been having a relationship with Laura.
- 13.4 Staffordshire police also had contact with Bradley when he reported the alleged assault by Laura in October 2020. However, as Bradley did not wish to take the matter further, no further information was gathered by the police and no contact was made with Laura to obtain her account or check on her welfare. The police therefore had no information about the history of Laura and Bradley's relationship and the difficulties Laura was experiencing.
- 13.5 Police officers from the Central Motorway Policing Group (CMPG) were involved in October 2020 when Bradley was charged with driving with excess alcohol but the officers processing that offence did not seek to gather any additional information from Bradley or make any enquiries to explore the explanation Bradley provided that the offence followed on from him having had an argument with his girlfriend. This meant the officers were unaware that police colleagues in Staffordshire were trying to make contact with Bradley to investigate further his allegation of assault.
- 13.6 There was no involvement of children's social care services with Laura and her baby.
- 13.7 The enquiries made of all relevant agencies in Dorset established that Bradley was not known to any agencies except Dorset police. Prior to the review period, there was police involvement in respect of a small number of low level matters that did not include anything that was relevant to this review.

- 13.8 The only Dorset Police contact with Bradley during the DHR timeframe was when Bradley was classed as a missing person in August 2020 which was quickly resolved. The scope of those subsequent enquiries did not require any further exploration of Bradley's social situation. However, from contact with his family, reference was made to Bradley being a "drinker" and being a user of recreational drugs. It was also established that he was in regular work as a chef and therefore had money coming in to fund his holidays and alcohol consumption.
- 13.9 There was no information held on national and local police systems to support Bradley's stories that he was involved in drug dealing. Dorset police had no knowledge of Bradley's relationship with Laura.

14. ANALYSIS

Introduction

- 14.1 The analysis will first provide insights as to how Laura experienced her situation in respect of her relationships with Adam and Bradley. As explained previously, these are in large part drawn from the text messages and telephone calls retrieved during the police investigation, supplemented by the perspectives provided by family and friends in their statements taken by the police following Laura's murder.
- 14.2 The analysis of Laura's relationship with Bradley, and how she experienced it, is presented by application of the 'Intimate Partner Homicide Timeline' (*the Timeline*) developed by Dr Jane Monckton Smith.³ This timeline was developed from an analysis of 372 killings in the UK for a research project which looked at domestic abuse homicides through the lens of the impact of coercive and controlling behaviour.
- 14.3 Following this, the report will analyse in turn the involvement of agencies during the DHR review period, and then lead into consideration of the 3 key lines of enquiry included in the terms of reference. These centred on the questions as to whether there were any barriers which prevented Laura from reaching out to agencies for support and / or reporting domestic abuse, particularly in respect of her being a new mother, and also experiencing some mental health issues. The third line of enquiry was to explore what light this case shone on the level of public awareness of how to recognise the indicators of domestic abuse, particularly coercive and controlling behaviour, and how any concerns can be reported.

15. LAURA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ADAM

- 15.1 When Adam went on holiday in 2019 without telling Laura, the perception of family members and friends was that this was a difficult period for Laura, as his actions clearly showed he had no intention of being with her.
- 15.2 When Laura told Adam she was pregnant, he is alleged to have made several unsuccessful attempts to get Laura to agree to have an abortion. This possibly explains the context to Laura's discussion with the GP that she was unsure whether she wanted to have the baby. Once Laura decided to proceed with the pregnancy, the relationship became tense, and was characterised by frequent arguments because Adam did not act on Laura's increasingly persistent pressure on him to leave his wife.

³ [https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/6896/1/6896%20Monckton-Smith%20\(2019\)%20Intimate%20Partner%20Femicide%20using%20Foucauldian.....pdf](https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/6896/1/6896%20Monckton-Smith%20(2019)%20Intimate%20Partner%20Femicide%20using%20Foucauldian.....pdf)

- 15.3 The unresolved situation and arguments had a detrimental impact on Laura's mental health which led to her taking more than the prescribed dose of the anti-depressant medication. Laura's presentation deteriorated and she started to appear unkempt, stopped wearing makeup and dying her hair which was totally out of character. Laura also began chain smoking, and was frequently seen having the shakes or bursting into tears at any time for no apparent reason. Laura was also not eating properly, which combined with the stress she was experiencing, caused her weight to drop dramatically between February and October 2020. One friend made the observation that Laura was a happier person when she was not involved with Adam but would soon become depressed whenever she had contact with him.
- 15.4 Following the holiday in Turkey, when Adam asked Laura why she was with Bradley, she told him that she was 'moving on now' and was fed up of waiting for him. However, when they resumed their relationship after a few weeks, Laura told Adam she had started the relationship with Bradley to make Adam jealous.
- 15.5 When Laura and Adam started to again make plans for a future together, and she made the decision to go to Jersey, some friends and family members counselled her against this because of their concern that she was setting herself up to be let down again by Adam. Laura would then stop discussing matters with those people who disapproved of her actions.
- 15.6 Despite being confined to the hotel room while Adam was at work in Jersey, messages sent by Laura revealed that the time alone with her baby had been the best part of her time there because of the friction in the relationship with Adam. Although Laura and Adam kept up the pretence that he was going to end the marriage as soon as he got home, it is evident that Laura was not expecting him to do this.

16. LAURA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH BRADLEY

- 16.1 The exploration of Laura's relationship with Bradley is structured around the 8 stages explained in the Intimate Partner Homicide Timeline ('the Timeline') - pre-relationship; early relationship; relationship; triggers; escalation; change in thinking; planning; and homicide. Within the coverage of each of these stages, the report will first summarise the key points in the research gained from the data examined by Dr Monkton Smith before setting out the review findings in respect of this case.

STAGE 1 – PRE-RELATIONSHIP

- 16.2 The DHR was unable to establish if there was any history of Bradley previously exercising controlling behaviour and / or stalking prior to becoming involved with Laura because he had never come to the attention of agencies in Dorset.
- 16.3 Similarly, from the statements provided to the police by Laura's family and friends, there was nothing to suggest she had previously been a victim of any domestic abuse including controlling behaviour in any of her previous relationships.

STAGE 2 - EARLY RELATIONSHIP

Key points from the research data

- 16.4 The data suggests that the way a relationship started was different to what it would become. For example, in most cases the relationships often started with the perpetrator being attentive before progressing to possessiveness and control. This is an identifiable stage which is not characterised by abuse but more about seeking commitment from the victim. There was a tendency for perpetrators to use possessive language like 'you're mine', and 'we'll be together forever', with early declarations of love also being common.
- 16.5 Normal romantic expectations and activities were therefore present but speeded up. In one case this commitment was achieved before the two had physically met, and in another case the perpetrator moved into the family home on the night they got together. Once commitment was secured from the victim, this could not be withdrawn. Families and friends noted these things, often feeling concern at the speed of the commitment, and noting an early change in the routines and behaviours of the victim:

Findings in respect of this DHR

- 16.6 Most of the above findings featured in this case. After Bradley first contacted Laura, this was the start of continuous text and phone communication between Laura and Bradley at all times of the day and night including the exchange of photographs.
- 16.7 Laura appears to have accepted the explanation Bradley gave for not being able to return to Bournemouth that he was facing charges for being a drug dealer. The DHR established through the extensive checks of records and intelligence by Dorset Police that there was no evidence to corroborate this claim. The DHR therefore concluded that this was just bravado on Bradley's part to impress Laura – just as he had tried to do with Adam and Charlotte in Turkey.
- 16.8 The impression reached by one of Laura's friends was that Laura had become smitten with Bradley, and Laura thought he was really nice, even though at this stage they had not even seen each other face to face. Laura also appeared to be taken in by Bradley's untrue boast that he had £15,000 from his drug dealing that he was prepared to spend looking after her and the baby.

Initial perspectives of family and friends

- 16.9 Soon after Bradley started staying with Laura, a friend noticed how Bradley was drinking heavily and warned Laura to be careful as this had been one of the reasons Laura had ended the relationship with Robert. Laura herself rarely drank alcohol and never kept any in the house. However, at this stage Laura seemed to have reassured herself that Bradley was still in holiday mode, and things would settle down - particularly as she said Bradley was good with her and her child.
- 16.10 The first time Laura's family met Bradley was at a birthday party in mid September 2020 and the first impressions were on the whole not favourable and they harboured concerns that the whole 'set up' appeared rather strange. This was partly because Bradley very different to the sort of person Laura would normally go for, and a common comment was that Bradley gave off a 'weird vibe'. One family member told the police that it was also 'quite weird' that Laura and Bradley seemed to get on like they had known each other for years, with none of the awkwardness that can be present in early relationships. Another family member's first impression was that Bradley was very 'cock sure of himself' given that he was meeting the family for the first time, and that he was drinking heavily.

- 16.11 Two of Laura's friends separately told Laura at a later point that Bradley's explanation about his drug dealing, and the court case, did not ring true, and questioned how Bradley could suddenly drop everything to come up to Staffordshire to be with Laura. They questioned whether Bradley was telling Laura the truth, and told Laura they were concerned as Laura hardly knew anything about Bradley and they feared that he was taking advantage of her.

STAGE 3 - RELATIONSHIP

Key points from the research data

- 16.12 This stage was found to have the most diversity in length of time. Some cases saw this stage last as little as 3 – 6 weeks, in others it was as long as 50 years where control was maintained, or the man did not want to end the relationship. There were controlling patterns in every case study, with significant levels of stalking and monitoring patterns present, sometimes accompanied by paranoia that the woman was being unfaithful. Constant demonstrations of devotion and loyalty characterised the dynamics of most of the relationships.

Findings in respect of this DHR

- 16.13 After just 9 days there were frequent arguments between Laura and Bradley because of his drinking, his suspicions that Laura was carrying on a relationship with Adam, and his increasing possessiveness in not allowing Laura any space to continue doing the things she used to prior to meeting Bradley. A recurring feature of these arguments was revealed by Laura that if anything was playing on Bradley's mind he would keep picking at it and not let it go.
- 16.14 The arguments were exacerbated by Bradley's heavy drinking which resulted in a marked change in his mood and behaviour. A witness to two of these early arguments was shocked by the extent of the transformation in Bradley's behaviour from being passive to aggressive when ordering Laura to stop replying to Adam's messages.
- 16.15 Those two arguments revealed an example of the way in which Bradley sought to guilt trip Laura in order to retain control of the relationship by telling Laura that his previous girlfriend had cheated on him, he was not allowed to have contact with their baby, and he would not allow this to happen to him again.
- 16.16 The DHR Panel was unable to confirm if there was any truth at all in these claims, and given that Bradley claimed that his child had the same name as Laura's baby, it was concluded that the story was almost certainly invented to put Laura under pressure. It is clear however, from the observations made by the witness, that Bradley came across as very convincing and seemed genuinely distraught in losing contact with his child.
- 16.17 Bradley's lack of trust led to his attempts to exercise control through the constant checking of Laura's mobile phone and car milometer, also never allowing Laura to sit on her own. Laura was also a victim of a pattern of stalking, including cyber stalking, which continued throughout the relationship until her murder. The police examination of the content of Laura's phone revealed the constant calls and messages Bradley made to Laura throughout the day – sometimes showing 30 or more missed calls if Laura did not reply.

STAGE 4 - TRIGGERS

Key points from the research data

- 16.18 The reasons for men killing their partners overwhelmingly revolved around withdrawal of commitment, or separation, which could be real, imagined, or just threatened. Attempts to separate were present in all the cases which progressed to this stage, and had been met with significant resistance.

Findings in respect of this DHR

- 16.19 The above findings were again evident in this case. During October, Laura's increasing unhappiness because of Bradley's drinking and constant checking up on her, led to her going out each day to secure some space for herself. Laura told a friend that she no longer knew what to do or say to Bradley to end the arguments and improve the situation. Laura agreed with her friend's observation that it was perhaps time to end the relationship.
- 16.20 However her efforts to end the relationship were met with resistance as seen by Bradley's refusal to leave, and his challenging Laura to call the police knowing that she would be reluctant to do this because of her fear of social services becoming involved. As will be seen in the next stage, this became a pattern in how Bradley resisted Laura's attempts to end the relationship.

STAGE 5 - ESCALATION

Key points from the research data

- 16.21 Escalation is an increase in the frequency, severity or variety of abuse, control or stalking - all designed to re-establish control or status. This could involve perpetrators using a number of tactics to re-establish their control, such as begging, crying, threats of violence, actual violence, stalking, or suicide threats. The length of this stage is difficult to estimate and seemed to differ across cases. Stalking was widespread, especially monitoring and tracking.

Findings in respect of this DHR

- 16.22 After Laura's first unsuccessful attempt to get Bradley to leave, he then attempted to maintain control by demanding that she spend more time with him - making the complaint that she was going out every day whereas earlier in the relationship she would only go out 2 or 3 times a week.
- 16.23 Laura's rejection of this demand led to Bradley increasingly telling Laura that he did not feel wanted by her any more as she no longer hugged or kissed him. Bradley attempted to make Laura feel guilty by making sarcastic comments that she should let him know when she could fit him into her busy schedule. Laura countered this by telling Bradley to stop putting her under pressure all the time.
- 16.24 It is evident that the first occasion when Laura successfully enlisted the help of a family member to get Bradley to leave the house was a key development in the escalation stage. By this time Laura had told a friend and Adam that she could not cope any longer and she felt utterly drained. She was also worried that her stress was being picked up by her baby who was exhibiting some unsettled behaviour. Being required to leave the house that evening clearly had a huge impact on Bradley as shown by his messages later that this had brought it home to him that the relationship could never go back to what it was.

- 16.25 It was at this point that Bradley successfully first used the threat of suicide to gain a response from Laura, telling her he had only ever wanted her to be happy, and if he was gone, she could meet up with someone else who would. Laura told Bradley that although he was saying he did not blame her for his decision to end his life, in effect that was what he was doing which was unfair.
- 16.26 Despite Laura wanting to end the relationship, it is evident that she still cared about what happened to Bradley given her response to the suicide threat in telling him to go to a hotel, let her know that he had arrived safely, and promising to visit him the next morning. That subsequent conversation led to Bradley being given the hope that the relationship could be salvaged if he went to Bournemouth to give them both some breathing space.
- 16.27 However, Bradley did not give Laura the space she craved as he continued to bombard her with messages saying how much he loved her, how much he hated himself and how lonely he felt. Although exasperated, Laura succumbed to this approach resulting in the short-lived reunion which swiftly ended following further arguments, and for a second time, Laura enlisting the help of a family member to remove Bradley.
- 16.28 The tearful suicide threats remained an almost daily feature of Bradley's contacts with Laura while she was in Jersey. Although telling Bradley that she was not happy that he was blaming her for his decision when her own mental health was so poor, her replies enabled Bradley to use this an opening to tell Laura how much he still loved her, how the early weeks of their relationship had been the best in his life, and to plead with her to send him messages reciprocating his love which she did.
- 16.29 Laura also told Bradley that if they were going to have a future together, each of them would have to stop harking back to past grievances. In giving a commitment to do this, Bradley gave a glimpse of the controlling behaviour he would continue to apply should they resume their relationship by insisting that Laura would have to reduce her phone use which she agreed to.
- 16.30 It is evident that the constant bombardment of contacts going over the same ground led to a hardening of Laura's attitude and her decision not to let Bradley stay in her house while she was in Jersey despite Bradley's pleadings that he had nowhere else to go as his mother had blocked him from returning home.

STAGE 6 CHANGE IN THINKING / DECISION

Key points from the research data

- 16.31 This stage occurs in, or at the end of, a period of escalation as the perpetrator's response to perceived irretrievable loss of control and/or status. The change in thinking appears to be associated with the perpetrator feeling that there is nowhere left to go to resolve his outrage or sense of injustice. In addition, the thinking that he is entitled to act is reinforced by the belief that there are social norms supporting his position.
- 16.32 The idea that homicide may be a possibility may occur at this time, and the level of planning found in homicide investigations suggests that there had been a considered decision to kill made at some point. Even if this possibility is not followed through, it represents an escalation in risk to the victim.

Findings in respect of this DHR

- 16.33 There were discernible changes in Bradley's thinking after he was asked to leave the house a second time. This is evident from his messages telling Laura how happy he was now that he knew he was not going mad having established that Laura had been lying about not seeing Adam. Over the next few days, a constant thread in Bradley's communications was one of self justification for why he had kept challenging Laura about his suspicions and checking up on her.
- 16.34 The discovery that his suspicions had proved correct led to the increasing number of threats made towards both Adam and Laura, not just in his contacts with Laura, but also in the conversations with Adam's wife and the friend he met when he returned to Bournemouth the second time when he stated his intention to kill both Laura and Adam.

STAGE 7 – PLANNING

Key points from the research data

- 16.35 The planning stage could potentially last anywhere from a couple of hours to one case where it extended over a period of twelve months. Where stalking continues, the risk remains high. In some cases there was evidence of the perpetrator creating opportunities for the killing to happen, and in some cases telling others of their plans to kill.

Findings in respect of this DHR

- 16.36 When passing sentence, the Judge made the comment that he could not say with certainty that Bradley intended to kill Laura. However, the conclusion reached by the police was that it was evident that when Bradley went to Laura's house to meet her on her return from Jersey, he was intent on causing Laura serious harm. This view stemmed from the analysis of events on the days leading up to the murder, and the manner of the attack.
- 16.37 The possibility of killing Laura and Adam had clearly been something that had been inside Bradley's head for several days, and regardless of whether he had made a decision to kill Laura, it is evident from the transcripts of the phone calls and texts over the preceding week that he was relentless in seeking to set up a face to face meeting. While Bradley told Laura that this was to enable them to talk things through and see if there was a chance of resurrecting their relationship, it is probable that he wanted to have the opportunity to confront Laura with his grievances.
- 16.38 Bradley adopted a number of tactics to try and force Laura into agreeing to a meeting. One was to continually play back to Laura the impact of her duplicitous behaviour on his mental health. Bradley also became fixated on whether Laura had met up with Adam at a funeral they had both attended during October, and he kept pressing Laura to confirm his suspicions. It is evident from Laura's responses that this constant probing put her on the back foot so that bit by bit she shared more about the nature of her contact with Adam that day. Bradley also continually used tears and further suicide threats to draw a response. These threats were done in an emotive way designed to make Laura feel guilty.

- 16.39 These tactics proved successful because Laura clearly took the suicide threats seriously and she would always contact Bradley to check he was safe. However, often when she did this, Bradley did not reply and left her dangling and uncertain whether he had followed through on his threat. Laura's concern for Bradley extended to sending him money to buy food when he said he had none left.
- 16.40 In seeking to understand why Laura agreed to meet Bradley contrary to the advice given by some friends not to do this but instead end the relationship for good, the review identified a number of contributory factors.
- 16.41 One factor was that she did not feel in control of the situation having told Bradley she was staying with a family member. Bradley's suspicion that she had lied to him about this resulted led to recurring demands that she send him a video of the house as proof she was there. When this request was rebuffed by Laura, Bradley then ramped up the pressure by first saying he was going to get a taxi to the house and then offering to send Laura money to get a taxi home when she said she could not afford the fare. Agreeing to meet Bradley as soon as she returned home was the only way to put him off and buy herself time.
- 16.42 Laura was also trying to stop Bradley from responding to a letter he allegedly had received from the police wanting to talk to him about the assault by Laura which he dangled over her to manipulate her into agreeing to meet him. From the messages shared with friends, it is clear that Laura could not be sure if she could take at face value his assurances that he would not respond to the letter, repeating her fear that this could lead to social services involvement. The review established from the police that no such correspondence had been sent to Bradley.
- 16.43 It is also evident that Laura was placed under pressure by Adam to placate Bradley to keep the situation calm while they were away, although as she told a friend, she would have preferred to have just ended the relationship with Bradley.

STAGE 8 – HOMICIDE

Key points from the research data

- 16.44 The final stage is the homicide itself and this may involve extreme levels of violence, even by previously non-violent people, that appears to have no direct relation to the level of violence evidenced in the relationship.

Findings in respect of this DHR

- 16.45 Bradley's determination to get inside Laura's house prior to her arrival home was shown by how he kept pestering Laura on the morning she was due to return. Some indication of Bradley's state of mind was provided by the descriptions of him pacing round the garden and being 'on edge' before Laura's friends let him into the house. His comment to them that he was not going to say anything bad about the family implied that he did have an issue with Laura. The discovery that Laura's passport was missing appears to have wound Bradley up further given the challenging messages he then sent to Laura.
- 16.46 The attack took place within a matter of a few minutes of Laura entering the house with her baby. The nature of the attack mirrored the observation drawn from the timeline data about the level of violence that can feature in domestic homicides. Although there was no history of previous violence in the relationship, the findings in the pathologist's report would suggest that this was a frenzied attack with evidence of 9 defence wounds on Laura's hands and left forearm.

16.47 The Pathologist was unable to provide a comment on whether the injuries themselves, or the force required, gave any indication of Bradley intention. However the conclusion reached by the police that was presented in the prosecution opening statement was that the attack on Laura was premeditated at least during the course of that afternoon. It would appear likely that the attack was carried out while Bradley was under the influence of alcohol which he had bought prior to Laura arriving home given the results of the alcohol tests carried out after his arrest.

ANALYSIS OF AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

17. GP PRACTICE

- 17.1 Laura had 6 recorded contacts with the GP Practice during the review period – 4 of these resulting in consultations with a GP, 1 with an advanced nurse practitioner, and 1 with a practice nurse. Although Bradley had registered with the same GP Practice, he had not sought any appointments.
- 17.2 It appears that in respect of the first contact in January 2020, the response to Laura's request to speak to a GP about her uncertainty whether to go ahead with the pregnancy was to signpost her instead to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. It is not known whether Laura pursued that suggestion. With the benefit of hindsight, the decision not to offer Laura an appointment was a missed opportunity to explore the reasons for her uncertainty, and particularly whether it was connected in any way to her known history of mental health issues. In addition, that may have led Laura to disclose the pressure she was experiencing from Adam to terminate the pregnancy. The GP representative on the DHR Panel confirmed that if the GP had established that Laura was under pressure from Adam to terminate the pregnancy, then different conversations would have taken place with her.
- 17.3 Laura's action in arranging a consultation with the GP for a medication review in January 2020 shows her willingness to act on professionals' advice, in this case that of the perinatal mental health team. Laura's openness about the mental health problems she was experiencing led to anti-depressant medication being prescribed.
- 17.4 From the information in the GP notes it remains uncertain as to how extensive the exploration was about Laura's social situation and possible support network because although Laura was part of a large extended family, there was only reference to 2 family members, who were said not to live locally, and the support of her former partner. Laura's description of living with an ex partner and having no contact with Adam ⁴ could have prompted further exploration of what might have appeared as a slightly unusual set up.
- 17.5 From the chronology supplied, it does not appear that Laura arranged a follow up appointment to review the impact of the anti-depressant medication as the next recorded contact was not until July 2020 when Laura was seen by a nurse associate for a diabetic check. At that consultation, the nurse did not pick up on the opening provided by Laura's explanation she had just had an argument prior to the elevated blood pressure reading, as to whom she had argued with, and what about. It was good practice however that the plan was made to repeat the blood pressure check in a week's time. However the chronology made no reference to this having taken place.

⁴ Adam was not referred to by name in the GP record but described as Laura's partner.

- 17.6 When the GP restarted the anti-depressant medication at Laura's request 2 weeks later, good practice was again evident in that the GP's exploration of the current issues Laura was experiencing took account of the previous mental health history. This resulted in a risk assessment being carried out as to whether Laura had any suicide ideation or thoughts of harming the baby. Again, based on the chronology, it does not appear that Laura arranged a follow up appointment for a review that was proposed in 3 weeks time.
- 17.7 With regard to the 6 week post natal examination, the GP panel representative was confident that the guidance issued by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) would have been followed. However, the GP records did not indicate whether Laura was seen on her own, or whether any enquiry was made around domestic abuse. The DHR panel was informed that since this case, post natal and baby checks are carried out with just the mother present, and the template for these reviews includes a specific prompt for the clinician to enquire about this issue.
- 17.8 This proved to be Laura's last contact with the GP practice because Laura did not respond to the telephone calls made to book a diabetic review. The DHR panel was informed that although this kind of pause in contact is not unusual for many patients it was unusual for Laura. The panel noted that the lack of response coincided with the turbulence at that point in Laura's life stemming from the problems in her relationship with Bradley.

18. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL NORTH MIDLANDS (UHNM)

- 18.1 Good practice was evident in the arrangements for Laura's care during her pregnancy to be provided by a consultant led team because of her type 2 diabetes. It is evident that there was close monitoring of this as it was picked up at the 16 week check that Laura had not been checking her blood sugar level for a week because she had run out of test strips.
- 18.2 Good practice was also evident in the referral to the perinatal mental health team in January 2020 as soon as Laura's mental health history and the current issues around anxiety and depression were identified. That assessment concluded that the latter were not related to her pregnancy and appropriate advice was given to self refer to Healthy Minds for support and the GP for a medication review given that Laura had not taken any anti-depressant medication during the past year. She was also advised to seek support from her employer to get time off to attend pre-natal appointments.
- 18.3 It was also good practice that in the early appointments, enquiries were made about any possible domestic abuse and also her social situation. When Laura revealed that she was looking for new accommodation as she was then residing with her ex partner, (Robert) it is not known if the assumption was drawn from this that Robert was the father of Laura's child.
- 18.4 It is evident that Laura engaged well with maternity services, attending all appointments for scans and reviews which resulted in early detection of the potential problems about delivery because the baby was in the breech position. The UHNM IMR highlighted as good practice the continuity of carer at these appointments.
- 18.5 All the expected checks were made in respect of Laura's social situation and preparations for the new baby at the point of discharge. These established that Laura was well prepared, had live in support from a close friend as she was then no longer living with Robert. Appropriate signposting was also given to services for new and lone parents.

18.6 However, a learning point identified by UHNM was that until that pre-discharge discussion, there had not been any further exploration since the initial consultations with the midwife at the start of the pregnancy regarding Laura's living arrangements and support at home which showed a lack of the required professional curiosity.

19. MIDLANDS PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION NHS TRUST (MPFT)

19.1 There was a marked contrast in what Laura shared about her mental health in the first 2 contacts with the health visitor. In the first contact in June via a telephone call because of Covid restrictions, Laura reported she was not experiencing any issues around low mood or anxiety. However, that had changed by the time of the 6-8 week review in July 2020 with Laura reporting that she had recently been prescribed anti-depressant medication. Although it was good practice that a targeted perinatal mental health review was offered, which Laura declined, it remains unclear as to the extent the health visitor explored why there had been a change in Laura's mental well-being.

19.2 During that visit, the health visitor did pick up on Laura's disclosures about the texts from Adam and Charlotte, his driving past her house to apparently check up on Laura, and his calls from another phone after Laura had blocked his number. This led to the health visitor advising Laura that she could report this to the police or seek legal advice if she thought it was harassment. However, although it was recognised that Laura could be a victim of harassment and stalking, there is no evidence that questions were asked about possible domestic abuse or that completion of a DASH risk assessment was offered.

19.3 At the 3-4 month review by the health visitor, Laura presented as brighter since the previous visit, with Laura reporting that she was continuing to take the anti-depressant medication and that she felt all the better for breaking off all contact with Adam.

19.4 The review acknowledged that it was not possible for the health visitor to ask questions about any domestic abuse on this visit because a friend was present. However, given Laura's previous disclosures about the unsolicited nature of the contact from Charlotte, and the possible stalking behaviour by Adam, the author's view was that the health visitor could have considered a follow up contact to see if Laura could be seen on her own to enable those enquiries to be made and signpost her to specialist domestic abuse support services in the event that Adam begin to bother her again.

19.5 In addressing this observation, MPFT explained that the reason this was not considered was that the current national framework for visits set out in the updated health visiting and school nursing service delivery model issued by Public Health in 2021⁵ does not readily facilitate this. This model provides for 7 visits during the first 2 years of a child's life - 5 of which are mandated.⁶ For a follow up visit to be carried out, either an unmet health need and / or safeguarding issue has to have been identified. In Laura's case, neither was identified during the 3-4 month visit which was carried out by a different health visitor to the one who had picked up on the possible stalking issue at the previous visit.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commissioning-of-public-health-services-for-children/health-visiting-and-school-nursing-service-delivery-model>

⁶ *antenatal health promoting review, new baby review, 6 to 8 week review, 3 month contact, 6 month contact, 1 year review, 2 to 2 and a half year review.*

- 19.6 The DHR panel was informed by MPFT that its safeguarding team is currently working with the clinical lead to review how the arrangements for the additional targeted health visiting service can address the kind of issue that arose in this case so that there is the opportunity for further follow up.
- 19.7 The review noted that this visit by the health visitor coincided with the early 'honeymoon' stage of Laura's new relationship with Bradley. Had that visit taken place a week later, it is possible, given that Laura was always very open in sharing information with professionals, she might have opened up about the difficulties she was starting to experience with Bradley. Importantly Laura may have disclosed that Bradley was now a member of the household which would have been a significant development in terms of future monitoring of the baby's care.

20. STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE

- 20.1 The conclusion reached in respect of the responses to the 2 reports from Laura about the contact from Charlotte, Adam's wife, was that these were proportionate.
- 20.2 In respect of the first report in March 2020 the abusive text messages from Charlotte were classed as malicious communications. Although not included in the IMR, it was confirmed during the DHR after a further check that Charlotte was spoken to and advised about her behaviour which was the action Laura had sought. However, no further detail was provided about the conversation with Charlotte and how she responded. Similarly, although Laura was subsequently updated on that contact with Charlotte, no further detail could be provided by the Police as to how Laura was contacted and what information was provided.
- 20.3 With regard to the subsequent contact from Charlotte in June about the delivery of the DNA test kit, there was no follow up by the police with Adam and Charlotte after the PCSO's visit to Laura. Given that the police IMR referred to this as a domestic abuse incident that had been linked to the previous report in March, further enquiries might have been expected given that Charlotte had failed to adhere to the advice previously given just 3 months earlier.
- 20.4 The explanation provided by the police during the review was that the advice given by the PCSO was appropriate as no crime had been committed and therefore no further investigation was required. There would have been no reason to speak with Adam or Charlotte unless specifically requested by Laura which did not appear to be the case. The observation was also made that that speaking to them might have actually 'added fuel to the fire'. Whilst the latest incident was linked with the previous report, it did not constitute an offence of harassment as a gap of 3 months between the 2 incidents would not constitute a course of conduct that met the evidential threshold. In addition the advice given to Charlotte 3 months earlier as per Laura's wishes, was simply that, which Charlotte did not have to take.
- 20.5 In contrast to the above, several unsuccessful attempts were made to contact Bradley by phone and a home visit over a period of 4 days to find out more after Bradley reported the assault by Laura at the end of October 2020. Although officers showed great persistence once their enquiries commenced, the finding of the police IMR which covered these attempts in detail, was that the attempts to contact Bradley was not in accordance with the force policy covering action required to domestic abuse incidents allocated a grade 3 response. This requires contact to be made within 24 hours.

- 20.6 The Police IMR highlighted the importance of ‘the golden hour of investigation’ so that an understanding of the incident can be gained quickly. In addition, the IMR was critical of the decision to file the matter after contact was made with Bradley who did not wish to pursue things further. This meant several important questions remained unanswered as to whether Bradley had been a victim of an assault and whether Laura had committed an offence or had acted reasonably in self-defence.
- 20.7 The lack of consideration given to speaking to Laura was a significant oversight as this meant no checks were made as to whether Laura and her new baby were safe and well – especially given Bradley’s explanation that he had been drinking when he reported the assault. Had Laura been spoken to at this point, she may have revealed the difficulties she had been experiencing in getting Bradley to leave her home, and his pattern of controlling and stalking behaviour may have emerged. This would then have provided the opportunity to assess whether Laura was a victim of domestic abuse and whether there was any potential risk of future harm.
- 20.8 The IMR also highlighted the issue that the officers tasked with locating Bradley were unaware that he had been arrested by traffic police after he crashed his car on the motorway. It does not appear that officers processing Bradley after his arrest carried out any enquiries with Staffordshire police about Bradley which might have revealed that officers there were trying to make contact with him as a possible victim of domestic abuse. This may have led to further exploration of the contributory factors advanced by Bradley for the drink driving offence that he had just had an argument with his girlfriend. Further enquiry might have led to steps being taken to check the girlfriend was safe, particularly as Bradley had admitted to drinking 8 cans of cider before setting off on his journey.
- 20.9 In respect of all the episodes of police involvement, the DHR did not receive any evidence that information was ever given to Laura and Bradley to signpost them to specialist domestic abuse support services that were available.

21. ANALYSIS OF WHETHER LAURA’S MENTAL HEALTH WAS A BARRIER TO HER DISCLOSING DOMESTIC ABUSE

- 21.1 The DHR finding was that the mental health issues that Laura was experiencing throughout the review time period were not a barrier to her seeking support. If anything, Laura had enhanced opportunities to disclose any domestic abuse as routine enquiry was made on several occasions.
- 21.2 This finding is evidenced by the fact that the GP records showed that Laura had sought GP support in the past and had been prescribed anti-depressant medication. In addition, Laura acted on the advice of the perinatal mental health team in seeking a medication review with the GP which resulted in the medication being restarted in January 2020. Laura then later, on her own volition, booked a consultation with the GP in July to request that the medication be restarted.
- 21.3 It is also clear that within her meetings with professionals, Laura was always very open about the nature of the mental health problems she was experiencing. This is evident from the record of the meetings with the perinatal mental health team, the midwives, the GP, and the check on Laura’s mental health by the health visitor at the 3-4 month review in September 2020.

21.4 Good practice was shown by professionals at most of these meetings in making routine enquiry about domestic abuse but none was disclosed. It was also good practice that in all the GP consultations where Laura raised concerns about her mental health, risk assessments were carried out to check whether she had any suicidal ideation or thoughts of self harm or of harming the baby.

22. WHETHER BEING A NEW MOTHER WAS A BARRIER TO LAURA REACHING OUT OR FOR SUPPORT OR REPORTING DOMESTIC ABUSE

22.1 The DHR's consideration of this question revealed a mixed picture. Prior to Bradley arriving on the scene, being a new mother was clearly not a barrier to Laura seeking support and reporting events which led her to her feeling unsafe. This is evidenced by her attending all antenatal appointments to ensure the best possible care for herself and the unborn baby, twice reporting the threats from Charlotte to the police, and unprompted, telling the health visitor about the stalking behaviour from Adam.

22.2 However, in respect of both the health visitor contact and the 2 episodes of police involvement, no offers were made to carry out a DASH risk assessment. Had these been carried out, they might have provided Laura with helpful insights about how to spot the signs of different types of domestic abuse, and given Laura the confidence to seek support in dealing with the problems she later experienced with Bradley. In addition, Laura was never signposted to New Era and was therefore unaware of the support she could access other than ringing the police.

22.3 Once Laura became involved with Bradley, being a new mother did become a barrier to her reporting abuse or reaching out for support outside of that provided by family members and friends. This was because of her fear that if she contacted the police to remove Bradley, this could lead to children's social care involvement and the removal of her baby because of Bradley's drug use.

22.4 Although wholly hypothetical, the DHR explored what the likelihood was of children's social care being drawn in if Laura had had contacted the police. The view shared by Children's Social Care was that it would have been highly unlikely that the circumstances would have met the threshold for intervention. This was because the usual immediate enquiries with other agencies would have revealed Laura's positive engagement and that there had never been any concerns about her ability to provide good care for her baby.

Enquiries about Laura's social circumstances

22.5 The review identified gaps in the extent of the enquiries made with Laura about her social circumstances, and a lack of professional curiosity to probe further the explanations she provided. As a result, a clear picture was never gained of the people she referred to when she made mention of an 'ex partner' (Robert) or former partner (Adam).

22.6 In Laura's contacts with maternity services, the initial information that she was living with her ex partner was not pursued further to check that this was a safe and supportive arrangement. No further enquiries were then made until the point of discharge from hospital after the baby's birth.

22.7 In addition, despite Laura having previously disclosed the stalking behaviour by Adam, the different health visitor who carried out 3 to 4 month review felt unable to explore whether there had been any change in Laura's social circumstances because of the presence of a friend which restricted what could be raised. This visit took place during the 'honeymoon' stage of Laura's involvement with Bradley which meant the health visitor gained a positive picture from Laura's presentation, and her description of experiencing improved mood having cut ties with Adam.

22.8 Crucially, Laura did not disclose that she was in a new relationship and Bradley was now a member of the household. The fact that this development remained unknown was a significant gap as research findings from safeguarding children's reviews have shown that the arrival of a new partner in the household can increase the risk to children - a development that requires full assessment.

23. RECOGNITION AND RESPONSE BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS THAT LAURA MAY BE AT RISK OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

23.1 The DHR established that Laura was surrounded by a supportive network of family and friends whose help she drew on extensively throughout the difficulties she experienced in her relationships with Adam and Bradley.

23.2 As well as being good listeners when offering support, family members and friends did not hold back from sharing their thoughts and advice about the situation Laura was reporting. However, there was a pattern of Laura then avoiding those people whose advice did not coincide with her own thinking, and then resuming contact once 'the dust had settled' and she had moved on from the situation that precipitated those discussions. It would appear from some of the police statements that trying to provide support in response to the latest crisis proved emotionally draining at times, particularly when there never seemed to be any improvement in Laura's situation.

23.3 It is evident from the advice given on occasions to Laura that some family members and friends recognised that the police was a possible port of call when there are concerns about domestic abuse. However, there is no indication that they were aware of other possible sources of support such as the New Era specialist domestic abuse services for victims.

23.4 The review noted that within some of the statements provided to the police, there was a sense that people felt they should have taken Bradley's threats more seriously. At the time however, they put these down to just things that can get said in the heat of the moment and that nothing would come of it.

24. CONCLUSIONS

24.1 The background to the start of the ill-fated involvement with Bradley was the unresolved situation between Laura and Adam regarding their future. The adverse impact of what was a stressful period for Laura after she became pregnant is evident from the descriptions of her deteriorating mental health, the change in her presentation, the dramatic weight loss and lack of self care. During the pregnancy her stress and anxiety was also exacerbated by the abusive messages from Charlotte and the further arguments these generated with Adam.

24.2 The immediate circumstances that led to Laura becoming involved with Bradley stemmed from him latching onto Adam and his family while on holiday. It is evident that Bradley was clearly on the look out for new adventures having given up his flat in Bournemouth and telling Adam and Charlotte that he might visit in a couple of weeks after this return.

- 24.3 It was Adam's action in telling Bradley about his involvement with Laura, and borrowing Bradley's phone to contact her, that enabled Bradley to make an approach to Laura. In prioritising his own needs Adam appears to have given no thought for Laura's right to privacy, or the potential risks to her safety, in using Bradley's phone and sharing so much information, including a photo of Laura. This was despite the unfavourable view that Adam and Charlotte had formed of Bradley because of him becoming a nuisance and his excessive drinking which resulted in a change of demeanour that caused Charlotte to feel anxious around him.
- 24.4 This was the background to Bradley successfully manipulating Laura into meeting him at a point when she was vulnerable because she had again been rejected by Adam. As regards Laura's motivation for entering into a relationship with Bradley, the conclusion of the police investigation was that she saw an opportunity to use Bradley to make Adam jealous as she still clung to the hope that at some point Adam would leave his wife to be with her.
- 24.5 The way in which Laura's relationship with Bradley progressed, which resulted in her becoming a victim of escalating levels of controlling behaviour and cyber stalking, reflected many of the patterns of behaviour described in the 8 stages of the 'Intimate Partner Homicide Timeline' developed by Professor Jane Monkton Smith.
- 24.6 From the outset, even before their first face to face meeting, Bradley smothered Laura with attention and promises that they could have a future together. However, after a honeymoon period of just 9 days, the daily arguments commenced because of Bradley's heavy drinking and mistrust of Laura which resulted in him constantly challenging her with his suspicion that she was still having a relationship with Adam. As the arguments became more frequent, Laura's personality changed from being bubbly and outgoing to being subdued and unhappy.
- 24.7 When Laura tried to take a step back and gain herself some private space away from the Bradley and the endless arguments, her attempts were met by an escalation of the controlling behaviour. This was manifested in his constant checking of Laura's mobile phone, her car milometer, and the cyber stalking through the constant messages and phone calls when she was out to check where she was and seek affirmation from Laura that she still wanted him. Bradley also started to guilt trip Laura by explaining how his previous relationship had ended because his girlfriend cheated on him and he had lost contact with their child – a story that the DHR Panel concluded was unlikely to be true.
- 24.8 Towards the end of October 2020, Laura made the first of several unsuccessful attempts to end the relationship. Bradley refused to leave, goading Laura to call the police knowing that she was unlikely to do that because of his drug use and her fear that children's social care services might become involved and take the baby from her. Sadly this fear was so great that she felt unable to act on the reassurances from family members and friends that this would not happen. As outlined earlier, the DHR established that it was unlikely that the situation would have met the threshold for intervention by children's social care services.
- 24.9 When Laura successfully enlisted help to get Bradley to leave the first time towards the end of October, Bradley appears to have realised that he was starting to lose control of the relationship, and first started to use the suicide threat. This proved effective in gaining the response he wanted from Laura that she would consider seeing if they could work things out. These suicide threats then became more frequent after Laura enlisted help a second time to remove Bradley from her home.

- 24.10 The DHR panel also noted that Bradley's action in immediately reporting the assault by Laura, reflected textbook perpetrator behaviour by casting the actual victim as the offender. Bradley then kept using the possibility of pursuing the assault further with the police as another tactic to prevent Laura ending the relationship.
- 24.11 It was the removal from the house the second time led to the discernable change in Bradley's thinking and the start of many threats to cause harm to Adam and Laura, including threats to kill which continued throughout the week Laura was in Jersey with Adam. These threats stemmed from his sense of self justification having established that his suspicions that Laura was seeing Adam had been proved to be correct.
- 24.12 As the week progressed, Bradley successfully heaped pressure on Laura, first in getting her to agree to meet him immediately on her return, and then to be allowed into the house where he waited to confront her. The conclusion of the police investigation was that Bradley was intent on causing Laura serious harm that day. Some insight into Bradley's anger and intent is shown by the frenzied nature of the fatal knife attack.

25. LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

- 25.1 This case has identified several areas of inter-related learning in respect of the DHR key lines on enquiry. Many of the areas of learning are not new as they have featured in previous DHRs commissioned by the Stoke-on-Trent Community Safety Partnership. Therefore the coverage of each theme will include action that has already been taken, and what further action is now recommended.

Making enquiry as a matter of routine about domestic abuse and the social circumstances of expectant / new mothers

- 25.2 Overall, good practice was applied by professionals in regularly making routine enquiry of Laura whether she was at risk of domestic abuse. However, the rapid changes in Laura's situation illustrate how quickly a person's circumstances can change within a short period of time. In Laura's case, there were the fluctuations in her involvement with Adam, and then the sudden entry of Bradley into her life. In both relationships, Laura became a victim of different degrees of controlling behaviour and stalking, including cyber stalking.
- 25.3 This reinforces the importance of practitioners continuing to make routine enquiry about domestic abuse at each contact, and carrying out a risk assessment whenever any information is picked up that suggests that a person may be a victim of domestic abuse and / or stalking. In addition, it is essential that practitioners show the necessary professional curiosity to establish full information about the social situation and living arrangements of expectant and new mothers.

Recommendation 1

The Stoke-on-Trent Domestic Abuse Partnership should seek assurance as to how health agencies satisfy themselves that when their staff are involved with expectant and new mothers, and it is safe to do so, they are:-

- (i) routinely making enquiries about domestic abuse at each contact and carrying out an assessment of risk when domestic abuse is identified;*
- (ii) seeking to gather sufficient information about the social circumstances and living arrangements.*

Signposting to specialist support services for victims of domestic abuse

- 25.4 There was no evidence that in any of her contacts with health professionals or the police, that Laura was provided with information about the specialist support she could access from the New Era service for victims of domestic abuse. In the case of maternity services involvement, this gap is a concern given that New Era has been delivering training to hospital staff. In addition, one of New Era's Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors (IDVA) is linked to the hospital to pick up referrals and offer advice.
- 25.5 It will be important therefore that in addition to a reminder being given to all agencies about the importance of their staff providing information to service users and victims about New Era, further investigation should be carried out jointly by UHNM and New Era to check that this information is now being provided to patients across the hospital site where the possibility of domestic abuse is identified.
- 25.6 In its exploration of the issue around signposting victims to New Era, the DHR Panel received the following helpful information from each of the health agencies covering Stoke-on-Trent about how this is covered in their domestic abuse training
- 25.7 With regard to primary care, the review heard from New Era that there are relatively low numbers of referrals from GP practices and other health services. This led to a suggestion being made that in respect of GP practices, there would be benefits of exploring further the feasibility of a member of the wider team within the practice being designated to take responsibility for providing oversight of the submission and quality of referrals.
- 25.8 In its consideration of the issues around referrals and signposting to support, the review noted that the Royal College of General Practice had launched the all age safeguarding standards in October 2024 which places the onus on those working in primary care to be able to demonstrate their capabilities in five areas:-
- Safeguarding professional standards;
 - Identifying abuse and neglect (specifying child, adult and domestic abuse);
 - Responding to abuse and neglect;
 - Documentation and record keeping;
 - Information sharing and multi-agency working.
- 25.9 The review heard from MPFT and North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare Trust (NSCHT) that they provide domestic abuse training to all staff who need to be equipped to routinely make enquiry about domestic abuse as recommended in the 2014 guidance issued by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)⁷ and recommendation 6 in the NICE Domestic Abuse Quality Standards (2016).⁸ This training includes raising awareness of local services available to support victims which is important as MPFT serves areas outside of Staffordshire. A compliance report is provided each month that is monitored and reviewed for assurance.

⁷ <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph50/chapter/Recommendations#recommendation-6-ensure-trained-staff-ask-people-about-domestic-violence-and-abuse>

⁸ <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs116>

- 25.10 NSCHT also explained that its training materials were written with input and quality assurance from New Era with more targeted training being delivered to certain services within the trust. This has included a bespoke session for the Crisis Care Centre and additional sessions being planned around coercion and control. As a result, mental health practitioners routinely ask about domestic abuse during initial assessments and whenever risk assessments are updated. NSCHT also has 15 domestic abuse champions who are involved in delivering training who meet bi-monthly to talk through cases. An offer is also made to all Trust staff to attend an annual session with the National Centre for Domestic Violence to promote their service.
- 25.11 UHNM confirmed that domestic abuse is covered within all levels of adult and child safeguarding training. The level 1 training is mandatory for all staff as is the higher levels of training for specific staff groups with attendance held within the individual staff electronic record. For example, domestic abuse is discussed at length during the Level 3 face-to-face safeguarding training delivered to staff working in maternity services.
- 25.12 As well as the above mandatory training, New Era provides non-mandatory bespoke training sessions that is available for all staff and included in the Midwifery Preceptorship rolling programme. Staff are also signposted to external training that is available. In addition to a dedicated domestic abuse intranet page, UHNM's safeguarding team also produces newsletters, 7 minute briefings, and posters which include domestic abuse support service information.
- 25.13 Safeguarding training compliance is reported in the quarterly and annual adult and child safeguarding assurance reports. Action to assess the impact of the various training initiatives include audits regarding 'asking the question', and daily review of postnatal discharges where if the question has not been asked, the community teams are asked to do this. Quarterly data is also being collated from referrals to Children's Social Care to identify themes, which includes domestic abuse.
- 25.14 UHNM also explained that both local and national domestic abuse support service information is included within UHNM's domestic abuse policies both for patients and staff, and the referral process to New Era embedded within the patient pathway for cases involving domestic abuse. New Era provides a weekly IDVA hospital drop-in session for patients and staff at both hospital sites which is widely promoted.
- 25.15 This pathway sets out the requirement for DASH risk assessments⁹ to be completed when abuse is disclosed or suspected, and these are reviewed by the UHNM Safeguarding team to identify any further action. Where patients do not wish to provide more information, the guidance explains that the risk assessment can still be completed based on the practitioner's observations and professional judgement.
- 25.16 UHNM highlighted how from 2024 the implementation of the use of digital records by the emergency departments, which include a social history section covering any concerns, has resulted in an increase in the number of DASH assessments being carried out. As this is a recent development that is still bedding in, the safeguarding team provides additional quality assurance to identify how the quality of recording might be improved.

⁹ *UHNM utilises the Safelives DASH risk checklist, with adaptations made by the UHNM safeguarding team to include further information such as support service referrals.*

25.17 Although all the information provided was reassuring about the comprehensive training arrangements in place, the DHR panel agreed that the following recommendation should be made.

Recommendation 2

The Stoke-on-Trent Domestic Abuse Partnership should seek assurance that:-

- (i) health agencies have taken action to ensure that their staff are offering to make a referral for service users to the New Era specialist service for victims of domestic abuse, or if a referral is not possible, then as a minimum staff are providing information signposting patients to New Era;*
- (ii) all health agencies and New Era have explored what further action is required to ensure that staff within health agencies are aware of the New Era service, the process for making referrals, and the availability of advice from New Era's Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors.*

Publicising that New Era is a non statutory service

25.18 The reluctance of Laura to contact the police to remove Bradley highlights the importance of continuing to raise public awareness of not only the availability of the support provided by New Era, but also that it is a non statutory service. This clarification could prove important reassurance for those seeking support, but who are fearful of the possible consequences that might flow from reporting abuse to the police or other statutory services.

25.19 In making this observation, it is important to acknowledge that in this case, even if Laura had been aware that New Era is a non statutory service, she may still have been concerned that if she were to disclose abuse, this might lead to the statutory agencies becoming involved because of child safeguarding issues.

25.20 The review heard that the status and nature of the non statutory support that can be provided by New Era is continually promoted through its training and awareness raising work with primary care, community health services and the acute hospitals which includes bulletins being sent regularly to all agencies. In the light of this, the DHR panel agreed that no further recommendation was required in respect of this issue.

Raising public awareness of coercion and control

25.21 Although family members and friends were extremely supportive to Laura during the difficult situation she found herself in with Bradley, and on occasions some advised her to contact the police, there was nothing in their police statements, or the transcripts of their contacts with Laura, that suggested they recognised that she was a victim of controlling behaviour and stalking.

25.22 The review noted that raising public awareness of how to recognise and report all types of domestic abuse has been an ongoing priority for the Partnership Board. In addition to the ongoing awareness raising work by New Era, a Domestic Abuse Communications Working Group had recently been set up, comprising a wide range of partners, to coordinate publicity campaigns around domestic abuse. Examples are the campaigns that were mounted around Christmas, Valentine's Day, and the European football championships in July 2024 – the latter taking an innovative approach of targeting potential perpetrators about their own behaviour.

25.23 In the light of this, it was agreed that a recommendation around this issue was not required but that the presentation of the DHR findings to the Partnership Board should highlight the importance and urgency of action already being taken.

Public perceptions of Children's Social Care Safeguarding Role

25.24 An important issue in this case was Laura's reluctance to contact the police to remove Bradley from her home because of her fear that this might lead to Children's Social Care involvement and the possible removal of her baby.

25.25 Given that children's social care had not had any previous involvement with Laura, her assumptions about the possible response would most likely have been influenced by stories in the media about children being removed from their parents. The panel was informed that the type of fear harboured by Laura is a common issue encountered by social workers. Also, it is one not just related to situations involving domestic abuse, but also where there are issues around substance misuse or mental health – the 3 risk factors which are commonly referred to as the 'trigger trio'.

25.26 In consideration of this issue, it was agreed that Children's Social Care would explore what steps might be taken to overcome this commonly held public perception of the likelihood of children being removed if the presence of these risk factors is reported, with the objective of giving victims more confidence to report these risks. It was acknowledged that this is a complex issue to address because there may be situations where reporting domestic abuse, or the other elements of the 'trigger trio', might require action to safeguard the children affected.

Police response to reports of domestic abuse or stalking

25.27 The DHR identified some important areas of learning from the gaps identified in the approach taken by the police in the various contacts with Laura and Bradley.

25.28 The first is the importance of police officers not accepting at face value any assurances provided by an alleged victim of domestic abuse that no further action is required to protect her / him, but ensuring that there is sufficient investigation to gain a full picture of what has occurred by seeking to obtain an account from the other party and check that he / she is safe and well. This learning stems from the assault reported by Bradley being filed without Laura being spoken to.

25.29 The second area of learning is the need to pick up on any information that indicates there may have been a domestic abuse incident, and ensure proportionate enquiries are made including checking that all parties are safe and well.

25.30 This learning stems from the Bradley's arrest for drunk driving when he admitted to having consumed a large amount of alcohol. The disclosure that this stemmed from him having just having had an argument with his girlfriend should have prompted further enquiries to check whether his girlfriend had suffered any harm, particularly given that Bradley may have been under the influence of alcohol at the time of the argument. Had lateral enquiries been made, this would have revealed that both parties were known to Staffordshire police.

Developments since this case

- 25.31 The DHR Panel was informed of ongoing initiatives taken by Staffordshire police which directly address the learning points from this case. First, through 'Operation Dare', in excess of 3,000 domestic abuse crimes were examined in order to improve the quality of investigations. This contributed to a change in policy whereby domestic abuse incidents now attract a grade 2 response requiring initial contact to be made within 2 hours.
- 25.32 Second, the 7 Steps process for investigations has been implemented which promotes an evidence-led approach that is not as reliant on support from the victim as was the case in 2020. In addition, the introduction of a secondary review process within the Harm Reduction Hubs, together with locally held MARACs, ensures positive action is taken to safeguard victims and their children to minimise the risk of any further incidents. Specific training has also been delivered on the Intimate Partner Homicide Timeline.
- 25.33 The final relevant development is the police and crime commissioner's office looking at the possibility of commissioning a service focused on providing support in cases of stalking.
- 25.34 In the light of these developments, the DHR panel agreed that there was not a need for a recommendation to address the learning in respect of police involvement.

26 FULL LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Stoke-on-Trent Domestic Abuse Partnership should seek assurances as to how health agencies satisfy themselves that when their staff are involved with expectant and new mothers, and it is safe to do so, they are:-
 - (i) routinely making enquiries about domestic abuse at each contact and carrying out an assessment of risk when domestic abuse is identified and carrying out an assessment of risk when domestic abuse is identified and carrying out an assessment of risk when domestic abuse is identified;
 - (ii) seeking to gather sufficient information about their social circumstances and living arrangements.
2. The Stoke-on-Trent Domestic Abuse Partnership should seek assurances that:-
 - (i) health agencies have taken action to ensure that their staff are offering to make a referral for service users to the New Era specialist service for victims of domestic abuse, or if a referral is not possible then as a minimum staff are providing information signposting patients to New Era.
 - (ii) all health agencies and New Era have explored what further action is required to ensure that staff within health agencies are aware of the New Era service, the process for making referrals, and the availability of advice from New Era's Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors.