

Emma Fawell
Community Safety and Wellbeing Lead Officer
Community Safety & Wellbeing
West Sussex County Council
2nd Floor East Wing,
County Hall, Chichester,
PO19 1RG

30 March 2023

Dear Emma,

Thank you for submitting the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) report (Nicola) for the Safer West Sussex Partnership to the Home Office Quality Assurance (QA) Panel. The report was considered at the QA Panel meeting on 22nd February 2023. I apologise for the delay in responding to you.

The QA Panel felt that it was a detailed report that included a good history of Nicola's background along with a helpful explanation of her vulnerability. The description that was provided of Nicola as a person allowed Panel members to gain a good insight into her as an individual.

The report helpfully contained a detailed chronology with easy-to-follow timeframes with research that was well referenced throughout. The research references around the relationship between alcohol and domestic abuse and the impact of Covid - 19 on alcohol consumption provided useful context and the inclusion of voluntary sector domestic abuse organisation representation on the panel was also positive and helpful.

However, the QA Panel also felt that there are some aspects of the report which may benefit from further revision, but the Home Office is content that on completion of these changes, the DHR may be published.

Areas for final development:

- There was limited consideration of coercive and controlling behaviour and economic abuse, and the report would benefit from being more probing on the stresses around financial difficulty / not working.

- The equality and diversity section of the executive summary and overview report relating to protective characteristics is not addressed as fully as it could be, especially as sex, age, disability, physical health are all factors.
- Section 1.7. 6 refers to one of the panel members having known the perpetrator's now adult child in a previous role. This raises questions regarding the independence of the panel member in question and who the panel member was. It would be good to know why the Chair did not meet with the perpetrators adult child to avoid/minimise the conflict of interest. It would also be helpful to understand how the panel chair assessed that the panel member who met with the perpetrator's adult child had no conflict of interest in doing so.
- In section 5.1.3, the report suggests that there is no information that the perpetrator was violent, yet in section 5.1.4 there is reference to friends talking about physical violence in the relationship and that it could be volatile.
- In 3.1.1, we learn that Nicola had a mental health caseworker, but in 4.12 we are told that Nicola declined engagement with mental health services.
- Neither the GP nor the support worker from United Response made any routine enquiries of Nicola about domestic abuse - 5.1.2 - yet there are no recommendations for either. It would be helpful to know what training etc. the GP practice has undergone around DA and what information might have been available in the surgery for Nicola to access etc. There should be learning around how vulnerability can make people susceptible to DA.
- The GP commented that Nicola did not want to disclose that she had a partner - 7.2.4. It would be good to know more about what the possible barriers to disclosure are.
- We learn that Nicola's children and 'family' did not want to participate in the review. However, it would be helpful to know which family members were approached. There is reference to Nicola's sister -2.1.17- and siblings - 2.1.54 - but there is no information on whether they were approached and declined.
- The Action Plan appears to be largely based on inputs and process improvements, some target dates have passed, and have no updates. Is the HIDVA now in post, for example, what impact is that post holder meant to have, and how will anyone know?
- A number of the terms of reference are not addressed - 4,6 and 7.

Once completed the Home Office would be grateful if you could provide us with a digital copy of the revised final version of the report with all finalised attachments and appendices and the weblink to the site where the report will be published. Please ensure this letter is published alongside the report.

Please send the digital copy and weblink to DHREnquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk. This is for our own records for future analysis to go towards highlighting best practice and to inform public policy.

Please also send a digital copy to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner at DHR@domesticabusecommissioner.independent.gov.uk

On behalf of the QA Panel, I would like to thank you, the report chair and author, and other colleagues for the considerable work that you have put into this review.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Abrams

Chair of the Home Office DHR Quality Assurance Panel