

Cardiff Public Services Board



Domestic Homicide Review Overview Report

'Sarah'

Murdered September 2017

Review & Investigation

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December 2019*

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Preface

The Cardiff Public Services Board would like to express its profound condolences and sympathy to Sarah's family and friends.

'Sarah' is not the real name of the woman who was murdered in Cardiff in September 2017; a pseudonym has been used in keeping with the Home Office Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews (December 2016), which states that domestic homicide review overview reports and executive summaries should be anonymised. The pseudonym was chosen by Sarah's mother.

The key purpose of undertaking a Domestic Homicide Review is to enable lessons to be learnt when someone is killed because of domestic abuse. For these lessons to be learnt as widely and thoroughly as possible, professionals need to be able to understand fully what happened in each homicide, and most importantly, what needs to change to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening again.

Sarah's murder met the criteria for conducting a Domestic Homicide Review under Section 9 (3)(a) of the Domestic Violence, Crime, and Victims Act 2004, in that her homicide was committed by someone to whom she had been in an intimate relationship (that person was later convicted of Sarah's murder).

Domestic violence is defined as 'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality'. This can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse.

Controlling behaviour includes a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour includes an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

Since December 2015, an offence is committed by a person if he or she repeatedly or continuously engages in behaviour towards another person that is controlling or coercive and at time of the behaviour, the two people are personally connected. The behaviour must have a serious effect on the victim and the perpetrator must know or ought to know that the behaviour will have a serious effect on the other person. ('Personally connected' means the two-parties are in an intimate personal relationship or they live together and are either members of the same family or they live together and have previously been in an intimate personal relationship with each other). Proof that the behaviour had a 'serious effect' can be established if on at least two occasions it can be shown to have caused fear that violence would be used against the victim or if it causes serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on the victim's day-to-day activities. The phrase 'substantial adverse effect' may include, but is not limited to stopping or changing the way someone

socialises, physical or mental health deterioration, a change in routine at home including those associated with meal-times or household chores, attendance record at school, putting in place measures at home to safeguard themselves or their children, changes to work patterns and employment status or routes to work.

In 2015 the Welsh Assembly passed the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (VAWDASV). The Act seeks an improved collective public sector response, stronger leadership and a more consistent focus on the way such issues are tackled in Wales and more importantly it seeks to stop the abuse happening in the first place. Amongst other things the Act requires the appointment of a National Adviser, the delivery of a prescribed programme of training for Local Authority, Health Boards and Trusts and Fire Authority staff, the production of national and regional strategies for tackling VAWDASV, work in schools to understand healthy relationships and improved services to victims and survivors.

The term domestic abuse will be used throughout this review as it reflects the range of behaviour encapsulated within the above definition and avoids the inclination to view domestic abuse in terms of physical assault only.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is the Report of a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) following the murder of Sarah in September 2017; she was stabbed by her boyfriend Adult A. Sarah is not her real name; the pseudonym was chosen by her mother in keeping with the Home Office Guidance for conducting domestic homicide reviews which stipulates that real names should not be used in domestic homicide review overview reports or executive summaries.
- 1.2 The review provides an independent overview of the service provided to Sarah and to Adult A by agencies that had contact with them. The key purpose for undertaking DHRs is to enable lessons to be learned from homicides where a person dies as a result of domestic violence and abuse. In order for these lessons to be learned as widely and thoroughly as possible, professionals need to be able to fully understand what happened in the lead up to each homicide, and most importantly, what needs to change in order to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening in the future.
- 1.3 The review has not sought simply to examine the conduct of professionals and agencies. To illuminate the past to make the future safer, the review has been professionally curious and has identified which agencies had contact with Sarah and Adult A and which agencies were in contact with each other. The aim was to consider how abusive behaviour can be prevented and to recommend solutions to help recognise abuse and either signpost victims to suitable support or to design safe interventions.
- 1.4 In an effort to view events through Sarah's eyes so as to understand the reality of her situation, the review sought to involve those around her including her family, friends and her employer as well as professionals.
- 1.5 **SARAH**
- 1.6 Sarah was only in her mid-20s when she died. Her ethnicity was 'White British'. She was described during the criminal proceedings against Adult A as being 'beautiful, intelligent and caring' and it was commented upon that many people had said what a lovely person she was.
- 1.7 Sarah and her former partner (not Adult A) had a child together, but when they separated, the child was placed with the father to look after. There was a history of animosity between the pair thereafter, largely over child-access issues.
- 1.8 Sarah was employed on a part-time basis as a Clerical Officer at a local company and was hoping to be made full-time in the very near future. Sarah often used crutches to aid her walking because of a problem with her feet, although she was not registered disabled. Her mother has told this review that to some, this made her appear physically vulnerable, but in reality, that was far from the case.

1.9 Sarah had known Adult A for less than two-months before he murdered her. Sarah never knew his real name or how old he was because he had lied to her about both. He was actually ten-years older than he had made out and the name he had used was completely fictitious.

1.10 They met through an internet dating website (Plenty of Fish) in late July 2017 and according to what Adult A told the police after he had been arrested for murdering Sarah, they had become engaged to be married within a week of meeting. It is now known that also within a short space of time, Sarah had a tattoo made of Adult A's (false) initials on her arm.

Comment: Section 10 of this report will comment about the potential significance as far as domestic abuse homicide is concerned of the relationship between Sarah and Adult A developing so quickly, and of Sarah having the tattoo on her arm.

1.11 During September 2017, and only a few-days before Sarah's murder, Sarah and her mother went abroad on holiday. Sarah had a ring on her finger that her mother had not seen before and when she asked Sarah about it, all she said was that it was not an engagement ring. Sarah had taken her mobile phone on holiday with her, but it broke while they were away, so she used her mother's mobile phone. During the week they were away, Adult A sent in the region of 400-text messages to Sarah's mother's phone. Sarah's mother said she considered the sending of so many text messages to have been obsessive behaviour, but that she never considered it in terms of it being coercive and controlling behaviour or of it amounting to a form of stalking. She no longer has that phone or the text messages, but her recollection of them is that they were either inconsistent or incoherent, for example, one would say something on the lines of, 'I'm missing you and can't wait to see you' which was immediately followed by something like 'Take your time when you get back'. Then, completely randomly he would send one accusing Sarah of having an affair with one of the waiters at the resort. The first time Sarah's mother learned that her daughter was engaged to be married to Adult A was when police told her during the investigation into her murder.

Comment: The main reason given by men who kill their partners is not that they were provoked, but that they felt they had lost power and control ¹. There are many forms the behaviour can take including resorting to stalking campaigns either physically or through social media, or through repeated telephone calls and text messages. All too often the intention is to retain control during periods when they are apart, for example when one or the other is away on business or on holiday. When that fails, the feelings of losing power and control can very quickly manifest into a desire to create a climate of fear in the eyes of the victim with threats to kill the victim, the victim's family and a new partner not being uncommon.

1.12 On the day that Sarah died and while she and Adult A had been socialising with friends, Adult A accused her of seeing another man. They argued, with Sarah saying that she was not seeing anybody else. The last time Sarah's friends ever saw her was when they dropped both of them off at Sarah's house after the argument. It is now

¹ <https://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/power-and-control/>

known that during that evening, Adult A stabbed Sarah to death before taking her car and leaving the area.

- 1.13 During the early hours of the following morning, Adult A sent a text message to a friend to the effect that he had killed Sarah and that the friend should contact the police. He sent another text message to Sarah's mother later that same day saying he had killed Sarah because she had shown him photographs of other men she had been seeing. The police were already with Sarah's mother when she received the text message.

Sarah's friends and family confirmed to the police during the murder investigation that there was no truth whatsoever in Adult A's assertion that Sarah had been seeing someone else.

The homicide investigators also discovered that while Adult A was 'on-the-run', he was sending social media messages, apparently to random women, stating that he was single and asking if they would like to meet him. Some of the messages were sexually suggestive.

1.14 **ADULT A**

- 1.15 Adult A pleaded guilty to Sarah's murder and was sentenced to life imprisonment with a recommendation that he serves 18-years before he can be considered for parole. In sentencing him, the Judge said..." *Using a false name, you formed a relationship, but the messages passed between you showed you were jealous and controlling... In the short time [Sarah] knew you, you used physical violence towards her...You then tried to form sexual relationships with other women on Facebook - you decided you had nothing to lose...You are determined, calculating, self-centred and very dangerous. Your behaviour after the killing shows a complete absence of remorse."*

- 1.16 Adult A was not from the Cardiff area and had moved there in September 2016. Initially, he was allocated local authority housing (under his false name) and he then moved in with Sarah in September 2017. He did not work.

- 1.17 Under his real name, he had an offending history spanning several years across many regions of England and Wales, which included sexual assaults as well as acquisitive crime. (More details of his offending can be found at paragraphs 12.9 and 12.10 of this report).

- 1.18 It is now known that in January 2016, Adult A and another woman began a relationship having also met on the Plenty of Fish dating website. She lived in the Gwent area of Wales, only about ten miles from Sarah. He had used his real name on that occasion, but the woman involved ended the relationship after about eight weeks because she suspected Adult A had been telling her lies about himself. Soon after the relationship ended, Adult A began sending her text messages which accused her of being in a new relationship, but it would "*Not (be) for long*". He also told her he was wanted by Police because he had failed to appear at court that day.

Comment: *This was probably untrue because there is no record of a scheduled court appearance for Adult A that day either under his real name or his pseudonym).*

- 1.19 The text messages became increasingly frequent over the following 12 days and they also became more unpleasant and threatening in nature, escalating from inappropriate name calling to making threats to rip her (and her new partner's) [expletive] heads off and destroying her home. The last message, received in late March 2016, purported to be an apology for sending the text messages, but added that he had thought he had HIV and that he had since had it confirmed. The woman reported what had happened to Gwent Police who made attempts to locate Adult A without success.

2. TIMESCALES

- 2.1 In line with agreed protocols, in October 2017, the police notified the Cardiff Public Services Board of the circumstances of Sarah's murder.
- 2.2 In consultation with local partners, all of whom understand the dynamics of domestic abuse, the chair of the Public Services Board notified the Home Office of the decision to commission a Domestic Homicide Review. In consultation with the police Senior Investigating Officer, the review chair decided to stay with the review until the criminal proceedings against Adult A were concluded. The review commenced in August 2018 and concluded in December 2019. The PSB acknowledges that the review has taken longer to complete than usual, but the delay is due to a combination of attempts to source additional information to add to the richness of the review, principally from people who knew Sarah, and to staff turnover within Community Safety at Cardiff Council. The dissemination of lessons learned from the review was not adversely affected by the delays.
- 2.3 Sarah's mother participated in the review and the panel would like to express their gratitude for her help at such a difficult time. During the months of finalising the report it has been difficult to engage with Sarah's mother due to the covid-19 pandemic. Sarah's mother has requested sight of the final report before publication which will take place at the earliest opportunity.

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 3.1 As mentioned above a pseudonym 'Sarah' has been used to protect her true identity.
- 3.2 Until the report is published it is marked: *Official Sensitive Government Security Classifications 2018*.
- 3.3 The review panel all signed-up to the following principles of confidentiality during the review process:

- *That information discussed by any agency representative within the ambit of a panel meeting would be strictly confidential and treated as such during the meeting and in the subsequent handling of any data considered at it.*
- *That the information was not to be disclosed to third parties without the prior agreement of the partners of the meeting.*
- *That information shared should be directly or indirectly relevant to the review*
- *Clear distinctions should be made between fact and opinion*
- *That all agencies were to ensure that the minutes of meetings were retained in a confidential and appropriately restricted manner. The minutes would aim to reflect that all individuals who are discussed during the meetings should be treated fairly, with respect and without improper discrimination. All work undertaken would be informed by a commitment to equal opportunities and effective practice issues in relation to age, disability, gender, gender identity, race, religion and sexuality.*

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

- 4.1 After careful consideration, it was agreed to review agency involvement with Sarah and with Adult A between January 2013 and September 2017, subject to any information emerging that prompted a review of any earlier incidents or events that were relevant.
- 4.2 As mentioned previously, Sarah had known Adult A for less than two-months before he murdered her. Both of them had been involved with agencies previously, albeit for very different reasons, hence the decision to extend the timescale of the review to explore whether there was any learning for agencies in the period before they met.
- 4.3 The review has addressed:
- *Whether the incident in which Sarah was murdered was a single incident or whether there were any warning signs and whether more could be done to raise awareness of services available to victims of domestic abuse*
 - *Whether there were any barriers experienced by Sarah's family/friends/colleagues in reporting any abuse in Cardiff or elsewhere, including whether they knew how to report domestic abuse should they have wanted to*
 - *Whether Sarah had disclosed abuse while at work and what support/policies and procedures are available for staff at her workplace*

- *Whether Sarah had experienced abuse in previous relationships in Cardiff or elsewhere, and whether this experience impacted on her likelihood of seeking support in the months before she died*
- *Whether there were opportunities for professionals to ‘routinely enquire’ as to any domestic abuse experienced by Sarah that were missed*
- *Whether Adult A had any previous history of abusive behaviour to an intimate partner, a relative or a co-habitee and whether this was known to any agencies*
- *Whether there were opportunities for agency intervention in relation to domestic abuse regarding Sarah and Adult A that were missed*
- *Whether any training or awareness raising requirements are-necessary to ensure a greater knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse processes and/or services in the region*
- *Whether it is possible to raise awareness of the dangers posed by using online dating sites where no vetting is undertaken.*

5. METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 Upon notification of a potential domestic homicide, a multi-agency scoping exercise was undertaken to ascertain whether agencies had any record of involvement with Sarah or with Adult A in any context that could have relevance to the review. The following agencies responded in the affirmative:
- *South Wales Police*
 - *Cardiff and Vale University Health Board*
 - *Cardiff Social Services*
 - *Cardiff Council Housing Services*
- 5.2 Those agencies were asked to produce Individual Management Reviews (IMR’s) and summary reports. They were also asked to include a comprehensive chronology that charted the involvement of the agency during the period determined by the DHR panel, to include a summary of the events that occurred, intelligence and information that was known to the agency, the decisions reached, the services offered and provided to Sarah and to Adult A and any other action that was taken. Further, the IMRs were to be completed with the review ‘Terms of Reference’ in mind and to consider not only whether procedures had been followed, but whether, on reflection, they had been adequate.

Comment: *The aim of an IMR is to look openly and critically at individual and organisation processes and practices and to provide an analysis of the service they provided. The IMR authors were independent in that they had no previous involvement with Sarah or with Adult A or any line-management responsibility for staff that had been involved with them.*

- 5.3 IMR authors were also asked to arrive at a conclusion about the service provided by their own agency and to make recommendations, where appropriate. Agencies with knowledge of Sarah and/or Adult A before the dates set for the review, were asked to provide a summary of their involvement. In addition, they were asked to include information that came to light after Sarah's murder that might identify learning for the future.
- 5.4 The IMR's produced during this review were shared amongst the panel members and were quality assured by the respective agency and by the panel chair. Where challenges were made, they were responded to promptly and in a spirit of openness and co-operation. The standard of the IMR's submitted was good.
- 5.5 This overview report has been compiled from analysis of a multi-agency chronology, information supplied in the IMRs, from open source material and discussions between the DHR report author and Sarah's mother as well as her employer and two of her friends. The chair's extensive knowledge of previous reviews and of aspects of domestic abuse have been utilised as have relevant references about domestic homicide reviews including the Home Office guidance and other associated Home Office publications.
- 5.6 The panel determined that matters concerning Sarah's family, the public and media would be managed by the review chair before, during and after the review.
- 5.7 The review panel took account of coroners and criminal proceedings in terms of timing and attempting to contact Sarah's family, her friends and her employer as well as Adult A to ensure that relevant information could be shared without incurring significant delay in the review process or compromise to the judicial process.

6. INVOLVEMENT IN THE REVIEW OTHER THAN BY AGENCIES

6.1 SARAH'S FAMILY

- 6.2 Sarah's mother participated in the review and agreed to meet with the review chair. She was given a copy of the Home Office DHR leaflet and the proposed terms of reference for the review were shared with her; she did not wish for any additional terms to be added. She declined the offer of advocacy support and initially said she did not want to receive a copy of this report, nor did she want to be contacted again about the review. She added that she was glad a review was taking place, but that she now wanted to attempt to put what had happened behind her and that any further participation by her in the review process would hinder that.
- 6.3 As mentioned previously, towards the end of the review process, the review chair contacted Sarah's mother again. She said that because some time had now passed since her daughter's murder, she felt more able to participate in the review, but that she did not feel the need to meet with the review panel nor did she desire advocacy support.

6.4 A summary of what Sarah’s mother said can be found at section 11 of this report.

6.5 SARAH’S FRIENDS

6.6 The review chair had brief telephone conversations with two of Sarah’s friends, but neither felt emotionally able to contribute to the review.

6.7 SARAH’S EMPLOYER/WORK COLLEAGUES

6.8 Sarah worked on an agency basis as a clerical officer for a large manufacturing company which has participated in this review.

6.9 ADULT A’S FRIENDS

6.10 None of Adult A’s known friends responded to requests by the review chair to participate in the review.

6.11 REQUEST TO INTERVIEW ADULT A IN PRISON

6.12 The review chair wrote to Adult A in prison to explain that a domestic homicide review was taking place and to ask whether he would be prepared to participate in it. He did not respond to the letter.

6.13 THE REVIEW PANEL MEMBERS

6.14 The review panel consisted of the following, all of whom were independent in that they had not previously been involved with Sarah or with Adult A or had line management responsibility for anyone who had:

Name	Organisation
Paul Johnston	Independent chair and report author
Stephanie Kendrick-Doyle	Housing & Communities - Cardiff Council
Alison Jones	Interim Community Safety Manager – Cardiff Council
Beth Aynsley	South Wales Police - Independent Protecting Vulnerable Person Manager
Natalie Southgate	Improvement Project Manager, Gender Specific Services – Cardiff Council
Alys Jones	Operational Manager, Safeguarding - Social Services, Children Services - Cardiff Council
Nicola Jones	Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator – Cardiff Council
Linda Hughes-Jones	Head of Safeguarding - Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
Nikki Harvey	Named Professional Safeguarding - Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Chris Fox	Senior Social Lettings Unit Manager (Social Inclusion) – Cardiff Council

6.15 The review panel met on the following dates:

28th June 2018

26th November 2018

20th September 2018

7TH May 2019

6.16 REVIEW CHAIR AND AUTHOR OF THE OVERVIEW REPORT

6.17 The Cardiff Public Services Board requested tenders from suitable applicants to act as chair and overview report author for this review. Following a competitive process, Paul Johnston was commissioned to undertake the roles of review chair and overview report author. He is not a member of the Cardiff PSB and is not associated with any of the agencies involved in the review. He is a former police officer who served with the West Yorkshire Police.

6.18 Paul is a specialist independent consultant in domestic homicide investigation and review, both in the United Kingdom and abroad who has been involved in more than 60 domestic homicide reviews. He has extensive experience of many aspects of public protection and has developed comprehensive policies and guidance around the investigation of forced marriage, so-called 'Honour-based violence', harassment/stalking and the interviewing of children and other vulnerable witnesses. He is a former regional coordinator for the training and deployment of police family liaison officers and is a former special advisor to an organisation that provides domestic violence and sexual abuse services and a registered charity that offers free specialist counselling for adults who are 18 or over and who experienced childhood sexual abuse, incest or sexual violence.

6.19 Paul also belongs to an international investigation facility that provides expertise in investigations into sexual and gender-based violence in conflict zones and he participates in the training of investigators of the Institute for International Criminal Investigations. He is a consultant and expert witness in cases at the European Court of Human Rights involving abduction, murder and domestic abuse femicide.

7. PARALLEL PROCESSES

7.1 There was a police investigation into the circumstances of Sarah's murder and subsequent court proceedings which resulted in the conviction of Adult A for her murder.

7.2 Sarah's murder was referred to the Coroner, who opened an inquest and then adjourned it because Adult A had been charged with her murder. The inquest has now been 'adjourned indefinitely' on the basis of the findings at the Crown Court.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

8.1 The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics. Discrimination which happens because of one or more of these characteristics is unlawful under the Act:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

8.2 The Act offers protection from discrimination for every individual. Importantly, the Act prohibits any protected status for domestic abuse and violence.

8.3 Sarah's first language was English and there is nothing to suggest other than what is outlined in this report, that her sex precluded her from asking for or receiving services. It is extensively reported² and acknowledged by professionals and those with knowledge of domestic homicide reviews³, that women are more at risk of serious harm and death, particularly from a partner/ex-partner.

8.4 There has been nothing during the review to suggest that Sarah was treated less favourably on any of the nine protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act or that any protected characteristics would have had a detrimental impact on any contact she may have had with agencies. No agency held information that indicated Sarah lacked capacity and there is no indication from the material seen by the review panel that there was ever a need for a formal assessment of her capacity under the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

8.5 Sarah's mother has told the review that her daughter was a lovely and intelligent young woman who was fiercely independent and strong willed, but she tended to be overly trusting of people and was impressionable at times; above anything else she really wanted to be liked and to have friends. The review panel has carefully considered whether Sarah could have been regarded as an 'adult at risk' as defined by the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. An adult at risk of abuse or neglect is defined as someone who has needs for care and support, who is experiencing, or is at the risk of, abuse or neglect and as a result of their care needs is unable to protect themselves. The Act makes it clear though that abuse must link to circumstances rather than the characteristics of the people experiencing the harm. Sarah's mother does not believe her daughter was in need of care and support or that she was unable to protect herself. If agencies had known about Sarah's relationship with Adult A, they could have assessed the degree of risk she faced and protective intervention could have been considered. The issue, however, is that no agency knew (or could have been expected to have known) about Sarah's relationship with Adult A.

² The lasting Impacts of Violence Against Women and Girls - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/thelastingimpactofviolenceagainstwomenandgirls/2021-11-24>

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575232/HO-Domestic-Homicide-Review-Analysis-161206.pdf

9. DISSEMINATION

- 9.1 This full and final report will not be made public until clearance to do so has been received from the Home Office. As mentioned previously, the content of the report and the executive summary has been anonymised to protect Sarah's identity and that of her family members and of agency staff as well as to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Comment: *Specifically, the report will be shared as follows. Onward dissemination will be a matter for each recipient:*

- Sarah's mother
- South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner
- Adult A's Offender Managers from HM Prison and Probation Service
- Cardiff Public Services Board
- South Wales Police
- Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
- Cardiff Social Services
- Cardiff Council Housing Services
- Cardiff Adult Safeguarding Board
- Welsh Government

10. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN WALES

- 10.1 In 2015, the Welsh Assembly passed the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (VAWDASV). The Act seeks an improved collective public sector response, stronger leadership and a more consistent focus on the way such issues are tackled in Wales and more importantly it seeks to stop the abuse happening in the first place.
- 10.2 In line with the requirements of the Act, the first regional VAWDASV strategy was published in November 2018 (after Sarah's murder). 'Safer Lives, It's in our hands' outlines how the region will support anyone who is experiencing or has experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence or violence against women, hold perpetrators to account, ensure professionals have the tools and knowledge to act, increase awareness of the issue and how to access support and help children and young people to understand inequality in relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong.
- 10.3 The regional strategy will contribute to the National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence and the Safeguarding Executive has adopted the overarching objectives of the national strategy as drivers for the strategic priorities. The strategy sets out to provide the leadership and direction that will promote consistency and best practice for the way in which violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is prioritised and tackled across the region. The collective vision within the strategy is for survivors, their children, wider family and communities to know how and where to get the help that they need, to provide that

help in a consistent and co-ordinated manner, and to work towards a society in which no form of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is tolerated.

10.4 COERCIVE AND CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR

10.5 What constitutes the criminal offence of coercive and controlling behaviour has already been articulated in the preface to this report. Controlling and coercive behaviour is often at the heart of domestic abuse. It is a deliberate and calculated pattern of sustained behaviour intended to create fear. The review has identified many aspects of coercive and controlling behaviour exhibited by Adult A towards Sarah. They had not known one another for very long, but obvious elements of Adult A's coercive and controlling behaviour over Sarah include the fact that he:

- Lied about his true identity
- Lied about his age
- Sent Sarah hundreds of text messages (to Sarah's mother's phone), within the space of a few days
- Repeatedly accused Sarah of having affairs with other men
- Proposed/whirlwind engagement

Sarah's mother paid for Adult A's false initials to be tattooed on Sarah's arm whilst they (Sarah and her mother) were on holiday together. Although Sarah said it was she that wanted the tattoo, Sarah's mother's firm belief is that it was something that Adult A had insisted she did as a way of exerting his control over her. (Perpetrators making their partners wear tattoos so that others will see them and know they're owned in some sense is an extremely common form of coercive control. Coercive control is very much about possession and about making the partners body a personal object to do with as the perpetrator desires).

The quick development of a romantic relationship into something quite serious can sometimes indicate that the perpetrator was employing coercive and controlling tactics from the outset. The relationship between Sarah and Adult A certainly developed into something serious very quickly and the review panel considers it likely that happened because of Adult A's desire to control Sarah. Sarah's mother though, said she was not surprised that Sarah had formed an emotional bond with Adult A so quickly, simply because it was something she had frequently done with previous partners, adding that it was just the way Sarah was because she could only see the good in people.

11. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

11.1 CONTRIBUTION FROM SARAH'S MOTHER

11.2 As mentioned at paragraph 6.2 of this report, Sarah's mother participated in the review, but said she felt she could only go through one interview about her daughter because she found it so upsetting. She added that she was pleased a domestic

homicide review was taking place, but she was aware that Sarah and Adult A had not known each other for very long and that neither she nor Sarah had had any idea that Adult A was not who he said he was.

11.3 Sarah's mother said she had thought it a good thing that Sarah was in a relationship with an older man, but that she (Sarah's mother) never really liked Adult A, although she could not definitively say why. She thought an older man would be more suited to Sarah because, in her opinion, Sarah needed to be with someone who was more mature in his outlook than any of her previous boyfriends had been. She added that Sarah was intelligent, trusting, at times impressionable and prone to being easily led.

11.4 She also said that Sarah liked the thought of being with someone who was older than her because Sarah believed that he would be more reliable than her previous boyfriends. As far as Sarah was aware, Adult A was about ten years older than her. Sarah's mother said that she is sure that had Sarah known that Adult A had been lying to her about his age (he was 20-years older than her), she would have 'run a mile'. She also said that had Sarah known that Adult A was not who he said he was and that he was a convicted criminal, she would definitely not have had anything to do with him, irrespective of what crimes he may have committed.

11.5 Sarah's mother said that on one occasion she had noticed a bruise on Sarah's arm, but when she asked her about it, Sarah had said she had bumped into a door frame; Sarah had then quickly changed the subject. Sarah's mother told the review chair that she hadn't believed her, but that she had decided not to pursue it at that time because she didn't want to upset Sarah. She said that if it had happened a second time, she would definitely have reported it to the police, but that as far as she knew, it had been the one and only occasion that Sarah may possibly have been physically assaulted by Adult A.

11.6 Sarah's mother also said that had Sarah been the victim of domestic abuse, the only person she would have confided in would have been her one and only true friend. She said she would rather not give the friend's telephone number to the report author because the friend was not very well and had previously told her that she did not want to talk to anyone about Sarah because she found it too distressing.

Comment: *The friend did later speak to the review chair on the telephone – see below.*

11.7 Sarah's mother said that Sarah was not a particularly communicative person and that she preferred keeping herself to herself, unless she really got to know someone. She added that Sarah never really found it easy to make friends, so she doubted whether Sarah would have formed any close friendships with anyone at work, especially because she was agency-staff and had only been there for a few weeks. She did say though that Sarah really enjoyed working where she did.

11.8 She also said that Sarah would have known how and to whom she could report abuse had she felt the need, because she had experienced it in a previous relationship and had reported it then. Although that partner had not been physically violent towards

her, he had, in Sarah's opinion, unfairly portrayed her as being a bad person and because of that, her young child had been taken away from her and had been placed with the father. Sarah's mother said that Sarah's experiences of some agencies (in respect of the child custody proceedings), had not always been as she would have liked, but there had also been many occasions when she had been very appreciative of them. Sarah's mother said she doubted very much that any adverse experiences Sarah may have had [of services] would have made her less likely to have reported domestic abuse, had she been experiencing it.

11.9 Sarah's mother said that losing custody of her child had a devastating effect upon Sarah and that there were certainly times when Sarah had felt very lonely and depressed about it all. She (Sarah's mother) said that for that reason, she tried to speak to Sarah every day just to make sure she was okay. Sarah's mother had not known that Sarah and Adult A had met via a dating website, but Sarah's mother said she could understand why her daughter would be drawn to meeting people that way because she tended to be embarrassed and awkward when meeting someone for the first time.

11.10 Sarah's mother added that she really did not know whether her daughter had been experiencing physical abuse during the two months she had known Adult A, but on balance, she thought it unlikely. She added that she had been suspicious when she had seen the bruise on Sarah's arm, but that she would have expected Sarah to have told her she been assaulted if that had been the case. She said the only reason why Sarah wouldn't have disclosed it would have been either through a fear of retaliation from Adult A or because she had had formed an emotional bond with him, something Sarah had often been prone to do, quite quickly, with previous partners. She added that Sarah really wanted people to like her and to have friends and that as a consequence, she tended sometimes to be less discerning or selective than she might have been. She also said that although she and Sarah had not talked much about why Sarah wanted Adult A's initials tattooing on her arm, she remembered thinking at the time that Sarah must have been *'truly under Adult A's spell'* to have wanted to do it.

11.11 Finally, Sarah's mother said that she wished she had asked Sarah more about the new ring on her finger, about why she really wanted to have Adult A's initials tattooed on her arm and that she had tried to find out more about Sarah's relationship with Adult A, especially after he had sent so many text messages to her while they had been on holiday. She added though that she doubted whether Sarah would have told her very much, simply because she was a reserved type of person who could also be stubborn and fiercely independent when she wanted to be.

11.12 **SARAH'S FRIENDS**

11.13 The report author had telephone conversations with two of Sarah's friends, but neither felt able to contribute to the review because they said they knew very little about the relationship between Sarah and Adult A and because they found it emotionally very difficult to talk about her. They did however describe Sarah as being a very gentle and kind person and that in their opinion, she was too trusting of other

people. The both said that Sarah wanted above all else to be in a stable relationship and to have a steady full-time job.

11.14 ADULT A'S FRIENDS

11.15 It became clear during the review that some of Adult A's friends had met Sarah through him. It appears highly likely that the friends would have known that Sarah did not know of Adult A's true identity (and probably his background). The review chair attempted to contact them by telephone and by letter to find out more about the relationship between Adult A and Sarah but none of them returned the telephone calls or responded to the letters.

11.16 SARAH'S EMPLOYER/WORK COLLEAGUES

11.17 Sarah worked through an employment agency as a clerical officer in the finance department at a very large local manufacturing company. She had not been there very long and although she worked in an office environment, she generally worked alone on general office duties.

11.18 The company has no knowledge of Sarah discussing any aspect of her relationships or social life with any colleagues or of her seeking any support through their in-house dignity at work or employee assistance programmes, details of which are made available to all employees and agency staff through their intranet and which are reinforced periodically through team communications and news-letters.

11.19 OPEN SOURCE MATERIAL

11.20 A television documentary programme was made about Sarah's murder in which a former partner of Adult A was interviewed. She had known him several years previously under his real name and she said he had been an overbearing and controlling individual who had wanted to be with her constantly; she had even found it difficult to leave the house to go shopping without him. She added that if she didn't tell him she loved him at least 100 times a day or if she didn't reply to his text messages, he would become aggressive. She also said that for no reason, he became fixated that she was seeing another man, but that nothing could have been further from the truth. He would not listen to reason and eventually he lost his temper and made chilling threats to kill her.

11.21 Also interviewed in the television programme was Sarah's childhood sweetheart. He explained that he and Sarah and other people who had been in the same friendship group had kept in touch and that they would occasionally meet up for a drink. He described having sent a text message to the group just a week before Sarah was murdered saying he was going to be in Cardiff the following month and suggesting they all meet up. He then received a text message back from Sarah's phone (almost certainly typed by Adult A) saying that Sarah had a boyfriend and that she loved him very much.

After he murdered Sarah, Adult A sent a text message to Sarah's mother saying he had killed her and that he had "just lost it" after she had told him she had been 'meeting up with other lads'. The police homicide investigators discovered a video message to Sarah made by Adult A (which had clearly been recorded in Sarah's flat) in which he said he was frightened he was going to lose her.

Many domestic homicide reviews have identified that the point of separation (or fear there is going to be a separation) between an abusive partner and their victim is a particularly dangerous time. The danger to the victim is guided by a loss of power and control by the perpetrator. There are many forms the abusive behaviour can take at this time including resorting to stalking campaigns either physically or through social media, or through repeated telephone calls and text messages. Sometimes the stalking behaviour can look to others like acts of true remorse for previous abusive behaviour, but often the intention is to regain control by 'getting back together', usually based on the promise that the abuser will change their behaviour. When that fails, the feelings of losing power and control can very quickly manifest into a desire to create a climate of fear in the eyes of the victim with threats to kill the victim, the victim's family and a new partner not being uncommon.

Adult A's abhorrent behaviour to the previous partner included him accusing her of seeing another man. This also happened with the woman in Gwent with whom he had been in a relationship for eight weeks in 2016 and with Sarah; the video message he left was purely a means of re-asserting his control over her and it is known that during the evening of Sarah's murder, Adult A was still accusing her of being unfaithful. Neither the previous partners nor Sarah were actually involved with anyone else and the review panel consider it likely that Adult A knew that was the case and that he just used it as justification for his obsessive and controlling behaviour.

11.22 REQUEST TO INTERVIEW ADULT A IN PRISON

11.23 As mentioned previously, the report author wrote to Adult A to explain that a domestic homicide review was taking place and to ask whether he would be prepared to participate in it. He did not respond.

Comment: *Accounts provided by convicted perpetrators are often a useful source of information for domestic homicide reviews, but it should be stressed that no-one can be compelled to participate in the process. When an interview does take place, invariably it is not possible to challenge what is said, and there could be any number of reasons why explanations provided may be inconsistent with other known aspects of a case. Such contributions, therefore, while welcome, are always viewed with caution.*

12. CHRONOLOGY OF RELEVANT AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

12.1 No agency was aware of any connection between Sarah and Adult A prior to Sarah's murder.

12.2 SARAH

- 12.3 In January 2013 and then again in December 2015, the police attended reports of Sarah being involved in domestic related incidents with two different partners. Sarah told the officers that both had been of a minor nature, that there had been no physical violence involved and that she did not wish to make a formal complaint. In the first case, Sarah was provided with the officer's telephone number in case she changed her mind about making a formal complaint, but the officer did not hear from her again. In the second, the partner was arrested and was formally cautioned for causing criminal damage to some of Sarah's property. Both reports were dealt with appropriately and in line with established policies and procedures that were in place at the time.
- 12.4 Sarah gave birth towards the end of 2013. She accepted support from the midwifery service following what had been a prolonged and traumatic birth and she also engaged with the routine health visiting service. Sarah provided a negative response to routine enquiry about domestic abuse and she said she had never been in an abusive relationship.
- 12.5 Sarah was referred to mental health services by her GP in 2014, after she had disclosed self-harm by cutting her wrist and trying to jump out of a first-floor window; she had added that she had received help from her partner and her 'parents-in-law'. She told mental health services that she was feeling low and hopeless, but that she did not feel suicidal.

Comment: As mentioned previously, no agency held information that indicated Sarah lacked capacity nor was there ever need for a formal assessment of her capacity under the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

Sarah had been prescribed anti-depressant medication following a series of incidents in which it had been alleged that she had not been looking after her child properly. The child had been placed in the care of the father under a residence order and Sarah had been taken to court for breaching police bail conditions.

Issues between Sarah and the child's father, predominantly over access, continued until the end of August 2016, with the police being called on several occasions. Cardiff Social Services were involved throughout and Sarah was referred to a Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) as perpetrator of domestic abuse. Sarah had also pleaded guilty at court to breaching a restraining order.

(A MARAC is a meeting where information is shared on the highest-risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. After sharing all relevant information they have about a victim, the representatives discuss options for increasing the safety of the victim and turn these into a co-ordinated action plan. The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the adult victim. The MARAC will also make links with other fora to safeguard children and manage the behaviour of the perpetrator. At the heart of a MARAC is the working assumption that no single agency

or individual can see the complete picture of the life of a victim, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety. The victim does not attend the meeting).

- 12.6 In May 2017, Sarah attended a pain management clinic following a referral by her GP. She said she had previously been attacked by a former partner, which had resulted in her developing agoraphobia, low mood, anxiety, low confidence, poor body image, weight gain and pain. Her medication was reviewed, and she was referred to a pain management programme.

Comment: *There is nothing in the records to indicate that the dynamics of the relationship between Sarah and the partner were explored during the consultation nor that the attack on Sarah was discussed any further or that the availability of support services was discussed.*

- 12.7 Sarah saw her GP again in August 2017 for weight loss management and during the consultation, she mentioned that she thought she might be pregnant.

Comment: *There is no evidence that Sarah's relationship status was explored by the GP nor whether she was asked about domestic abuse. (Targeted enquiry is now in place following the implementation of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 7, and the introduction of the National Training Framework in the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015).*

The GP surgery has now received training on domestic abuse via the IRIS project, so staff are now more aware of the need to explore and identify possible domestic abuse and the support available to victims. The IRIS project is a general practice-based domestic violence and abuse training support and referral programme. Core areas of the programme are training and education, clinical enquiry, care pathways and an enhanced referral pathway to specialist domestic violence services. It is aimed at women who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse from a current partner, ex-partner or adult family member. IRIS also provides information and signposting for male victims and for perpetrators.

- 12.8 **ADULT A**

- 12.9 Adult A had a very long list of convictions under his real name in various parts of England, many of which involved violence towards women, including intimate partners. He was not known to South Wales Police (or any other agency in the South Wales Police area) in that context though, in fact very little was known about him. As no one was aware of the relationship between him and Sarah, there was little opportunity to discover he was using a false name. When Sarah attended a GP appointment there was a potential opportunity to become aware of their relationship but it still remains unknown if this would have identified the false identify of Adult A. (Paragraph 13.19).

- 12.10 His convictions and formal cautions for physical and verbal violence dated from 1992 to 2014 and included using threatening and abusive behaviour, robbery, numerous assaults (including grabbing his female partner by the neck in 2003, slapping and punching his wife in 2004, grabbing his wife by the throat in 2006 and racially/religiously aggravated common assault). He served several terms of

imprisonment and was last released from custody in 2015. He was not the subject of any form of licence supervision while in the community.

- 12.11 In October 2015, Adult A (using his real name) visited the Council Housing Centre in Cardiff seeking accommodation. When he was told that there was no accommodation available, he became aggressive. He then pushed a computer on to the floor and made racist comments about other service users. As security staff were ejecting him, he threatened to 'burn the place down'. The police commenced enquiries to trace him and a month later they arrested him in another area of Wales. He told officers that he had previously lived in Bristol, but that he had moved to Cardiff within the past nine-weeks. He alleged he had been unfairly treated while in the Housing Centre and out of frustration, he had pushed the computer to the floor. He denied making threats to set fire to the premises. Because the computer had not been damaged, no further action was taken against him.

Comment: *Adult A's inappropriate behaviour should have been registered on the Council's Risk Database, but that did not happen. A recommendation will be made that in the future, staff are reminded of the need to do so.*

- 12.12 As mentioned at paragraphs 1.18 and 1.19, it is now known that in January 2016, Adult A (using his real name) and a woman from the Gwent area began a relationship having also met on the Plenty of Fish dating website. After the relationship ended in March 2016, he sent her a series of extremely unpleasant and threatening text messages.
- 12.13 In April 2016, a man made a complaint to the police that Adult A (under his real name) had sent him numerous threatening text messages. The caller said he did not know why he had received them and added that the last time he had seen Adult A in the city centre, everything was fine between them. The police took no further action, but advised the man to contact them again should he encounter any further problems with Adult A.
- 12.14 Nearly a year later, the same man reported that Adult A had been 'chatting-up' his girlfriend and that he (Adult A) had then grabbed him around the throat. The police investigated and came to the conclusion there had been a verbal altercation and some pushing and shoving between them and that they had then apologised to each other. Neither wished to make a formal complaint and no further action was taken.

13. ADDRESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 13.1 Each term appears in bold italics and is examined separately. Commentary is made using the material in the Individual Management Reviews, other documents and the Domestic Homicide Review Panel's debates. Some material would fit into more than one term and where that happens a best fit approach has been taken to avoid unnecessary duplication.

- 13.2 ➤ ***Whether the incident in which Sarah died was a single incident or whether there were any warning signs and whether more could be done to raise awareness of services available to victims of domestic abuse.***
- 13.3 No agency was aware of the association between Sarah and Adult A. Sarah's mother did tell the review of a time when she suspected Sarah may have been assaulted by Adult A, but Sarah said she had only bumped into a door. Her mother added that had the same thing happened again, she would have reported her suspicions to the police, but as far as she was aware, there had been no repetition.
- 13.4 As mentioned previously, only a short-time before Sarah's murder, while she and her mother had been on holiday, Adult A sent some 400-text messages to Sarah on her mother's phone. Sarah's mother said she considered it to have been obsessive behaviour by Adult A, but she never considered it in terms of it being coercive and controlling or of it being a form of stalking. She added that had she thought about the significance of such behaviour, she may have reported what had happened to the police, but that she would only have done so had it been accompanied by some other form of abuse, either physical or verbal.
- 13.5 There were other warning signs of Adult A's coercive and controlling behaviour, but no agency knew about any of them until after Sarah had been murdered. Within two-months of meeting Adult A, Sarah had his false initials tattooed on her arm; he was almost certainly monitoring her telephone and text conversations and he was accusing her of seeing other men. He had robbed Sarah of her ability to make informed choices about her relationship with him by using a false name, lying about his age and by deceiving her into thinking he was of good character. We will also never know if this deception was sustained by the silence of those friends of Adult A who also knew Sarah.
- 13.6 Whether those friends considered Adult A's behaviour towards Sarah to be abusive is not known, nor is it possible to say if they thought he was being physically violent towards her. Whereas there is always a need to raise awareness of services available for victims of domestic abuse, the review panel is not clear as to whether increased awareness raising would have made any difference in Sarah's case. That said, the review panel consider that the possibility should be examined of initiating a programme of awareness raising to the general public about what constitutes coercive and controlling behaviour between partners and what options are available in reporting it.
- 13.7 The review panel does however consider there to be a case for raising awareness of the dangers of false profile information provided by some people on dating websites (see later term).
- 13.8 ➤ ***Whether there were any barriers experienced by Sarah's family/friends/colleagues in reporting any abuse in Cardiff or elsewhere, including whether they knew how to report domestic abuse should they have wanted to.***

- 13.9 Sarah had previously been involved with agencies following issues around verbal domestic abuse with previous partners and in particular, she had some unwelcome experiences (including court orders) in respect of the custody of her young child. The extent to which those experiences may have formed a barrier in her mind about reporting abuse from Adult A is not clear, but she did continue to report incidents during and after the custody issues and when she did so, she was offered advice and relevant information was shared between agencies. Sarah's mother told the review chair that although Sarah's experience of some agencies had not always been as she would have liked, there had been many occasions when Sarah had been complimentary about them. In Sarah's mother's opinion, any adverse experiences Sarah may have had of services would not have made her less likely to have reported domestic abuse at the hands of Adult A.
- 13.10 Sarah was an intelligent but impressionable young woman who according to her mother and her friends just wanted to be liked and to have more friends. They say that because of that, she tended sometimes to be less discerning or selective than she might have been when it came to making friends or entering into relationships. Sarah never disclosed anything to her mother that showed Adult A in a negative light, but she (Sarah's mother) said she was always concerned that Sarah might hide or minimise negative aspects of a relationship rather than run the risk of bringing the relationship to an end. She added that Sarah was clearly very fond of Adult A, even though they had not been together very long. The review panel consider it a distinct possibility therefore that a real barrier to Sarah reporting any abuse by Adult A was an emotional bond she had with him.
- 13.11 The review panel is also mindful that a barrier to Sarah reporting abuse by Adult A could well have been a very real fear of what he might do if she did. Although Sarah did not know of Adult A's true identity or of his violent criminal record, she may well have either experienced abuse from him and not reported it, or she may have sensed what he was capable of from his demeanour.
- 13.12 There are many other barriers to a victim disclosing they are being abused, including embarrassment, fear of ridicule and humiliation, a lack of confidence (the impact of coercive relationships erodes the self-confidence and the self-worth of those being subjected to abuse), not wanting to cause undue worry to family and even shame. Sarah's mother stressed that Sarah really wanted people to like her and to have friends, but that for some reason she never found that easy. The friends that Sarah did have said she was a very gentle and kind person and that if anything, she was too trusting of other people. They added that what Sarah wanted above all else was to be in a stable relationship and to have a steady full-time job. The possibility cannot be discounted therefore that Sarah's desire to have friends and to be in a stable relationship may have outweighed her inclination to report anything untoward in her relationship with Adult A.
- 13.13 ➤ ***Whether Sarah had disclosed abuse while at work and what support/policies and procedures are available for staff at her workplace.***

- 13.14 Sarah did not have many friends at work because she had not been employed there very long. No one within the company has any knowledge of Sarah discussing any aspect of her relationships or social life with any colleagues or of her seeking any support through their in-house dignity at work or employee assistance programmes, details of which are made available to all employees and agency staff through their intranet and which are reinforced periodically through team communications and news-letters.
- 13.15 ➤ ***Whether Sarah had experienced abuse in previous relationships in Cardiff or elsewhere, and whether this experience impacted on her likelihood of seeking support in the months before she died***
- 13.16 As mentioned above, Sarah had been involved with agencies previously about domestic incidents with two previous partners and she had also been involved in a protracted and stressful process in respect of the custody of her child. Events did not always work out as well as Sarah had hoped, but nothing came to light during the review to suggest that those experiences impacted on the likelihood of her seeking support in the months before she died. On the contrary, Sarah's mother said that Sarah was both complimentary and critical in equal measure of the agencies with whom she had been involved.
- 13.17 ➤ ***Whether there were opportunities for professionals to 'routinely enquire' as to any domestic abuse experienced by Sarah that were missed***
- 13.18 Opportunities were missed by Sarah's GP during consultations in May and in August 2017 to make routine enquiry about domestic abuse. It is unlikely that Sarah had met Adult A by May 2017, but certainly she was in a relationship with him in August when she made the disclosure to the GP that she thought she might be pregnant. There is no evidence that Sarah's relationship status was explored during either consultation, but even if it had been and had Sarah been comfortable in discussing it, she would unwittingly have given the GP false information about her boyfriend's identity. This may or may not have led to Sarah finding out his true identity.
- 13.19 ➤ ***Whether Adult A had any previous history of abusive behaviour to an intimate partner, a relative or a co-habitee and whether this was known to any agencies***
- 13.20 Adult A had a history of abusive behaviour to intimate partners, but his offending was recorded under his real name and the offences took place in another part of the United Kingdom. No agency knew (or could reasonably have been expected to know) that he was in a relationship with Sarah nor that he was using a pseudonym.
- 13.21 The only people who did know his true identity (and potentially some of his offending history) and that he was lying to Sarah about it were some of Adult A's friends who had met Sarah through him. We will never know the reasons or circumstances as to why Adult's A friends remained silent, chose not to or were not able to warn Sarah,

but none of Adult A's friends accepted repeated invitations to participate in this review.

13.22 ➤ ***Whether there were opportunities for agency intervention in relation to domestic abuse regarding Sarah and Adult A that were missed***

13.23 No agencies were aware of the relationship between Sarah and Adult A, so there were no opportunities for intervention.

13.24 ➤ ***Whether any training or awareness raising requirements are necessary to ensure a greater knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse processes and/or services in the region***

13.25 Legislative changes implemented as a result of The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 highlight improvements that the public sector must make to ensure there is a robust response to victims of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Cardiff and Vale University Health Board has implemented changes that have significantly improved the practice of staff. Staff are now aware of the Welsh Government National Training Framework 'Ask and Act' programme, and GP surgeries have received training via the IRIS project on domestic abuse and are aware of the services available to support victims.

13.26 As mentioned at paragraph 13.6 of this report, the review panel is of the view that the possibility should be examined of initiating a programme of awareness raising to the general public about what constitutes coercive and controlling behaviour between partners and what options are available to reporting it.

13.27 ➤ ***Whether it is possible to raise awareness of the dangers posed by using online dating sites where no vetting is undertaken.***

13.28 As mentioned previously, the review panel considers there to be a case for raising awareness of the dangers of false profile information being provided by some people on dating websites. Basic internet searches indicate that it is thought that between 10% and 38% of profiles misrepresent vital information about the profile owner. Motives behind this deception are varied and include identity theft and financial scams, but this and other domestic homicide reviews have shown that dating websites are sometimes the means through which the victim of domestic abuse homicide first met the perpetrator.

13.29 Experience shows that online² many people are more likely to disclose personal information about themselves than they would face-to-face, which is something predatory perpetrators would undoubtedly take advantage of. The report author is aware of several domestic homicide reviews where the use of dating websites was a feature and a recommendation will be made in this review that a scoping exercise be conducted nationally to quantify the issue to enable consideration of what personal safety advice, if any, may be given to the users of dating websites.

² <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/date-safely-recommendations-for-online-dating-platforms-safety-tips-for-users-during-covid-19#>

14. AGENCY KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- 14.1 Opportunities were missed by Sarah's GP during consultations in May and in August 2017 to make routine enquiry about domestic abuse. It is unlikely that Sarah had met Adult A by May 2017, but certainly she was in a relationship with him in August when she made the disclosure to the GP that she thought she might be pregnant. There is no evidence that Sarah's relationship status was explored during either consultation, but even if it had been and had Sarah been comfortable in discussing it, she would unwittingly have given the GP false information about her boyfriend's identity. This may or may not have led to Sarah finding out his true identity.
- 14.2 The review has highlighted the apparent ease at which Adult A was able to lie about his true identity, to sustain the lie and ultimately to take advantage of Sarah.

15. CONCLUSIONS

- 15.1 Sarah was an intelligent and cheerful young woman who was fiercely independent and strong-willed, but who apparently tended to be impressionable and overly trusting. Her mother told the review that Sarah's lovely disposition meant that she could be less discerning or selective than she might have been when it came to making friends or entering into relationships.
- 15.2 She and Adult A met on a dating website but from the very outset, he lied about his true identity in every sense of the word; Sarah never knew who he really was or what he was capable of. They knew each other for only a few weeks before Adult A viciously attacked and murdered her, apparently while in a rage about his (mistaken and irrational) belief that she was seeing someone else.
- 15.3 There is evidence now that in that short space of time, Adult A was coercing and controlling of Sarah. No agency was aware that they were together. South Wales Police and Cardiff Council Housing Services knew he was in Cardiff (under his real name) but not in a context that would have caused either of them to believe he posed a specific threat to anyone.
- 15.4 Adult A had been a violent criminal for many years (to both men and to women), with some of his offending being committed against female partners. His offending took place across England and at the time of meeting Sarah through to the time of her murder, he was not subject to any Court Orders or Licence conditions. Even had he not lied to Sarah about his true identity, the likelihood would have been that agencies would not have known they were together.
- 15.5 Thousands of people meet via dating websites and in the vast majority of cases none have ulterior motives. The review panel is struck though at how apparently easy it was for Adult A to create a false profile. No one knows what Sarah thought about the profile or whether she considered it could have been false or misleading and if she

did, whether she was aware of the risks involved and what she could have done to authenticate the information she was being presented with.

- 15.6 It is not possible to say for sure whether Sarah's desire to have friends and to be in a stable relationship outweighed any inclination she may have had either to disclose abuse by Adult A or to scrutinise what he told her about himself. It is highly probable that Adult A's motive for lying about his identity and background was predatory from the outset and was designed to entrap an unsuspecting victim. Only a matter of months beforehand and using his real name, he had entered into at least one other relationship with a woman he had met on the dating website. That had ended abruptly because she had thought he had been telling lies about himself. As with at least one previous partner, he clearly had difficulty accepting it and resorted to sending abusive and threatening text messages and offering violence to who he imagined to be the respective women's new partner.

16. RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 GENERIC

- 16.2
- That an awareness raising campaign should be delivered, aimed at the general public, about what constitutes coercive and controlling behaviour and how to recognise it. It should include the provision of practical advice to anyone who has a suspicion that either they or someone they know may be a victim and how support options can be identified and accessed.
 - That a national review of completed domestic homicide reviews (and other publications) be commissioned to determine the extent to which dating websites feature in background circumstances of cases, to enable consideration to be given as to what advice, if any, may be given to dating website users about their own safety.

16.3 The only agencies with case-specific recommendations are:

16.4 CARDIFF AND VALE UNIVERSITY HEALTH BOARD

- 16.5
- That all health staff/GP'S should undertake mandatory Group 1 Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence training to ensure they are able to target victims of domestic abuse and to provide assurance that the University Health Board is meeting the needs of victims.
 - That the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence training will consider the impact of social media and dating websites
 - That health staff should enquire and document the relationship status and the name of a victim's partner through the Ask & Act process

- That appropriate staff groups within the University Health Board should attend Group 2 Domestic Abuse Training under the Welsh Government National Training Framework.

16.6 **CARDIFF COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICES**

- 16.7
- That staff are reminded of the requirement to record violent incidents on the ALERT risk database.