

Safer Lincolnshire Partnership

DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW

OVERVIEW REPORT

Into the deaths of

Ellie and Jeff

In 2019

Report Author

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Report Completed: 21 May 2020

Final

*“There are no words which can adequately express our feelings of loss and the immense gap in our lives without our beautiful daughter.”
Ellie’s Mum and Dad.*

*“Jeff was such a wonderful son, kind, thoughtful, generous, very loving and full of fun. My heart aches every day without him”.
Jeff’s Mum.*

The Domestic Homicide Review Panel and the members of the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership Board would like to offer their sincere condolences to both the families who lost their loved ones in the terrible act carried out by the perpetrator which caused their deaths, and which has caused this Review to take place. The two families whose daughter and son were unlawfully killed have been left with a huge gap in their lives, and they are much missed by their many friends.

The family of the person judged to have been responsible for the murders, also receive our condolences. They are in no way responsible for their family member’s actions, and the impact on their lives of his actions needs to be acknowledged.

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Preface

The Domestic Homicide Review Panel and the members of the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership Board would like to offer their sincere condolences to all the families who lost their loved ones in the terrible incident which caused their deaths, and which has caused this Review to take place. The two families whose daughter and son were unlawfully killed have been left with a huge gap in their lives, and they are much missed by their many friends.

The family of the person judged to have been responsible for the two victim's murders, also receive our condolences. They are in no way responsible for their family member's actions; and the impact on their lives of his actions also need to be acknowledged.

The key purpose for undertaking a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) is to enable lessons to be learnt where there may be links with domestic abuse. In order for these lessons to be learnt as widely and thoroughly as possible, professionals need to be able to understand fully what happened in each death, and most importantly, what needs to change in order to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening in the future. The victims' deaths in this case met the criteria for conducting a Domestic Homicide Review according to Statutory Guidance¹ under Section 9 (3)(1) of the Domestic Violence, Crime, and Victims Act 2004. The Act states that there should be a "review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by-

- (a) a person to whom he was related or with whom he was or had been in an intimate personal relationship, or
- (b) a member of the same household as himself, held with a view to identifying the lessons to be learnt from the death".

The Home Office defines domestic violence 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 the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional.

Controlling behaviour is: 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 is: 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

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

¹ Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews (Revised August 2013) Section 2(5)(1)

DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report of a domestic homicide review (DHR) examines whether agency responses and support were given to Ellie and Jeff² who were residents of the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership³ area prior to the point of their murders in early 2019, and whether agencies had contact with the person who was assessed to have unlawfully killed them.
- 1.2 In addition to any agency involvement the review will also examine the past to identify any relevant background or trail of abuse before the homicide, whether support was accessed within the community and whether there were any barriers to accessing support. By taking a holistic approach, the review seeks to identify appropriate solutions to make the future safer.
- 1.3 The review follows the deaths of a woman and two men who died in the county of Lincolnshire. Inquiries revealed that the woman had recently ended a relationship with one of the men and resumed a relationship with her previous long-term partner. The man from whom she had recently separated was found to have purchased fuel, knives, and other equipment the day before the fatal event. When the woman and her partner returned to her home in the early hours of the morning, from reports by her housemate, it is understood that they were confronted in her room by her previous partner. Despite the attempts of her housemates to gain entry to the room in response to shouts and screams, they could not succeed and a few seconds later the smell of fuel was followed by an explosion. The three people in the room died, and the two housemates were rescued by neighbours just before fire service and police arrived.
- 1.4 The review will consider any agency contact and involvement with the two victims and the perpetrator from May 2018 when it is believed the relationship between the female victim and the deceased perpetrator may have commenced, up to the fatal incident. Relevant information outside this timeframe will also be considered.
- 1.5 The key purpose for undertaking DHRs is to enable lessons to be learned from homicides where a person is killed 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 understand fully what happened in each homicide, and most importantly, what needs to change in order to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening in the future.
- 1.6 The review documents have been considered by the Home Office Quality Assurance Panel and approved for publication. A small number of minor amendments requested by the Panel have been made to provide points of clarification. This is the final version of the review.

Timescales

- 1.7 This review began with a first Panel meeting in July 2019 and was concluded on 21 May 2020. Reviews, including the overview report, should be completed, where possible, within six months of the commencement of the review. Very little information was available for the first Panel; therefore, the decision was made to await the outcome of the Coroner's Inquest which took place in the autumn of 2019. The Panel also recognised the vital importance family information would play and following the Inquest the review progressed

² Pseudonyms have been used throughout this Review for both the victims and the perpetrator. The pseudonyms have been chosen by their families.

³ The name of the Lincolnshire Community Safety Partnership

at a pace and time appropriate for the family members and their availability to contribute to the review. By necessity, these considerations took the review over statutory guidance timescales.

Confidentiality

- 1.8 The findings of each review are confidential. Information is available only to participating officers/professionals and their line manager until the review has been approved by the Home Office Quality Assurance Panel for publication.
- 1.9 To protect the identity of the victims, perpetrator, and their family members the pseudonyms below have been used throughout this report. The pseudonyms for the victims have been chosen by their family. The pseudonym for the perpetrator has been chosen by the Review chair, but a member of their family approved its use.
- 1.10 The victims: Ellie was aged 27 years at the time of the homicide.
Jeff was aged 24 years at the time of the homicide.
- The perpetrator: Zach was aged 32 years at the time of his death.
- 1.11 All parties involved in this Review were white British.

Terms of reference of the Review:

1.12 **Statutory Guidance Section 2(7) states 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.
- Contribute to a better understanding of the nature of domestic violence and abuse; and
- Highlight good practice.

Specific Terms of Reference for the Review:

- 1) To describe and analyse the events which led up to the fatal incident commencing from May 2018 when it is understood the relationship between the female victim and the deceased perpetrator may have commenced. Any background information before this date which has relevance or will bring context to the review will also be included.
- 2) To examine whether there is anything in the perpetrator's background which might explain his character and his behaviour which led to the fatal incident from which the review can learn to prevent similar murders. (question asked by family)
- 3) To explore whether there is any evidence or information which may indicate that there was coercive or controlling behaviour or abuse in the relationship.
- 4) If there is any indication that the victim who was previously in a relationship with the perpetrator was concerned about the perpetrator's behaviour, were there any barriers to her seeking help and support?

- 5) Are messages raising awareness about domestic abuse and coercive control adequately distributed, and are local support services widely publicised in public spaces?

Methodology

- 1.13 The Safer Lincolnshire Partnership chair was informed by the Police of the fatal incident early in 2019, and in consultation with partners at a decision-making panel meeting, the decision was taken that the circumstances met the criteria for a domestic homicide review to be undertaken. The Home Office was notified of this decision the same day. The Review chair who is also the author of this report was appointed in May 2019.
- 1.14 A wide variety of local agencies and county council departments totalling 20 in all were contacted to establish whether services had been involved or had contact with the parties in this review. The police and ambulance service were only involved in relation to the fatal incident. Health records were reviewed and found to have either limited information, the content was irrelevant to the review, or in respect of the perpetrator, he had not had contact with a health professional for many years. No other local agencies had records of contact with the parties involved. As a result of this very limited agency contact, the Panel decided no Individual Management Reviews were required.
- 1.15 In addition to contacting local agencies, enquiries were made of community safety colleagues in Norfolk and Luton to establish whether information was held by their agencies regarding the perpetrator who had lived in both areas. Although he had registered with a GP in Norfolk, he had not visited the practice. The only information to emerge from Luton was a record of the perpetrator as a juvenile being involved with the police together with other juveniles.
- 1.16 The Senior Investigating Officer provided information to the Panel and to the chair to assist with the review.
- 1.17 Inquiries were made of the National Domestic Violence Helpline to explore whether Ellie may have contacted them for advice or support. However, there is no record of contact with her.
- 1.18 At the first Panel, information available was very limited due to on-going police inquiries for the Coroner's Inquest. This hampered the Panel's ability to draft the terms of reference. It was agreed that further information would be gathered which would include consultation with family members to identify other information sources as the initial scoping of agencies revealed little or no information.
- 1.19 The author attended the final hearing of the Coroner's Inquest and information from this hearing has been included in the review. All information from the Inquest was in the public domain.

Involvement of Family, Friends, Work Colleagues, Neighbours and Wider Community

- 1.20 The chair and panel members are most grateful for the helpful contributions made to this review by the families and friends of Ellie and Jeff. This has been particularly important given the lack of contact with agencies or services and has enabled the accuracy of information to be ensured as far as possible.

- 1.21 The chair and panel are also grateful for the contributions made by Zach's sister which has been particularly helpful in providing valuable family background and information about their early life and more recent past which has clarified information presented to the review. It has not been possible to corroborate this information as Zach's other family members did not respond to letters inviting them to contribute. The limited information from his brother within the review came from his statement to the Inquest.
- 1.22 Contact with the families was facilitated in the first instance by their Family Liaison Officers, and this was followed by a letter from the chair which included the Home Office leaflet explaining the review process and a leaflet explaining the support available from the specialist Domestic Homicide Review advocacy service AAFDA⁴.
- 1.23 The chair had the opportunity to explain the review further during a meeting with Jeff's mother and sister in the month prior to the Inquest. Despite their grief, they generously shared their memories of Jeff, and the chair was privileged to see photos and video footage of their much-loved son and brother.
- 1.24 The chair had a brief opportunity to meet Ellie's family at the Inquest, and telephone and email contact followed. They have been selfless in supporting the review with information and have taken the view that nothing can bring their Ellie back, but they are willing to contribute if it will help. The family was supported by a Victim Support Homicide Team support worker.
- 1.25 The victims' families have assisted the chair with contacting friends, some of whom had also been work colleagues in the past. Their contributions via a face to face meeting, during phone calls, and via emails have also been very valuable and informative for this report.
- 1.26 Terms of reference 2 was suggested by a family member, and the two victims' families have been updated by email and telephone calls during the review process, including being consulted about the Terms of Reference.
- 1.27 Letters, texts, and phone calls were made to a family member of the perpetrator whom the police identified as a family contact, and eventually contact was made via text which at that time was their preferred method of contact. The chair gained valuable information for the review via text 'interviews', and after the final review Panel, the chair was able to meet with the family member to share the draft report and to check the information they had given was accurately represented. An amendment was made, and additional information added at this meeting. Two further letters were also sent via the review administrator to two brothers of the perpetrator, but a response was not achieved.
- 1.28 The chair wrote to Ellie and Zach's manager at the delivery company for which they worked inviting them to contribute by any method of their choice. However, no response was received.
- 1.29 The chair took the final report to share with both Ellie and Jeff's family to check the family content for accuracy and to add any comments they wished to make. They were content with the content and findings. The chair asked if they wished to make any recommendations, but they could not identify any recommendations which might make a difference in similar cases.

⁴ Advocacy After Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) <https://aafda.org.uk/> - a charity specialising in expert and peer support to families who have experienced fatal domestic abuse including through major criminal justice processes such Domestic Homicide Reviews, Inquests, Mental Health Reviews and Independent Office of Police Complaints Inquiries.

Contributors to the Review

- 1.30 The parties to this Review had no contact with agencies other than appointments with their general practitioners. The practices concerned provided a summary of appointments and treatment. Where these appointments took place, no health concerns which could be indicative of, or raise concerns about domestic abuse were evident. The perpetrator had no contact with the GP with whom he was registered. As a result, the Panel agreed there was no necessity to request Individual Management Reviews from any agency.
- 1.31 The lack of agency involvement until the fatal incident means this Review has been heavily reliant on the contributions of family and friends, and information from the Coroner's Inquest.

The Review Panel Members

- 1.32 The following were members of the Review Panel undertaking this review. Panel members were all independent of contact with the parties involved.

Name	Job Title	Agency Represented
Gaynor Mears	Independent Chair & Report Author	
Clare Tozer	Safeguarding Adults & Children's Lead	Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Det Supt Jon McAdam	Head of Protecting Vulnerable Adults Unit	Lincolnshire Police
Danny Moss/ Karen Gardner	Group Manager	Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue
Pete Adey	Assistant Chief Officer	National Probation Service
Jane Keenlyside	MARAC/Senior Manager	Edan ⁵ Lincolnshire
Jade Sullivan	Community Safety Strategy Coordinator	Lincolnshire County Council
Advisors to the Panel		
Toni Geraghty	Assistant Chief Legal Officer	Legal Services Lincolnshire
Teresa Tennant	DHR Administrator	Lincolnshire County Council

The chair would like to express her thanks to the members of the Panel for their thoughtful deliberations, and their contributions to the drafts of the report.

⁵ EDAN Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Service (formerly West Lincolnshire Domestic Abuse Service) is a registered charity. The service covers the county of Lincolnshire, and provides support and assistance to women, men and children suffering, or fleeing from domestic abuse.

Author of the Overview Report

- 1.33 The chair and report author for this review is an independent DHR chair and consultant Gaynor Mears OBE. The author holds a master's degree in Professional Child Care Practice (Child Protection). During this degree she made a particular study of domestic abuse and its impact, the efficacy of multi-agency working and the community coordinated response to domestic abuse. The author also holds an Advanced Award in Social Work in addition to a Diploma in Social Work qualification, and it was her experiences of cases of domestic abuse as a Children and Families Team senior practitioner which led her to specialise in this subject.
- 1.34 Gaynor Mears has extensive experience of working in the domestic abuse field both in practice and strategically, including roles as county domestic abuse reduction coordinator; in crime reduction as a community safety manager working with Community Safety Partnerships and across a wide variety of partnerships and agencies; both in the statutory and voluntary sector. She was also regional lead for domestic and sexual violence at the Government Office for the Eastern Region and was a member of a Home Office task group advising areas on the coordinated response to domestic violence. During her time at Government Office she worked on the regional roll-out of IDVA Services, MARAC, Sexual Assault Referral Centres, and Specialist Domestic Violence Courts, supporting Partnerships with their implementation. As an independent consultant, Gaynor Mears has undertaken research and evaluations into domestic abuse services and best practice, and since DHRs were introduced in 2011, she has undertaken DHR chair's training and completed a large number of reviews. She has also served as a trustee of a charity delivering community perpetrator programmes. Gaynor Mears meets the requirements for a DHR chair as set out in DHR Statutory Guidance 2016 Section 4(39) both in terms of training, knowledge, and the experience required for the role. She has not been employed by, and is independent of, any agencies in Lincolnshire.

Parallel Reviews

- 1.35 A Coroner's Inquest was opened and adjourned in the Spring of 2019. The Inquest resumed and was concluded in the autumn of 2019. Information from the final hearing has been included in this Review.
- 1.36 The Inquest found that Ellie and Jeff had been unlawfully killed, and that Zach's death was by suicide.

Equality and Diversity

- 1.37 The Equality Act 2010 places an equality duty on organisations including local authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics covered by the Equality Duty under Section 4 of the Act are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage, and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination), pregnancy and maternity, race which includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality, religion or belief which includes lack of belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 1.38 Neither the victims, nor the person found to have unlawfully killed them, and whose death the Inquest found to be death by suicide, had contact with any local authority services. Therefore, there were no opportunities to assess any services for equality of access.

- 1.39 However, in respect of Ellie, her sex would have been relevant. Analysis of Domestic Homicide Reviews⁶ reveal that women are overwhelmingly the victims of domestic homicide thus placing her at increased risk in the context of this review.
- 1.40 In terms of any barriers which may have prevented the victims accessing services to support victims of domestic abuse, this rests primarily with the concept that neither Ellie the female victim, nor Jeff the male victim, realised they were, or were about to become, victims of domestic abuse. Without that realisation, and the risk that Zach the perpetrator posed, they would have had no cause to access services. This is discussed further in the Analysis section of this report when addressing term of reference 4 on page 20.

Dissemination

- 1.41 In addition to the families the following will receive a copy of the review:

Members of the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership
Lincolnshire Police & Crime Commissioner
Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Organisations represented on the review Panel
Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership
Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board

2. Background Information (The Facts)

- 2.1 At the time of the fatal incident Ellie lived in a shared house with four other adults. Jeff lived in his family home. Both lived in Lincolnshire. Zach was living with a family member in Luton. There were no children involved and none in the house where the fatal event took place.
- 2.2 Ellie had previously been living in Luton with Zach for approximately 3 months. They met when working for the same company in Peterborough. Ellie's mother confirmed this would have been in May 2018. Zach's family members confirmed in a statement to the Inquest, and in interview with the review chair, that Ellie was Zach's first relationship. They both transferred to Luton with the company around September that year and lived in Zach's brother's home in that area. Following a Christmas holiday with Ellie's family, Zach and Ellie returned to Luton and she ended the relationship; Ellie returned to her home town in Lincolnshire the same day. A friend reported that Ellie received several messages and constant phone calls from Zach after this. Ellie and her previous partner Jeff rekindled their relationship, and they were out together on the evening of the fatal incident.
- 2.3 Police enquiries revealed that Zach had hired a van, purchased knives, petrol, and other products from an outdoor specialist shop and then drove to Ellie's home town. He spent that evening looking around the town for her. When this failed, he went to the house she shared with other adults. When Ellie and Jeff returned late that night, another resident heard a commotion in Ellie's room and went to investigate. Zach opened the bedroom door then closed it rapidly. Another resident then tried to open Ellie's door, but could not. There followed an explosion and fire which quickly took hold. Ellie, Jeff, and Zach died. The two

⁶ Domestic Homicide Reviews: Key Findings from a Comprehensive Analysis of Domestic Homicide Reviews. Home Office 2016.

⁶ Sharp-Jeffs N, Kelly L. (June 2016), *Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) Case Analysis Report for Standing Together*. Standing Together Against Domestic Violence & London Metropolitan University.

other residents were helped to safety by neighbours before the house collapsed due to the fire.

- 2.4 The Post-mortem which was undertaken by pathologist Professor Guy Ruddy MBE found the following:
- 2.5 Ellie had injuries consistent with force to the neck and she had inhaled toxic gases indicating that she was breathing at the time of the fire, but she was likely to have died before the building collapsed. Death was caused by inhalation of smoke and toxic combustion.
- 2.6 Jeff sustained a single stab wound to the heart. It was Professor Ruddy's judgement that Jeff was breathing at the time of the fire. The cause of his death was given as (a) inhalation of toxic smoke, and (b) stabbing to the heart contributed to his death.
- 2.7 Zach had a wound to the left upper leg consistent with a weapon wound, possibly a knife, which would not have been life threatening. He was alive and breathing at the time of the fire and died of inhalation of toxic smoke and products of combustion. The GP practice with whom Zach registered in 2017 had never seen him. However, they provided medical information of a past motorcycle injury which enabled Professor Ruddy to identify Zach's remains.
- 2.8 No evidence of drugs was found in any of the deceased.
- 2.9 The Coroner's Inquest found that Ellie and Jeff had been unlawfully killed. Zach's death was by suicide.
- 2.10 The police told the Inquest that the evidential threshold was met, and had he lived Zach would have been charged with murder.

Panel Statement:

- 2.11 The Panel would like to emphasize their gratitude to the family and friends who have contributed to the review. The information within this report would not have been possible without their help. The author and Panel have endeavoured to represent their views and opinions as they expressed them, and this has helpfully illuminated how events have been interpreted or rationalised by them, as opposed to being interpreted through the eyes of services or practitioners.

About the Victims:

Ellie:

- 2.12 Ellie is an only daughter and sister who is greatly missed. She is described by her family as a sunny, amusing, quite feisty young woman who could be very outspoken and stubborn at times. However, she also had an underlying lack of confidence. She did not like being on her own, preferring to be with people. From her mid-teens she had long term relationships, which meant she had limited time on her own.
- 2.13 From a young age Ellie is described by her mother as wanting to please people. A very helpful disposition for working in the hospitality sector as Ellie did for a number of years. She could be quite dramatic, and very funny. Her mother recalls how Ellie would often make her laugh. She could be very spontaneous; for example, she would turn up at her

parents' home many miles away unannounced. She spoke regularly to them on the phone, with calls sometimes lasting an hour.

- 2.14 Ellie's friends consistently describe her as fun, hardworking, a loyal friend, and a good laugh. Although her contact with her friends could be spasmodic due to geographical distance or work commitments, friends say they could always pick up from where they left off when they met up.
- 2.15 Ellie and Jeff worked together in the past and had a relationship for approximately 4 years, but in March 2018 Ellie messaged friend 1 to say that they had split up. However, friend 2 reported receiving an earlier message in October 2017 in which Ellie said she had split with Jeff.
- 2.16 Friend 2 reported messages with Ellie in the past in which they exchanged comments regarding a previous relationship in which Ellie had been asked to delete all her male friend's details from her phone contacts list. Friend 2 had commented to Ellie that this was controlling behaviour and could lead to domestic abuse. Ellie had replied that this boyfriend 'was never full on abusive' which her friend took to mean he had never hit her, but in friend 2's opinion he had tried to control who she spoke to. Whilst the panel have debated this piece of information and have found no evidence to suggest that there is a causal link or relevance to the relationship with the perpetrator, it may indicate that Ellie had been made aware by her friend of at least one aspect of what constituted controlling behaviour.
- 2.17 Ellie was hard working and wasted no time in finding work when a job ended. After working in the hospitality business for several years, the last of which was taking responsibility for being the Designated Premises Supervisor at a large pub and restaurant from April 2016 until she left in late Spring 2018, Ellie switched to working as a delivery driver for a company in Peterborough. It was there that she met Zach when he was responsible for her training.
- 2.18 Ellie's family liked Zach when they met him because he wanted to take care of her. They knew little about him other than Ellie telling them that he had been in a relationship before when he lived on a farm, and when the relationship broke down, he suddenly left his job of 15 years and went abroad. This is in contrast to Zach's family member's reports that Ellie was Zach's first relationship.
- 2.19 When Ellie and Zach began their relationship, they started planning a future possibly on a farm, but Ellie's parents thought Zach appeared to be trying too hard. For example, Ellie said she wanted a laptop one day and the following day Zach bought it for her. Ellie's mother explained that Zach was all over Ellie and his actions were "over the top". Ellie once said to her mother that "he's all over me; I can't breathe".
- 2.20 Friend 3 who met with the chair confirmed that Ellie had told her that Zach was 'smothering' and 'too possessive' and around November (2018) Ellie told friend 3 she no longer wanted to be with him. Friend 3 said she had the impression that Zach was controlling. Ellie only had to mention that she fancied something, and Zach would turn up with whatever she had expressed an interest in. Her friend added that she thought Ellie always loved Jeff.
- 2.21 Ellie's other friends do not recall her mentioning Zach, but if she did it was not by name. This was viewed as unusual. She mentioned her move to Luton and meeting someone, but not who. Friend 3 said that thinking back to previous relationships, Ellie had always been very open with information about anyone she was seeing, so for her not to mention anything about Zach seemed a little odd to her.

- 2.22 Friend 1 reported that when she was planning her wedding Ellie had not mentioned Zach as a potential 'plus one'. Whereas when she had first started seeing Jeff she had asked if he could be her 'plus one' at the wedding, and so to her there felt like there was a bigger commitment there (to Jeff). Ellie's friend 1 said it felt as though Zach was not meant to be a serious relationship in Ellie's eyes, although whether this was the case she could not say.
- 2.23 Ellie had not been in touch with friend 1 regarding any concerns she had with any relationship she had at the end of the year (2018). In contrast when Ellie and Jeff first broke up in early 2018, she visited friend 1 who lived some distance away. Friend 1 thought Ellie found it reassuring that she was not that far away from Lincolnshire if she needed to get away for a few days, but far enough that she could cut herself off from things back home. But Ellie did not mention to friend 1 anything regarding an unhappy relationship. Friend 1 said it seemed out of character that Ellie had not mentioned Zach to her or a few of their mutual friends. If she had any issues in the relationship with Zach, friend 1 felt she would have come to her and off-loaded any problems and concerns as she was never one to keep quiet about how she felt.

Jeff:

- 2.24 Jeff is an only son and brother in his family. Tragically, his family also suffered the sudden death of his father 12 months before. Not surprisingly, Jeff's sudden loss, and the hugely exuberant character that he was, has left a massive hole in the family. Family and friends alike describe Jeff as a fun character and a joker. Whether it was playing pranks on his mother and sister, or others outside the family, Jeff was always inventive, but without any malice, although he could embarrass his mother in public sometimes with his brilliantly timed comments in a loud voice, especially when they were in shops together. Occasionally, though not often, his mother managed to reverse the prank on Jeff.
- 2.25 Jeff was noted for always accepting a dare, especially if there was money involved. He was a very caring person and his willingness to accept a dare was put to good use when in 2014 he had his head shaved to raise money for Stand Up to Cancer. Jeff said later that he had not expected the cold weather to hit his head as much as it did, but he did get used to it and he helped many people through his actions.
- 2.26 Taking pride in his appearance was also a Jeff trademark. He liked his designer clothes, especially his trainers. His mother related how he would put plastic bags over his trainers if the drive outside the house was muddy or wet. Jeff was also fastidious about his personal grooming, and it is a mark of his sense of humour that he presented his mother with a gift box containing some of his facial hair from his last appointment at the barbers. This may have been intended as a joke, but it now takes on a completely new meaning and importance for his mother.
- 2.27 During his funeral, one of the tributes evidenced friends' views of Jeff. He was described as a demonstrative, loving man who was generous with his hugs and kisses. He had the 'gift of the gab' and could get around anyone and sell anything to anyone. Jeff made friends easily, and he had many friends, including life-long friends from his school years. His warm people and social skills had recently helped Jeff achieve the job of his dreams as a customer advisor which he loved.
- 2.28 Ellie and Jeff remained friends after they split up following their 4 years together as a couple. They had resumed their relationship shortly before the fatal incident, and their murders in such terrible circumstances have been devastating for their families and their many friends.

The Perpetrator:

Zach:

- 2.29 Information gained from a statement provided to the Inquest by Zach's brother described that Zach was the youngest of five children whose parents split up when he was young. His sister confirmed that Zach was only 4 months old when their parents separated, she was 4 years old. Their father left the area and started another family. Zach's sister reported that around the age of 7 months Zach went to live with his father and his new family but was then returned to live with his mother and siblings approximately 10 months later.
- 2.30 Zach's sister, who was the second eldest in the family, described a tough childhood for herself and Zach which could be described as resulting in a variety of adverse childhood experiences. She alleged that after their father left, they experienced difficulties which resulted in Social Service becoming involved which indicate that their mother may have had difficulty in meeting her children's needs. The experiences described by Zach's sister suggest that Social Services involvement may have been due to neglect and possibly physical abuse. Inquiries were made of the area in which the family grew up, however due to the number of years which have passed no record of the family could be located by the local authority.
- 2.31 Zach's sister stated that she knew very little about her mother's background, other than being told by an aunt that her mother was brought up in care following the death of her mother as her father could not take care of all his children. She has no knowledge as to whether her mother was a victim of domestic abuse in the past. Zach's sister explained that she looked after him when they were children; she became like a mother to him, and he like a son to her, they were very close.
- 2.32 Zach's medical summary records that at the age of 12 years he was bullied by an adult in the area in which he lived and the police were called. When he was 14 years old police records from Bedfordshire show that he was among 8 juveniles given a final warning by police for harassment and damage. The circumstances of this incident are not known from police records due to the final warning being given when he was under 18 years, and juvenile records are removed if no criminal behaviour takes place within 2 years. Zach's medical summary notes are unremarkable apart from recording a broken right femur due to motorcycle injury in 2008, and a finger crush injury in 2010 when it was noted that his employment was as a farmer.
- 2.33 His sister described Zach as a child as always out-going, he had good friends, but he was accident prone. When he was 15 years old his sister reports the family moved to Norwich. His brother's statement for the Inquest recalls that Zach had a fascination with the army; he had been an army cadet when younger. During police inquiries for the murder investigation, two crossbows and samurai swords were found among his possessions. According to his sister Zach did not consider the army as a career because he did not like being told what to do.
- 2.34 Zach's sister explained that as children they had limited education due to missing a great deal of school. She recalled someone from the school visiting to check why they were not in school, but she does not remember what action was taken. Zach's sister added that he was unhappy at school as he felt he did not fit in because of the absences. She was aware that when he was approximately 11 or 12 years old he would shoplift vodka and drink.
- 2.35 From the age of 16 years up to 2015, a period of 13 years Zach worked as an egg packer on a farm, a job found for him by his sister. He left this job when he was 29 years old to travel around Italy, Poland, and Germany. He told his sister that he wanted a change and to have more of a life. On his return he stayed with his sister for a year, after which he went

first to Norwich, then Peterborough and on to Luton working for a large delivery company. Zach's brother's statement to the Inquest confirms that he met Ellie when he was training staff at the company in Peterborough in 2018 and Ellie was one of his trainees. He then transferred to the company's Luton area branch in September 2018 to recruit and manage drivers. Two of Ellie's friends said that Ellie told them Zach gave her the best routes.

- 2.36 In his statement, Zach's brother stated that Ellie was Zach's first real girlfriend, but it was one-sided; Zach was said to be besotted with Ellie. His sister confirmed that Ellie was Zach's first real relationship. However, she reported that Zach had 'a thing' for a woman when he worked at the egg packing farm, but she was aware that it was not a 'real relationship' and intimacy had not taken place, as Zach discussed it with her. This is in contrast to what Ellie was told for his reasons for leaving this job. Zach's sister met Ellie and Zach as a couple many times when they visited her at her home. She stated that she was first introduced to Ellie as Zach's girlfriend in July 2018. They appeared very much in love and were making plans for the future together. However, when they visited to give Christmas presents on 23 December 2018 Ellie seemed withdrawn from them. Zach's sister thought Ellie was not happy; when outside for a cigarette Ellie told Zach's sister she was depressed, but then she went back inside without saying anything further.
- 2.37 From statements made at the Inquest by two of Ellie's housemates in Lincolnshire none of them had met Zach or were aware that he had ever been to the house. However, this could have been because they were at work at the time he visited. One of the housemates had met Jeff at the house; the other had only moved in that autumn and had not seen Jeff or Zach in the short time they had been there.
- 2.38 From the description of Zach's childhood presented by his sister, the Panel recognises that this gives a picture of a difficult start in life. However, whilst many children growing up in similar circumstances may experience comparable life-long effects, they do not commit such acts as Zach.

3. Chronology

3. 1 Ellie met Zach when she went to work for a delivery company in May 2018. He was training her in the new job. Ellie's relationship with Jeff her former partner of 4 years had ended, and she had moved from her home town. Ellie had not mentioned this new relationship to any friends. In September or October 2018 Ellie's friend 2 received a message from her saying "life's got a bit weird; moved to Luton for work". Ellie and Zach moved there after a transfer within the company for which they worked. Ellie turned down a supervisor's role preferring to be out delivering. Zach was to recruit and train new drivers, and his role also meant determining Ellie's delivery routes.
3. 2 In the late autumn 2018 Ellie's mother reported that Ellie bought Zach a birthday present and Christmas present, but when they went to stay with her family for Christmas, her mother noticed a change in Ellie's behaviour towards Zach. She did not sit near him and walked beside others when the family went out. Ellie was very distant towards him. Her mother knew something was wrong; she felt that Ellie was going through with Christmas for her family's sake. It was the first time they had not been working over the holiday period and the family was all together for the first time in many years at Christmas. Ellie's mother thought she did not want to spoil it for them.
3. 3 After Christmas, on 28 December 2018, Ellie and Zach left her family home and travelled back to the Luton area to Zach's brother's house where they were staying. Ellie's mother understands that Ellie ended her relationship with Zach shortly after and then travelled back to Lincolnshire that same night; she called her parents the next morning and told her mother she had ended the relationship. Ellie told her mother "I've broken him". Her mother

reports that Ellie appeared to be taken aback by the impact that ending the relationship had on Zach. Ellie's family neither saw nor heard anything to indicate that Zach was violent, abusive, or controlling towards Ellie before the fatal incident; all they knew was that Ellie told her mother that Zach was all over her (as recorded in paragraph 2.19). Their relationship was not of a long duration and the family had not had many occasions to see them together as a couple. However, the Inquest heard that the relationship appeared to be one-sided, and Zach was described as over-bearing.

3. 4 According to Zach's brother's Inquest statement, Zach told him about the break-up with Ellie a couple of hours after they returned from her parent's home. He said that Ellie told him he was too nice for her. His brother reported that Zach was very upset and 'mooched about'. Zach contacted his employer and asked for time off and then left the house carrying bags. At 10pm Zach's brother messaged Ellie to see if Zach had been in touch.
3. 5 One of Ellie's housemates confirmed at the Inquest that when Ellie returned from Luton, she said she had ended her relationship with Zach. Before Christmas Ellie had said to a housemate that she was not happy and did not know what she wanted to do with her life. Her housemate reported that Ellie had a phone call from Zach on the 29 December 2018, after which Ellie said that Zach had 'gone a bit mental' and 'gone off the rails and given up his job'. Ellie's housemate also told the Inquest that she had never seen Zach at the house, but from the beginning of December onwards Jeff was a regular visitor and Ellie's relationship with him was being rekindled. Zach's brother however, said that Zach knew the house having been there, and he would have known that a small window at the rear of the house was left open to allow the house cat to enter. It is believed that this is how he entered the house to wait for Ellie.
3. 6 The police investigation identified the following movements by Zach prior to the fatal incident:
 - 10:30hrs Zach left his brother's house carrying a rectangular object in a bag.
 - 11:22hrs he hired a transit van costing £338 and drove to Peterborough (this sum indicates the rental was for more than a few days: hire costs range from £20 to £30 per day).
 - Purchases a jerry can, camping stove, matches, binoculars, fishing line, battery, torch, lock knife, and £85 hunting knife, totalling £253.
 - 17:00hrs Zach bought petrol for the jerry can (the van was fuelled by diesel).
 - 01:19hrs he purchased a parking ticket in Ellie's home town.
 - 01:20hrs Zach is seen on CCTV walking around the town looking in venues suggesting he was searching for someone.
 - 01:33hrs he left the town and drove to the road in which Ellie's house was located.
 - 02:00hrs a nearby resident noticed the van parked in the street. The lights are turned off as he approaches.
3. 7 At 02:30hrs one of Ellie's housemates who had recently arrived home saw Ellie and Jeff arrive back in the house. Ellie and Jeff helped the housemate to bed as she had been drinking. Another housemate was also in the house. Approximately 10 minutes later the housemate heard male and female voices, angry shouting, banging, and screaming. She went to Ellie's bedroom door and kicked it, thinking that Ellie and Jeff were arguing. The door opened and Zach appeared with a black handled knife about 8 inches long in his hand. Zach stood there pointing the knife at Ellie's housemate with what was described as a crazy, angry look on his face. She could not see Ellie or Jeff when Zach opened the door. At that point, the second housemate came out of her room and pulled her away. Zach shut the door.

3. 8 The second housemate heard male and female voices and Ellie saying, “let me out; stop hitting me”. She could not make out what the male voice was saying, it was a deep loud voice. She tried to kick the door, shouting ‘let me in’ whilst phoning the police at the same time, but the door was locked from the inside. Shouting and screaming was heard again, and then the smell of fuel quickly followed by fire igniting under the door; 2 seconds later an explosion shook the whole house. Very quickly the whole house was ablaze. Fortunately, the housemates were rescued by two neighbours who bravely ignored their own safety to pull them out just before the arrival of the fire service. The two housemates are to be commended for their courage in trying to intervene in what must have been a very traumatic experience for them.
3. 9 During the inquiries which followed a laptop belonging to Zach was found and examined. It included the following history of web searches which took place shortly after Ellie had left:
- Checking on local car hire companies
 - How to track people by their mobile phone
 - How to read your girlfriend’s WhatsApp messages
 - Checks of Ellie’s Facebook profile
 - Vehicle telematics relating to vehicle tracking
 - Images of the house where Ellie lived
 - What can happen if you breathe too much gas?
 - Natural accelerants
3. 10 The Inquest heard that during police examination of Zach’s room in Luton two pieces of notepaper were found on which was written the phrase “I HOPE EVERYONE IN THIS PLANET D” and “ALSO F*** THAT BITCH” was found written. This was suspected to be referring to Ellie. However, Zach’s sister reported that these notes were left in a drawer by a previous tenant who had a difficult relationship with her adult daughter and referred to her. However, the police search log records that the documents were found on the bedroom floor of Zach’s room. It is not possible to confirm the origin of the messages. No analysis of mobile phones was possible due to damage sustained in the fire. Analysis of the party’s public facing social media accounts revealed no content which concerned their relationship or could be relevant to domestic abuse. Zach was said not to use social media.

4. Overview

- 4.1 Prior to the fatal incident, no agencies or professionals had any knowledge of Ellie and Zach’s connection with each other, nor that Ellie and Jeff had resumed their relationship. That Ellie had returned to Lincolnshire was not known by agencies.
- 4.2 Medical information revealed Zach had not visited the medical practice he joined in 2017. The only events of significance from his earlier history have been described in paragraph 2.32. Ellie had not seen her GP since a routine appointment in August 2018. There are no records of Ellie consulting her GP between August 2018 and the fatal incident in relation to feeling depressed which she had mentioned to Zach’s sister (paragraph 2.35) and Jeff had not visited his GP since 2016.
- 4.3 There was no evidence available to family and friends that Zach was abusive to Ellie. Her friends never saw her with Zach and her family had limited contact with them as a couple. However, Ellie’s statement to her mother that “he’s all over me; I can’t breathe” may be suggestive of possessive and possibly controlling behaviour by Zach. In his evidence to the Inquest the senior investigating officer described Zach’s behaviour in the relationship as appearing to be ‘over-bearing’ and ‘stifling’. There was evidence from Zach’s laptop found in his room in Luton (see 3.9 above) that he was searching for ways to stalk Ellie digitally

by trying to access her WhatsApp messages, and through other remote means, but this was not known before the fatal incident.

5. Analysis

5.1 The analysis will follow the review terms of reference.

1) To describe and analyse the events which led up to the fatal incident commencing from approximately August 2018 when it is believed the relationship between the victim and the deceased perpetrator commenced. Any background information before this date which has relevance or will bring context to the review will also be included.

5.2 This term of reference has been met by the above chronology and background facts as the Panel has been able to discern them with the information available.

2) To examine whether there is anything in the perpetrator's background which might explain his character and his behaviour which led to the fatal incident from which the review can learn to prevent similar murders. (question asked by family)

5.3 Zach's sister described the difficult childhood they experienced, particularly Zach and herself whom she stated were treated differently. Their father left when Zach was just 4 months old and although he moved to live with his father for a short time, his sister said Zach was returned to live with his mother and siblings. From Zach's sister's description of the treatment they experienced as children, it would suggest that they suffered physical and emotional abuse as well as neglect, and according to Zach's sister, this resulted in Children's Social Services involvement although she cannot remember when this took place; she has little memory of any intervention. The information received from Zach's sister suggests that she and Zach may have grown up in an unstable environment with their mother.

5.4 Parents' developmental history can have a profound impact on their own adult relationships and parenting⁷. Zach's mother was reported by Zach's sister as being brought up in care, and whilst we do not know from what age she was in care, it would appear from the information provided by Zach's sister that this was due to her father not being able to cope following his wife's death. Whilst many neglectful parents have been shown to have grown up in unstable, hostile, non-nurturing homes which can lead to adults with unstable personalities, stressful marriages, and abusive parenting of their own children, this does not mean that a cycle of parental neglect can be clearly established.⁸ Many will survive such experiences and do their utmost not to repeat their experiences in their own families. Although Zach's sister describes elements of her upbringing which may suggest the factors outline above might have been relevant to her mother's parenting, research for this review has been unable to corroborate the information provided. Other family members did not respond to the chair's letters. Therefore, it can only be conjecture that the factors mentioned from research could have affected her parenting of Zach.

5.5 In the absence of his mother's availability to care for him Zach may, through necessity, have replaced his attachment to his mother with attachment to his sister; she reports that she was like a mother to him although only 4 years his senior. This carried on into Zach's adulthood; his sister found him his first job, and he returned to live with her for over a year after his travels. It is accepted that children may form attachments with others such as

⁷ Gaudin (1993) Child Neglect: A Guide for Intervention. In *Neglected Children: issues and dilemmas*, Stevenson O. Blackwell Science, Oxford

⁸ *ibid*

fathers, grandparents, and older siblings in the absence of a main care giver,⁹ and this can mitigate the negative impact of poor or lack of attachment to a main carer. Nevertheless, there may still have been some effects, for although his sister provided care for him, during their childhood their physical and emotional environment remained the same until they left home.

- 5.6 It was Zach's sister's opinion that from his childhood experience of being rejected by his mother, Zach just wanted to be loved and needed. His brother said in his Inquest statement that Zach was besotted with Ellie, and his sister told the author that Ellie was Zach's first relationship and they seemed very in love. The only explanation his sister said she can imagine for his actions is that he loved Ellie so much that when she ended the relationship, he lost control. The Panel have respect for Zach's sister's rationale for his actions, but also felt that attempts to explain Zach's actions should not take away his responsibility for what he did.
- 5.7 For some adults affected by attachment problems in their childhood there can be a need to be emotionally close, but as Howe et al highlight, the feeling of being dependent on someone who may hurt and abandon you can be fraught with feelings of anxiety and loss, and separation and abandonment are constant fears.¹⁰ This can lead to relationships which are characterised by conflict, jealousy, possessiveness and uncertainty; it is not unusual for these feelings to lead male partners to be very possessive, and the other person to abandon the relationship,¹¹ as indeed Ellie did. This may be one explanation for Ellie's reports of feeling 'smothered' in the relationship with Zach, and why, as well as being inexperienced in relationships, Zach was so intent on pleasing Ellie by buying her any item she expressed an interest in such as a laptop or particular takeaway meal. Howe et al explain:
- "The constant fear is that their partner will leave them. The result is behaviours by the anxious partner that are aggressive, restricting and dependent, all suggesting a high reluctance to let go. At other times, however, when things are going well and there is much togetherness, enmeshed sentimentality spills over into acts of exaggerated generosity" (Page 110)
- 5.8 There is no evidence to suggest that Zach was aggressive or restrictive before Ellie separated from him and the fatal act of aggression took place, but information confirms he was possessive of Ellie and his acts of generosity imply that he was over anxious to please her. However, with the above factors in mind it could be hypothesised that Ellie's ending of the relationship was a rejection which he could not tolerate and, as his sister suggested to the chair, he lost control. Loss of personal control can also be interpreted as a loss of control of a partner or of a relationship brought about by the trigger of separation and the often-quoted attitude "If I can't have you, no-one can"¹².
- 5.9 The above is an attempt not to make excuses for Zach's behaviour, but to relate his background, and in the light of relevant research, to offer possible explanations for what may have affected his actions. The review only has family member's information on which to base this hypothesis; Children's Services in the Luton area could find no records of Social Services involvement. The Panel acknowledges that the review must avoid straying into the realms of speculation and conjecture. It is noteworthy however, that the painful impact of their reported adverse childhood experiences is palpable within the words of Zach's

⁹ Howe D et al (1999) *Attachment Theory, Child Maltreatment and Family Support: A Practice and Assessment Model*. Macmillan, Basingstoke

¹⁰ Howe D et al (1999) *Attachment Theory, Child Maltreatment and Family Support: A Practice and Assessment Model*. Macmillan, Basingstoke

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Monkton-Smith J (2019) *Intimate Partner Femicide: Using Foucauldian Analysis to Track an Eight Stage Progression to Homicide*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077801219863876>. Accessed 29.1.20

sister. Whether the impact was the same experience for Zach as his older sister we cannot tell; his sister's care for him may have mitigated some of the harmful effects.

- 5.10 How this information can be used to prevent similar murders as asked in this term of reference is debatable. It is arguable however that prevention springs from the need to start support in the earliest years of children's lives for those who are born into families where neglect and abuse take place. By applying research and well-honed assessment skills to identify neglect, and importantly by listening to children, interventions and therapy should aim to halt neglect and build healthy attachments.

3) To explore whether there is any evidence or information which may indicate that there was coercive or controlling behaviour or abuse in the relationship.

- 5.11 Before attempting to address this term of reference, it would be helpful for the family members who read this report, and for practitioners who may read this report and are yet to receive training, to explain what constitutes coercive and controlling behaviour. In addition to the definition in the Preface of this report, Professor Evan Stark In his seminal work on coercive control explains that:

“Coercive control shares general elements with other capture or course-of-conduct crimes such as kidnapping, stalking, and harassment, including the facts that it is on-going and its perpetrators use various means to hurt, humiliate, intimidate, exploit, isolate and dominate their victims. Like hostages, victims of coercive control are frequently deprived of money, food, access to communication or transportations, and other survival resources even as they are cut off from family, friends, and other supports.”¹³ (Page 5)

Essentially coercive control is a pattern of behaviour which can develop and escalate over time in its intensity and the methods used; it involves what Professor Stark describes as the micro-regulation of a victim's everyday behaviours by the perpetrator. The purpose is control, both physical and psychological. The author has experience of working with women who were subjected to coercive control and the techniques used by their perpetrators varied. For example, these ranged from seemingly innocuous behaviours such as rigid expectations regarding household chores, in one case a particular folding and layout of bathroom towels was stipulated, non-compliance would result in abuse or threatened abuse. Phone calls to the home at regular intervals throughout the day to check the victim is there is another controlling behaviour which keeps a victim housebound and isolated. Kidnapping and rape can also be used as a physical and psychological controlling mechanism.

- 5.12 There are aspects of Zach's behaviour reported within this review which could be construed as controlling behaviour, but the Panel have found no indisputable evidence to categorically confirm that this was the case prior to his actions which took the lives of Ellie and Jeff as well as his own.
- 5.13 Zach's presentation to Ellie's family gave no rise to suspicion that he might be controlling or abusive. Ellie's description to her mother of feeling 'smothered' by the relationship, could benignly mean he was over affectionate, excessively attentive, and wanting to be with her all the time; his brother had described him as being "besotted" with Ellie. Or it could equally have referred to a possessive and controlling relationship of a kind which Ellie was not used to. Ellie does not appear to have given examples to describe what the 'smothering' relationship entailed.

¹³ Stark E (2007) *Coercive Control, How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*, New York, Oxford University Press

- 5.14 When Ellie and Zach met at work in Peterborough this was relatively close to where Ellie lived where she had friends, and where a member of her family also lived. We do not know whether the job transfer from Peterborough to Luton was brought about by Zach to distance Ellie from her friends and family member, but it did result in her moving with him to live in his brother's home many miles away from her sources of support and friendships, although Ellie does appear to have maintained contact with friends via social media, and she regularly spoke to her family by phone. However, Zach's sister explained that the move was due to the chance of promotion at the Luton branch of the company and this was the reason for the move.
- 5.15 The job in Luton meant that Zach was in a position to know where Ellie was at any given time as the vans were tracked when they were out delivering. If he was using this as a means of surveillance it would not have been questioned as vehicle tracking was a routine part of the job.
- 5.16 There is evidence from the search of Zach's laptop undertaken during the police investigation, that on 29 and 30 December 2018 he had made an internet search for information on vehicle telematics which included technology for tracking vehicle movements. This could suggest that he was contemplating fitting a device to Ellie's car and coupled with his other internet searches, including how to track a phone, is strongly suggestive of an intention to undertake digital stalking of Ellie. The date of Zach's internet search so soon after Ellie left suggests that his fact finding had a sinister motive. He was also checking Ellie's Facebook profile, and he had images of the house where Ellie lived. Research undertaken by Women's Aid found that nearly a third of respondents in their survey (29%) experienced the use of spyware or GPS locators on their phone or computers by a partner or ex-partner¹⁴. Research also shows that stalking by ex-partners accounts for the largest group of stalking victims, with the majority of these victims being women.¹⁵
- 5.17 A helpful guide has been produced by the Network for Surviving Stalking and Women's Aid Federation of England on Digital Stalking and the protective steps to take.¹⁶
- 5.18 Ellie's friend 3 described that after Ellie ended the relationship and returned to Lincolnshire, she received constant messages and phone calls from Zach. After one call on 29 December 2018 Ellie told her friend that Zach had 'gone a bit mental' and he had 'gone off the rails and given up his job'. This coupled with Ellie's statement to her mother that "I've broken him" indicates an acute reaction to the separation.
- 5.19 The highest risk behaviour for homicide in domestic abuse cases is a previous history of domestic violence and abuse¹⁷, but we have no information or evidence that Zach was abusive in a previous relationship; indeed, it would appear that Ellie was his first real relationship. However, research by Monkton Smith and others confirms "the reasons given for men killing their partners overwhelmingly revolved around withdrawal of commitment, or separation" (p11).

¹⁴ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/onlinesafety/> (accessed 13.01.20)

¹⁵ Mullen, Pathe and Purcell (2009). *Stalkers and their Victims*. Cambridge University Press cited in Perry J (2012) *Digital stalking: A guide to technology risks for victims*. Published jointly by Network for Surviving Stalking and Women's Aid Federation of England (see link below).

¹⁶ Perry J. (2012) *Digital stalking: A guide to technology risks for victims* Published jointly by Network for Surviving Stalking and Women's Aid Federation of England. Available at: www.domesticviolence.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Digital_stalking_A_guide_to_technology_risks_for_victims_2012.pdf

¹⁷ Monkton Smith J, Williams A, Mullane F (2014) *Domestic Abuse, Homicide and Gender, Strategies for Policy and Practice*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

- 5.20 The most common trigger for homicide in an abusive relationship is separation, and risk is heightened when the abuser is highly controlling in addition to being violent¹⁸. The end of the relationship equals a loss of the control. Whilst it is not unusual to be emotionally upset when a partner ends a relationship, Zach reacted to the separation well outside the parameters of what might be expected by taking steps in a planned and deliberate manner to take retribution on Ellie for her ending of the relationship.
- 5.21 The Panel reviewed Zach's health records, and whilst not looking for medical excuses for Zach's actions, medical notes revealed no history of consultations with any relevance to this review. Indeed, he had not consulted a health professional for many years, and entries concerned injuries caused by accidents.
- 5.22 A perpetrator threatening suicide is an evidence-based risk factor which is included in the DASH risk assessment¹⁹ used to assess the level of risk in domestic abuse cases. However, Ellie's mother questions whether Zach intended to die in the fatal incident he caused. The amount he paid for the hire of the van he used would have covered several days. He had also purchased camping equipment, and there is a suspicion that he intended to live 'rough', possibly in the countryside he knew, after the homicide. From the information presented at the inquest, the chair believes it is likely that Jeff tried to defend Ellie, and Zach used the fuel he had purchased to finalise his plan, with the exception being that he did not survive to escape. However, we are confined to the coronial verdict that Ellie and Jeff were unlawfully killed, and Zach died by suicide.

4) If there is any indication that the victim who was previously in a relationship with the perpetrator was concerned about the perpetrator's behaviour, were there any barriers to her seeking help and support?

- 5.23 The only concern which appears to have been expressed by Ellie about the relationship with Zach was mentioning to a friend that he was possessive and telling her mother that it was 'smothering'; and 'he's all over me I can't breathe'. Exactly what she meant by these phrases is not exactly clear as she did not describe what she meant. Ellie had previously been very open with her friends about her relationships, but she did not discuss Zach with them. Whether this is indicative of a gradual process of being isolated from them following the move to Luton with Zach is impossible to say. Isolating a victim from friends and family is a part of coercive and controlling behaviour. Friend 3 did describe to the review author how Ellie sent her a mobile phone picture of her on one of her deliveries; therefore, there was phone contact between them.
- 5.24 The relationship was only of 5 to 6 months duration and Ellie took steps to bring it to an end as she told a housemate she was unhappy. Ellie was proactive; she had recently rekindled her relationship with Jeff and left Zach. She did not express concerns to anyone regarding any ramifications for her personal safety after leaving Zach to return to Lincolnshire. The information the Panel had available does not suggest a young woman fleeing an abusive relationship through fear, but a strong and decisive young woman who felt uncomfortable in the relationship and who took action to leave. Conversely, could she have been managing her own safety due to concerns about which we and her family know nothing?
- 5.25 Only one friend had the impression that Zach was controlling, but she had never met him, therefore this was just the perception she had from Ellie who complained of his

¹⁸ Ibid and Stark E (2007) *Coercive Control, How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*, New York, Oxford University Press

¹⁹ Domestic Abuse, Stalking, and Harassment - An evidence-based risk assessment tool used in addition to professional judgement to assess risks faced by victims of domestic abuse.

possessiveness. Considering the terrible actions Zach took, with the benefit of hindsight it could reasonably be surmised that had their relationship continued, Zach may have become more possessive and controlling of Ellie. Perhaps a friend's warning about a previous boyfriend wanting her to remove male friends from her mobile phone being a type of control linked to domestic abuse, might have sparked some recognition that Zach was becoming more controlling and what started out as caring attention became possessiveness and the beginnings of control. However, this must remain conjecture due to lack of evidence.

- 5.26 Ellie ended the relationship herself and there is nothing to suggest she had reason to suspect that she could be in danger and in need of protection and support. Had she done so, it is highly likely that she would have chosen to go to her parents many miles away. Therefore, it is not possible to say whether she would have found barriers to seeking support had she needed. Neither Ellie nor Jeff had occasion to contact the police in the past, therefore it is not possible to say whether or not they would have been reluctant to contact them had they felt under threat from Zach after Ellie return to Lincolnshire.
- 5.27 Victims of domestic abuse and coercive control may not identify themselves as victims, especially if the abuse does not involve actual violence. This can form an invisible barrier to seeking help. Ellie does not appear to have expressed any opinion that indicated she thought her relationship with Zach was abusive; smothering yes, but not explicitly abusive from her perspective as far as it is possible to tell from the information available.

5) Are messages raising awareness about domestic abuse and coercive control adequately distributed, and are local support services widely publicised in public spaces?

- 5.28 When Ellie was with Zach she was living in Luton for that short period of time. It is not proportionate to examine every available service and the publicity and awareness raising materials in that area. However, a short search of the internet provides an accessible directory of support available in Luton²⁰
- 5.29 Ellie was only back in Lincolnshire a very short time before the fatal incident; therefore, it is unknown whether she would have accessed any local publicity about domestic abuse. She had returned to the county and her previous long-term partner Jeff, and it is unlikely that she would see herself as a potential victim of domestic abuse at that time to make such information relevant to her.
- 5.30 The local area does have a programme of raising awareness and publicising domestic abuse, and materials are widely distributed in public spaces for example in GP surgeries, public houses, housing services etc. An indication of its effectiveness is reflected in the increasing rates of referrals to local services at all levels, which is in line with publicity campaigns and partnership activity. The local authority has a domestic abuse section on its website which provides a directory of local and national support services²¹, advice for those who experience abuse, and advice for family and friends who suspect that someone they know may be abused. Lincolnshire is also covered by the services of EDAN, a specialist domestic abuse charity who have a comprehensive website and materials available.²²

²⁰ https://www.luton.gov.uk/Community_and_living/crime-and-community-safety/Domestic_violence/Pages/Whatisdomesticabuse.aspx. Accessed 27.1.20

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help#domestic-violence-and-abuse-new-definition>
Accessed 27.01.20

²² <https://edanlincs.org.uk/> accessed 06.02.20

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. The tragic murders of Ellie and Jeff was a terrible shock to all those who knew and loved them. It was inexplicable that someone whom Ellie had known for such a relatively short time, and whom her friends had not even met, could commit such a terrible crime.
- 6.2. Police inquiries and the Inquest revealed the planning which Zach had undertaken to carry out his fateful act very soon after Ellie ended the relationship. At any time on the journey from Luton to Lincolnshire he could have stopped and turned back, but he did not.
- 6.3. Relevant research suggests that the perpetrator's sister's suggestions of their adverse childhood experiences of neglect and abuse may have had a negative impact on his adult life and affected his adult relationships. This includes insecurity around relationships with others, fears of abandonment, and possessiveness. Conflict and aggression on one hand and acts of exaggerated generosity on the other can be a factor in such relationships.
- 6.4. There are hints from the limited sources of information presented in the review that Zach was possessive and overbearing in his relationship with Ellie and that she found this to have a 'smothering' effect on her. Whether Zach's behaviour was because he was besotted with Ellie and trying too hard to gain her affection; whether there was a more malevolent intent on possessing and controlling her; or whether his possible childhood abuse reported by his sister distorted his view of a healthy relationship, it is not possible to draw a firm conclusion. However, Zach's final actions were violent and devastating in the extreme.
- 6.5. This is an unusual review in that apart from minimal medical records which held no relevant information to the case, no other agencies or services had contact with the victims or the perpetrator. This has led to a lack of agency information frequently available to reviews from which evidence can be drawn to inform lessons to learn.

7. Lessons to be learnt

- 7.1. Ellie appears to have instinctively felt that what she described as a 'smothering' relationship with Zach was not for her and she left. She did not appreciate that separation can be the most high-risk time in some cases when leaving someone who felt so intensely about her as Zach appears to have done. Behaviours within relationships such as those described in this review i.e. over attentiveness and possessiveness, may take place in varying degrees without spilling over into the violence seen here. However, whilst not wishing to generate unfounded anxiety in relationships, there is a case to be made that wider publicity is needed to increase the awareness of coercive and controlling behaviours, not just for victims, but also family, friends, and the wider population.
- 7.2. This review has reinforced the reason why separation is among the triggers which form the high-risk factors in domestic abuse risk assessment tools. However, no occasion arose for any agency to undertake a risk assessment in this case.
- 7.3. The review confirms what many professionals already know that where adverse childhood experiences may have occurred, this can in some instances impact on adult future relationships. This highlights the importance of early support and intervention for children and families to mitigate such damaging experiences.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 In relation to the lesson identified above at paragraph 7.1, the Panel discussed the necessity for a recommendation regarding public awareness campaigns as this has already

been a recommendation of a previous Lincolnshire review.²³ In response to that recommendation the local area has already put in place a strategic communications plan to raise public awareness. Nevertheless, given that it is 3 years since the previous review it is appropriate that, in recognition of this review, a further recommendation is made to reinforce the importance of the local strategy and the need for it to continue.

Recommendation 1:

That the countywide strategic communications plan continues to raise public awareness of domestic abuse, coercive control, and the high-risk triggers for serious harm of separation and all types of stalking including via of social media.

- 8.2 Agencies were not involved with the victims or the perpetrator therefore recommendations for change are not required in this instance. However, as this review accentuates the importance of recognising separation as a high-risk time in such relationships as discussed in this report, notably those which appear to be intense and possessive in nature, it would be helpful for this case to be used within domestic abuse training throughout the county to reinforce the risk even in relationships of short duration.
- 8.3 The perpetrator had no contact with agencies in Lincolnshire; indeed, he had never lived in the county. Therefore, in respect of the third lesson learnt at paragraph 7.3 regarding early support for children facing adverse experiences as a preventative measure against difficulties in adulthood, there is no evidence to justify a recommendation for Lincolnshire's services. However, it is hoped that by using the contents of this review in training the efficacy of early intervention will be promoted and influence future policies and practice.

Recommendation 2:

The content and learning within this review should be used to inform domestic abuse training within the county to reinforce separation as a high-risk trigger for serious harm. This should include recognition of the fact that a relationship of short duration does not diminish the seriousness of the risk. The training should also emphasise the importance of early intervention to protect children from future harm, and to reduce the risks of adverse impact on their relationships in adulthood.

²³ <https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1285/dhr-claire-and-charlotte-hart>