



## **Domestic Homicide Review Report**

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Under s9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act  
2004

Review into the death of Samantha  
in March 2017

Report Author: Christine Graham  
August 2022

Last updated: March 2025

## Preface

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The Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership and the Review Panel wish at the outset to express their deepest sympathy to Samantha's family and friends. This review has been undertaken in order that lessons can be learned. We appreciate the support and challenge from Samantha's family and friends throughout the process.

This review has been undertaken in an open and constructive manner with all the agencies, both voluntary and statutory, engaging positively. This has ensured that we have been able to consider the circumstances of this incident in a meaningful way and address, with candour, the issues that it has raised.

The review was commissioned by the former Aylesbury Vale Community Safety Partnership, now Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership, on receiving notification of the death of Samantha, in circumstances that met the criteria of Section 9 (3)(a) of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

## Tribute from Samantha's family

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At the age of just 47, Samantha was prematurely ripped from our lives. She was a bright, intelligent, youthful woman with so much more to give. She was confident, loud and daring. Unabashed, she expressed herself through her vibrant, flamboyant lifestyle and appearance. She was beautiful in every way with an attractive demeanour and a bright, sunny personality. Samantha was very thoughtful and empathetic. From an early age, she recognised the value of friendships and cherished the network of her many friends as she progressed through life. She was compassionate and extremely generous. She would give her last penny if she thought that somebody needed it.

As a child, Samantha wanted to become a ballerina and we remember her flexible, gymnastic abilities. Not everything in Samantha's life was perfect. At a young age she was diagnosed with dyslexia, she was subsequently privately educated and later went on to become a successful businesswoman.

Samantha was a wonderful person to be associated with and she had a wide circle of friends. She never 'burned bridges' and kept in touch with all her friends stretching back to her teenage years, including previous boyfriends. She had always been very sociable, fun-loving, and gregarious. She loved the company of her friends, and her numerous pets. Samantha regarded the animals with whom she shared her space as her friends and companions. That is, until she met her last boyfriend. As is common in coercively controlled relationships, a wedge was driven between her and her family and friends, and just before her death even her animals were all suddenly, unexpectedly destroyed.

Samantha was a demonstrative, tactile and cuddly person. She was genuine with her emotions and was not afraid to publicly display her affections. She was caring and loyal to a fault, even at her own expense, which unfortunately played its part in her ultimate end. Samantha was a loving person, nurturing and motherly. She didn't have any children of own but was a loving Godmother to her best friend's children. When Samantha's mother died of cancer at the age of 57 in 2005, she tried extremely hard to fill the gaping hole left behind and become the anchor for the family.

Samantha's value cannot be overestimated. She was an extraordinary person, as well as being just as ordinary as anybody's sister or daughter. She did not pursue a relationship to die. She should not be blamed for her poor choice in boyfriend. She should not be blamed for her misplaced affections and loyalty to a controlling, manipulative liar. She did not willingly follow a path to destruction. Samantha's path was one of success and optimism before she met her last boyfriend, and then her life descended into three years of extreme physical, mental, and financial abuse. Unfortunately, the abuse she suffered which led to her death now defines her existence.

During those 3 years the Police were called multiple times. They photographed her injuries; she was hospitalised, and other agencies became involved. Unfortunately, the fear of her boyfriend combined with her misplaced loyalty stifled the efforts of the agencies and her family and friends to help her. A few months before her death, the court issued a DVPO against her boyfriend. The DVPO did its job and her boyfriend distanced himself from her in fear of being prosecuted. During that time her health and vitality improved considerably, and she began putting her life back on track. Unfortunately, one month was not long enough.

As soon as the DVPO expired, her boyfriend forced her to move home which further isolated her. She hated the new cottage that her boyfriend had found for them, and after everything had been moved, she continued to live on a mattress at her old address for two weeks until the rental period expired. After that she stayed in a hotel for a week rather than stay in the new cottage, and the week after that she stayed at a friend's house for another week, finally going to the new cottage 3 days before her death.

During the last two weeks of her life the Police attended during multiple incidences involving Samantha. During a welfare check just 8 days before she died, she told the Police that her boyfriend had slammed her head on the floor. They judged her to be drunk instead of suffering the side effects of a bleed on the brain resulting from a traumatic head injury.

The legacy of the injustice weighs heavily on her family and friends who miss her terribly.

This Overview Report has been compiled as follows:

**Section 1** begins with an introduction to the circumstances that led to the commission of this review, and the process and timescales of the review.

**Section 2** sets out the facts in this case, including a chronology to assist the reader in understanding how events unfolded that led to Samantha's death.

**Section 3** provides the overview and analysis of the information known to family, friends, employers, statutory and voluntary organisations, and others who held relevant information. It specifically addresses the issue of identifying any domestic abuse that existed within Samantha's relationships.

**Section 4** addresses other issues considered by this review.

**Section 5** and **6** sets out the lessons identified, and the recommendations made.

**Section 7** provides the conclusion debated by the panel.

**Appendix One** provides the terms of reference against which the panel operated.

**Appendix Two** addresses the specific questions raised throughout the review.

**Appendix Three** sets out the ongoing professional development of the Chair and Report Author.

Where the review has identified an opportunity for support, this has been noted in a text box.

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## Section One – Introduction

### 1.1 Summary of circumstances leading to the Review

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- 1.1.1 This report of a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) examines agency responses and support given to Samantha, a resident of the then Aylesbury Vale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) area prior to her death in March 2017. Following a reorganisation of area responsibilities, the Aylesbury Vale Community Safety Partnership has now become the Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership.
- 1.1.2 In addition to agency involvement the review also examined her past to identify any relevant background, domestic abuse, whether support was accessed within the community and if there were any barriers to accessing support. By taking a holistic approach the review seeks to identify appropriate solutions to make the future safer for others.
- 1.1.3 Samantha was found deceased at her home address at approximately 11.30 am on a Sunday morning in March 2017. At the time of her death, she was 47 years old. She was discovered by her sister, who had attended her home after becoming concerned about her recent lack of contact. Forensic evidence gathered during a subsequent Police investigation and presented to an inquest showed that she was likely to have died 4-5 days before being found.
- 1.1.4 Samantha had recently moved to a rented property for which she had signed the agreement as a sole tenant on 4th February 2017, after her boyfriend failed to attend the appointment. On 16th February, she announced on Facebook that her relationship was over. However, he continued to contact her (until the time of her death), and his car was seen parked at the cottage on 28th February. Samantha was found deceased several days later. After Samantha's death, her boyfriend's wallet and a Chinese meal purchased by him were found inside the property. She was found dead in the lounge surrounded by boxes that were there as a result of her recent house move. The lounge windows had been blocked with boxes, obscuring the view from outside.
- 1.1.5 Samantha's relationship with her boyfriend started in 2014. The relationship resulted in several calls to Police regarding domestic. Samantha had been subject to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC); and he had been subject to a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) in relation to Samantha.
- 1.1.6 Prior to meeting Samantha, her boyfriend had two previous convictions for criminal damage and battery on a previous partner. The disposal of both offences included Restraining Orders and Protection from Harassment.
- 1.1.7 When Samantha was found, she was naked, lying on her back with her legs apart and the soles of her feet appearing placed together. The subsequent post-mortem, including neuropathology, confirmed that Samantha had died because of an acute subdural haematoma, likely to have occurred in the day or two prior to her death. Although a rebleed of a slightly older haematoma was possible. A specialist neurologist stated that 'the predominant part of the haematoma was composed of bleeding of less than 48 hours and likely less than 24 hours duration'. There were also multiple bruises on Samantha's body. The cause of death was recorded as: 1a Acute subdural; haematoma 1b Alcoholic liver disease.
- 1.1.8 Samantha's boyfriend provided evidence to the Police and during the inquest. He stated he had last seen Samantha three days prior to her being found. He told the inquest that that he

arrived at Samantha's home with a Chinese take-away at around 11.30 pm and found her asleep on the sofa. He then moved Samantha on to the floor to make her more comfortable and at no stage did she wake up or communicate. He said that he went upstairs and slept in her bed until 7.00 am when he got up for work. He said that Samantha was alive and still breathing when he left, denied any assault upon Samantha that could have caused her death. Her last known communication appears to have been at around 8.30 pm on that same evening. The Chinese take-away was found by Police uneaten four days later.

- 1.1.9 After the discovery of her body, the Police were called and launched a homicide investigation. As a result, Samantha's boyfriend was arrested and interviewed. The Police investigation revealed insufficient evidence to bring criminal charges against him in relation to her death.
- 1.1.10 The matter moved to an Inquest, which was held in February 2018. HM Coroner recorded a narrative verdict, concluding that the evidence supported the position that Samantha did not die as a result of a spontaneous haematoma. The subdural haematoma, which caused her death, resulted from a traumatic injury that was likely to have occurred less than 24 hours before she died. The evidence did not assist in confirming whether the injury resulted from an accidental fall or from her receiving a blunt blow to the head in some other manner. There was though, nothing to suggest that she intended to harm herself.
- 1.1.11 A narrative verdict is given when a coroner declines to use one of the 'shorter forms' of finding, such as 'open', 'unlawful killing', 'natural causes', etc. The narrative sets out the facts but does not settle upon a short verdict. In this case, the coroner determined that a Jamieson Inquest was the most appropriate manner of discharge. A Jamieson Inquest is generally held as a narrower form of inquest that establishes 'by what means did a person die', as opposed to a Middleton Inquest that looks at 'by what means and in what circumstances did a person die'.
- 1.1.12 Despite a full Police investigation and an inquest that heard live evidence, the way in which Samantha sustained the trauma to her head that ultimately resulted in her death is unclear.
- 1.1.13 This review does not seek to reinvestigate Samantha's death; such investigations are for the Police and Coroner. It has, however, reviewed voluminous documents, received reports from a range of agencies, and spoken with a number of witnesses. It has done this to learn from the specific circumstances of this case to better protect others in the future.
- 1.1.14 It is within the above context that this review is set. The key purpose for undertaking a DHR is to enable lessons to be learned from homicides or other deaths where the person dies, and domestic abuse may have been a contributory factor or a key factor in the person's life. For these lessons to be learned as widely and thoroughly as possible, professionals need to understand fully what happened in each homicide, and most importantly, what needs to change to reduce the risk of such tragedies happening in the future.

## **1.2 Reasons for conducting the Review**

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- 1.2.1 This DHR is carried out in accordance with the statutory requirement set out in Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.
- 1.2.2 The review must, according to the Act, 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 purpose of the DHR is to:

- Establish what lessons are to be learned from the domestic homicide regarding the way in which local professionals and organisations work individually and together to safeguard victims.
- Identify clearly what those lessons are both within and between agencies, how and within what timescales they will be acted on, and what is expected to change as a result.
- Apply these lessons to service responses including changes to policies and procedures as appropriate.
- Prevent domestic violence and homicide and improve service responses to all domestic violence and abuse victims and their children by developing a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to ensure that domestic abuse is identified and responded to effectively at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Contribute to a better understanding of the nature of domestic violence and abuse.
- Highlight good practice.

1.2.3 The Community Safety Partnership was made aware of information held by the Police that suggested that reported domestic abuse was a feature of the relationship between Samantha and her boyfriend. As a result of this information, together with the 'open' nature of HM Coroner's finding and the now known history, the partnership sought to rely upon the spirit of the Act, in particular the section: 'the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect'. As a result, a DHR was commissioned.

### **1.3 Process and Timescales for the Review**

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- 1.3.1 Aylesbury Vale CSP<sup>1</sup> was notified of Samantha's death in December 2017. Whilst this is several months after the event, the Police investigation had been ongoing and because the cause of death was inconclusive, no formal request for a DHR was made. The CSP was included in two update meetings, and the CSP Chair was kept informed so that the decision could be kept under review.
- 1.3.2 Aylesbury Vale CSP was updated on the case on 15th March 2018. Partners at the meeting agreed that there should be an initial review of the case in order that learning could be captured.
- 1.3.3 On 11th May 2018, Samantha's family, through their AAFDA<sup>2</sup> advocate, asked the partnership if a DHR had been commissioned. This email was acknowledged, and on 4th June 2018, the chair of the CSP wrote to the AAFDA advocate and explained that discussions were underway with the Chair of the Adult Safeguarding Board about the most appropriate way forward. The advocate wrote to the CSP again on 5th and 29th June, pressing for a DHR to be commissioned.

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<sup>1</sup> Following reorganisation this is now the Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership

<sup>2</sup> Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) supports families and friends who have lost a loved one through fatal domestic abuse.

- 1.3.4 The AAFDA advocate made contact again on 12th July and was advised that a review was being sought and that an Adult Safeguarding Review was being explored with Adult Social Care, following a formal request from Thames Valley Police (TVP).
- 1.3.5 On 13th July, the case was referred to the Adult Safeguarding Board to consider a Safeguarding Adults Review. It concluded the case did not meet the criteria. The chair of the Adult Safeguarding Board then enquired why a DHR had not been commissioned with the chair of the CSP.
- 1.3.6 On 23rd July, the chair of the CSP met with a Chief Inspector of the Thames Valley Police. Following the disclosure of information by the Police of domestic abuse, it was agreed that it was probable domestic abuse had a bearing on Samantha's death. Therefore, a DHR was commissioned. The AAFDA advocate was advised of this decision on 26th July 2018.
- 1.3.7 The Home Office was notified of this decision on 26th July 2018.
- 1.3.8 The Independent Chair and Report Author were appointed in October 2018.
- 1.3.9 The first panel meeting was held on 9th November 2018. Agencies represented were:
  - Aylesbury Vale District Council
  - Aylesbury Women's Aid
  - Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
  - Buckinghamshire County Council – Adult Safeguarding
  - Reducing the Risk of Domestic Abuse
  - South Central Ambulance Service
  - Thames Valley Police
- 1.3.10 Apologies were received from the National Probation Service for this first meeting; however, they attended subsequent meetings.
- 1.3.11 At this first meeting, the panel considered its composition and agreed that Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust should be invited to join the panel, they attended the second meeting.
- 1.3.12 After consideration of the information available across a range of agencies, including all the agencies named within the DHR Statutory Guidance, it was agreed that Individual Management Reviews (IMRs) would be required from:
  - Thames Valley Police
  - Reducing the Risk of Domestic Abuse
- 1.3.13 As a result of information gathered during the review, additional information was requested from Adult Social Care and the John Radcliffe Hospital. Reports were received and the information was discussed in panel meetings and appropriately incorporated within the report. The panel met five times, with the chair and author carrying out a number of additional single agency meetings to clarify points and address issues. The review was concluded in August 2022.

## **1.4 Terms of reference**

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- 1.4.1 The full terms of reference can be found at Appendix one of this review. However, this review specifically sought to do the following:

- Establish the facts that led to the death of Samantha in March 2017, and whether there are any lessons to be learned from the case about the way in which local professionals and agencies worked together to safeguard Samantha.
- Apply these lessons to service responses, including changes to inform national and local policies and procedures, as appropriate.
- Consider the sufficiency of local services and ease of accessibility.
- Contribute to a better understanding of the nature of domestic violence and abuse.

1.4.2 As the review evolved, the issue of understanding of the nature of head injuries became a key feature and that aspect is covered within the report.

## **1.5 Confidentiality**

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1.5.1 The content and findings within the IMRs are confidential and only available to those participating within the review. However, all relevant information and findings have been included within the review. The Home Office Quality Assurance Panel approved and agreed the publication of the report.

1.5.2 The family requested to use Samantha's real name, which the Panel agreed to. Her boyfriend remains unnamed and is referred to as 'boyfriend' throughout the report.

1.5.3 Even though at times Samantha and her boyfriend had separated he will be known as 'boyfriend' throughout the review, unless referred to in a direct quote from contributors.

## **1.6 Dissemination**

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1.6.1 The following individuals/organisations will receive copies of this report:

- Samantha's family
- Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police
- Chief Executive Officer, Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (now Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board)
- Chief Executive, Aylesbury Vale District Council (now Buckinghamshire Council)
- Director for Adult Services, Buckinghamshire County Council (now Buckinghamshire Council)
- Independent Chair, Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board
- Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner
- Chief Executive, Aylesbury Women's Aid
- Chief Executive, Reducing the Risk Domestic Abuse
- Chief Executive, South Central Ambulance Service
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner
- TVP Service Improvement and Investigation Review Team

## **1.7 Methodology**

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1.7.1 After some discussion about the most appropriate form that the review into Samantha's death should take, it was agreed on 23rd July 2018 to undertake a Domestic Homicide Review.

1.7.2 Gary Goose and Christine Graham were appointed in October 2018 to undertake the review, and the review panel met for the first time on 9th November 2018. The panel met five times, and the review was completed in August 2022.

- 1.7.3 At the meeting on 9th November 2018, the process of the review was explained to the panel, with the chair stressing that the purpose of the review is not to blame agencies or individuals but to look at what lessons could be learned for the future.
- 1.7.4 Agencies were asked to secure and preserve any written records that they had pertaining to the case. Agencies were reminded that information from records used in this review were examined in the public interest and under Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which allows relevant authorities to share information where necessary and relevant for the purposes of the Act, namely the prevention of crime. In addition, Section 29 of the Data Protection Act 1998 enables information to be shared, if it is necessary, for the prevention and detection of crime, or the apprehension and prosecution of offenders. The purpose of the DHR is to prevent a similar event.
- 1.7.5 At this meeting, the Terms of Reference were agreed, subject to the family being consulted. It was agreed that the chair and report author would contact the family through AAFDA (Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse).
- 1.7.6 The chair and report author met Samantha's sister, brother, and stepfather, who were supported by their AAFDA advocate, on two occasions. Continued dialogue was maintained with the family through their AAFDA advocate. The family have contributed a tribute to Samantha, which is included in this report.
- 1.7.7 The chair and report author met with the family to share the report in December 2019. A copy was left with the family to allow them to read the report in peace and at their own pace. The family's AAFDA advocate collected their comments and fed these back. There was regular contact between the advocate and the chair and report author before the full feedback was received in December 2020. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, this process was delayed; however, the review panel felt that it was important to allow the family the time that they needed. The family disagreed with the perspective of some of the contributing agencies and wanted to rebalance the narrative about Samantha. As a result, several iterations of the overview report have been drafted and redrafted. Where the family still disagree about certain aspects of the review, these have been clearly stated within the body of this report.
- 1.7.8 In 2023, Samantha's family submitted additional documents to the review, which resulted in further amendments to the report. They continued to be supported by an AAFDA advocate.
- 1.7.9 The Review Panel acknowledges the time and effort spent by Samantha's family to ensure that her voice is heard in this review.

## **1.8 Contributors to the Review**

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- 1.8.1 Those contributing to the review do so under Section 2(4) of the statutory guidance for the conduct of DHRs, and it is the duty of any person or body participating in the review to have regard for the guidance.
- 1.8.2 All panel meetings include specific reference to the statutory guidance as the overriding source of reference for the review. Any individual interviewed by the chair or report author, or other body with whom they sought to consult, were made aware of the aims of the DHR and were referred to the statutory guidance.

1.8.3 However, it should be noted that whilst a person or body can be directed to participate, the chair and the DHR review panel do not have the power or legal sanction to compel their co-operation, either by attendance at the panel or meeting for an interview.

1.8.4 The following agencies contributed to the review:

- Aylesbury Vale District Council – Panel member
- Aylesbury Women’s Aid – Panel member
- Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group – Panel member and report from Hospital
- Buckinghamshire County Council – Panel member and report
- National Probation Service – Panel member
- Reducing the Risk of Domestic Abuse – Panel member and IMR
- South Central Ambulance Service – Panel member
- Thames Valley Police – Panel member and IMR

1.8.5 The following individuals contributed to the review:

- Samantha’s sister, brother, and stepfather.
- Two friends of Samantha.
- A former partner of Samantha (not the person referred to as ‘boyfriend’ within this review).

1.8.6 This review has attempted to reconcile the views of the family with the information held by those who were involved prior to Samantha’s death, but it has not been possible in all aspects.

1.8.7 Efforts to contact Samantha’s boyfriend, including through his last known solicitor, were unsuccessful.

## 1.9 Review Panel

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1.9.1 The members of the Review Panel were:

Gary Goose MBE	Independent Chair	
Christine Graham	Overview Report Author	
Chris Oliver	Community Safety Advisor	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Will Rysdale	Chair	Aylesbury Vale Community Safety Partnership
April Benson	Director of Services	Aylesbury Women’s Aid
Krista Brewer	Safeguarding Adults Lead	Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Julie Murray	Head of Service Safeguarding Adults, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and Local Authority Safeguarding Manager	Buckinghamshire County Council – Adult Safeguarding
Nuala Waide	Head of Safeguarding	Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust
Debbie Johnson	Senior Operational Support Manager	National Probation Service
Patricia Walsh	Manager	Reducing the Risk
Tony Heselton	Head of Safeguarding and Prevent	South Central Ambulance Service
Carl Wilson	Detective Inspector	Thames Valley Police

## 1.10 Domestic Homicide Review Chair and Overview Report Author

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- 1.10.1 Gary Goose served with Cambridgeshire Constabulary, rising to the rank of Detective Chief Inspector. His policing career concluded in 2011. During this time, as well as leading high-profile investigations, Gary led the Police response to the families of the Soham murder victims. From 2011, Gary was employed by Peterborough City Council as Head of Community Safety and latterly as Assistant Director for Community Services. The city's domestic abuse support services were amongst the areas of Gary's responsibility, as well as substance misuse and housing services. Gary concluded his employment with the local authority in October 2016. He was also employed for six months by Cambridgeshire's Police and Crime Commissioner, developing a performance framework.
- 1.10.2 Christine Graham worked for the Safer Peterborough Partnership for 13 years, managing all aspects of community safety, including domestic abuse services. During this time, Christine's specific area of expertise was partnership working – facilitating the partnership work within Peterborough. Christine has collaborated with various organisations and partnerships to review their community safety and anti-social behaviour practices. Christine has also worked with a number of organisations to review their approach to community safety and deliver training in tackling anti-social behaviour. Christine served for seven years as a Lay Advisor to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough MAPPA, which involved her in observing and auditing Level 2 and 3 meetings, as well as engagement in Serious Case Reviews. Christine chairs her local Safer off the Streets Partnership.
- 1.10.3 Gary and Christine have completed or are currently undertaking several Domestic Homicide Reviews across the country in the capacity of Chair and Overview Author. Previous Domestic Homicide Reviews have included a variety of different scenarios: male victims; suicide; murder/suicide; familial domestic homicide; a number which involve mental ill health on the part of the offender and/or victim; and reviews involving foreign nationals. In several reviews, they have developed good working relationships with parallel investigations/inquiries, such as those undertaken by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, NHS England, and Adult Care Reviews.
- 1.10.4 Neither Gary Goose nor Christine Graham are associated with any of the agencies involved in the review nor have, at any point in the past, been associated with any of the agencies.<sup>3</sup> Full details of the ongoing professional development of the Chair and Report Author are included in Appendix Four.

## 1.11 Parallel Reviews

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- 1.11.1 During 2018, the coroner undertook an Inquest into Samantha's death. The findings of this inquest are contained within this report.

## 1.12 Equality and Diversity

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- 1.12.1 Throughout this review process, the panel has considered the issues of equality. In particular, the nine protective characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. These are:
  - Age
  - Disability

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<sup>3</sup> Multi-agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews (para 36), Home Office, Dec 2016

- Gender reassignment
- Marriage or civil partnership (in employment only)
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

1.12.2 Women's Aid state: 'domestic abuse perpetrated by men against women is a distinct phenomenon rooted in women's unequal status in society and oppressive social constructions of gender and family'.<sup>4</sup> Women are more likely than men to be killed by partners/ex-partners. ONS data<sup>5</sup> shows that for the period April 2008 to March 2019, 925 women were killed by a partner or ex-partner, compared with 152 men.

1.12.3 The Femicide Census 10-year report<sup>6</sup> found that the largest number of femicides (888, 62%) were carried out by men who were currently, or had been previously, in an intimate relationship with the victim.

1.12.4 The Review Panel considered the issue of equalities and disadvantages carefully and concluded that apart from sex none of the other protected characteristics were relevant in this case.

## Section Two – The Facts

### 2.1 Introduction

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2.1.1 Samantha was a 47-year-old white British woman at the time of her death. Her family have said that she struggled in her early years due to non-acceptance by her grandparents of the fact that she had a different father to her siblings. They say that she was excluded from things, but this had, according to her family, given her strength in her adulthood, and she built a very successful career. She was an assertive, confident businesswoman. Samantha had an older brother and sister. Her mother died in 2005, and this had a significant impact on Samantha. She remained close to her stepfather.

2.1.2 Samantha had been in a stable relationship for around seven years, which ended in 2013. When this relationship ended, she met her most recent boyfriend and that relationship began in earnest in 2014. Samantha's family have stated that Samantha had not experienced abuse in any relationship prior to this one.

2.1.3 Samantha's boyfriend was 43 years old at the time of her death. His occupation was described on record as a landscape gardener or civil engineer.

2.1.4 Relatively little is held within agency files and thus known about Samantha's boyfriend, but he had six convictions for nine offences between August 1991 and July 2013. His most recent conviction, prior to Samantha's death, was for battery and criminal damage in April 2013 in relation to another partner whilst in the north of England. He was sentenced to three month's imprisonment wholly suspended for 15 months. The sentence included a restraining order.

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<sup>4</sup> (Women's Aid Domestic abuse is a gendered crime, n.d.)

<sup>5</sup> Homicide in England and Wales, year ending March 2019, Office for National Statistics, February 2021

<sup>6</sup> UK Femicides 2009-2018, Femicide Census

This was his only conviction for violent offences. At the time of the IMR he was not known to any other Police forces other than Thames Valley Police and Lancashire.

## 2.2 Chronology

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2.2.1 This chronology includes information provided by Samantha's family as well as that known to agencies. The review has sought to ensure that there is no hierarchy of testimony. It will be made clear, within this section, the information that has been provided by the family. This section is a factual account, and any commentary is dealt with later in the report.

### 2014

2.2.2 Samantha's relationship began with her boyfriend in January. That same month, at a family meal, Samantha's stepfather noticed bruising on her. She confirmed that her boyfriend had caused this but said that she could handle it.

2.2.3 In February, Samantha and her boyfriend began to live together in a rented cottage.

2.2.4 In June, Samantha received a substantial inheritance from her grandparents.

2.2.5 On 16th July, Samantha spoke to her sister on the phone. Samantha told her that her boyfriend had pulled out huge clumps of her hair whilst being a passenger in his car. He then threw her out while the car was still moving, causing her to scrape her hands, elbows, and knees on the tarmac. She then rolled on to a grass verge and then discovering that she had lost her shoes in the chaos. Samantha was forced to walk nearly two miles home in her bare feet. When she arrived home, her boyfriend was not there. Samantha's family say that she was left with significant bald patches and caused her distress. Samantha was not able to go out without a hat (until her friend had made a hairpiece). This meant that she had to take unpaid leave from work.

2.2.6 Samantha told her sister that the physical violence was becoming more frequent and extreme and was scaring her. She added that she didn't know where he was, or when he was coming back. The uncertainty was adding to her fear and anxiety because he could come back anytime, including when she was asleep. Samantha was truly fearful of her boyfriend and what he was capable of. Following that conversation, Samantha's sister called her every day to ensure her safety and put her mind at ease.

2.2.7 On 19th July 2014, the Police received two calls from Samantha. It was recorded that she was not making sense during the first call but there was no obvious suggestion that this was a prank call. She was advised by the first call taker to ring her GP. The second call taker identified that there was a need to ensure that Samantha was well, and officers were dispatched with an 'urgent' grading. However, this was later downgraded to 'by arrangement'.

2.2.8 That same morning, Samantha's sister had tried to contact her several times, but she was not getting a response. She sensed something was wrong, so drove out to Samantha's home. As she approached the cottage, she noticed the curtains were drawn, which was odd as it was a bright summer's morning. After knocking at the door and calling out her name, she eventually opened the front door. Samantha was in a panic and furtively glancing around as she quickly ushered her sister inside and bolted the door behind her.

2.2.9 Samantha's sister immediately noticed bruising to her face and arms. Samantha's behaviour was extremely concerning; she was terrified, acting paranoid, and hallucinating. Samantha believed there were shadowy figures, hiding in the grass in her garden, that were trying to get into the house. She was genuinely petrified, saying that they were trying to get to her through her phone. She was manic, charging from room to room, checking the windows and doors and believing she had to try to save people from these sinister, shadowy figures.

2.2.10 Samantha told her sister that she'd phoned the Police, but by that point, her sister didn't know what to believe. Samantha's paranoid, erratic behaviour was scaring her sister, so she decided to call her stepfather. As she left the cottage to retrieve her mobile phone from her car, she met two Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) walking up the garden path. The officers asked who she was and then accompanied her back to the cottage.

2.2.11 When one of the PCSOs arrived at the address, he noted that Samantha was clearly confused and shaking. She had visible bruising on her left arm and under her left eye. Samantha said that she bruised easily when she banged herself. She made no disclosure of domestic abuse to the PCSO.

2.2.12 Samantha's sister has advised the review that the other PCSO spoke to her privately. Samantha's sister told the other officer that Samantha had said that the bruising happened when she was making a cup of tea and felt a presence behind her. As she turned around, she was headbutted in the face by her boyfriend. She said that Samantha lost consciousness and when she awoke, her boyfriend was gone. She could not explain Samantha's current behaviour, saying that she did not drink heavily, took no medication or illegal drugs, and had no mental health issues. She did say that, in the past, her boyfriend had beaten her up, but she had not witnessed anything, and when Samantha was probed, she would deny any abuse. The visible bruises were photographed by the PCSO. An ambulance was called by the PCSOs.

2.2.13 When the ambulance crew arrived, they assessed Samantha and asked her to provide a urine sample. Samantha insisted that her sister accompany her to the bathroom as she feared the shadowy figures were in there waiting for her. The urine test showed that Samantha had a urine infection that was causing her to have delirium and a dangerously high temperature. The paramedics suspected a possible kidney infection and stressed the need to get her to the hospital urgently. They asked her sister to quickly pack an overnight bag for her. Samantha insisted that her sister include the hairpiece that she used to cover up the bald patches where her boyfriend had pulled out huge clumps of hair from her scalp.

2.2.14 The PCSO and the ambulance crew continued to ask Samantha about her injuries and photographed the visible bruising whilst she was getting changed, and her sister packed her overnight bag. The ambulance service found 'numerous bruises around her body' and told the Police that they 'did not find her explanation convincing'.

2.2.15 On the way to the hospital, Samantha suffered convulsions, and on arrival, was immediately taken to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Her prognosis meant that Samantha's condition was critical, and emergency treatment was administered. She spent 18 hours in ICU.

2.2.16 Samantha was thereafter admitted to the John Radcliffe Hospital for ten days. She was suffering with acute pyelonephritis (severe kidney infection) that was causing a high fever and hallucinations. She also had a four-week-old head injury, fresh bruising over and under her left eye, and other bruising all over her body. The hospital staff were aware that Samantha's sister had said that her boyfriend had headbutted her in the face, and the ambulance crew

also informed them of the suspected domestic abuse. So, when her boyfriend arrived at the hospital, he was prevented by staff from entering the ward and left without seeing Samantha.

- 2.2.17 Uniformed officers attended the address, at the request of the Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit, at 10.04 pm on 19th July looking for Samantha's boyfriend. When they arrived, they were met by a third party who informed them that he had already left to find Samantha at the hospital. The third party also told officers that Samantha's boyfriend had said that 'they were not getting on' and 'their relationship was shaky'. Officers reported that they were going to try to ring him but said they were unable to contact him.
- 2.2.18 At 11.04 am on 20th July 2014, a uniformed patrol officer spoke to Samantha's sister on the telephone. The Police record says: Samantha's sister told him that she had spoken to Samantha a few days prior to going to her house on Saturday 19th July. The family told the review that they shared further information relating to the incident about her boyfriend pulling out clumps of her hair and throwing her out of a moving car. She said that there was an ongoing campaign of violent physical abuse. Samantha's sister told them about Samantha's bald patches and that she was trying to cover them up with a hairpiece. She added that Samantha was trying to get someone to sort out her hair (a hairdresser friend).
- 2.2.19 The officer asked Samantha's sister if she knew of her boyfriend's whereabouts. She replied that she didn't, but he often disappeared. She added that she didn't know when he was coming back.
- 2.2.20 Samantha's sister told the officer that on the morning of the 19th, she had tried calling Samantha several times, but she didn't pick up. She said it was unusual, and it worried her and played on her mind. She then told the officer how her Saturday routine had been interrupted by a 'sixth sense' and felt something was seriously wrong. She said that she felt an urgency to go to Samantha's cottage to check on her. She said that she had been at the house for at least ten minutes before the Police arrived, and during that time, Samantha had told her that her bruises were caused by her boyfriend. She said that he had beaten her up and headbutted her in the face.
- 2.2.21 On 21st July 2014, the Adult Protection Report was reviewed by a Protecting Vulnerable Person Referral Centre Supervisor at Thames Valley Police. It was noted that Samantha was not considered a risk to herself, and no consent for information sharing had been given; therefore, no referral would be made at this time. It was noted that Samantha was graded as 'Standard' risk, there were no children involved, and no consent for information sharing had been given; therefore, no referral would be made at this time to partner agencies. A domestic incident report was not generated.
- 2.2.22 On 22nd July, a 'Section 2' referral<sup>7</sup> was made by John Radcliffe Hospital to Buckinghamshire Adult Social Care, as she had disclosed that her boyfriend had hit her. The hospital social worker telephoned the ward to speak to Samantha. She could be heard (as she came to the phone) saying that she would deny everything. She denied any concerns but confirmed that she would contact her GP or Police if she needed to.
- 2.2.23 At 6.05 pm on 22nd July, Samantha discharged herself from the hospital. Her family have advised the review that she made the decision to cut her hospital convalescence short because she was expecting to be collected by her boyfriend after he finished work that

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<sup>7</sup> A Section 2 of The Community Care (Delayed Discharges) Act 2003 requires an NHS body to notify social services of a patient's likely need for community care services upon discharge.

evening. However, Samantha's boyfriend did not arrive and left her stranded. Samantha's family believe that this was to punish her for involving the Police. Samantha spent another night at the hospital, after being allowed to sleep in the family waiting area. The following morning, she caught a bus from Oxford to Thame but felt unwell so called her sister to collect her. Samantha's sister was at work but told her she would collect her during her lunch break. When Samantha's sister collected her, she was shocked at how unwell Samantha looked, so immediately drove her to her GP in Haddenham, a few miles away. Samantha was given some tests by her GP and then told to go home and give her body a chance to recover. Over the next few weeks, Samantha remained very unwell, so her stepfather stayed close by and accompanied her to all her doctor's appointments.

2.2.24 The Police made repeated attempts to contact Samantha again; however, the first time they spoke to her was on the afternoon of 24th July at her home address. She was accompanied by her stepfather during this conversation. She told officers that some of the bruising had been caused accidentally when she had been playing with a boxer dog, and the rest had been caused by the female friend (who she did not want to make a complaint about), and when mountain biking. The Police officer recorded the conversation as follows: 'listening to her and watching her body language I was not entirely convinced that she was telling me the truth and I told her as such. She did not appear shocked that I did not believe her, but she was still adamant that there is no domestic abuse from her partner. I spoke to her [stepfather] in private and he suspects that her partner has been physical based on how upset she can get but he has no evidence that she is'.

2.2.25 The family's recollection of this interaction is that Samantha's stepfather felt that he was placed in a very difficult position, knowing that Samantha was not telling the truth, but at the same time understanding that openly disagreeing with her in front of the Police could exacerbate her problems with her boyfriend. However, he told the Police of the multiple occasions that Samantha's boyfriend had been 'bashing her about'. Samantha later told her stepfather to mind his own business and keep out of her life. Samantha was afraid of her boyfriend, and she worried about the effects that her disclosures to the hospital staff, and the Police involvement, might have when she saw him again. Whilst her stepfather was around, she felt comforted and safe, but she didn't want her family talking to the Police, which would result in an escalation of her problems at home.

2.2.26 There is nothing further on record, or recalled by the family, until 5th January 2016. The family believe that this was not because the abuse had ceased but, rather, that she felt frightened and had been isolated by her boyfriend to such an extent that her confidence had been knocked.

## 2016

2.2.27 On 5th January, Samantha's best friend received a text from her saying that her boyfriend had beaten her up and trashed the house. At 11.35 pm, Samantha's friend then received an email from Samantha's boyfriend's email address saying: 'Call Police now. Get them to my house'. Samantha's best friend was initially confused. However, she then realised that Samantha had sent the email from her boyfriend's device and immediately tried to phone her, but her phone was switched off. Samantha's best friend replied to the email asking: 'Samantha, is that you?' She was extremely wary of Samantha's boyfriend and worried that he might be playing games with her: she knew him as a 'mind controller and a bully'. Samantha then replied with an email saying: 'It's Samantha. He's beaten me up and trashed the house. He punched me in the face

and hit me over the head with a metal chair. He's taken my phone, my iPad and my purse. I've got his iPad and I'm hiding in the cupboard under the stairs. Please call the Police'.

- 2.2.28 Samantha's friend immediately called 999 and detailed several incidents in which her boyfriend had 'done some damage to her before', 'ripped her hair out', chucked her out of a car, left her stranded, quite a few bruises, and black eyes.
- 2.2.29 The officers arrived just after midnight (28 minutes after the call) and found both Samantha and her boyfriend at the property. There was no obvious injury, but Samantha said that her boyfriend had hit her on the head with a metal chair and punched her in the face. She told Police that he was troubled, dangerous, and violent and had, in the past, given her black eyes and broken her nose, as well as suffocating her with pillows, but she had not reported it. This account was captured on Body Worn Video (BWW) although neither party would make a statement. Samantha did provide a pocket notebook entry to Police in which she explained that she had called them because she felt 'vulnerable following an altercation at home with her partner but did not wish to provide further details or make any complaint'. Her boyfriend was arrested on suspicion of assault, criminal damage, and cannabis possession. The officers completed a DASH<sup>8</sup> risk assessment, which was graded 'Medium'.
- 2.2.30 When interviewed, Samantha's boyfriend denied the offences. Samantha did not feel able to provide a statement as evidence for the assault and criminal damage investigations. Samantha's best friend, who had initially reported the crime, also felt unable to provide a witness statement for fear of being disloyal to her after Samantha had threatened to disown her if she did. Samantha's fear of her boyfriend often drove a wedge between her family and friends. Her family and friends recognised Samantha's desperation but found it impossible to understand her abject fear. They have told the review that it was much easier for Samantha to test the loyalty of her family and friends than upset the fine balance she maintained at home.
- 2.2.31 After her boyfriend's arrest, Samantha rang custody multiple times asking after him, saying that she wanted him released from custody. Her family informed this review that she was petrified of the ramifications if she did not appear to be doing her utmost to remedy the situation. The uniformed custody sergeant, reviewing the assault and criminal damage investigations, confirmed that neither met the threshold test for prosecution. Subsequently, Samantha's boyfriend was released without charge.
- 2.2.32 The next day, a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) application was submitted, and it was agreed to disclose to Samantha about her boyfriend's previous history so that she could make an informed decision about continuing the relationship. Samantha said that she was aware of his previous history, and that she would not sign the disclosure agreement to agree to keep the Police information confidential; therefore, no specific information was given to her. The Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit (DAIU) then considered sharing the information with her verbally, without her agreeing to the rules of the scheme, in hope that it might encourage her to make a formal statement, but then decided that might not be wise. On that basis, the officer recorded that he was going to post a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to Samantha, as she was not willing to meet him. The officer believed that this was the best option to provide Samantha with the information to confirm that there was a risk of continuing in her relationship; however, it would not contain the specific detail that a DVDS would have provided. After this incident, a Risk Management Occurrence (RMO) was set up –

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<sup>8</sup> Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment Risk Assessment is used to help understand the risk level for the victim.

to record and manage the risk from this and any future domestic incident reported between the couple.

- 2.2.33 During July and August, Samantha phoned her brother multiple times per day after she returned from holiday in Spain. She told him they were getting married, and he described her as begging him to give her away at her wedding, but he refused to participate or legitimise (what her brother called) the abusive union. In September, Samantha told her sister that she had booked her wedding. The family say that Samantha was in constant contact with them, almost to the point of being a nuisance.
- 2.2.34 At 8.17 pm on 29th September, the Police received a call from a female repeatedly whispering, "I need to get out of here" and that she "needed a flight", before saying "I have to go". She then rang off. The caller was described as sounding shaken and scared. The number of the call was linked to Samantha, and officers were dispatched to her address. When officers arrived, less than an hour later, they formed the view and recorded that she was highly intoxicated with visible bruising to her breast, arms, and leg. She did not engage with the officers, and they formed the view that she appeared to be hostile.
- 2.2.35 For her safety, under Police guidance, Samantha agreed to leave the property. The officers offered to take her to a place of safety, and she asked to be taken to her sister's house, it was also recorded that her boyfriend should not be told of her location. Whilst at her sister's house, the officers spoke to Samantha and her sister about her injuries and her relationship with her boyfriend. Samantha did not feel able to make a statement to support a potential prosecution case, but her sister said that the abuse had been going on for a long time, having started soon after she met him. She was convinced that Samantha's boyfriend was responsible for the injuries and did not mention any other suspects. Samantha continually tried to stop her sister from saying anything negative against her boyfriend and was not happy with her for disclosing that information. Her family believe that she was fearful of further violent reprisals. After much persuasion, Samantha allowed the officers to record her injuries on Body Worn Video. They recorded significant bruising to her breasts, arms, and legs. A DASH assessment was undertaken, and she was graded as 'High risk'. Officers left Samantha in the care of her sister, at her sister's home.
- 2.2.36 The officers returned to the Police station to complete follow-up enquiries in relation to locating Samantha's boyfriend.
- 2.2.37 Samantha's sister describes that after officers had left, she gradually calmed down and became less anxious and feeling less vulnerable. Her sister made up the spare bedroom downstairs and they retired for the night. An hour or so later, Samantha's sister heard fumbling around downstairs and somebody trying the front door and windows. She was petrified that Samantha's boyfriend was trying to get into the house, so she and her partner went downstairs to investigate. They discovered a downstairs window was open and Samantha was missing. Samantha's sister's partner went out into the street and saw Samantha walking barefooted away from the house, so he ran after her to find out what was going on.
- 2.2.38 Samantha expressed concern for her cats and dogs, which remained back at her cottage. She said that they had not been fed, and she worried for their safety should her boyfriend return while she was not there. She said that she needed to get back home and explained that she did not want to disturb her sister and her partner, as she knew that they had to be up very early in the morning. Samantha's sister phoned her stepfather to take Samantha home and

asked if he could stay with her in case her boyfriend returned. A short while later, Samantha's stepfather and his wife arrived to take her home.

- 2.2.39 Samantha, her stepfather and his wife arrived back at Samantha's house at approximately 00.30 am to find the Police in the garden using their torches to look around the property. They said they were waiting to arrest her boyfriend if he returned home. Whilst they were there, they thoroughly checked for signs that her boyfriend had returned; however, there were no signs, and his motorbike was missing. They left Samantha at the cottage, in the care of her stepfather and his wife. Before the Police left, they moved the spare front door key to a different location – so it was less obvious to Samantha's boyfriend, should he return. They reassured Samantha and her family that they would remain in the area if they required further assistance. Samantha's stepfather noticed packed luggage and suitcases by the front door. Samantha said that they had been due to fly to Spain early that morning. Financial records seen by Samantha's family, indicate that the trip had been booked on 22nd September.
- 2.2.40 The Police officers left the home and provided a handover to progress the arrest of Samantha's boyfriend. A crime report for a domestic related assault was raised, and the risk assessment indicated that Samantha was at 'high' risk of harm. The Risk Management Occurrence was updated, and the investigation and safety planning were passed to a specialist team of detectives within DAIU. There was a briefing slide on their local system for officers to be aware of possible domestic abuse and a 'tasking' to complete regular address checks and note vehicle details, etc.
- 2.2.41 Soon after officers left, Samantha asked her stepfather and his wife to leave, saying that it would be best if they were not there and that everything was going to be fine. She was concerned for the safety of her stepfather and his wife, suspecting that her boyfriend would return and one of his dangerous violent attacks could be aimed at them. Samantha's boyfriend had told her that he had killed somebody in the past, and Samantha did not want to put her family at risk. Her stepfather was not convinced that everything would be 'fine' if her boyfriend returned to the house but did not want to add to Samantha's obvious anxieties, so they sat outside in their car.
- 2.2.42 Samantha's family say that at around 1 am, whilst Samantha's stepfather and his wife sat outside, Samantha's boyfriend returned to the cottage. Her stepfather confronted him and asked him to leave, adding that the Police were involved, and they were still nearby. Her boyfriend angrily reacted by yelling at Samantha: 'what have you done now?', before aggressively driving off in her car. Samantha's stepfather and his wife stayed with her until they felt certain that she was safe, and her boyfriend was not likely to return that night. They left at about 2 am.
- 2.2.43 In his Police statement, Samantha's stepfather said that Samantha's boyfriend returned to the property whilst he was in the car outside. He went to confront Samantha's boyfriend, but Samantha's boyfriend convinced him that he had nothing to do with the injuries, and Samantha ushered her father back inside her property. He did not call the Police at this point but had suggested to both parties that the Police needed to sort things out.
- 2.2.44 Attempts were made to arrest Samantha's boyfriend at 8.28 am on 30th September, at the home address. There was no answer at the door, no lights were on, and both vehicles (registered to Samantha) were parked outside. A further attempt was made at lunchtime to arrest Samantha's boyfriend, and checks were conducted to ascertain if the couple were abroad.

2.2.45 Samantha's sister received a concerned phone call from her stepfather explaining that he had received a panicked, hysterical call from Samantha in which she said that her boyfriend was outside her house trying to get in. Samantha's sister left immediately and travelled the short distance to Samantha's cottage. On entering, she found Samantha cowering on the floor in the corner of her kitchen, shaking with fear. Samantha had mistakenly been convinced that her sister entering the house was her boyfriend coming back again. Her sister examined Samantha and found new bruising on her. Samantha told her sister that her boyfriend had returned to the cottage around lunchtime. She said that he became very angry and aggressive after discovering that the key had been removed, and he was not able to open the front door. Eventually, he became exceedingly angry and violent; he kicked in the front door, breaking the lock and splintering the door frame in the process. The front door was no longer functionally able to be locked.

2.2.46 After Samantha calmed down, she opened up to her sister and explained exactly how she received her horrific injuries. Samantha said that her boyfriend had punched and kicked her to the ground and then knelt on her chest and tried to suffocate her with a cushion. She explained that it was his knees on her chest that had caused the bruising to her breasts. She described it as incredibly painful and hurt her to breathe. She also thought that he might have broken her ribs. She added that she didn't think she could take another beating while she felt so sore.

2.2.47 Samantha's sister tried to persuade Samantha to accompany her to the hospital A&E or the doctor's surgery, but Samantha insisted that it would only make things worse if the Police got involved. Samantha's sister told her that she believed Samantha's boyfriend was extremely dangerous and that he might 'come back to finish the job'. She pleaded with Samantha to help get protection for herself and get him arrested. Samantha allowed her sister to take comprehensive photographs of the bruising all over her body. She confided in her sister saying: 'Keep those [the photographs] in case he kills me next time'.

2.2.48 Ultimately, Samantha was vulnerable and scared and told her sister where her boyfriend might have gone. Samantha gave the address of his mother's house in Suffolk but asked her not to tell the Police. It was obvious to Samantha's sister that Samantha knew that she was going to pass this information on to the Police. Samantha's sister feels it important to note that Samantha's abject fear of her boyfriend meant that she had to be seen to be trying to protect him, for fear that he might detect her lying in a future confrontation.

2.2.49 Samantha's sister then left the cottage and immediately rang the Police to give them the details of his mother's home in Suffolk.

2.2.50 Enquiries to locate Samantha's boyfriend were not straightforward, but he was arrested in Suffolk, at 11.44 pm, on two counts of assault. In interview, he alleged that Samantha had been kicked by a horse in the field adjacent to her home. Samantha's sister, who has considerable experience with horses, said that 'the pony was very old and would not have been capable of kicking anyone'. Samantha also had considerable experience with horses and had owned horses for most of her life. At that time, Samantha owned a horse that could be difficult but was never known to kick.

2.2.51 Samantha's sister gave a statement to the Police in which she told Police that, on 29th September, she had also seen bruising on Samantha's back, breasts, and arms (this was after the Police had left the room). She also told officers that, after a concerned phone call from her stepfather on 1st October 2016, she had found Samantha cowering in the corner of her

kitchen in fear, thinking that she was her boyfriend coming back into the house. Samantha's sister told them that she had seen new bruising on Samantha from the newer incident on 1st October, when her boyfriend had been at the cottage before she arrived. She told them that she had taken comprehensive photographs of Samantha's injuries and added that Samantha had asked her to secure them in case 'the next time he kills her'. Samantha's sister also told them that the violent abuse had been going on for a long time but had got worse since Samantha lost her job.

2.2.52 Samantha's stepfather also gave a statement to the Police. He stated that Samantha had rung him on Saturday, 'crying, panting and hysterical' because her boyfriend had returned to the cottage following the incident on Thursday night. He called Samantha's sister to urgently go there and find out what was going on. Samantha's sister went to her cottage and found her scared to death, with new bruising on her arms. He told Police about the historic domestic violence Samantha had endured over the last two and a half years at the hands of her boyfriend, and that Samantha had collapsed from a kidney infection in summer 2014. He told them that she had admitted to the hospital staff that her boyfriend had headbutted her, broken her ribs, suffocated her, and broken her arm, as well as throwing her out of a moving car. Samantha's stepfather told them that after the Police left Samantha's cottage in the early hours of 30th September, Samantha's boyfriend had returned to the property whilst he was waiting outside in the car. He stated that he confronted Samantha's boyfriend and asked him to leave, adding that the Police were involved, and they were still nearby. Samantha's boyfriend reacted by saying to Samantha: 'what have you done now?' He said that Samantha's boyfriend had tried to convince him that he had nothing to do with her injuries and added that he could be a very convincing liar. Samantha then tried to usher her stepfather outside. However, he refused to leave until her boyfriend left the property, and he threatened to call the Police. Samantha's boyfriend told him that he was happy for the Police to be called and wanted the Police to 'sort things out'. But Samantha's stepfather was aware that he was a practised and convincing liar and worried that the Police might believe his lies and leave Samantha in a more vulnerable position. Samantha's stepfather did not call the Police. Soon after, her boyfriend agreed to leave.

2.2.53 The Police completed a prosecution file based on the evidence provided by Samantha's family. The Crown Prosecution Service confirmed that they were unable to prosecute due to insufficient evidence. The Police issued a Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) to Samantha's boyfriend whilst he was in custody.

2.2.54 An officer from the DAIU visited Samantha to explain the DVPN to her. Her boyfriend had left the area and said that he would respect the terms of the DVPN. Samantha was referred to an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) with a request to provide 28-day support, and a referral was made to MARAC<sup>9</sup>. The IDVA tried to contact Samantha that day, but there was no answer, so a message was left with details of the service available and her contact details.

2.2.55 A Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) was issued following a hearing at Oxford Magistrates Court. The DVPO would expire on 31st October 2016. It was served on Samantha's boyfriend at 3.35 pm on 5th October.

2.2.56 Samantha replied to the IDVA with a text message saying: 'I am fine doll, don't worry'. Samantha's family believe that she was eager to put them off, as she was convinced that any

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<sup>9</sup> Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference held by key agencies to discuss high risk domestic abuse cases and, where possible, create actions to reduce the risk.

more meddling in her affairs would increase her problems at home and escalate what she perceived as an already out-of-control situation, leading her to more danger and uncertainty.

- 2.2.57 The family say that just around this time, Samantha became upset towards them after their attempts to keep her away from her boyfriend. Samantha sent a text to her stepfather saying: 'please do not call again, I'm done with all of you'. Samantha's family want it to be known that this was not unusual to her family. She had countless 'run-ins' with them, as her boyfriend often tried to drive a wedge between them, just as he had done with most of her friends.
- 2.2.58 On 4th October, the Police received intelligence<sup>10</sup> that Samantha's car was being driven whilst she was intoxicated. The registration was added to the ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) 'hotlist'.
- 2.2.59 On 7th October, Samantha asked her sister to contact her boyfriend on her behalf as Samantha was worried about contacting him and exacerbating her fears due to the DVPO. Samantha was very concerned that her boyfriend was spending money on her credit card. She also wanted her car back. Samantha's sister telephoned her boyfriend on her behalf. During the call, Samantha interjected that she wanted to speak to him. However, he refused to speak to her as that would breach the conditions of the DVPO, and he was too afraid of the consequences to his personal liberty.
- 2.2.60 On 11th October, the IDVA spoke to Samantha and again explained the services that she could offer. Samantha said that she was sticking to the terms of the DVPO, as she did not wish to get her boyfriend into trouble, and she would resume the relationship as soon as it expired. She said that it was a big misunderstanding that had got out of hand and that she neither needed nor wanted any help. She did say, however, that she would keep the IDVA's number.
- 2.2.61 Samantha told her sister, on 15th October, that her boyfriend had spent £3000 on her credit card and withdrawn £950 from her account within the last few days.
- 2.2.62 On 27th October, Samantha was discussed at the MARAC meeting. It was initially thought that Samantha and her boyfriend were on holiday in Spain, but by the time of the meeting, it had been established that they had not gone. The family have since told the review that Samantha did not leave the country after July 2016. As she had been offered support and indicated that she planned to resume the relationship the IDVA case was closed.
- 2.2.63 At midnight on 31st October 2016, the DVPO expired.
- 2.2.64 Samantha's family have advised the review that, following the expiry of the DVPO on 31st October 2016, Samantha's boyfriend had persuaded her that they should move home, for a 'fresh start', in the new year.
- 2.2.65 On 1st November, Samantha signed a Memorandum of Understanding, at which time Samantha told the DAIU officer that she had been contacted by the IDVA but did not need their help.
- 2.2.66 On 7th November, after a conversation with the DAIU officer, the IDVA sent a text to Samantha to remind her of the support that she could provide. She received no reply. The

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<sup>10</sup> Intelligence can be described as information about an individual or event that is not recorded formally in a statement or some other formal mechanism and generally where the source of the information wants to be kept confidential.

next day, after discussion with her manager, it was agreed that as Samantha had their details, it was now up to her to contact them.

- 2.2.67 The Police received intelligence on 11th November 2016 that Samantha's boyfriend's vehicle was parked at the end of Samantha's drive and her car was not there.
- 2.2.68 In December 2016, Samantha's boyfriend had contacted a letting agent and went to view a cottage in a small village.
- 2.2.69 On 25th December 2016, Samantha did not turn up for Christmas lunch, which was unlike her. A few days later, she told her sister that she could deal with things (with her boyfriend) on her own.

## **2017**

- 2.2.70 Samantha's family have advised the review of Samantha's movements over the next few days. On 3rd January, Samantha viewed the cottage and paid £235 in agent's fees. She agreed to move in on 1st February.
- 2.2.71 On 16th January, Samantha attended a job interview.
- 2.2.72 On 25th January, the appointment with the letting agent, to sign the tenancy agreement, was postponed.
- 2.2.73 On 1st February, Samantha had her pets put down because her boyfriend did not want them in the new house, as they would cause the furniture to smell. Her pets were very important to Samantha, and this was extremely traumatic for her.
- 2.2.74 On 4th February, Samantha and her boyfriend left their home, in separate cars, to go to the new cottage and sign the lease. However, her boyfriend failed to arrive. After an hour of waiting, she signed alone. On 7th February, the large items of furniture were moved in, but Samantha continued to live at the previous address. Her boyfriend was not present at this time, and she arranged the move alone. Samantha's family have stated that Samantha did not want this move and that is why she continued to live at her previous address and paid the rent for a further month.
- 2.2.75 On 13th February, her boyfriend returned and stayed overnight with Samantha. The family say that he attacked her on the morning of 14th February, damaging the property and leaving her with no electricity. This prompted her to move to a local hotel later that day.
- 2.2.76 That same day, (14th February) at 2.15 pm, the Police had a report that a woman driving her car had gone into a local petrol station. It was alleged that 'she was so drunk she was barely able to speak'. The roads policing unit were not able to locate her. Later that day, at 5.13 pm, the Police received a call from a lorry driver who said that she had hit his lorry. He said that she appeared to be drunk and had offered him money not to report it. When she drove away, she dropped her bank card, which allowed her to be identified. The Police were not able to locate the vehicle, but the registration was again added to the ANPR 'hotlist'.
- 2.2.77 On 15th February, Samantha phoned her sister to tell her that she had stayed at a hotel, as there was a problem with the electricity at the new house. She also phoned her stepfather,

and she seemed confused and emotional. Samantha later phoned him again asking if she could stay at his house.

2.2.78 At 12.59 pm on 16th February, Samantha reported some criminal damage to a wing mirror and windows at the cottage, stating that she felt that it was linked to a male she had met (around 13th February), who was interested in her. She said that there had been an incident when her boyfriend had come around and found the male at the property. Officers were dispatched on an 'urgent' basis due to the risk of further escalation – as it was noted that Samantha was previously at high risk of domestic abuse from her boyfriend. The Police arrived at 2.39 pm, but Samantha was not there. As the premises were insecure, they checked over the premises and found that the back door was insecure. House-to-house enquiries were completed, but the criminal damage was not witnessed and there were no forensic opportunities.

2.2.79 The landlord of the rental property reported the damage to the Police separately. The landlord said that he, and the agents, were working with Samantha to move her on from the property; however, they were concerned that, as she was a victim of domestic abuse, they did not wish to exacerbate matters.

2.2.80 Samantha told her family that, on 18th February, her boyfriend had violently assaulted her and 'smashed her head on the floor'.

2.2.81 On 19th February, Samantha's sister phoned her brother, very distressed about Samantha. She reported that the house that Samantha had moved into had been vandalised – the windows had been broken, and electricity lines had been cut. Samantha had, therefore, moved into a local Travelodge and was in a vulnerable state. She said that she had received a disturbing text message from Samantha in which she said that her boyfriend had come into her hotel room at the Travelodge, grabbed her by the hair, and smashed her head on the floor. Samantha thought that she must have been unconscious for quite some time, possibly most of the night.

2.2.82 At around lunchtime, Samantha's brother managed to speak to her on the phone. He recalls that she seemed confused and emotional. He expressed his concerns to her about staying at the Travelodge. She replied that she would sleep in her car because she hated the cottage and deeply regretted the move. She told him to stop telling her what to do and that she felt she was being bullied by everyone. Her brother noted that she was slurring her speech so asked if she had been drinking. Samantha said that she had not but was very tired because she had not slept well and did not feel like herself. After the call, Samantha's brother had an in-depth conversation with his partner about Samantha's situation, and they decided that they needed to get some professional advice.

2.2.83 The same day, the Police received a call from a local supermarket at 4.33 pm, as they were concerned about Samantha. She had been in the store and was acting erratically and appeared to have a panic attack. She had a cut and bruise to her head. She tried to buy four bottles of wine, which was refused by staff. She refused help from the staff and left the store in her car. This is when the Police were called. The Police went to her address and were unable to locate her. When they looked through the window, it appeared that someone was moving in or out of the property (as boxes were seen).

2.2.84 Samantha's family have advised that she slept in her car that night, for fear of her boyfriend returning to the hotel.

2.2.85 At this time, Samantha's brother and his partner were so concerned about Samantha that they went to the Citizen's Advice Bureau in their hometown to seek advice. They were given the numbers of some support agencies. They went straight to their local MIND office. They were advised to dial 999, but they did not feel that this was the correct use of emergency services, so they decide to contact Thames Valley Police direct.

2.2.86 At 12.41 pm, staff at the Travelodge contacted the Police as they were concerned for a female who had been staying there for a week. She was described as permanently intoxicated since she had arrived, and she had just checked out. The staff had not seen her drinking that day.

2.2.87 At 4 pm, a welfare check was undertaken following the incident at the supermarket the previous day. A PCSO saw Samantha at her house and described her as friendly and welcoming but confused and reluctant to talk about her relationship and got upset when she was talking about it. She disclosed that her boyfriend had slammed her head on the floor, causing the bruise to her forehead. She was advised to contact her GP. There was no electricity in the house. The MASH<sup>11</sup> was notified, and it was decided that the neighbourhood team would 'keep an eye on her'.

2.2.88 On the way to her friend's house, Samantha's car broke down on the M40. Soon after breaking down, Samantha was collected from the hard shoulder and taken to the nearest services by the Highway Agency. She was subsequently collected by her friend from Oxford Services, at approximately 6.30 pm.

2.2.89 At 5:22 am on 21st February, Samantha sent a text message to her stepfather (which was to be her last text message to him) saying: 'I'm sick to death of being a punchbag x not going back to it xx'. He replied saying: 'If he is knocking you around again, please involve the Police xx'.

2.2.90 At 3.24 pm, Samantha's brother contacted Thames Valley Police because he was concerned about the welfare of his sister. The Police concluded that, as Samantha had recently been checked, no further check needed to be completed. They attempted to ring him back to tell him that the check had been done the day before, but the number was unobtainable.

2.2.91 On 22nd February, a uniformed patrol officer was tasked with completing a new domestic abuse risk assessment form on Samantha, but Thames Valley Police have no record of this being completed.

2.2.92 Samantha's family informed the review that, on the afternoon of 22nd February, Samantha's boyfriend took her other car (that he had been using) to the cottage and posted the keys through the door. At 3 pm, Samantha took a taxi to the cottage and collected her car.

2.2.93 Samantha's friend recalls that Samantha was planning on meeting her boyfriend on the 22nd of February, as he had a new job abroad and he wanted her to go with him. Her friend recalls that Samantha had said it was 'make or break' day.

2.2.94 On 23rd February, a Police neighbourhood specialist officer reviewed the case, and it was decided that the neighbourhood policing team would keep a closer eye on Samantha. There are no records of what actions were taken.

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<sup>11</sup> The Buckinghamshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has staff from the council, police and NHS working in the same location responding to safeguarding concerns in relation to children and vulnerable adults.

2.2.95 At 2:05 pm on 23rd February, Samantha's brother rang the Police for an update on Samantha's situation. The call taker explained, that they could not give him any information, as they could not verify his identity. After seeking advice, he was advised that Samantha was safe and well.

2.2.96 The review has been told by Samantha's family that, on 27th February, Samantha returned to the cottage to take delivery of her washing machine from her previous address. While she was there, her boyfriend sent her multiple text messages, pleading with her to meet up with him. He said that he 'forgave her', that he wanted to make a 'fresh start' and talked about the possibility of 'moving back in'. He tried to persuade her that he was going to 'make changes', and that the recent events had 'been a wakeup call for him'. Samantha told her family that she was done with him and ready to move on with her life. However, she agreed to meet him for lunch on 1st March.

2.2.97 On 28th February, the Police received intelligence that Samantha's boyfriend's car was parked on the driveway of her cottage. This information was passed onto the neighbourhood team, although, there is no record what action was taken. However, they were unaware that the vehicle had been returned to Samantha, and her boyfriend was no longer driving it.

2.2.98 In early March, Samantha's sister was concerned as she had not heard from her. She went to the cottage and found Samantha lying on the lounge floor. She called the Police and ambulance service. Samantha was pronounced dead at the scene.

2.2.99 On 7th March 2017, a DVDS disclosure was made to Samantha's boyfriend's new partner.

## Section Three – Overview and Analysis

### 3.1 Information known to family and friends

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3.1.1 The review is very grateful to those who have contributed to the overview report. As well as her family, Samantha's friends and a former partner were also spoken to as part of the review. The insight that they have been able to provide has helped us to build a picture of Samantha.

3.1.2 Samantha was educated at Oxford and had, in the past, been the director of several companies. She had also won awards for her work. She was described as: 'very kind, generous, competent, clever, resourceful, friendly, quick-witted, hard-working and productive. Her vitality could have been of tremendous benefit to the world'. Her family said that a major part of her character was her ability to rebound from adversity.

3.1.3 Samantha was very close to her mother. Her death, in 2005, had a huge impact on Samantha.

3.1.4 The picture that has been painted of Samantha was of a complicated woman who presented herself as a loud, outgoing, and bubbly person but that this persona masked sadness that she carried with her. It has been said by a close friend, that Samantha was 'like a little girl inside' and 'was a woman who was seduced by danger and who would act impulsively'.

3.1.5 Samantha's brother described her by saying, 'Historically, Samantha had been a strong personality. She grew up in an environment where her siblings knew she was different, so treated her differently. Samantha struggled in many ways in her early life, but this adversity gave her strength in her adulthood, and she grew to have a very successful career. She also was a very pretty and attractive woman. She gained a lot from the attention that those attributes gave her. Early in her relationship with her partner, she showed signs of

vulnerability and uncertainty that I did not recognise in her. At the same time, her life began to derail. Everything in her life that did not involve him began to fall apart including her self-esteem. Samantha died a shell of the person that she had been, after this relationship during which she endured physical, emotional and financial abuse, she was destitute and believed that she was worthless.'

### **3.2 Detailed analysis of agency involvement**

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- 3.2.1 This section summarises the totality of the information known to agencies and others involved during the years leading up to the incident. The detailed chronology will not be repeated here; rather, this section will provide an analysis of agency involvement.
- 3.2.2 The review acknowledges that this approach can lead to a level of duplication, however it allows the reader to look at each individual organisation without having to refer to the preceding section.

Thames Valley Police (TVP)

19th July 2014

Initial response

- 3.2.3 The Police received two calls from Samantha on 19th July 2014. She was not making sense during the first call but there was no obvious suggestion that this was a prank call, and she did claim that there were people in her car and in her house. She was advised by the first call taker to ring her GP. The second call taker identified that there was a need to ensure that Samantha was well, and officers were initially dispatched with an 'urgent' grading, but this was downgraded to 'by arrangement'.
- 3.2.4 The Individual Management Review (IMR) submitted by TVP, notes that this action was appropriate at the time, but it would have been best practice to consult with partners in ambulance service or community mental health team to see if there was a role for the Police or whether this would be more appropriately dealt with by the NHS. The review accepts the finding of TVP that, if this had occurred in 2019, with the same set of circumstances, it is likely that the call would have been passed to the ambulance service or the community mental health team to contact Samantha. The Mental Health Street Triage<sup>12</sup> team might have been available, but this is not present in all areas.
- 3.2.5 One of the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) who attended, stated that on arrival at Samantha's address, Samantha was clearly confused and shaking but the cause of this was unclear. The ambulance service was then called. Samantha explained the visible bruising on her left arm and under her left eye by saying that she bruised easily if she banged herself. She made no disclosure of domestic abuse to the PCSO.
- 3.2.6 Whilst one of the PCSOs was with Samantha, the other spoke privately with her sister. She could not explain the behaviour, saying that Samantha did not drink heavily, took no medication or illegal drugs, and had no mental health issues. Samantha's sister did say that in the past, Samantha had disclosed that her boyfriend had 'beaten her up', but she had not witnessed this and when Samantha was probed, she would deny this.

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<sup>12</sup> Mental Health Street Triage team – TVP officers work in partnership with Mental Health Trusts and some local authorities in the Thames Valley area to provide an 'on the ground' triage service for people experiencing mental health crisis.

3.2.7 The second PCSO in the crew, continued to ask Samantha about her condition and photographed visible bruising. The ambulance service found 'numerous bruises around her body' and told the Police that they did not find her explanation convincing. It was thought by ambulance staff that Samantha had a urine infection, and she was taken to John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford.

3.2.8 **The review agrees with TVP that the PCSO demonstrated professional curiosity by speaking privately to Samantha's sister when she arrived for a routine visit.**

The review notes:

When the Adult Protection Report was completed, the domestic abuse flag was not ticked, even though the PCSO had asked that the incident be highlighted to the Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit (DAIU) with a view to triggering a further investigation. When the call taker took the call, it should have recorded a 'Crime Related Incident' assault with a domestic abuse flag, given what TVP had been told by Samantha's sister. The review believes that these were both missed opportunities to explore the domestic abuse further.

#### Crime recording

3.2.9 **The review is satisfied that, at the time of this incident, it would not have been recorded as a full offence until Samantha confirmed it. Due to changes in crime recording since that time, a full offence would now be recorded from the beginning, taking the sister's disclosure as her acting on behalf of Samantha and other potential bruising being considered. The review also notes that, it was not routinely part of the role of a PCSO to attend an incident of suspected domestic abuse at that point or become involved in the investigation. Once this incident was identified as a domestic incident, it was allocated to a uniformed officer to commence the investigation. The review accepts that this would not have impacted upon safeguarding. As a result of the changes noted above, no recommendations follow in respect of these issues.**

#### Investigation around possible domestic abuse

3.2.10 When uniformed officers arrived at Samantha's address in July 2014, at the request of DAIU, they found that her boyfriend had already left to find Samantha at the hospital. A third party at the address told officers that Samantha's boyfriend had said they were not getting on and their relationship was 'shaky'. Officers reported that they were going to try and ring him but that they were unable to contact him during the night.

3.2.11 **The review agrees with the IMR author that ideally officers would have had an opportunity to speak to Samantha before making efforts to contact her boyfriend, and before he arrived at the hospital. It is acknowledged that, at this point, although Samantha's sister had spoken with the Police about the abuse, there was no direct disclosure of domestic abuse by Samantha.**

3.2.12 Officers made several attempts to contact Samantha. The first contact was on the afternoon of 24th July 2014, at her home address. It had been difficult for officers to find a time when Samantha was available, and this matter was passed from one shift to another, with supervisors regularly reviewing the log and reiterating in the crime log that this should not be left to escalate, due to concerns about Samantha's mental and physical health.

3.2.13 During the intervening period, it is noted that at 11.04 am on 20th July 2014, a uniformed patrol officer had spoken to Samantha's sister on the telephone. She said that her sister had had an argument with her boyfriend a few days earlier and she was upset. She said that Samantha had bruises caused by her boyfriend and another female friend.

3.2.14 The review notes that a further Crime Related Incident (assault) should have been created in relation to the claim against the female friend, until clarified with Samantha to determine whether a full offence should be recorded. Although this is a learning point for TVP, it is not deemed to have been significant enough to have impacted upon her safety.

3.2.15 When officers did meet with Samantha, she was accompanied by her stepfather and was spoken to at length. Samantha said that some of the bruising had occurred because of an accidental injury with a boxer dog. She said that the rest was caused by the female friend, which she did not want to make a complaint about, and by mountain biking.

#### Risk assessment and referral process

3.2.16 On 21st July 2014, the Adult Protection Report was reviewed by a Protecting Vulnerable Person Referral Centre Supervisor<sup>13</sup>. It was noted that Samantha was not a risk to herself, and no consent had been given for information sharing; therefore, no referral was made. No domestic incident report was created, and although the DAIU were aware of the incident, they had no further involvement.

3.2.17 The review is satisfied that the decision not to share information, at the time, was the correct one. Furthermore, given the requirement of GDPR<sup>14</sup>, it is even more unlikely that a report assessed as 'Standard Risk' would be shared without consent today. It is noted that all the officers who had contact with Samantha, were willing to challenge and probe accounts around injuries and her disclosures to her. Unfortunately, it was difficult to piece together a consistent account that might have formed the basis of the investigation. Officers have now been given greater guidance on investigation of such crimes in difficult circumstances. Investigating and prosecuting offences of domestic abuse without the support of a victim, is possible but does require evidence from witnesses and other sources. The review has not identified that such evidence was readily available: greater engagement with third parties would have been necessary to examine whether such evidence was available. Given the changes in guidance assured by TVP, no additional recommendations arise out of these issues.

5th January 2016

#### Initial Response

3.2.18 This was the first incident involving Samantha in 18 months. This was reported by a third party. There was a delay in officers arriving at the scene due to resourcing issues (arriving in 28 minutes rather than the target time for an 'immediate' response of 15 minutes). All local units were engaged on other 'immediate' graded calls.

3.2.19 Whilst en-route, officers were completing intelligence checks. They were told that Samantha's boyfriend had previously been known for battery and criminal damage in 2013 and that there was one previous Adult Protection Report on the address (from the above incident in 2014).

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<sup>13</sup> Protecting Vulnerable Person Referral Centre – the referral hub prior to MASH being set up.

<sup>14</sup> General Data Protection Regulations, introduced as part of the Data Protection Act 2018

As this had not been correctly classified (as discussed above), no information was relayed to those attending the incident regarding the suspicion of domestic abuse during the previous Police contact. However, the caller had detailed several incidents in which she said that her boyfriend had 'done some damage to her before – ripped her hair out, chucked her out of a car, left her stranded, quite a few bruises, black eyes'.

#### Arrest and investigation

- 3.2.20 When officers arrived, they found that damage had been caused to the property but there were no obvious injuries, even though Samantha had told officers that her boyfriend had hit her on the head with a metal chair and punched her in the face. She described him as 'troubled, dangerous and violent' and that he had previously given her black eyes and a broken nose, as well as 'suffocating her with pillows'. Samantha provided a pocket notebook entry to Police that explained that she called Police because she felt 'vulnerable following an altercation at home with her boyfriend, but that she did not wish to provide further details or make any complaint'.
- 3.2.21 Samantha began by answering the first three questions within the domestic abuse risk assessment form, saying that, in the past, he had assaulted her by suffocating her with a pillow, hitting her on the head, and hitting her in the face (causing black eyes and a broken nose), but then was unable to go on.
- 3.2.22 Officers identified a domestic abuse crime and took positive action straight away, by arresting Samantha's boyfriend on suspicion of assault, criminal damage, and for cannabis possession. Unfortunately, Samantha did not feel able to provide a statement of evidence for the assault and criminal damage investigations. The report was quickly reviewed by a uniformed sergeant who endorsed the risk grading as 'Medium risk'. When interviewed, Samantha's boyfriend denied the offences.
- 3.2.23 The third party who had initially reported the concerns, also felt unable to provide a witness statement for fear of being disloyal to Samantha.
- 3.2.24 The review notes that Samantha was revisited to see if she felt able to provide a statement to support a prosecution, as per expected practice. She told the officers that she did not wish to provide any evidence and had tried to help her boyfriend have access to a solicitor at the Police station.
- 3.2.25 The uniformed custody sergeant reviewing the assault and criminal damage investigations, confirmed that neither met the threshold test for prosecution. Samantha had made a disclosure of assault to the attending officers, but there was no supporting evidence from the 999 call or of injuries, or an account from Samantha on body worn video. If there had been any of the supporting evidence described, even without a statement of complaint from Samantha, then the expectation was (according to the advisor informing the Police review) that this should have been a consideration for the evidential review officer and/or custody sergeant – but there was not.
- 3.2.26 The review notes that Samantha's boyfriend was dealt with positively for the cannabis possession discovered on arrest. A Police caution was an appropriate form of disposal given that he had not been found in possession of drugs since 2009.

3.2.27 A number of safety planning activities were considered by a specialist detective sergeant in DAIU, along with the potential of an emergency disclosure under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS)<sup>15</sup>. Unfortunately, although Samantha had agreed on 8th Jan 2016 to meet a detective sergeant from the Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit to talk things through or to progress a DVDS process, Samantha now felt unable to proceed with this. She said that she was not prepared to meet Police, nor to receive the disclosure or sign any undertaking to keep any disclosure confidential. Samantha told the Police that she knew all about her boyfriend's past.

3.2.28 Despite this, consideration was given as to whether sharing the information, even under these conditions, might encourage Samantha to make a formal statement, but the officer did not think it wise to detail the history verbally without her agreeing to the rules of the scheme. On this basis, the officer recorded that he was to post a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)<sup>16</sup> to Samantha, as she was not willing to meet. This way, Samantha had information to confirm that there was a risk of continuing in her relationship, but it would not contain the specific detail that a DVDS would have provided.

3.2.29 **The review is satisfied that the officer sought to take positive action to inform Samantha of the information but questions the appropriateness of having posted this to her, given the risk that this may have posed for her if her boyfriend had seen the letter.**

3.2.30 At this point, Samantha's address was flagged on the TVP systems. A Risk Management Occurrence (RMO)<sup>17</sup> was set up following this incident and risk management contact completed as expected. This included comprehensive updates from the DAIU and neighbourhood policing team, who were also using briefing slides to make local officers aware, monitor the address, and make regular attempts to engage with Samantha. Contact was also made with the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) to establish if they were in contact with them.

3.2.31 A Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN)<sup>18</sup> – with the potential to apply for a Domestic Violence Protection Order – was not requested on this occasion. This decision was taken because, without evidence to show the use or threat of violence, it would have been unlikely that this would have been granted. Consideration was also given to what the victim wanted and what it would achieve. Samantha did not appear to be living with her boyfriend at the time. The DVPN would not have prevented contact. Particularly, if Samantha wanted to maintain contact, as she said she did. Samantha rang custody multiple times to ask after her boyfriend, saying that she wanted him released from custody. In making the decision not to request a DVPN, it was noted that safeguarding of children was not an issue, and she did not appear to be living with him at the time.

3.2.32 **The review notes that TVP considered whether there were other tactics that could have been used to safeguard Samantha. The Police continually tried different methods, over time, in an effort to gain her trust.**

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<sup>15</sup> DVDS/Clare's Law – this allows members of the public and professionals to request disclosure by the police to a potential victim of their partner's history of domestic violence, thus enabling them to make informed choices regarding their relationships and to take steps to better protect themselves and their children.

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – a document stating the known or expected risks in relation to a situation; this is delivered to the victim so that they can make decisions about their own safety. The victim is asked to sign to say that they have understood the risks and a copy kept by the victim and police.

<sup>17</sup> Risk Management Occurrence is a record of similar incidents, decision-making and safety planning to co-ordinate all risk assessments on a central document.

<sup>18</sup> DVPN / DVPO – all relevant staff and officers were advised of new powers to protect victims using these measures from 30th June 2014. The DVPN has to be approved at superintendent level or above and the DVPO applied for through court.

29th September 2016

The incident

- 3.2.33 The Police received a call from a female, repeatedly whispering, 'I need to get out of here' and that she needed a flight before saying, 'I have to go'. She then hung up. The caller was described as sounding shaken and scared. The number of the call was linked to Samantha, and officers were despatched to her address. When officers arrived, less than an hour later, they noted that she had visible bruising to her breast, arms, and leg and was highly intoxicated.
- 3.2.34 The body worn video (BWV) of the officers attending, has been reviewed by the officer preparing the IMR. It was noted that Samantha continually said that it was not her boyfriend that had caused the injury, and she gave the name of another male, whom she said was responsible; however, she did not give any further details. The officers believed that Samantha was backtracking and contradicting herself, that domestic abuse was a possibility, and her current boyfriend was the prime suspect. Samantha did allow officers to record her injuries to her chest, arms, and leg on BWV. She gave confused statements to the Police. At one point she said that: 'I can deal with it' but then immediately said that her boyfriend was 'dangerous'.
- 3.2.35 The Police noticed that there was post addressed to Samantha's boyfriend in the kitchen.
- 3.2.36 The Police say that Samantha was highly intoxicated and emotional (this is backed up by the BWV), and this made it difficult for officers to manage her welfare and safety. After some negotiation, Samantha agreed to leave the property. Once she decided to go, she tried to leave immediately without putting on her shoes or packing some clothes. The officers offered to take her to the Police station or wherever she felt safe: she asked to be taken to the home of her sister.
- 3.2.37 When they arrived at her sister's home, Samantha's sister told officers that she had phoned her at work the day before and said that her boyfriend had broken her ribs. At this point, Samantha became very agitated and tried to silence her sister. Her sister was of the view that the abuse had been going on for a long time but had become worse since Samantha lost her job. She was convinced that her sister's boyfriend was responsible and did not mention any other suspects.
- 3.2.38 Samantha did not feel able to make a statement to support a potential prosecution case.
- 3.2.39 The Police left Samantha in the care of her sister and brother-in-law and returned to the Police station to complete enquiries in locating Samantha's boyfriend. Whilst they were doing this, they were advised that Samantha had left with her stepfather and his wife to go back to Samantha's home, mentioning that she was meant to be going on holiday [abroad] the next day.
- 3.2.40 The Police returned to the address and were waiting when Samantha arrived. They thoroughly checked the property for signs of her boyfriend having returned home. However, there were no signs, and his motorbike was not there. They left Samantha in her home, and her stepfather planned to sit in the car outside. Before the Police left, they moved the spare front door key to a different location – so it was less obvious to Samantha's boyfriend.

3.2.41 A crime report for a domestic related assault was raised and the risk assessment undertaken. This indicated that the grade was 'High' risk. The Risk Management Occurrence was updated, and the investigation and safety planning were passed to a specialist team of detectives within DAIU.

3.2.42 *The review notes that efforts were to be focused around progressing an evidence-led prosecution. This is an example of good practice.*

#### Arrest attempts

3.2.43 The first attempt to arrest Samantha's boyfriend was made at 0.28 am on 30th September, at the home address. There was no answer at the door, no lights were on, and both vehicles (registered to Samantha) were on the drive. A further attempt was made at lunchtime, and enquiries were made to ascertain if the couple were abroad. On 1st October, Samantha's sister rang TVP to say that Samantha's boyfriend was at his mother's home in Suffolk. Enquiries to locate him were not straightforward, but he was arrested by Suffolk Police at 11.44 pm on Sunday 2nd October, on suspicion of two counts of assault. In interview, he said that Samantha had been kicked by a horse.

3.2.44 A full investigation was undertaken by the DAIU, who completed a prosecution file based on evidence provided by Samantha's relatives. On 3rd October, the CPS confirmed that they were unable to prosecute due to insufficient evidence. They commented that the hearsay evidence was inadmissible and that the contradictory accounts, provided by Samantha, made her evidence unreliable.

3.2.45 *The review is satisfied that attempts to arrest Samantha's boyfriend were carried out expeditiously, and the case was thoroughly investigated.*

#### Safeguarding

3.2.46 In view of the lack of evidence to bring a prosecution, the investigating officers obtained the authority, from a Police superintendent, for a Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) to be issued against Samantha's boyfriend while he was still in Police custody. This was followed up by a Domestic Violence Protection Order hearing at Oxford Magistrates Court, where the order was granted. This order would last until 31st October and was officially delivered to Samantha's boyfriend at 3.25 pm on 5th October.

3.2.47 *The review notes the positive action taken by officers to safeguard Samantha.*

3.2.48 On 3rd October, an officer from the DAIU visited Samantha to explain the DVPN to her. Her boyfriend had left the area and said that he would respect the terms of the DVPN. Samantha was referred to an IDVA, with a request to provide 28-day support, and a referral was made to MARAC.

3.2.49 On 27th October, Samantha was discussed at the MARAC meeting. It was initially thought that Samantha and her boyfriend were on holiday in Spain, but by the time of the meeting, it had been established that they had not gone. The family have since told the review that Samantha did not leave the country after July 2016. The safeguarding plan that had been put into place was discussed and the IDVA service spoke of their efforts to engage with Samantha. As she had been offered support and indicated that she planned to resume the relationship, the IDVA case was closed.

3.2.50 On 1st November, Samantha signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

3.2.51 The review safeguarding methods were put into place in relation to Samantha:

- Referral made to IDVA,
- Safety planning discussed with Samantha by DAIU officers on a visit on 2nd October 2016,
- DVPO was issued to the perpetrator on 4th October 2016
- A SIG marker was placed on the address (to alert call takers when called to address),
- ADA High Risk Flag was added (to Niche system to alert anyone making desktop investigations of systems),
- A briefing slide was completed (to make local officers aware of concerns), and neighbourhood policing team were doing regular drive-bys to the address.

3.2.52 In relation to the latter, there were 21 recorded patrols of the address by local officers/PCSOs, where vehicles, etc. were noted – between 12th October 2016 and 11th November 2016.

3.2.53 On balance, the review is satisfied that immediate safeguarding was achieved, and the attending officers spent time carefully talking to Samantha to explain her options and trying to gain her confidence. Officers worked hard with Samantha's family to keep channels of communication open and informed as to the whereabouts of Samantha's boyfriend.

3.2.54 The Police initially thought that they had gone on holiday together, which would have put Samantha's boyfriend in breach of the DVPO – however, it was then established that they had not travelled abroad, so no breach had been made.

Roads Policing related incidents – October 2016 to February 2017

3.2.55 In October 2016 and February 2017, Samantha's vehicle was added to the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system's 'hot-list', which effectively monitors for sightings of this vehicle.

3.2.56 On 14th February 2014, there were two reports relating to concerns around drink driving in Samantha's car – the first at a garage in Thame (information was passed to Roads Policing units) and then within a matter of hours, a second report when she collided with a lorry in a layby in Haddenham, near Thame. The lorry driver in the incident reported that Samantha had tried to give him money not to report the incident, but he alerted Police. Unfortunately, by the time the matter was reported, the available resources were too far away to have made an area search meaningful. According to records, it was clearly a little difficult to understand the caller initially, but an interpreter was obtained in due course.

3.2.57 The review is satisfied that the Road Traffic Collision (RTC), involving a parked lorry, was reported by the lorry driver, and investigated in the normal way, resulting in a Notice of Intended Prosecution (NIP) being sent out to Samantha for the offence of careless driving. This was a straightforward 'damage only' collision in which the vehicle failed to stop. As Samantha died a couple of weeks afterwards, no court action was taken.

3.2.58 Whilst Samantha moved her belongings to the cottage on 14th February, or thereabouts, she did not stay there; rather she went to the local Travelodge following an incident resulting in damage to the windows at the cottage. On 20th February, she told an Officer that she hated living in the cottage and was hoping to move out.

3.2.59 On 16th February, Samantha reported some criminal damage to a wing mirror and windows at the cottage, stating that she felt that it was linked to a male she had met (around 13th February), who was interested in her. She said that there had been an incident when her boyfriend had attended and found the male at the property.

3.2.60 On 21st February, Samantha's brother phoned TVP and said that Samantha had argued with her boyfriend after he had found a male at the property. Damage had been caused to the windows and the electricity had been cut off. He said that both Samantha and her boyfriend were capable of the damage but did not know who had caused it.

#### Analysis

3.2.61 Uniformed officers were dispatched on an 'urgent' basis due to the risk of further escalation, as it was noted that Samantha had previously been considered high risk of domestic abuse from her boyfriend.

3.2.62 When officers arrived, there was no response, but the back door was insecure. House-to-house enquiries were completed but the criminal damage had not been witnessed and there were no forensic opportunities.

3.2.63 The landlord of the property reported the damage separately. The landlord said that, as a result of the damage, they were working with the agents to move Samantha on from the property. However, they had concerns that she was a victim of domestic abuse, and they were not keen to exacerbate matters.

3.2.64 [The review notes that it is encouraging that the landlord and letting agent were keen to potentially safeguard Samantha. The family disagrees that the letting agent was in any way supportive. The family had issues after Samantha's death, which they feel demonstrate the landlord and letting agent's attitude; however, these are not within the scope of this review.](#)

3.2.65 Samantha was initially dealt with as a potential victim of domestic abuse, and two crimes were recorded (criminal damage and harassment); however, she later advised officers that she had fabricated the story, and she had been having a relationship with her new boyfriend. The criminal damage was therefore investigated, and the harassment/stalking was ruled out. Consequently, the matter was not escalated to the DAIU. A uniformed patrol officer was tasked to complete a domestic abuse risk assessment form on 22nd February. However, there is no evidence of this being completed. In the absence of forensic evidence and due to conflicting accounts from Samantha, the matter was filed as 'no further action' by a Police sergeant.

This incident was not escalated to the DAIU, and the risk assessment was not completed. This appears to be a missed opportunity as Police will be aware that it is not uncommon for a victim to downplay incidents, and Samantha had previously been considered a high-risk victim of domestic abuse.

Samantha called to report stalking and criminal damage. Samantha told Police that she believed the man she had met a few days earlier was most likely responsible for the broken window because she suspected an 'altercation' had taken place between him and her 'husband'. However, there was no evidence to support this, and the Police acknowledged in the report that it could equally be her 'husband' who was responsible – neither were recorded as a suspect. The DOM5 risk assessment was requested, in relation to the man Samantha had met a few days earlier and Samantha, by the

crime scrutineer. However, the officer responded saying that they were not in a relationship, and the stalking element was negated (and cancelled) after Samantha gave additional details. Regardless, a DOM5 should have been completed based on the nature of Samantha's relationship with the man she had met a few days earlier, and she was insistent that he was responsible. The Force have identified, and are addressing, the issue of increasing professional curiosity.

It could be argued that the DOM5 should have been completed for the third party. However, the Police were faced with an outright denial of there being an intimate relationship, and it is challenging for the officers to approach a domestic risk assessment. That said, some questions will always be answerable just from information retrieved during attendance and initial investigation. It is correct to suggest that some officers may have considered one to be completed regarding her 'husband', but again, there was no suggestion that he was responsible.

In mid-2020, TVP introduced a new 'high risk' policy in relation to victims. In summary, a high-risk victim will continue to be treated as high risk (from the same perpetrator) for 12 months after initial designation, irrespective of the severity of subsequent incidents. The only means of regrading will be via MARAC. This is aimed at preventing yo-yoing between risk grading and maintaining a consistent approach in ownership by DAIU and associated safeguarding. It is likely that had this happened now, this new policy would have raised the incident to the attention of DAIU.

19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017

3.2.66 On 19th February, the Police received a call from a local supermarket as they were concerned about Samantha. She had been in the store and was acting erratically and appeared to have a panic attack. She had a cut and bruise to her head. She tried to buy four bottles of wine, which she was refused by staff. She refused help from the staff and left the store in her car. This is when the Police were called.

3.2.67 Officers were dispatched on an 'immediate' basis to locate Samantha due to her demeanour, injuries, recent claimed bereavement, and suspicion of drink driving by staff at Sainsburys. Officers were unable to locate Samantha at her last known address. They noted, from looking through the window, that someone appeared to be moving in or out, as boxes were seen. Attempts were made to locate Samantha, and this was done when she returned to her home at approximately 4 pm on 20th February. Further enquiries by officers indicated that Samantha had left the property after the criminal damage incident on 16th February and did not return until 20th February.

3.2.68 *The family wish to stress that it is, of course, possible that Samantha was not drunk during these incidents but was suffering from concussion, or head injury, caused by her boyfriend when he beat her up and 'slammed her head on the floor'.*

3.2.69 A PCSO attended and generated an Adult Protection Report. On this report, he commented that Samantha was intoxicated during the visit and was confused about the names of her boyfriend and another a male she was in a relationship with. The PCSO noted faint bruising to the top of her forehead, and he advised her to attend her GP. There was no electricity in the property, but Samantha did not show signs of being a danger to herself. The PCSO did not feel that Samantha would be able to give her consent to a referral to Adult Social Care, due to her intoxication at the time. He advised her against travelling back to the Travelodge as it was apparently close to where her boyfriend lived, and he did not want to encourage her to drive when intoxicated. The PCSO was left with the impression that she was going to stay with a friend for a few days.

3.2.70 During the conversation, Samantha initially told the PCSO that she had fallen but then reluctantly explained that she had obtained the bruising, to the whole of the top of her forehead, after her boyfriend proceeded to slam her head into the floor. She said that they had argued after her boyfriend had found her at home with a man that she had met in the pub.

3.2.71 In a statement provided after Samantha's death, the PCSO stated that Samantha initially told him that she had fallen, and then 'reluctantly explained' to him that she had obtained the bruising to the 'whole top of her forehead' after her boyfriend 'proceeded to slam her head into the floor.' She indicated to the PCSO that her boyfriend was known to Police, and the PCSO had been briefed on his name prior to attendance. She also mentioned that the argument had been over her boyfriend finding her at home with a male she had met at the pub.

3.2.72 Evidence from the inquest supports the view that the mechanism of injury that Samantha described to the PCSO (i.e., being held down by her boyfriend and her head being forced down to the floor) was not considered consistent with the location of the fatal injury.

3.2.73 **Although the review was informed that Samantha smelt of alcohol and appeared unsteady at the time of making the disclosure, and even though the PCSO referred to her being inconsistent in what she was saying, the apparently clear disclosure should have generated either a Crime Report in relation to a domestic related assault, or at the very least, a 'domestic abuse' flag on the Adult Protection Report. The Adult Protection Report did not contain any details of the alleged assault. This would have activated a further review of the circumstances, and in conjunction with the domestic history recorded between the two, a different decision may have been made by the Police risk assessors in the MASH – with regards to sharing the information with Adult Social Care.**

3.2.74 **The Review Panel considered whether the PCSO should have identified that Samantha may have needed medical attention, given that that she had suffered a head injury. The review is satisfied that, given the training that he had at that time, his response was appropriate. Since then, the review has learned that enhanced training is now provided – considering the greater understanding generally about head injuries – and the review is confident that an ambulance would now be called, or advice would be sought from the triage number. This is a number that only the Police can access in order that they can speak to a medical professional who assesses the need for an ambulance or provides medical advice to enable an informed resolution.**

3.2.75 **The review would have considered a recommendation in relation to Police action following head injuries had TVP not advised them of the increased training now provided.**

Given that the information that Samantha gave was a clear disclosure of domestic abuse by her boyfriend, this should have generated either a Crime Report in relation to a domestic related assault, or at the very least, a domestic abuse flag on the Adult Protection Report. The Adult Protection Report did not include any details of the alleged assault. This would have activated a further review of the circumstances, and in conjunction with the domestic history recorded between the two, a different decision may have been made by the Police risk assessors in the MASH – with regards to sharing information with Adult Social Care.

Additionally, if a crime report had been generated, an investigation would have been opened, and Samantha's boyfriend may have been arrested.

If this had been recorded and flagged as a domestic assault for an existing high-risk victim, it would have been highlighted to the relevant DAIU and MARAC co-ordinator as a repeat incident. This would have triggered a second hearing at MARAC.

This would have also highlighted that the risk had been transferred from Oxfordshire to Buckinghamshire; therefore, consideration could have been made to transferring ownership of Samantha's risk management to the Buckinghamshire DAIU. However, due to the timing of the MARAC in Buckinghamshire, the case would not have been heard before Samantha's death.

In the opinion of the review, these were missed opportunities.

- 3.2.76 The review notes that the PCSO acknowledges that, in retrospect, he did not feel empowered in his new role as a PCSO, to recognise the need to record the disclosure; he would be aware of this now. It is noted that he did deal with what he thought were the immediate safeguarding concerns, in that he provided Samantha with the light from a torch to ensure that she got into bed without tripping over the many packing cases, and he gave Samantha safety advice.
- 3.2.77 The review has been advised that new Crime Recording Operational Guidance is currently being published by TVP. This will reinforce to staff that they are required to record crime on the basis of what they are told has happened, not what they think may have happened. This means that there is little discretion in relation to the requirement to record crime.
- 3.2.78 A recommendation was considered around the aspect of crime recording. However, the review is assured by TVP of the action being taken above and thus no recommendation is made.
- 3.2.79 The family of Samantha hold a view that a PCSO should not have been deployed to this incident – they feel they are less qualified than a Police officer and should not be placed in such a position.
- 3.2.80 To provide clarity for the family and any reader of this review, the role, key accountabilities, and behaviours of a PCSO are set out by the College of Policing as such<sup>19</sup>.

#### Role Purpose

- 3.2.81 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) act as the key liaison between local communities and Policing. Publicly facing, they provide a visible, accessible and approachable uniformed presence in the community to offer reassurance, defuse situations with threats of conflict, improve confidence and trust, gather information and foster good community relations.
- 3.2.82 This role holds designated PCSO legal powers of enforcement in line with local Force requirements to support the successful resolution, prevention, and deterrent of local crime. PCSOs are also expected to respond to a wider range of non-criminal issues that contribute to vulnerability and safety within the community. They will be expected to act with discretion, making appropriate use of their designated powers and acting within Force guidelines.

<sup>19</sup> <https://profdev.college.police.uk/professional-profile/police-community-support-officer-pcso/>

### Key Accountabilities

- Maintain a highly visible community presence in accordance with local area needs to address issues of public concern, act as a deterrent to local crime and improve community confidence.
- Support ongoing Police operations undertaking community-based activities as directed to gather, handle, and submit information and intelligence, acting in line with legislation, policies, and guidance, to support law enforcement.
- Support Police Officers in initial front-line response to incidents enabling resolution to and/or preventing escalation of low-level offending in line with their designated powers and remit.
- Develop close working relationships with key community bodies/individuals as directed to gather and provide information, support the vulnerable, promote community cohesion, identify, and tackle low-level issues such as anti-social behaviour.
- Develop effective relationships with individuals, including the vulnerable and at risk, across the community, providing support and guidance to identify root causes, assess needs, prevent crime, respond to concerns, and build trust in policing.
- Assist front line responses to more complex incidents as a first at scene responder, acting to contain, assess needs and/or provide support to ensure immediate public safety.
- Maintain awareness of potential and actual risks to individuals, escalating potential threats to public safety in line with Force guidance to support the identification and resolution of issues.
- Support the identification and exploration of new ways of working and innovation in community policing, applying critical thinking and problem-solving methodologies to identify solutions to problems in line with evidence-based practice.
- Support the implementation of problem solving and evidence-based policing initiatives by championing and applying relevant methodologies and approaches to area of work.

### Behaviours

3.2.83 All roles are expected to know, understand, and act within the ethics and values of the Police Service.

3.2.84 The Competency and Values Framework (CVF) has six competencies that are clustered into three groups. Under each competency are three levels that show what behaviours will look like in practice. It is suggested that this role should be operating or working towards the following levels of the CVF:

- Resolute, compassionate, and committed
- Inclusive, enabling, and visionary leadership
- Intelligent, creative, and informed policing

3.2.85 Given the breadth of the role that PCSOs fulfil, this review does not feel that it was inappropriate to deploy a PCSO to this incident, as reported. Deployment is a balance of the needs of the incident compared to the resources available, and the central point as to whether Samantha was suffering from a head injury that required more than advice, was not something that was affected by whether the person who was attending was a PCSO or a Police officer. The issue is whether all staff who attend such incidents can recognise the debilitating effects of a head injury. We have discussed this in the preceding sections of this report.

3.2.86 Samantha's family disagree with this view.

21<sup>st</sup> February 2017

3.2.87 At 3.24 pm, Samantha's brother phoned TVP. He wanted the Police to undertake a welfare check as he was not in the local area, and he had been unable to contact her. He expressed concern for her welfare and mental health due to her long history of alcohol use<sup>20</sup> and domestic abuse. He was concerned about her mental health and asked the Police to consider the use of powers under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act<sup>21</sup>. Police systems were checked, and it was seen that a welfare check had already been undertaken on 20th February, when she was seen by a PCSO.

3.2.88 The Police tried to call her brother to update him, but the number was unobtainable. Her brother rang TVP again on 23rd February and was advised of the welfare check, although for data protection reasons, her exact location was not disclosed to him.

3.2.89 The review is satisfied that this course of action was appropriate, given the information available to the Police at the time.

The day Samantha's body was found

3.2.90 Samantha was found by her sister at the property, and a full major crime investigation was conducted.

3.2.91 The review is satisfied that the Police demonstrated tenacity in trying to engage with Samantha.

3.2.92 Efforts were made to keep lines of communication open with Samantha and her family: approaching her at different times.

3.2.93 The review has been told of ongoing work by TVP to constantly improve the service offered to victims of domestic abuse, including family members and children. This includes:

- New Domestic Abuse Operational Guidance was issued in June 2017. This made it clearer what was expected of each individual role in a domestic abuse investigation, revised intelligence checks to be completed, and simplified ways in which flags and risk levels are recorded.
- A simplified procedure to follow when processing DVDS applications, with training regularly updated.
- The enhanced use of case studies and scenarios as part of the training for PCSOs in domestic abuse and crime recording.

3.2.94 The review is aware that the issues raised by the IMR author about concerns with crime recording standards, are a matter that has previously been raised by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), and this will be monitored as part of the inspections.

3.2.95 The Police found no specific recommendations for their organisation. The organisation has advised the review that a rollout of DA Matters training<sup>22</sup> has begun across the Force, and this

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<sup>20</sup> Samantha's family deny the phrase about 'long history of alcohol abuse' was used. However, that is what the Police recorded at the time. We are unable to reconcile the difference.

<sup>21</sup> S.136 Mental Health Act 1983 – this legislation enables the Police to take those people they consider at risk to a place of safety for further mental health assessment by qualified professionals.

<sup>22</sup> <https://safelives.org.uk/training/police>

is compulsory for all frontline officers, including front office staff and custody staff. New recruits to the Force will receive:

- In Foundation Training, recruits receive a detailed mandatory input, in two parts, in relation to domestic abuse. Part 1 looks at domestic abuse as a subject and explores it in some detail. It also introduces the DOM5 and risk assessment.
- Part 2 looks at a domestic abuse investigation and allows the officers to work through an investigation using their knowledge from Part 1.
- Both sessions look at levels of risk, and officers are tasked with defining the level of risk in scenarios.
- DA Matters Training.
- Target audience is constable to inspector on shift and neighbourhood (not PCSOs); Contact Management; and DAIU teams.

3.2.96 Delivery began in January 2020, and 40 sessions ran around the Force until an enforced pause due to COVID-19. Around 80% of officers were trained, plus a section of the other groups. Custody was the exception, as they couldn't be abstracted to attend. Training resumed in June 2020, targeting Foundation students.

3.2.97 In January 2021, training resumed to a bigger, wider audience. PCSOs and CID were included. These ran through to December 2021. 152 sessions ran, and 85% of the target audience were trained.

3.2.98 DA Matters training was delivered by two people: one giving a Police perspective; the other one giving the perspective of someone who works with, or supports, victims. The second role was usually a caseworker or volunteer from partner agencies. Module learning outcomes – DA Matters:

- Define what is meant by the term 'domestic abuse.'
- Explain the role of the first responder and DA Matters Champion in the DA Matters change programme.
- Explain what is meant by the term 'coercive control' and how to discover evidence of coercive control using appropriate questions and communication techniques.
- Describe the effect of multiple controlling behaviours on victims, other vulnerable persons, and children impacted by the perpetrator's behaviour.
- Identify why victims can find it difficult to leave an abusive relationship and how hard perpetrators work to resist their victim leaving an abusive relationship.
- Identify the stages of change that a victim experiences when in, and preparing to leave, an abusive relationship and how these impact on them as responders.
- Describe what intervention responders can provide to a victim at each stage of an abusive relationship.
- Specify the link between coercive control and stalking and harassment.
- Explain best practice when recording and reporting the responses to domestic abuse incidents, including recognition of crime(s) that should be recorded, maximising evidential opportunities, and minimising victim blaming.
- Describe the tactics that perpetrators may use to manipulate first responders.
- Describe the importance of securing evidence at the scene of a domestic abuse incident.
- Identify the need and potential options to safeguard victims and children.

3.2.99 *This review again highlights that those victims with whom engagement is challenging, particularly with those with multiple issues such as substance misuse and mental illness, are amongst the most vulnerable. The Police did make efforts to gain evidence to prosecute*

Samantha's boyfriend; they also took efforts to safeguard her. They were hampered by Samantha's presentation and their resultant lack of understanding of her true vulnerability.

### 3.2.100 **Recommendation One**

**It is recommended that the findings from this review are shared with the relevant strategic leads of TVP's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy to help inform the Force's objectives of improving victims' trust and confidence in Police. This strategy will include working with partners and specialist organisations in raising awareness amongst officers and staff about why vulnerable victims may fail to engage.**

3.2.101 Samantha was an open case to the Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates (IDVA) – between 3rd October and 8th November 2016.

3.2.102 3rd October 2016:

- A MARAC/IDVA referral was received from the Police.
- DAIU emailed to inform the IDVA that they were applying for a DVPN, that Samantha was not co-operating with the Police, and that she had declined IDVA support.
- The IDVA sent a text to Samantha, introducing the support and asking her to call.
- A call was made to Samantha, but the line was busy.

3.2.103 4th October 2016 :

- The IDVA received a text from Samantha saying: 'I am fine doll, don't worry'.
- The IDVA telephoned the DAIU to advise that they had texted Samantha and she had declined support.
- The DAIU called the IDVA with details about the service of the DVPO and asked the IDVA to wait a week and then try to contact Samantha again.
- The IDVA asked the DAIU to let her know if they were going to visit Samantha, in the hope that they could go along as well.

3.2.104 11th October 2016:

- The IDVA rang the DAIU to see if they had heard from Samantha, but they had not.
- The IDVA rang Samantha and reintroduced herself and explained the nature of the services that could be offered.
- Samantha advised the IDVA that she was abiding by the terms of the DVPO, as she did not want her boyfriend to get into trouble, but that she would resume the relationship as soon as it expired. She reiterated that she neither needed nor wanted help.
- The IDVA was sure that Samantha understood the services that were on offer and asked her to keep the mobile number and to contact at any time. Samantha said that she did not want support but thanked the IDVA and said that she would keep the number.
- The IDVA advised DAIU of the contact.

3.2.105 2nd November 2016:

- MARAC was held and the IDVA updated the meeting about the contact that she had with Samantha.

3.2.106 7th November 2016:

- The IDVA received an email from DAIU to advise that the officer had been to see Samantha to serve the Memorandum of Understanding. Samantha had told the officer that she had been contacted by the IDVA, but she did not need their help.
- DAIU asked the IDVA to try again, by text, to offer support.
- The IDVA sent a text to Samantha saying: 'Hi 'Samantha just a reminder that I am [here for] support if you ever felt you needed it. Take care N'. No reply was received.

3.2.107 8th November 2016:

- The IDVA discussed the case with her manager, and it was agreed that Samantha had the number and knew the support that was available, so it should be left to her to make contact.

3.2.108 The review is satisfied that the IDVA made prompt contact with Samantha and tried on numerous occasions to engage with her, including looking to 'piggy-back' onto a visit from the Police – as it is known that sometimes a face-to-face meeting might yield better results than a telephone conversation or text. It is acknowledged that it is difficult for an IDVA to engage with a victim, like Samantha, who made it very clear that she did not wish to engage with the support. The review has been told that had there been other issues such as dependent children, housing, employment, or financial issues, the IDVA might have been able to find another way into engagement with Samantha, and the review has no reason to believe that these opportunities would not have been taken.

**3.2.109                   Recommendation Two**

**It is recommended that IDVA services work directly with the Police to help develop understanding of the issues outlined in the aforementioned recommendation.**

Buckinghamshire Council – Adult Social Care

3.2.110 Adult Social Care was not asked to provide an IMR to the review but provided an explanation about the two contacts that they had with Samantha.

22nd July 2014

3.2.111 A 'Section 2' of The Community Care (Delayed Discharges) Act 2003 was received from John Radcliffe Hospital. A Section 2 requires an NHS body to notify Adult Social Care of a patient's likely need for community care services after discharge.

3.2.112 On 22nd July, the hospital social worker contacted the urology ward of John Radcliffe Hospital (by telephone), to speak to Samantha, as it was reported that on admission, she had disclosed that her boyfriend had hit her. On the way to the telephone, Samantha was heard to say that she would deny everything. She denied any concerns but confirmed that she would contact her GP or Police if she needed to. The ward staff confirmed that Samantha had capacity to make her own choices and decisions.

7th June 2018

3.2.113 Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board received a referral for a Safeguarding Adult Review. This was considered on 17th July, and the panel's decision was that the criteria had not been met. Before the decision was taken, an approach was made to Oxford Safeguarding Adults Board to see if they had any information that could inform the decision.

3.2.114 The review is satisfied that Adult Social Care acted appropriately to the two referrals that they received. There are no specific recommendations for this organisation.

### **3.3 Evidence of domestic abuse**

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*The review is mindful that no charge has been brought against Samantha's boyfriend in relation to her untimely death. Nonetheless, it is appropriate that we consider the abuse that is evident in this relationship, with a view to learning lessons for the future. The relationship began at the beginning of 2014.*

#### Physical abuse

- 3.3.1 We know that very early in the relationship, Samantha told her family that her boyfriend had thrown or pushed her out of a moving car and made her walk home barefoot. Around the same time, Samantha said that he had also pulled out huge clumps of her hair, leaving her with visible bald patches. Samantha was forced to take time off work until a friend could make a hairpiece that gave her confidence to go out. This was observed by friends too.
- 3.3.2 In July 2014, Samantha's physical injuries were observed by agencies for the first time. When the Police were called, she had visible bruising on her left arm and under her left eye. She did not disclose any domestic abuse, but her sister told the Police that, in the past, her boyfriend had beaten her up. When she was examined in hospital, Samantha was found to have a four-week-old head injury, bruising over her left eye, and bruising all over her body.
- 3.3.3 Samantha told her sister that her boyfriend had headbutted her to the face, and Samantha thought that she had been unconscious because she woke up on the floor and her boyfriend was no longer there.
- 3.3.4 In January 2016, Samantha's friend called the Police as she had received a text from Samantha saying that her boyfriend had trashed the house and beaten her up. She had also received an email saying: 'phone Police'. During this call to the Police, the friend described several incidents in which Samantha's boyfriend had done damage to her before. She referred to him ripping her hair out, chucking her out of a car, leaving her stranded, and causing bruising and black eyes.
- 3.3.5 When the Police arrived on this occasion, Samantha said that her boyfriend had hit her with a metal chair and punched her in the head, giving her black eyes. She said that there had been violence on other occasions, including suffocating her with pillows and breaking her nose.
- 3.3.6 In September 2016, Samantha was seen, by the Police, to have bruising to her breasts, arms, and legs. Samantha's sister also told the Police that she had seen bruising to Samantha's back.
- 3.3.7 In her final days, Samantha was visited by a PCSO who was carrying out a welfare check, and she told him that her boyfriend had slammed her head on the floor, causing a bruise to her forehead.
- 3.3.8 On one occasion, Samantha allowed her sister to take photographs of the bruising on her arms and breasts and said: 'keep these in case he kills me next time'.

3.3.9 Within the space of a matter of days, Samantha experienced two attacks from her boyfriend where her head was smashed against something. The first being on 14th February and the second being on 18th February.

#### Emotional abuse and intimidation

3.3.10 Samantha would continually deny to agencies that her injuries had been caused by her boyfriend. It seems clear that she was intimidated by him and fearful of the repercussions if she did tell anyone. She would invent elaborate and inconsistent explanations for her injuries, which demonstrates the intimidation that she was experiencing. Samantha did disclose the abuse to her family and friends and was generally open with them, especially with her best friend. However, she remained deeply uncomfortable disclosing to any agencies for fear of the repercussions from her boyfriend, due to getting him into trouble.

3.3.11 On one of the occasions that Samantha's sister talked to the Police, she said that, on arriving at her sister's home, she had found Samantha cowering in the corner of the kitchen in fear. Samantha had thought that her sister was her boyfriend coming back to the house.

3.3.12 Samantha had told three different people that her boyfriend had told her that he had previously beaten someone to death and disposed of their body. Whether this was true or not, it had the effect of warning her about what he was capable of.

3.3.13 Samantha's sister told the review that the first time she met Samantha's boyfriend, he told her that he had obviously met the wrong sister.

3.3.14 Samantha's boyfriend had previous criminal convictions, and he made it very clear to Samantha that he would hold her fully responsible if he was convicted of any further crimes, especially if it led to him receiving a prison term. It was in this context that he told her that he had killed someone in the past. Whilst he does not have a conviction for murder or manslaughter, it was the effect of telling Samantha this that caused her fear.

#### Economic abuse

3.3.15 Having examined Samantha's financial records (obtained as part of the probate process) in detail after her death, her family have provided evidence to the review of economic abuse. When Samantha and her boyfriend were due to move into the cottage, he did not turn up to sign the tenancy agreement. This left Samantha to sign it alone, thus making her financially liable for the property.

3.3.16 During the three years from 1st January 2014 to her death in March 2017, Samantha paid all the household bills, including rent, council tax, telephone and broadband, electricity (from August 2016), mobile phones, home insurance, tax and insurance on two vehicles, TV licence, Sky and Amazon Prime subscriptions, as well as an average of £450 a month in supermarket shopping. Her boyfriend, on the other hand, paid the electricity bill.

3.3.17 During their relationship, Samantha and her boyfriend went on holiday, and it is evident that she paid for the holiday.

3.3.18 It could be said that all couples organise their finances differently and that this is not clear evidence of economic abuse, but Samantha's family have several texts from Samantha saying that her boyfriend was maxing out her credit cards and taking large amounts of money from

her. In October 2016, Samantha told her sister that her boyfriend had spent £3000 on her credit card and withdrawn £950 from her account within the last few days.

- 3.3.19 In October 2016, Samantha had no money to live on or to buy food. That month, she borrowed £300 from her best friend, and on one occasion, her stepfather went shopping with her and she did not have any money; consequently, he had to buy her groceries.
- 3.3.20 Early in the relationship, in April 2014, Samantha reported to the bank and the Police, fraudulent use of her debit card: for purchases that she had not made (£1004.70); and for online gambling transactions in March and April 2014 (£1022). It is not clear if Samantha suspected her boyfriend of being responsible for these transactions.

#### Coercion and control

- 3.3.21 Coercive behaviour is an act or pattern of acts of assaults, threats, humiliation and intimidation, or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. 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<sup>23</sup>. Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 created a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship.
- 3.3.22 When Samantha began her relationship with her boyfriend, she kept in touch with her former partner (who was loving and supportive). Her boyfriend would telephone her former partner to ask about Samantha and how to deal with her. Her former partner believed that this was to see if they were still seeing each other because he was jealous. After a time, Samantha's former partner told him not to call any more.
- 3.3.23 Samantha told family that her boyfriend was 'extremely jealous' of her male friends and other men that she spoke to. She, therefore, distanced herself from them because she was fearful that he would be violent towards them.
- 3.3.24 When Samantha's stepfather had confronted her boyfriend about the injuries to her, Samantha's boyfriend had sought to convince him that he had nothing to do with the injuries, and Samantha had ushered her stepfather outside, seeking to end the conversation.
- 3.3.25 Samantha liked living in her home in a village but was persuaded by her boyfriend to move to another village, which was not her choice. Samantha believed that she and her boyfriend were going to make a fresh start when they moved into the cottage of his choosing, just before her death.
- 3.3.26 Samantha's boyfriend sought to isolate her from her family when they tried to persuade her to end her relationship with him. At Christmas 2016, she did not turn up for Christmas dinner, which her family said was very unlike her. She sent a text to her sister saying: 'please let me deal with this, I'll see you another time'. On another occasion, she texted to her stepfather: 'please do not call again, I am done with all of you'.
- 3.3.27 When Samantha and her boyfriend began their relationship, Samantha was working in a job that she loved and had been doing for more than three years. She had been saving to buy her own home. Whilst Samantha loved her job, her boyfriend did not like her enjoying herself at

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<sup>23</sup> Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship, Home Office, December 2015

work and was jealous of her relationships with her colleagues. He did not trust her and did not like her going away on company events. Samantha told her family that he had insisted on accompanying her to her conference just before she left the company in April 2014.

- 3.3.28 Samantha would telephone her brother when she was driving and when he asked her about this, she said it was because her boyfriend was possessive. She justified this by saying it was because he loved her and was trying to protect her. Her sister also reported that when she phoned Samantha, she would often whisper: 'can't talk, [boyfriend's] here'.
- 3.3.29 Samantha's ex-partner said that she would say, when she spoke to him on the phone, that she had to go and get her chores done before her boyfriend came home. She said that he would complain about her not cooking and cleaning.
- 3.3.30 Samantha's family and friends report similar interactions with her boyfriend, and the pattern was the same. He would try to ingratiate himself to Samantha's contacts, in full view of her, and use personal information he had gleaned to start conversations about her to belittle her and undermine her confidence. He would act overly friendly and inappropriately with her friends and family. Her brother said that 'a casual observer might think that we had all been friends for years.' Samantha's boyfriend did this with everybody within Samantha's circle, including her family member's partners and Samantha's ex-work colleagues. Her family believe that his objective was to gain information to use against Samantha at a time of his choosing. Socially, Samantha's life was a minefield and a claustrophobic nightmare.

#### Pets

- 3.3.31 Samantha came from a family of animal lovers. Her pets had been her companions for over a decade. Samantha's family have told this review that her boyfriend did not want the pets in the new cottage. Consequently, on 1st February, she took her pets and had them destroyed. This was, her family have told the review, extremely traumatic for Samantha. She loved her pets dearly and agreeing to destroy them, filled her with guilt, sadness, and regret.
- 3.3.32 The use of pets in coercion and control, is well documented. Research undertaken by the Dogs Trust<sup>24</sup>, found that nine in ten households who experienced domestic abuse, said that animals were also abused by perpetrators. Here we see the callousness of Samantha's boyfriend. According to her family, he did not destroy her pets; instead, he forced her to do it.

#### Gaslighting

- 3.3.33 Gaslighting is a manipulative tactic in which a person, to gain power and control, plants a seed of uncertainty in the victim. The self-doubt and constant scepticism slowly and meticulously cause the individual to question their reality.
- 3.3.34 Samantha's family believe that her boyfriend repeatedly told her that the violence was her fault. If she did not drink alcohol, these things would not happen, and she would not have these injuries.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/latest/2021/dogs-trust-freedom-project>

## Section Four – Other Issues Considered

### 4.1 What barriers did Samantha face in accepting the help offered? Or in leaving the relationship?

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- 4.1.1 We cannot know for certain how Samantha felt about her relationship with her boyfriend and why she was unable to leave him, despite the abuse and violence that she experienced. However, the previous section sets out the abuse that she suffered at her boyfriend's hands, and of course all those pressures - fear, control and coercion in its various guises - and her own feelings towards him. These pressures once again demonstrate how difficult it is to extricate a victim from a relationship such as this. Samantha tried her best and despite the supportive efforts of her friends, family, and that of professionals, something drew her back to him each time. However, this review accepts that it may well have been because of fear of him on her part.
- 4.1.2 Samantha's family feel that she may not have wanted to end the relationship because she 'genuinely loved him and believed that she could eventually change him'. They say that they know that she had invested everything, in the belief that she could appeal to his good side, and he would reciprocate her love and generosity. She wholeheartedly believed in him (up until the point that her finances were exhausted, and he abandoned her, after forcing her to move out of their home following the DVPO). Samantha had dedicated her life and finances into the relationship and desperately clung on to the belief that her boyfriend had a good side.
- 4.1.3 Samantha's family and friends have all told the review that, during the time she was with her boyfriend, she lost all her confidence. It is highly likely that this contributed to her feeling unable to seek help for her situation.
- 4.1.4 The first time that Samantha's injuries were evident to agencies was in July 2014, when she was admitted to hospital with a serious illness. During her stay in hospital, she disclosed to staff that she was experiencing abuse from her boyfriend; however, when Adult Social Care telephoned to speak to her, she was heard to say that she would deny everything.
- 4.1.5 Samantha's family have told the review that the physical abuse was constant and although at times it appeared that she was not disclosing, when the family have subsequently discussed this, they have realised that she was continually disclosing the abuse she was enduring but to different members of the family at different times. It has been difficult for them to recall specific incidences due to her disclosures being so numerous that they blend together.
- 4.1.6 That said, Samantha's family have told the review that Samantha feared for her life when her boyfriend's liberty was threatened because of Police involvement. She feared that she would not be believed or that his word would be taken over hers.

### 4.2 Did perceptions of the effect of alcohol, or its use, affect decision-making?

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- 4.2.1 When considering the incidents leading up to Samantha's death, the review is aware that on a number of occasions, she was described as having been, or appearing to be, under the influence of alcohol. Therefore, it is appropriate for the review to consider the part that alcohol may have played in this relationship. This is not done in order to portray the victim as

an 'alcoholic' or someone whose behaviour was negatively affected by her own use of alcohol; it is done for three reasons:

- To demonstrate the effect that alcohol can have on relationships.
- If organisations, or those involved in supporting Samantha, have recorded her as having been 'under the influence of alcohol', were those reports accurate, or were other factors, such as head injuries, not recognised – and if so, what learning can better protect others in future?
- Did anyone recognise the use of alcohol as a potential coping mechanism to enable the victim to deal with the abuse that she was suffering, or did organisations look only at the symptom and not the cause?

4.2.2 The review is grateful to her family and friends, in sharing information that has helped us to understand Samantha's life in the time outside the scope of this review.

4.2.3 Samantha ran her business. She had a responsible position, providing services to large corporations including the Ministry of Defence. She felt great responsibility for her employees.

4.2.4 Samantha's family have told the review that, after her mother died in 2005, Samantha's alcohol intake increased during that summer. Samantha would sometimes go to have lunch in a pub garden with her then partner and her family, more to connect with people than to drink. She needed to heal with family and friends. Around this time, Samantha began arriving at work late from lunch and sometimes not at all, but her family believe that this was not due to her drinking excessively but because she seemed to lose her desire, interest, and inspiration. 'Generally, she seemed to care less'. Work was taken care of by her employees and Samantha stepped away.

4.2.5 After her business collapsed in 2009, she parted company with her then partner. She lost her house and lived in a caravan with her dogs. Her family describe this as an all-time low point for Samantha. She lost nearly all her friends, her job, her lifestyle, her car, her boat and her house. Although family did not see her often during this time, they did speak on the phone. Her family say that Samantha was embarrassed by her poverty and the fall of her business and feel this was the reason why she did not meet socially with her family for a few years. It was then several years before they met up socially as a family.

4.2.6 When Samantha began her relationship with her former, long-term partner in 2010, she was keen for her family to meet him. The first time the family met him was in a restaurant. The family say that this followed the old pattern – she would have a couple of glasses of wine, behave in an inappropriate way, become maudlin, and then need to go to bed. She did not drink excessively, and her alcohol intake was very low before this pattern would follow. Going out with Samantha could be a difficult experience, not because she would fall over drunk, but because she embarrassed everybody after just a couple of glasses of wine. This is what her family mean when they talk about her drinking.

4.2.7 Samantha's brother recalls that between 2010 and 2012 Samantha and her partner visited him on a couple of occasions, and these were brilliant visits. They went out for lunches and dinners. He says that the visits were perfect because Samantha was happy and had completely turned her life around from the lows after losing her business. Samantha's brother was immensely impressed with her fortitude in bouncing back. It was a true testament to her strong character and impressive resilience. She now had her dream job as a marketing manager for Thomson Directories and a brand-new company BMW. She was happy in every aspect of her life. It was attractive and infectious, and her brother wanted to be part of it. Her

brother then reconnected with her on social media and was pleased and impressed to see that she had turned her life around from the lows of a couple of years previously.

- 4.2.8 Family and friends have told the review that Samantha had long periods of time when she was not drinking. Her family report that, throughout her life she had never accessed treatment for her alcohol use because she felt, and they agree, that there was never any need to.
- 4.2.9 A previous partner describes how Samantha replaced alcohol with exercise and would exercise for hours to get rid of her stress. The review agrees with her family's view that fitness can correlate with vibrancy, energy, focus, and wellbeing. Strenuous exercise promotes self-esteem and confidence. At this time, Samantha had emerged from a low point in her life and was in a new period in her life: full of promise and possibilities. She was in a good relationship, had landed her 'dream' job and was fit, focused, and full of confidence.
- 4.2.10 Towards the end of Samantha's life, her family knew that she was drinking alcohol again to cope with the abuse. We are unable to quantify volumes. Samantha's family insist that she was NOT consistently or habitually drinking alcohol during that period. She was taking prescribed medication to help her stop drinking and was also away from the source of her anxieties (her boyfriend), thanks to the DVPO. She was also very worried about money. Her family also noted a dramatic uplift in her health and vitality – enabling her to get her life back on track – whilst her boyfriend was out of the picture (texts/phone evidence). Retrospectively, her family wish there was a mechanism in place that would enable them to petition the courts to extend the DVPO. A few more weeks could have made a life changing difference.
- 4.2.11 We know that Samantha struggled greatly with the abusive relationship and, as when her mother died, used alcohol to cope. When you look at the events in Samantha's life, her drinking increased when she lost her mother and when she was in the abusive relationship. People will use substances to cope with difficult times in their life, this does not mean this becomes their lifestyle.
- 4.2.12 The post-mortem undertaken after Samantha's death, indicated the presence of liver disease consistent with chronic abuse of alcohol. There was some evidence of structural brain disease associated with alcohol abuse. Liver disease may be associated with abnormalities of blood clotting. Therefore, there is an increased risk of the development of significant intracranial bleeding, following relatively minor trauma. The levels of alcohol and other substances were low at the time of her death. No cirrhosis of the liver was identified.
- 4.2.13 The review has been told that Samantha's boyfriend was a man who drank alcohol to excess. Research finds that between 25% and 50% of those who perpetrate domestic abuse, have been drinking at the time of the assault<sup>25</sup>, and cases involving severe violence, are twice as likely to include alcohol<sup>26</sup>. It has also been found that in an intimate relationship where one partner has a problem with alcohol or other drugs, domestic abuse is more likely to occur<sup>27</sup>. However, the impact of alcohol on domestic abuse is complicated.

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<sup>25</sup> Bennett L and Bland P, Substance Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence, National online recourse centre on violence against women, cited in Alcohol, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault, 2014, Institute of Alcohol Studies

<sup>26</sup> McKinney C et al., (2008), Alcohol Availability and Intimate Partner Violence Among US Couples, cited in Alcohol, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault, 2014, Institute of Alcohol Studies

<sup>27</sup> Galvani S, (May 2010), Supporting families affected by substance misuse and domestic violence, The Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care, University of Bedfordshire, ADFAM, p5 cited in Alcohol, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault, 2014, Institute of Alcohol Studies

4.2.14 It is important that we remember that domestic abuse is about power and control by one partner over the other. Not all alcoholics are abusive and not everyone who abuses their partner is an alcoholic. Whilst we can say that alcohol is a compounding factor in a person being abusive towards their partner, we must avoid suggesting that it causes it. Alcohol is not the cause of the abuse or the violence: the desire for power and control is.

4.2.15 In this case, whilst Samantha's boyfriend may have been violent towards her when he was under the influence of drugs or alcohol, the power that he exerted over her undoubtedly extended beyond just the times when he was drunk.

### **4.3 What support is available to family and friends of those experiencing domestic abuse?**

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4.3.1 It has been clear from this review that Samantha's family and friends were concerned about her relationship with her boyfriend and tried to support her in reporting incidents to the Police. When Samantha was unable to proceed with reports to the Police or disclose to health colleagues what was happening, they did not know what more they could do.

4.3.2 The review is certain that Samantha's family are not alone in this. A search of local and national agencies has found that:

- Women's Aid (national) has a page on its website: 'I'm worried about someone else'.
- The national Women's Aid website has a search facility for local services and provides a link to Aylesbury Women's Aid and Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services.
- Aylesbury Women's Aid has a page on its website explaining how victims and their families can self-refer to services.
- Reducing The Risk website offers local phone numbers to call.
- SAASSBMK (Sexual Assault and Abuse Service Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes) has page for friends and family on their website.

4.3.3 In addition, the following is a summary of awareness training currently in progress within the area, co-ordinated by the Community Safety team at Buckinghamshire Council:

- Several domestic abuse campaigns run throughout the year, aimed at the public.
- Support for the White Ribbon campaign and the 16 days of action each November, including council-hosted events, social media posts, radio adverts and posters in public places.
- Valentine's Day campaigns and a Red Flag campaign is aimed at friends, family and work colleagues, to help them spot the red flags in relationships.
- The Council's Domestic Abuse team also runs the Buckinghamshire Domestic Abuse Champions network (since 2015), which has over 450 multiagency frontline professionals as members. Members come from various agencies, including Police, health, social care, schools, Probation, fire service, and Dogs Trust, to name a few. Champions attend a 2-day training course that covers the local picture in Buckinghamshire, regarding support agencies and programmes, why victims stay and how to support them, the different types of perpetrators, the different types of abuse, the child's experience, how to assess the level of risk with the DASH (Domestic Abuse Stalking Harassment) risk assessment, and much more. They have also run four DHR Learning events for professionals in the past 2 years, covering male victims, suicide, victims from ethnic minority groups and the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community and domestic abuse. Attendance at each event runs at about 200.

4.3.4 The Review notes the positive work being carried out to support awareness, victims, and professionals.

#### **4.3.5 Recommendation Three**

**It is recommended that Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership continues to raise awareness of the services available and considers a campaign aimed at families and friends.**

### **Section Five – Lessons Identified**

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- 5.1 There remains a need for officers to continue to enhance their understanding about why victims of domestic abuse may find it difficult to co-operate, and to continue to develop strategies and tactics to encourage engagement.
- 5.2 There continues to be a need to ensure that local residents, particularly families and friends, understand domestic abuse and where they can seek help.
- 5.3 Given what is now known about the cause of Samantha's death, it is possible that the symptoms that she displayed to the Police and others, which were taken as her having been drinking, may of course have resulted from a head injury (in addition to her having consumed alcohol). Society's understanding of the effects of head injuries has changed significantly since the time of Samantha's death.

### **Section Six – Recommendations**

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- 6.1 It is recommended that the findings from this review are shared with the relevant strategic leads of TVP's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, to help inform the Force's objectives of improving victims' trust and confidence in Police. This strategy will include working with partners and specialist organisations in raising awareness amongst officers and staff about why vulnerable victims may fail to engage.
- 6.2 It is recommended that IDVA services work directly with the Police in helping to develop understanding of the issues outlined in the aforementioned recommendation.
- 6.3 It is recommended that Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership continues to raise awareness of the services available and considers a campaign aimed at families and friends.
- 6.4 The family has made the following recommendation:

#### **6.5 Recommendation four**

**A national Domestic Abuse Perpetrator's Register is developed.**

### **Section Seven – Conclusions**

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- 7.1 This has been a desperately sad case to review. We are hugely grateful to the family of Samantha, who have provided all the information they have, to allow us to understand this case and learn from it. We are also grateful to the friends of Samantha, who have equally assisted this review.

- 7.2 Samantha was a vulnerable woman, and there is compelling evidence to suggest that she was subject to violent domestic abuse, as well as emotional abuse, during her final significant relationship.
- 7.3 Those undertaking this review, are left with a sense of too many unanswered questions. Despite the Police investigation and live evidence given to the inquest, how Samantha came by the head injury that subsequently led to her death, remains unknown. It is not for this review to speculate on that cause.
- 7.4 What this review has demonstrated once again, is that despite the efforts made by those charged with the responsibility of safeguarding, we still find it difficult to quantify the actual risk that is posed to those victims who, for a variety of reasons, feel unable to engage with Police and others, when they are subject to abusive behaviour. We encourage all those involved in safeguarding the vulnerable, to work together to better understand vulnerability and develop strategies and tactics to encourage engagement.

## Appendix One – Terms of Reference

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### **Terms of Reference for the Domestic Homicide Review into the death of Samantha**

#### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) is commissioned by the Aylesbury Vale Community Safety Partnership<sup>28</sup> in response to the death of Samantha, which occurred in March 2017.
- 1.2 The review is commissioned in accordance with Section 9, The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.
- 1.3 The Chair of the partnership has appointed Gary Goose MBE and Christine Graham to undertake the role of Independent Chair and Overview Author, respectively, for the purposes of this review. Neither Christine Graham nor Gary Goose is employed by, nor otherwise directly associated with, any of the statutory or voluntary agencies involved in the review.

#### **2 Purpose of the Review**

- 2.1 The purpose of the review is to:
- 2.2 Establish the facts that led to the incident in March 2017, and whether there are any lessons to be learned from the case about the way in which local professionals and agencies worked together to safeguard Samantha.
- 2.3 Identify what those lessons are, how they will be acted upon, and what is expected to change as a result.
- 2.4 Apply these lessons to service responses, including changes to inform national and local policies and procedures, as appropriate.
- 2.5 Consider the sufficiency of local services and ease of accessibility.
- 2.6 Additionally, establish whether agencies have appropriate policies and procedures to respond to domestic abuse, and to recommend any changes as a result of the review process.
- 2.7 Contribute to a better understanding of the nature of domestic violence and abuse.

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<sup>28</sup> Now Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership

### **3 The Review Process**

- 3.1 The review will follow the statutory guidance for Domestic Homicide Reviews, under the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 (revised 2016).
- 3.2 This review will be cognisant of, and consult with, the process of inquest held by HM Coroner.
- 3.3 The review will liaise with other parallel processes that are ongoing or imminent, in relation to this incident, in order that there is appropriate sharing of learning.
- 3.4 Domestic Homicide Reviews are not inquiries into how the victim died or who is culpable: that is a matter for coroners and criminal courts.

### **4 Scope of the Review**

- 4.1 The review will:
- 4.2 Draw up a chronology of the involvement of all agencies involved in the life Samantha, to determine where further information is necessary. Where this is the case, Individual Management Reviews will be required by relevant agencies, defined in Section 9 of the Act.
- 4.3 Produce IMRs for a time period commencing November 2013.
- 4.4 Invite responses from any other relevant agencies, groups, or individuals identified through the process of the review.
- 4.5 Seek the involvement of family, employers, neighbours, and friends to provide a robust analysis of the events.
- 4.6 Produce a report that summarises the chronology of the events, including the actions of involved agencies, analyses and comments on the actions taken, and makes any required recommendations regarding safeguarding of families and children where domestic abuse is a feature.
- 4.7 Aim to produce the report within the timescales suggested by the statutory guidance, subject to:
  - guidance from the Police as to any sub-judice issues,
  - sensitivity in relation to the concerns of the family, particularly in relation to parallel enquiries, the inquest process, and any other emerging issues.

### **5 Family Involvement**

- 5.1 The review will seek to involve the family in the review process, taking account of who the family may wish to have involved as lead members, and to identify other people they think relevant to the review process.
- 5.2 We will seek to agree a communication strategy that keeps the families informed, if they so wish, throughout the process. We will be sensitive to their wishes, their need for support, and any existing arrangements that are in place to do this.

5.3 We will work with the Police and coroner to ensure that the family are able to respond effectively to the various parallel enquiries and reviews, thereby avoiding duplication of effort and minimising their levels of anxiety and stress.

6 Legal Advice and Costs

6.1 Each statutory agency will be expected and reminded to inform their legal departments that the review is taking place. The costs of their legal advice and involvement of their legal teams are at their discretion.

6.2 Should the Independent Chair, Chair of the CSP, or the Review Panel require legal advice, then Aylesbury Vale Community Safety Partnership will be the first point of contact.

7 Media and Communication

7.1 The management of all media and communication matters will be through the Review Panel.

Gary Goose and Christine Graham  
Independent Chair and Overview Author

## Appendix Two – Questions Raised during the review

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1 The below questions were raised throughout the review. These have been answered through the body of report but are brought together here to ensure that they were all addressed.

**1.1 What support was available for Samantha?**

1.1.1 Domestic abuse support services are available across the area in which Samantha lived. These include advice from their websites, helplines, one-to-one support, refuge, etc.

1.1.2 Samantha was offered the support of the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service. This would have provided one-to-one support that helped her to understand her situation and the options that were available to her.

1.1.3 Had Samantha disclosed abuse to her GP, or other health professionals, she would have been told about domestic abuse services that were available in the area.

**1.2 Is there enough support available in the area?**

1.2.1 All services recognised the pressure they faced due to the reduction in financial support and personnel. Agencies involved in this review would always welcome more funding to allow them to provide more support, but there are a range of services in the area.

**1.3 What did agencies do to try and support Samantha?**

1.3.1 The review has found that agencies tried to support Samantha and signpost her to specialist services.

1.3.2 On the first occasion that Samantha had contact with the Police (July 2014), her visible bruises were photographed in case she decided to pursue a complaint against her boyfriend.

1.3.3 In July 2014, Samantha was admitted to hospital with a urine infection. During her stay, she disclosed to staff that she was experiencing domestic abuse. A referral was made by the hospital staff to Adult Social Care, and the hospital social worker phoned her. She was heard to say, as she came to the phone, that she would deny everything. She denied any concerns but confirmed that she would contact her GP or the Police if she needed to

1.3.4 The police were called, by a friend, in January 2016. Despite Samantha saying that she did not wish to provide further details of the domestic incident, her boyfriend was arrested on suspicion of assault, criminal damage, and cannabis possession. A DASH risk assessment was undertaken and assessed as 'medium' risk.

1.3.5 The Police decided to disclose to Samantha, her boyfriend's history, but she said that she did not wish to hear this as she already knew and would not sign the disclosure agreement.

1.3.6 Samantha was offered support by the IDVA service. Repeated attempts were made to contact her.

1.3.7 Neighbourhood Police were tasked to keep an eye on her and her property, following this incident in January 2016.

1.3.8 When the Police were called in September 2016, they recorded her injuries on body worn video. She was taken to her sister's house, and it was recorded that her boyfriend was not to be told of her location.

1.3.9 Her boyfriend was arrested as soon as possible. When the Crown Prosecution Service decided that no further action was possible, a Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) was issued. This was followed with a successful application to the Magistrates' Court for a Domestic Violence Protection Order, which prevented Samantha's boyfriend contacting her for 28 days.

1.3.10 Samantha's case was discussed at MARAC, and a further referral was made to the IDVA service. Although she did not wish to access the service, she agreed to keep the IDVA's phone number.

1.3.11 When Samantha called the Police in February 2017, they found the house insecure, and they checked the premises.

1.3.12 On 20th February, a welfare check was undertaken following the incident at Sainsburys. The MASH was notified, and it was agreed that the neighbourhood team would keep an eye on her.

**1.4 How was Samantha advised about the DVPO? What information was she given? Was she told about support services that were available?**

1.4.1 An officer from the Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit (DAIU) visited Samantha at home on 3rd October 2016 at 01.21 am, to explain the Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) to her: this had been issued earlier that day. Samantha had a friend with her, and she was happy for him to stay whilst she spoke to the officer. Officers explained the DVPN to her and gave her documents to read, which she did whilst the officer was there. She told the officer that she was not happy with the terms of the DVPN and that she wanted her boyfriend to come home. It was explained to her that he would be arrested if he were to contact her. Samantha told the officer that she understood and said that she would not make contact with him during the stated period; however, she said that after the DVPN/DVPO expired, she would let him come back to live with her. Samantha signed the officer's notebook to say that the conditions and consequences had been explained to her.

1.4.2 The DVPO was issued at Oxford Magistrates Court on 4th October: expiring on 31st October 2016. Samantha was seen leaving the court by officers. They spoke to her and gave her an update. Again, a pocket notebook entry was signed.

1.4.3 This DVPN/DVPO related to the incident on 29th September. Following this incident, a briefing slide was put onto the IT systems so that local officers were alerted to the situation and the fact that the DVPO was in place.

1.4.4 A flag was put on the address so that officers knew there was a threat of high-risk domestic abuse.

1.4.5 On 30th September, leaflets with information were given to Samantha's sister. Samantha was referred to an IDVA with a request to provide 28 days support, and a referral was made to MARAC for the case to be discussed on 27th October. Unfortunately, Samantha did not engage with the IDVA.

1.4.6 On 1st November 2016, Samantha signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which described concern for serious harm, including even death.

1.4.7 The DVPO was issued in Oxfordshire Magistrates Court, but the information would have been visible to all officers in the Thames Valley Police – as it was attached to the relevant domestic abuse record.

**1.5 Did Samantha's boyfriend breach the DVPO? If he did, what action was taken?**

1.5.1 The Police suspected that Samantha's boyfriend had breached the DVPO as it was thought that, at some point in October, they were on holiday in Spain.

1.5.2 Enquiries were conducted with Borders Police to alert them if the couple travelled back into the UK, and an alert was placed on the Police National Computer to locate and arrest him.

1.5.3 Regular attempts were made to locate Samantha and her boyfriend, both in person with address checks, and over the phone. The Police kept in touch with family members in a joint effort to locate them.

1.5.4 The DVPO expired on 30th October 2016.

1.5.5 Although there is no record of any action being taken in relation to this potential breach, it is important to note that a DVPO cannot be prosecuted retrospectively. Even if an arrest had been achieved before the expiry date, it is unlikely that it would have been pursued, as Samantha had clearly stated that she wished to be with him.

1.5.6 When Samantha refused the Clare's Law disclosure, was consideration given to making this disclosure to her family?

1.5.7 Information shared under 'Clare's Law' is shared with the person 'best placed' to own the information and act on it. This, in effect, means the best person to keep the person (potentially at risk) safe.

1.5.8 It is important to note that there was not a significant domestic abuse history in relation to Samantha's boyfriend, and she had said that she was already aware. Samantha told the Police that, if she was given the information, she would not keep it confidential and would not sign a confidentiality agreement.

1.5.9 If Samantha had lacked capacity, had lived with a family member, or the family member had applied for the Clare's Law disclosure, these might have been factors that could have led to a different decision. Although, any such disclosure may have contained more limited details than would have been shared with the victim.

### **Appendix Three – Ongoing Professional Development of Chair and Report Author**

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Christine has attended:

- AAFDA Information and Networking Event (November 2019)
- Webinar by Dr Jane Monckton-Smith on the Homicide Timeline (June 2020)
- Ensuring the Family Remains Integral to Your Reviews - Review Consulting (June 2020)
- Domestic Abuse: Mental health, Trauma and Selfcare, Standing Together (July 2020)
- Hidden Homicides, Dr Jane Monckton-Smith, AAFDA (November 2020)
- Suicide and domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire DHR Learning Event (December 2020)
- Attended Hearing Hidden Voices: Older victims of domestic abuse, University of Edinburgh (February 2021)
- Domestic Abuse Related Suicide and Best Practice in Suicide DHRs, AAFDA (April 2021)
- Post-separation Abuse, Lundy Bancroft, SUTDA (April 2021)
- Ensuring family and friends are integral to DHRs, AAFDA (May 2021)
- Learning the Lessons: Non-Homicide Domestic Abuse Related Deaths, Standing Together (June 2021)
- Suspicious Deaths and Stalking, Professor Jane Monckton-Smith, Alice Ruggles Trust Lecture (April 2021)
- Reviewing domestic abuse related suicides and unexplained deaths, AAFDA (May 2021)
- Young people and stalking: Reflections and Focus, Dr Rachel Wheatley, Alice Ruggles Trust Lecture (May 2021)
- Giving children a voice in DHRs – AAFDA (November 2021)
- Cross Cultural Training Webinar – Incels and Online Hate – HOPE Training (November 2021)
- Male victims of domestic abuse, Buckinghamshire DHR Learning Event (January 2022)
- Older victims of domestic abuse, Dr Hannah Bows, DHR Network (February 2022)
- Enhancing the cancer workforce response to domestic abuse – Standing Together and Macmillan (April 2022).

Christine has completed the Homicide Timeline Online Training (Five Modules), led by Professor Jane Monckton-Smith of University of Gloucester.

Gary and Christine have:

- Attended training on the statutory guidance update (May 2016)
- Undertaken Home Office approved training (April/May 2017)
- Attended Conference on Coercion and Control (Bristol, June 2018)
- Attended AAFDA Learning Event (Bradford, September 2018)
- Attended AAFDA Annual Conference (March 2017, 2018 and 2019)
- Attended Mental Health and Domestic Homicides: A Qualitative Analysis, Standing Together (May 2021)
- Attended AAFDA DHR Chair Refresher Training (August 2021)
- Commissioned bespoke training on DHRs and Suicide, Harmless (March 2022)
- Attended Strangulation and Suffocation: Introduction to the new offence for England and Wales, Training Institute of Strangulation Prevention (July 2022).