

**17 August 2022
MEDIA RELEASE**

**Inquest concludes that serious state failings contributed to unlawful killing of eight week old
Harper Denton**

**Before HM Senior Coroner Emma Whitting
Bedford and Luton Coroner's Court
12-14 & 19-20 & 28 July 2022**

Harper Denton aged only 8 weeks *“was unlawfully killed by her father who had been previously convicted of violent offences against a two year old; failures by state agencies sufficiently to manage the continued high level of risk of his further offending contributed to her death”*.

So concluded the Bedford & Luton Coroner following an inquest into Harper's death on 12 June 2018 from catastrophic injuries inflicted on her by her father, Kevin Eves who was convicted of her murder and sentenced to life imprisonment on 6 November 2019. The Coroner also indicated that she would be exercising her power to make a report to prevent future deaths.

Unknown to Harper's mother, Kevin Eves – then known as Kevin Forbes - had been convicted over a decade earlier, on 12 October 2006, of child cruelty and GBH upon a 2 year old which had resulted in a life threatening skull fracture and brain injury. Having been sentenced to 9 years imprisonment, he was released on licence on 15 July 2010, but at the time he entered into a relationship with Cherinea Denton in 2015 he was not under any supervision by any state agency. Harper was born in April 2018.

Upon his release from prison on licence, Kevin Eves was subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and it was recognised that there would be serious safeguarding concerns if he entered into a relationship with anyone with young children. MAPPA requires criminal justice agencies and other bodies to work together in order to protect the public, including victims, from serious harm.

Prior to the end of his licence in January 2015, Kevin Eves came to the attention of the Metropolitan Police Service at least three times in response to serious allegations of domestic abuse against his then girlfriend. A MARAC (a multi-agency conference designed to protect high risk victims of domestic abuse) took place in January 2015 and Metropolitan Police officers were informed of allegations of the highest severity. However, both of the police officers who were present at the MARAC did not complete a crime report nor did they contact the victim to establish whether she wished to speak to the police: a failure for which they were subject to misconduct procedures as a 'matter of poor performance' following information ascertained through the inquest.

On 15 January 2015, at the conclusion of his licence, his supervision by Probation was terminated and he was no longer subject to any form of monitoring by any state agency, despite knowledge of the new allegations and a recognition that the risk he posed to the public was high.

By September 2015 Kevin Eves had met Cherinea Denton and by February 2016 he was living with her and her young child. On 30 November 2017 Bedfordshire Police officers attended Cherinea's home to deal with Eves for driving without a valid licence, and they became aware that Cherinea Denton was pregnant while at least one of them was informed about his conviction of assault upon a 2 year old. Nevertheless, no safeguarding referral was made.

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Following Harper's birth in April 2018, healthcare professionals who saw Cherinea and Harper remained unaware of Kevin Eves' previous conviction. They told the inquest that, had they been made aware of this information, they would have triggered a safeguarding referral and an immediate strategy meeting would have been convened with police, social services and healthcare services. The GP who saw Harper days before her death gave evidence that she did not see any injuries to Harper and that she appeared to be happy and alert. It was accepted that there was no way that Cherinea could have known about the injuries to Harper until after she was murdered.

On 12 June 2018 Kevin Eves murdered Harper.

In her detailed and critical conclusion, the Coroner found that:

- The Metropolitan Police Service
 - failed to investigate the allegations made against Kevin Eves in December 2014, and therefore failed to consider whether a further criminal prosecution was possible;
 - failed to identify Kevin Eves as a "Potentially Dangerous Person" in accordance with the ACPO Guidance on Violent Offenders, which would have ensured that he was appropriately flagged on all police systems or made the subject of a risk management plan, leading to a safeguarding referral and an alert about his risk being placed on his GP record, such that the risks to both Cherinea Denton and Harper would have been significantly clearer to Bedfordshire Police when they came into contact with Kevin Eves on 30 November 2017;
 - failed to consider applying for a Violent Offender Order (VOO) against Kevin Eves which would have ensured that he remained subject to notification requirements to safeguard future victims, lasting until at least January 2017, so the fact that Kevin Eves was living with a child would have been flagged to the local authority.
- The Probation Service failed to properly share information which would have greatly assisted the police in recognising the importance of taking action at that stage.
- Bedfordshire Police failed to consider wider public protection opportunities on encountering Kevin Eves in November 2017, having been made aware of his previous conviction for child cruelty and that he was living with Cherinea Denton who was pregnant at the time.

Cherinea Denton, Harper's mother said: *"I would like to thank HM Coroner Emma Whitting and her team for their kindness and support during this horrific journey over the last four years. The findings of this inquest are devastating but they are the first public acknowledgement that my family were failed and let down by a system and individuals that were supposed to protect us from a dangerous child abuser."*

The Metropolitan Police, the Probation Service and Bedfordshire Police all failed and as a result of their failings my daughter was murdered and my son lost his sister. My beautiful daughter did not have to be murdered and her murder could have been prevented several times. My whole family have lost the opportunity to watch Harper grow. I had a right to be informed of the previous conviction and the danger that was posed to my family but I was denied that right. I call upon the Home Office to establish a register for perpetrators of child cruelty and abuse to protect children in the future. My Harper's legacy will be one of strength, truth and justice. Harper will have a voice and it will be mighty."

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Sophie Naftalin of Bhatt Murphy who represents Cherinea said: *“The inquest has heard evidence of the very serious and continuing danger that Kevin Eves posed to children but at the end of his licence he was under no supervision by the state whatsoever.*

Although there were systems available to protect the public in these circumstances, we have heard alarming evidence of repeated missed opportunities on the part of Probation and Bedfordshire Police to make safeguarding referrals and a wholesale failure on the part of the Metropolitan Police to respond adequately to allegations of domestic abuse, to understand the civil powers available to them to deal with violent offenders (such as Violent Offender Orders or the Potentially Dangerous Person provisions) or the systems for information sharing which are specifically designed to protect the public in this type of scenario. The Coroner has found that failings on the part of state agencies were causative of Harper’s death.

It is clear that the system designed to protect children from child abusers is broken. It is overly complex and overly reliant upon individual proactivity and professional curiosity. The risk of a break in the chain is far too high when the outcome – such as in this terrible case – could be the foreseeable murder of a child. This inquest has provided a real opportunity for professionals to consider the flaws in the existing system and we sincerely hope that the Home Office and police forces around the country listen to the Coroner’s conclusions and learn from the terrible facts that led to Harper’s murder.

Finally, it is important and notable that this was an Article 2 ECHR inquest. The Human Rights Act allowed my client to fully participate in this inquest, to try and hold the state to account for the failures that led to her daughter’s death and to try and ensure that lessons can be learned. The attack on the Human Rights Act by the current government would have the effect of denying my client those rights”.

Jodie Anderson, Senior Caseworker at INQUEST said: *“Harper’s inquest has exposed a litany of failings running through the Metropolitan Police Service, the Probation Service and Bedfordshire Police, and multi-agency services specifically tasked with protecting the public from violent offenders. That somebody with a known history of serious violence against children was allowed to be in a family setting unsupervised shows a deeply failed system that is not fit for purpose in protecting children from serious harm.”*

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information please contact Sophie Naftalin on s.naftalin@bhattmurphy.co.uk

Harper’s family is represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group member Sophie Naftalin of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors and Nick Armstrong and Rosalind Comyn of Matrix Chambers. They are supported by INQUEST Caseworker Jodie Anderson.

Other Interested persons represented are the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Metropolitan Police Service, Bedfordshire Borough Council, Bedfordshire Police, the GP and the Trust. Kevin Eves was also recognised as an interested person to the inquest.

Alfie Gildea was 4 months old when he was killed by his father in 2018. Greater Manchester Police (GMP), Children’s Services and the Health Visiting team all failed to assess the risk to Alfie or recognise coercive and controlling behaviour by Alfie’s father towards his mother, including a long history of domestic violence. Despite the police knowing about the domestic abuse inflicted by Alfie’s father, Alfie’s mother was never made aware of his 20 previous convictions including for domestic violence in relation to three previous partners. See the [closing media release](#).

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Alex Malcolm, 5, was killed by a man in November 2016. The former partner of his mother was under supervision of probation service following a series of convictions for violent behaviour. Despite having spoken to the relevant probation officer, Alex's mother was never made aware of her former partner's history and the risks for which he was being monitored. See the [closing media release](#).

INQUEST is the only charity providing expertise on state related deaths and their investigation to bereaved people, lawyers, advice and support agencies, the media and parliamentarians. Our specialist casework includes death in police and prison custody, immigration detention, mental health settings and deaths involving multi-agency failings or where wider issues of state and corporate accountability are in question, such as the deaths and wider issues around Hillsborough and Grenfell Tower. Our policy, parliamentary, campaigning and media work is grounded in the day to day experience of working with bereaved people.

Please refer to INQUEST the organisation **in all capital letters** in order to distinguish it from the legal hearing.

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