

**Bhatt Murphy Solicitors**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**20 February 2019**

**Inquest jury find that “systemic failures” by police preceded Donna Williamson domestic homicide**

Donna Williamson was stabbed to death on 12 August 2016 by her former partner Kevin O'Regan, who is now serving a life sentence for her murder. Donna was 44 and had a complex array of needs including depression, a long standing disability, and alcoholism. Her death followed a sustained and escalating pattern of domestic abuse by O'Regan which had come to the frequent attention of the police from 2009.

The inquest jury found that police failures contributed to the death, in that there had been “a *persistent failure to address and record an appropriate level of risk, which resulted in insufficient referrals to statutory bodies and multi-agency functions who could address that risk*”. They found that there were “*systemic failures that resulted in missed opportunities to reduce or eliminate the risks*”.

Those repeated failures, over the months and weeks before Donna was murdered appear to have been rooted in a sense that officers perceived Donna to lack credibility. O'Regan was arrested for assaulting and threatening to kill Donna twice in the months before the murder, and was on bail conditions at the time which prohibited him from contacting her or entering the borough where she lived. He was found to have breached those conditions twice in the week before her death. The first time, although Donna had called the police for assistance as he had threatened her with a knife, he was only processed for breach of bail and no other offences. The arresting officer sent an incomplete file to the Court after the bail hearing had taken place, and O'Regan was therefore re-released with the same bail conditions. Less than a week later, O'Regan was apprehended a few roads away from Donna's house. Even though checks revealed that he had again breached his bail conditions, O'Regan was informed that he was free to go. Approximately 30 minutes later he murdered Donna at her flat by stabbing her with a kitchen knife.

The Coroner indicated that he would be making a number of reports to prevent future deaths.

**Donna's mother Susan Williamson said:**

*“The jury's conclusion does justice to the evidence that we have heard in the inquest; evidence that included that police officers failed to properly assess and deal with the serious risk Kevin O'Regan posed to Donna. We as a family were not asked by the police about what we knew. While nothing detracts from the fact that Donna was brutally murdered in August 2016 by Kevin O'Regan and he is the one who is responsible for killing her, there are lessons for the police to learn. We have taken comfort from the way in which senior officers have responded to the failings identified and promises made that lessons will be learned”.*

**Sophie Naftalin, solicitor for the family said:**

*Donna's death is one in an epidemic of domestic homicides. This inquest has exposed the gulf between the Metropolitan Police policy on domestic violence and the attitudes and actions of officers on the ground. This powerful conclusion is a real opportunity for the Metropolitan Police Service to address its failings so that it can improve the protection offered to victims of domestic violence, and bring perpetrators to justice.*

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. The inquest took place before Senior Coroner Andrew Harris Inner South London Coroner's Court 1 Tennis Street, London SE1 1YD
2. Donna Williamson's family is represented by Sophie Naftalin of Bhatt Murphy and Alison Gerry of Doughty Street Chambers. They have also received support from Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Assault (AAFDA).
3. For further information please contact Sophie Naftalin at Bhatt Murphy on 020 7729 1115 or [s.naftalin@bhattmurphy.co.uk](mailto:s.naftalin@bhattmurphy.co.uk)