

Bhatt Murphy Solicitors

PRESS RELEASE

**EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER PUBLICATION OF SBP REPORT ON MONDAY 18
DECEMBER 2017**

BRISTOL COUNCIL & POLICE FOUND INSTITUTIONALLY RACIST

A Multi-Agency Learning Review commissioned by Safer Bristol Partnership ('SBP') into the circumstances surrounding the racist murder of Iranian asylum seeker Bijan Ebrahimi published today, has found evidence of institutional racism on the part of Bristol City Council ('BCC') and Avon and Somerset Constabulary ('ASC'). This is believed to be the first finding of institutional racism against a police force since the publication in 1999 of Sir William Macpherson's report into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence; and the first of its kind against a local authority.

The Mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees has issued a public apology to Mr Ebrahimi's family *"for the failings in the council's treatment of Bijan leading up to his tragic death in July 2013"* and accepting all of the findings of the review including *"evidence of both discriminatory behavior and institutional racism on the part of Bristol City Council."* This follows an apology in 2014 from the then Acting Chief Constable of ASC, John Long QPM, accepting that: *"Mr Ebrahimi sought help from the police and did not get it. In some cases the IPCC have identified that this was as a result of discrimination."* A further apology provided in July 2017 by the current Chief Constable, Andy Marsh included his acceptance that: *"We failed him in his hour of need and I am unreservedly sorry for the pain his family have suffered in the last four years."*

As a result of an independent investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), a police officer and a community support officer received prison sentences for misconduct in public office following a criminal trial in December 2015, four officers were dismissed from ASC in 2016, and seventeen other police officers or staff faced disciplinary proceedings. The IPCC published its final report in July 2017.

The publication of SBP's review marks the end of long battle by Mr Ebrahimi's family to establish the truth surrounding his preventable murder and to insist upon systemic change for the protection of other vulnerable people. As a result of their landmark campaign, ASC has overhauled its systems for investigating hate crime and supporting victims via a template that it is hoped will effect systemic change across the jurisdiction. In contrast, BCC has taken over four years to acknowledge the need for reform but at a recent meeting with the family agreed to engage *"in a process of learning in order to ensure the effective protection of victims of race hatred and abuse"*.

Mr Ebrahimi's family said as follows:

"No review can ever bring back our beloved Bijan but it is important that his voice has been heard. Bijan always said that racism must be challenged wherever it is found, including in town halls and police stations. Bristol City Council took nearly five years

to accept that it failed Bijan and the need for change. This is far too long, although late is better than never. We will not rest until improved systems are put in place to protect other vulnerable people”.

The family’s solicitor, **Tony Murphy** of **Bhatt Murphy** said as follows:

“Acknowledging the institutional nature of the racism at the core of this tragedy is an essential first step towards systemic change. There is no reason why the Council could not have taken this step much sooner and its delay has been injurious, not just to Bijan’s family, but to public confidence in the Council’s ability to combat racism. The Mayor’s recent commitment to working with the family and to gaining public confidence via meaningful reform is welcome”.

Alex Raikes of the charity **SARI**,¹ which provided victim support to Mr Ebrahimi and continue to support his family said as follows:

“Institutional Racism was a key factor in why Bijan was failed in the years prior to his murder when he sought help repeatedly from the authorities. We hope that identifying this underlying cause will help to create effective solutions to combatting hate crime”

NOTE TO EDITORS

- Bijan Ebrahimi was murdered in July 2013 in Bristol by Lee James, who is currently serving a life sentence
- A copy of SBP’s report is **attached**, together with the Mayor’s apology
- BCC and ASC are members of SBP
- Requests for interviews to be emailed to t.murphy@bhattmurphy.co.uk

END OF RELEASE

¹ Stand Against Racism and Inequality