

PRESS RELEASE

Coroner criticises police and makes recommendations to prevent future deaths following the murder of Anne-Marie Nield in Rochdale.

25 January 2019

Before Assistant Coroner Mrs Lisa Hashmi

Greater Manchester Coroner's Court

Anne-Marie Nield died on 8 May 2016 as a result of multiple injuries inflicted upon her by her ex-partner Richard Howarth, who is now serving a life sentence for her murder. An inquest was resumed into her death to examine the role of officers of Greater Manchester Police (GMP) before her death.

Anne-Marie was a vulnerable woman and a repeat victim of domestic abuse at the hands of successive partners. Richard Howarth had a history of abusing his female partners such that he had been identified by GMP as a "Serial and Serious Perpetrator of Domestic Abuse", a term within their domestic violence policy to identify repeat offenders.

Evidence was heard at the inquest of the three times that police had been called to attend domestic incidents between Anne-Marie and Richard Howarth before he murdered her. Although Anne-Marie informed the police that she had been subject to non-fatal strangulation at the hands of Richard Howarth, this was not recorded as a crime. Neither was his prior attempt at strangulation upon a previous partner identified as giving rise to a heightened risk to Anne Marie, despite this being commonly known to be a 'red flag' to domestic violence practitioners.

On 11 March 2016 Richard Howarth was charged with common assault and criminal damage and was bailed with conditions not to contact Anne-Marie. Anne Marie was never informed of these bail conditions and nor did the police disclose to her Richard Howarth's previous history following "Clare's Law".

On 8 May 2016 Richard Howarth beat Anne Marie to death.

After Anne Marie's death an independent internal review concluded that the risk to her was repeatedly under-assessed and that the circumstances justified an assessment that she was at high risk of serious harm. The police have accepted that Anne-Marie should have been informed of the bail conditions and of Richard Howarth's history of domestic violence.

Reaching a conclusion of unlawful killing, Mrs Lisa Hashmi Coroner for Greater Manchester indicated that she would be making a Prevention of Future Deaths Report concerning the apparent lack of familiarity that front line and specialist domestic violence officers had with the GMP Domestic Violence Policy, the failure in the policy to recognise the risk posed by non-fatal strangulation and a failure to contact Anne-Marie after she supported the police in a prosecution of Richard Howarth.

Bhatt Murphy Solicitors

Responding to the outcome of the inquest, **Catherine McIntosh**, sister to the deceased commented as follows:

“After my sister’s murder, it was a great shock to learn about Richard Howarth’s history of violence against other women. The police knew that he was a dangerous man but no-one properly identified the risk that he posed to Anne Marie. I now understand that she had a right to know about his history and that the failure to inform her was a missed opportunity to protect her.

I am very pleased that the failures of the police in how they dealt with Anne-Marie have been recognised by the Coroner after hearing evidence at the inquest. I can only hope that as a result of Anne-Marie’s death future victims of domestic violence can be given better protection and support by officers of Greater Manchester Police”.

Sophie Naftalin of Bhatt Murphy solicitors who represented the family said:

“Anne Marie’s case raises important issues for those tasked with protecting vulnerable victims who may struggle to access the help that they need. This inquest is not the first to shine a light on the failure of Greater Manchester Police officers to understand their own policy on domestic violence and properly assess risk. Domestic homicide is at epidemic levels. It is time for officers on the ground to get the training and resources that they need to be able to do their job properly”.

Catherine McIntosh was represented by Sophie Naftalin and Anastasia Solopova of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors and Camille Warren of Garden Court North. She was supported by Marie Englishby of Action After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) and Victim Support.