

PRESS RELEASE

6 July 2023

Jury concludes that Kellie Sutton was unlawfully killed in self inflicted death following domestic abuse

**Before Assistant Coroner Samantha Broadfoot KC
Cambridge and Peterborough Coroner's Court**

26 June 2023 – 6 July 2023

Kellie Sutton was a 30 year old mother of three. In March 2017 she started seeing Steven Gane who subjected her to physical and psychological domestic abuse from the start of their relationship. Kellie was discovered unconscious on 23 August 2017, apparently having hanged herself, and was pronounced dead in hospital three days later.

An inquest jury has now concluded that Kellie was unlawfully killed, in that the domestic abuse that she was subjected to caused her death. The jury also reached critical findings that failings of Hertfordshire Police officers also contributed to Kellie's death.

A link to the Record of Inquest can be found **here**:

Background

Kellie was a much loved and popular young woman who loved her children deeply. The jury heard evidence that she was vulnerable and was a repeat victim of domestic abuse. Having separated from the partner of her youngest child in 2015 Kellie met Steven Gane in March 2017.

After Kellie was found unconscious on 23 August 2017, friends, family and neighbours gave evidence to the police that Kellie had been psychologically abused and controlled by Steven Gane since the start of their relationship and that that she had disclosed incidents of physical abuse, including on 3 June 2017 where he had split her head open. The subsequent police investigation uncovered evidence from text messages that on the morning of Kellie's death, Steven Gane had actively encouraged her to take her own life.

On 9 July 2017, two police officers from Hertfordshire Police had attended a callout to Kellie's home following a report by a neighbour that she could hear Kellie being assaulted by her partner and that a child had been present. The officers who attended did not undertake a safeguarding check on the children nor did they undertake house to house enquiries. Kellie reported being very frightened and that Steven Gane controlled everything that she did, but she did not report the assault. The officers assessed the case to be a 'non crime domestic' and that it was the lowest of risk levels. They did not identify that Hertfordshire Police had at least five pieces of intelligence on Steven Gane of previous allegations of domestic abuse made by former partners, nor that Kellie was a repeat victim of domestic abuse.

Following Kellie's death, specialist domestic abuse officers from Hertfordshire Police then undertook a groundbreaking investigation into the domestic abuse that Kellie had been subjected to by Steven Gane prior to her death. On 23 March 2018 Steven Gane was convicted at St Albans Crown Court of three offences against Miss Sutton: one count of coercive and controlling behaviour in an intimate family relationship and two counts of assault: the injury to Kellie's head on 3 June 2017 and the strangulation that had taken place on 9 July 2017 following which police had attended the family home.

Steven Gane was not charged with manslaughter and so the criminal proceedings had never addressed the question of whether in law his criminal acts had caused Kellie's death.

Steven Gane was sentenced to 4 years 3 months' imprisonment and served with a 10 year criminal behaviour order.

The first inquest

The first inquest took place on 17 March 2020. In advance of the inquest, representations were made on behalf of the family that Hertfordshire Police and Steven Gane be recognised as interested persons, that Article 2 ECHR be recognised as being engaged, that a jury be empanelled, and that the Coroner consider returning an unlawful killing verdict on the basis of the evidence. The Coroner accepted that Article 2 ECHR was engaged but refused all the other applications. He refused to call the officers who had attended on 9 July 2017.

The inquest went ahead and the Coroner heard evidence from the Home Office pathologist and from one of the officers who had conducted the investigation after Miss Sutton's death. At the conclusion of the evidence the Coroner concluded that Kellie died from suicide contributed by domestic abuse. No findings were made against the officers and a short form conclusion of unlawful killing was not returned.

A letter of claim was sent on behalf of the family setting out the illegality of the first inquest. The Coroner conceded that the failure to recognise Steven Gane as an interested party amounted to a procedural irregularity and it was agreed by consent that the inquest should be quashed. The High Court quashed the first inquest by Order dated 25 June 2020.

The second inquest

The second inquest took place before Assistant Coroner Samantha Broadfoot KC and a jury. Article 2 ECHR was found to be engaged. Steven Gane, Hertfordshire Police and the family were all recognised to be interested parties.

Steven Gane was summonsed to attend and the officers who attended on 9 July 2017 were called to give evidence. Both officers admitted that they had not considered the offence of coercive control when they attended, and that this had not been in their mind when conducting the risk assessment. Steven Gane was warned of his right not to self incriminate and did not answer questions on the extent to which he had caused Kellie's death.

An expert in domestic abuse Mary Mason gave evidence and the head of Safeguarding Command at Hertfordshire Police made admissions that there had been failings on 9 July

2017, in particular a failure to check on the children, carry out house to house enquiries or exercise professional judgement when undertaking the risk assessment.

At the conclusion of the evidence the Coroner directed the jury to consider unlawful killing, suicide, accidental death and to make critical findings about the actions of Hertfordshire Police.

The jury concluded that Kellie had been unlawfully killed and that failings of Hertfordshire Police officers on and after 9 July 2017 contributed to her death.

Mrs Pamela Taylor, Kellie's mother said: *"Kellie was a much loved mother, daughter, sister, auntie and friend. It would have been Kellie's 36th birthday tomorrow and she had everything to live for. Her family miss her every day and nothing will bring her back. It is an unspeakable loss and something we will never get over.*

In these last two weeks we have heard disgusting evidence about how Kellie was bullied and abused and assaulted by Steven Gane during their relationship and those are things that a mother should never have to hear.

I will always believe that Steven Gane is responsible for Kellie's death and that if she hadn't met him she would still be here. Although he was found guilty of coercive and controlling behaviour and assault, it has taken until today for him to be held publicly accountable for her death.

We have fought now for many years for this inquest and for this unlawful killing conclusion. I now call on the CPS to reconsider this case and to charge Steven Gane with unlawful act manslaughter so he can also be held accountable in the criminal courts.

I also believe that the police failed to protect Kellie before she died and that there was so much more that could have been done by professionals to help her. Police forces must do better to protect victims of domestic abuse. I can only hope that this inquest conclusion helps other victims by increasing awareness of how domestic abuse leads to suicide and self harm.

The family's solicitor, Sophie Naftalin of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors said:

"This groundbreaking conclusion of unlawful killing sends a powerful message – abuse that leads to suicide can amount to unlawful act manslaughter. We ask police forces and the CPS to learn from this conclusion and have the professional curiosity to consider this as a possible charge when investigating and prosecuting other unexplained deaths in the context of domestic abuse.

We have also heard evidence of shocking police failings before Kellie's death and a failure on the part of frontline officers to recognise basic indicators of controlling and coercive behaviour. Until frontline officers are properly trained in domestic abuse risk assessment and in using the powers available to them we will continue to see predictable deaths happen on the police watch.

The family also wish to thank the specialist police officers who conducted a thorough investigation after Kellie's death, to the Coroner who conducted a full and fearless inquiry and to the jury who carefully listened to the evidence and returned this conclusion.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information, interview requests and to note your interest, please contact Sophie Naftalin at s.naftalin@bhattmurphy.co.uk

The family are represented by Sophie Naftalin of Bhatt Murphy and Paul Bowen KC of Brick Court Chambers. They also received support from the charity Action After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA).

Journalists should refer to the [Samaritans Media Guidelines](#) for reporting suicide and self-harm and [guidance for reporting on inquests](#).