

PRESS RELEASE

21 May 2024

Kellie Sutton: Coroner issues Prevention of Future Death Report identifying a police failure to understand coercive control and the risk of suicide in the context of domestic abuse.

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

Inquest: 26 June 2023 – 6 July 2023

PFD: 30 April 2024

Kellie Sutton was a 30 year old mother of three who died on 26 August 2017. Between March 2017 and her death in August 2017 she was in a relationship with Steven Gane who subjected her to months of coercive and controlling behaviour and serious domestic abuse. Police officers had attended Kellie's home on 9 July 2017 following a report to the police from a neighbour who had heard her being assaulted by Gane. The police left taking no further action and assessing the case as 'standard' risk, i.e. the lowest category of risk. Kellie was discovered unconscious on 23 August 2017, apparently having hanged herself, and was pronounced dead in hospital three days later.

In July 2023 an inquest jury 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 on 9 July 2017 also contributed to Kellie's death.

The Coroner has now issued a powerful Prevention of Future Death Report (link [here](#)) to Hertfordshire Police identifying that the following failures by the police could risk further lives:

1. The lack of understanding of coercive and controlling behaviour and its impact on victims;
2. The lack of awareness of the link between domestic abuse and suicide;
3. The lack of understanding by frontline officers of when a Domestic Violence Protection Notice could be applied for. A DVPN is a type of civil order available to police officers to give short term protection to victims of domestic abuse.

Mrs Pamela Taylor, Kellie's mother said: *"In 2023 an inquest jury returned a landmark conclusion that Kellie was unlawfully killed by Steven Gane and that the police who attended her home in July 2017 could have done more to protect her. I am so pleased that the Coroner has recognised this in her Report to Prevent Future Deaths and I hope that this finding can help to raise awareness of how domestic abuse impacts mental health and help other victims"*

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

“At the inquest in 2023 we heard shocking evidence that six years after Kellie’s death the frontline officers who attended Kellie in 2017 still did not understand coercive control, risk assessment or the civil powers available to them to protect victims. Those officers are not unique. There is a widespread failure on the part of police forces up and down the country to understand the basics of domestic abuse and to adequately assess the risk of both homicide and suicide. This powerful report issued by the Coroner identifying that these failures create a risk to life is a wake up call and an opportunity for Herts Police and police forces nationally to improve their understanding and response to domestic abuse”.

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](#).

Details of the Centre for Women’s Justice super complaint from March 2019 into protective orders can be found [here](#) and the joint investigation in response by the College of Policing, HMICFRS and the IOPC from August 2021 can be found [here](#)