

**London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Community Safety Partnership  
Domestic Violence Homicide Review Panel  
Carina aged 50, murdered in Dagenham in August 2018**

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BARKING AND DAGENHAM  
COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

**DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**CARINA AGED 50**

**KILLED IN DAGENHAM IN AUGUST 2018**

**REVIEW PANEL CHAIR AND REPORT AUTHOR**

**BILL GRIFFITHS CBE BEM QPM**

**21 SEPTEMBER 2020`**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Introduction**

This summary outlines the process taken by the Community Safety Partnership Domestic Violence Homicide Review Panel established in May 2019 under s9 Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBB), independently chaired by Bill Griffiths CBE BEM QPM, to review the murder of 'Carina' aged 50 (pseudonym), caused by strangulation and arson in early August 2018, that had been inflicted by her husband, 'John' (pseudonym), also 50. Criminal proceedings were completed in April 2019 and John sentenced to Life Imprisonment with a minimum of 25 years to be served.

The process began in May 2019 with a meeting of all agencies that potentially had contact with those involved prior to the death of Carina. Agencies participating in the review were:

LBBB Healthy Lifestyles  
LBBB Adult Social Care  
LBBB Children's Social Care  
LBBB Education  
Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge CCG GP Practice for the family  
Metropolitan Police Service Specialist Crime Review Group.

Independent specialist Domestic Abuse advice to the Panel was also received from:

Victim Support London, and  
Advocacy Following Fatal Domestic Abuse

Panel members were senior representatives and independent of line management:

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Sonia Drozd         | LBBB Senior Commissioner, Healthy Lifestyles                              |
| Hazel Northstephens | LBBB Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Healthy Lifestyles                      |
| Florence Henry      | LBBB Domestic Abuse Commission Programme Manager                          |
| Carolyn Greenaway   | LBBB Head of Service Children's Social Care                               |
| Jay Devereux        | LBBB Education Core Team Officer  |
| Eve McGrath         | Lead Safeguarding Nurse, Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge CCG |
| Josephine Feeney    | Senior Operations Manager, Victim Support                                 |
| Beverly Williams    | Detective Inspector, MPS Specialist Crime Review Group                    |
| Bill Griffiths      | Independent Chair and author  |
| Tony Hester         | Independent Manager and Panel Secretary                                   |

The main lines of inquiry in the Terms of Reference for the review were:

1. Scope of review agreed from January 2010 to date of homicide with any earlier event of significance to be included
2. Identify relevant equality and diversity considerations, including Adult Safeguarding issues
3. Determine whether the DHR also meets the criteria for a Serious Case Review, as defined in Working Together to Safeguard the Child 2015, if so, how it could be best managed within this review

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4. Establish whether family, friends or colleagues want to participate in the review. If so, to ascertain whether they were aware of any abusive behaviour to the victim prior to the homicide (any disclosure; not time limited). In relation to the family members, whether they were aware if any abuse and of any barriers experienced in reporting abuse, or best practice that facilitated reporting it. It was noted that the Chair had established contact through AAFDA (Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse) with the daughters and that Victim Support Homicide Service were supporting Carina's parents and this would be coordinated but managed separately
5. Take account of previous lessons learned in LB Barking and Dagenham
6. Identify how people in the LB of Barking and Dagenham gain access to advice on sexual and domestic abuse whether themselves subject of abuse or known to be happening to a friend, relative or work colleague.

Each agency provided a chronology of contact with the family and these were reviewed by the Panel. Chronology compilers were independent of any operational involvement with the family. It was agreed that Individual Management Reviews were not required, although the police helpfully supplied a letter that outlined the information that had been gathered in the course of the homicide investigation. The Panel met on five occasions and debated four versions of the overview report.

This was an appalling tragedy for Carina's family and through the Chair, the Panel offered their heartfelt condolences upon the loss of Carina. For her daughters, (Daisy 21, Iris 20 and Rose 14) not only have they lost a dedicated and loving mother in a brutal murder, they have also 'lost' their perpetrator father to the prison system for many years. Their collective and individual maturity in coping with this predicament is striking and Carina would rightly have been proud of her daughters.

The process ended when the Barking and Dagenham Community Safety Partnership approved a final version of the overview report at a meeting on 11 December 2019.

### **Summary chronology and key issues arising from the review**

Carina was born and raised in Hornchurch from 1967. She did well at school and soon found employment with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) where she worked at Job Centres in East London. Carina was very popular with colleagues. In about 1995 when aged 27, Carina met and married John. They lived initially with her parents then in their first house nearby where Carina gave birth to Daisy in 1996 and to Iris in 1998. They then moved to the house in Dagenham (the murder scene in 2018) where Rose was born. All who knew Carina would say that "she lived for her daughters", and they confirmed to the Chair that: "her love for us was demonstrated every day". Carina was also very protective toward her parents following the death of her brother.

Carina had a passion for horses and this was shared by her daughters and she owned a horse that was stabled close by. In August 2011, the horse was found with fatal neck wounds. No suspects were identified in the police investigation. Carina purchased a replacement horse shortly after that she gave away in July 2018.

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John has African Caribbean heritage and his family moved back to St Lucia when he was 15 and he stayed with a brother in London. John became a self-employed builder but, when it came to his own house, embarked on refurbishment projects without completing and finishing the work. There was no carpet on the floor, no door to the bathroom and the back garden was overgrown and full of unfinished outbuildings. For several months in 2017/8 the family had to travel to Carina's parents for showers.

John's passion was Soul music and he would drink and socialise away from the family with like-minded friends and they would regularly go away to 'Soul Weekends' held at a former holiday camp. John was always immaculately dressed and would buy his clothing from high end stores such as Selfridges.

It was well known among the family and some friends that John had embarked on affairs and there are police records in 2003 and 2007 that document arguments with girlfriends. One such affair led to a divorce in 2010 but the couple continued living together at the house and then re-married in 2012. Their daughters and Carina's parents did not know about this until the trial.

In the midst of this difficulty, in early July 2010, Carina called police to report an assault by John. Following an argument, he had assaulted her and grabbed her around the throat applying pressure. He left the scene prior to the arrival of police, taking the children with him. Carina said that they were going through a separation and was fearful and concerned about repercussions. However, she did not want him arrested and only wanted the matter recorded for future reference. She was referred to Victim Support but did not respond to contact.

The police 'positive action' policy on domestic abuse was explained and John was arrested a few days later. Carina attended the police station with him and provided a withdrawal statement. This was a possible indication of coercion and control. John denied the allegation. No further action was taken because there was no additional or independent evidence of the assault, nor a history of reported abuse that would have brought into consideration a 'victimless prosecution'.

Children's Social Care were informed and, due to the age of Rose, a Child in Need plan was opened. A Social Worker attempted to arrange a home visit but, instead, spoke to both parents separately by phone. Carina minimised the incident and put it down to a build-up of stress, and that things were now better between her and John. He would not enter into any discussion with the social worker saying it was a "family matter" and added he would refuse access to Carina and the children. Carina subsequently phoned the social worker again to say that she supported her husband's views, which may be another indicator that Carina was being coerced and controlled by John. In the absence of other information, the decision was made by the Team Manager to end the assessment in late July 2010.

This incident is the only recorded domestic abuse known to anyone in safeguarding and was unknown to family members. An incident of a different kind occurred in mid-August 2011 when police were called to the stables where Carina kept her horse. He had been found dead with a deep 20" clean laceration to his neck line. An investigation, including witness enquiries and CCTV search, yielded no lines of inquiry. Understandably, Carina was extremely distressed but did not

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voice suspicion about who was responsible. John acknowledged that the £500 monthly upkeep for the horse was an issue between them. Carina replaced the horse with another. About a month before the homicide, Carina gave that horse away so that she could spend the money on a replacement car.

All other information about what was going on in the relationship derives from friends of Carina and her family:

- Her parents noted the marriage was unhappy for the past five years, with the couple leading separate lives. This included taking family holidays in Devon with Carina and their granddaughters while John indulged his Soul weekends. Carina would attend her parents' home with the girls for lunch every Sunday while John stayed at home, yet he expected a portion of lunch to be prepared and brought for him. They helped Carina out financially with the upkeep of her horse. They also made regular cash loans to her at the end of the month to see her through before she was paid. Carina would pay the housekeeping bills through her bank and John would repay her half in cash. He frequently held out on this commitment and it became a form of financial control that was often conducted in the presence of their daughters who would watch the disputes unfold.
- The daughters also observed a pattern of control that was verbal. When John was in a bad mood, he would pick on Carina for an argument. If he had an issue with, say, a daughter not clearing up he would criticise Carina for failing to supervise them properly, rather than speak direct to the daughter concerned who could also be in the room. He would break into a sweat and pace up and down when this happened; signals the daughters collectively and individually understood would build into their father shouting angrily at Carina. She would walk away so that it did not continue in front of their daughters.
- Carina's close friend from the stables knew her to be "the life and soul of the yard" until, that is, she would receive a call from John. Her facial expression would become blank and her words carefully and calmly chosen. She usually would have to leave to get home to deal with some problem. On the odd occasion that John came to the stables, Alice noted the same change in Carina and that John made his disapproval obvious.

In the last few months of her life, Carina began asserting a measure of independence. For example, when Daisy decided to have a tattoo, Carina chose to have one as well, followed by a tongue piercing. John admitted to the Chair that he was "very disapproving" of both the tattoo and the piercing. Carina began to socialise more and lost some weight. To one friend she had said she was only staying with John until Rose had finished education. To another, she confided that she had started a mild flirtation and arranged to meet her the day after the fatal incident and to take a bag for her, saying: "He would kill me if he found out". John claimed to know that Carina was seeing someone and he was unaffected by that.

Another factor revealed in the trial is that, a few weeks before the homicide, John had taken out joint life insurance in the sum of £310k for a monthly payment of £100. When he had made the first payment, he called the next day to check that the policy was now valid. At the trial John made the excuse that the insurance company had approached him in the first instance to encourage him

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that the policy was good value. On the morning of the homicide, John sent a text to a work colleague cancelling their lift arrangement.

On a weekday in early August 2018 at 06:47, Daisy reported the fatal incident via 999, saying that her father was attacking her mum. She thought that Carina was being strangled due to sounds she had heard from inside her parents' bedroom and a locked room upstairs. She also reported a fire at the house with smoke coming from her parents' bedroom and she believed her mother was inside.

Prior to the arrival of emergency services, passing refuse collectors and a neighbour entered the house but were turned back on the stairs by John claiming that Carina had gone for a walk. When his daughters pointed out that Carina's phone and keys were still there, he loudly accused them of lying. He persisted with his account to the police and firefighters, adding that he and Carina had argued and he had lit candles to lighten the mood before she went out. When Carina's badly-burned body was discovered with visible evidence of strangulation, John was arrested for murder and arson.

John was interviewed but provided no explanation or comment about his actions and he was charged with murder and arson with intent to endanger life. At his trial he claimed that Carina had kicked his knee and he was in such shock and pain that he could not recall what happened. He was found guilty of both offences and sentenced to life imprisonment for Carina's murder with seven years to run concurrently for the arson offence, to serve a minimum term of 25 years.

### **Conclusions from the review, lessons to be learned and recommendations**

The window on Carina's life that has been opened by contact with family and friends after her murder was not available to anyone responsible for safeguarding. The domestic abuse incident reported to the police, victim support and children's services in 2010 was the only recorded information available. The report had been handled correctly in line with extant policy but the evidence of coercion and control that is clearly apparent with hindsight was not widely recognised at that time. There is no evidence that this homicide was predictable to, or preventable by, professionals.

There are some indicators of abuse known to family members, such as John's coercion and control of Carina, both emotional and financial over many years. Friends and neighbours also may well have harboured suspicion about the nature of their relationship, as intimated by one early comment in the social media response to reports of the fire: "I hope Carina is OK".

There is learning to improve the system for safeguarding, nonetheless. A common theme from the DHR process as highlighted in the 'Spalding' case could be applied here: "The behaviour was not known to professionals or understood by members of his family"<sup>1</sup>. It is posited that the strategic learning points that emerge from this review are:

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<sup>1</sup> Source: DHR - The Homicides of Claire and Charlotte Hart 18 July 2016 (author's emphasis)  
<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/safer-lincolnshire-partnership>

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1. To what extent can front-line safeguarding professionals become more able to identify and be curious about coercive and controlling behaviour
2. To what extent can families, friends and communities be educated to recognise coercive and controlling behaviour and to understand the pathways to alerting professionals.

### **Recommendations from the review**

As a consequence of Carina's murder and several other elements of local learning, Barking and Dagenham Council have implemented a number of initiatives in the Borough that provide a comprehensive response to these strategic learning points. These include:

- The Health and Wellbeing Board agreeing a 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' Strategy 2018-2022 - a trauma and gender informed approach to Violence Against Women and Girls in Barking and Dagenham
- A Health and Wellbeing Strategy that adopted a whole system approach to domestic abuse
- Nearly 300 frontline staff trained to recognise and respond to coercion and control through a MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) funded project to improve victims' access to services
- Refreshed 'Addressing Domestic Abuse at Work Statement and Guidance'
- Ground-breaking initiative - DV FLAG (Family Law Action Group) East, run by Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) with the Council's Legal Service to ensure speedy access to high quality legal aid and *pro bono* advice
- A Health Education Partnership initiative to develop whole school approaches to domestic abuse
- Refuge Charity awarded contract to deliver community-based support to victims, sanctuary schemes, refuge accommodation, support for children affected by domestic abuse and 1:1 behaviour change support for perpetrators
- Initiation of a 'Domestic Abuse Commission' that brings together a panel of 12 national experts chaired by CEO of Shelter and former CEO of Women's Aid to explore the attitudes in the community around domestic abuse. The intention is to publish its final report in January 2021 2020 with a series of recommendations around how to tackle abusive behaviours at their core
- Borough-wide 16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence up until Christmas
- Learning events across the Strategic Director of People and Resilience's portfolio and wider

The intended outcome of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2023, that includes domestic abuse as a named priority, is: "A borough with zero tolerance to domestic abuse that tackles underlying causes, challenges perpetrators, and empowers survivors"<sup>2</sup>.

Given the comprehensive nature of the actions already taken and the local partnership's published commitments and intended outcomes, the Panel agree that the strategic learning points have been and will be addressed, therefore a separate action plan is not required for this review.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Joint-Health-and-Wellbeing-Strategy-2019-2023.pdf>