SETDAB Southend, Essex & Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board

Southend Community Safety Partnership

DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Southend- on-Sea Community Safety Partnership

Rose died November 2023

Report completed May 2026

Report published July 2026

Chair and Author – Katie Bielec

Foreword

Rose, our sister was a kind person who spent her life looking after others, especially our mum, stepfather, elderly neighbours and friends. We all adored her for the angel she was.

Preface

Southend-on-Sea Community Safety Partnership (CSP), panel members and the author wish at the outset to express their deepest sympathy to the family of Rose. This review has been undertaken in an open and constructive manner with all agencies engaging positively which has ensured we have been able to consider the circumstances of Rose's death in a meaningful way and address with candour any issues raised. The report highlights positive and supportive practice, any barriers accessing services and any learning that can be shared to reduce the risk of such a tragedy happening again in the future.

1. Introduction

1.1 Rose was murdered by her brother Nick. At the time of her death, they lived together in Southend with their elderly mother, Shirley.

1.2 In line with paragraph 75 of the statutory guidance and to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, pseudonyms have been used throughout the report. The names Rose, Nick and Shirley were chosen by the family and agreed by the panel.

1.3 In November 2023, Southend-on-Sea CSP received a referral from Essex Police after Rose's murder. Due to Rose and Nick's sibling relationship, Southend-on-Sea CSP identified the case met the criteria for a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) as set out within the Home Office Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for DHRs 2016[1]. DHRs became statutory in 2011 under Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004)[2].

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/revised-statutory-guidance-for-the-conduct-of-domestic-homicide-reviews
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-domestic-violence-crime-and-victims-act-2004

1.4 The decision to carry out the review and the commissioning of the chair and author was completed in December 2023.

1.5 Due to additional concerns regarding Nick's behaviour and relationship with Shirley and her husband (the sibling's stepfather), Shirley gave permission for the review to include her information to ensure a whole picture could be understood.

1.6 The review considered agency contact and/or involvement with Rose, Nick and Shirley from 1 January 2021 to the time of Rose's death. Agencies were asked to consider any events outside of these dates and include such information if relevant to the review. The panel identified agencies required to provide Individual Management Review's after SETDAB completed scoping across the Essex area. Terms of Reference were provided, and agencies were asked to review their involvement with the family.

1.7 This review followed the statutory guidance and SETDAB DHR Protocol. The sharing of information between agencies complied with Section 9 Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004[3].

2. Glossary

- **Athena** - A single integrated police IT system
- **AWARE** - A mnemonic created to help observe what is happening around a child: **A**ppearance, **W**ords, **A**ctivity, **R**elationships & **D**ynamics, **E**nvironment
- **CSP** – Community Safety Partnership
- **DASH RIC[4]** –Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment Risk Indicator Checklist
- **DHR** – Domestic Homicide Review
- **GP** – General Practitioner
- **IMRs** - Individual Management Reports are provided by agencies
- **SETDAB** - Southend, Essex & Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board
- **STORM** - A command-and-control database used by Essex Police to manage the deployment of resources and record incidents
- **Whole Family Approach -** Securing better outcomes for adults, children, and families
- **THRIVE -** Assists staff identify **T**hreat**, H**arm, **R**isk, **I**nvestigative opportunities, **V**ulnerability and **E**ngagement opportunities quickly and resolve issues at first contact.
- **ACEs** -Adverse childhood experiences
- **LPA –** Lasting Power of Attorney
- **AWARE principles -**framework adopted by Essex Police to enhance professional curiosity to identify vulnerable children in child abuse and domestic abuse investigations
- **VOTC –** Voice of the Child

3. Involvement of family, friends, and colleagues

3.1 The family were informed of the review, provided a Home Office leaflet and were supported by Victim Support Homicide Advocates. The chair remained in contact with the family and advocates throughout.

[3] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97881/DHR-guidance.pdf

[4] https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Dash%20risk%20checklist%20quick%20start%20guidance%20FINAL_1.pdf?msclkid=770463f4ceac11ec8f0466908e13260a

3.2 Rose worked at a local school, who shared memories of her.

3.3 No friends were identified for the chair to reach out and contact.

3.4 Neighbours who knew Rose, Shirley and Nick were elderly and had moved away from the area, which meant they were unable to be spoken to for the purpose of the review.

3.5 The chair spoke with Nick from prison with the support of his Custody Probation Officer.

4. Contributors to the review

4.1 SETDAB contacted over 40 agencies (including statutory and non-statutory services) of those, Essex Police, the family's GP practice and Southend-on-Sea Council Adults and Communities (Adult Social Care) were identified to provide an IMR.

4.2 IMR authors, panel members and the chair/author were all independent of any support or supervision of any agency interaction with the family. All panel members comprised of agencies recommended within the statutory guidance including specialist domestic abuse services. A full list of agencies and roles can be found within the Overview Report.

5. Parallel Reviews

5.1 A criminal trial was held in May 2024. Nick pleaded guilty to murder and was sentenced to life in prison with a minimum term of 13 years. Due to the severity of the murder, the family believe this sentence was too lenient and Nick will remain a danger to them and others.

5.2 The coroner concluded that Rose was unlawfully killed by Nick.

5.3 No other reviews were conducted at the time of this review.

6. Equality and Diversity

6.1 Rose was a 64-year-old white British female. Shirley is a white British female and was aged 84, and Nick is a white British[5] male and was 54 years old at the time of the murder. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2023[6] found that 73.5% of victims were female. The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 1.4 million women experienced domestic abuse between 2022 – 2023. Therefore, Rose and Shirley were more likely to be abused due to being female.

6.2 This pattern is also reflected in adult family violence, where women are disproportionately harmed by male relatives, partners, and ex-partners, particularly in contexts involving coercive control, financial dependence, or caring responsibilities. Research consistently shows that gendered power dynamics shape both intimate partner abuse and abuse within family networks, meaning women face higher risks of serious harm across these settings.

[5] According to the latest 2021 census, the population in Southend-on-Sea is predominantly white (87%)

[6] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023

6.3 In the year 2022 – 2023, the ONS found 4.2% of victims were aged between 60 – 74 years. Research from SafeLives and Dewis Choice[7] found people aged 61 years and over were more likely to experience abuse from an adult family member, than an intimate partner. It also found that statutory services regularly did not recognise domestic abuse in cases where the perpetrator was not an intimate partner. This can result in older victim-survivors not being offered access to specialist domestic abuse resources.

6.4 Rose was independent, working full time and was in control of her money and able to be independent financially. The family believe Nick had a belief that women were 'below' men, and they had a role to play within the home. This misuse of 'Male Privilege or Entitlement' is recognised within the Duluth research[8], such as reinforcing gender roles, withholding information, misuse of medication all of which appears to have been present within this home and ultimately became deadly.

6.5 Rose was diagnosed and had been on medication for Schizophrenia since 1991. She had 6 to 12 monthly physical and mental health reviews; she was recorded as managing her condition excellently, and no mental health or safeguarding concerns were ever raised.

6.6 The family believe both Rose and Nick had a learning difficulty. Both attended secondary schools for children with additional learning needs but again there was never any formal diagnosis of this. The family recall how both Rose and Nick struggled academically and were unable to maintain friendships or relationships. Shirley and the family believed Rose was unable to live independently and for the last 20 years of her life she lived with Shirley. It is unclear if this perception was accurate or the family's perception.

6.7 If both Rose and Nick did struggle to understand the concept of boundaries, and how to communicate, it may have created additional barriers and complex dynamics within the family home. The charity, Choice Support[9], found those with learning difficulties are often treated as children, who rarely have a voice in decision making, leaving them invisible to agencies and those around them. They found those with learning disabilities were twice as likely to be subjected to domestic abuse, with abusers being more likely to be a carer or family member. They are less likely to understand they are being abused, creating barriers in reporting to those around them or to authorities.

6.8 Although Nick lived alone for some of his adulthood, he had lived with one of his sisters (and her family) as well as Shirley. He and the family informed the chair that he could never maintain a job and would 'flit' from job to job. He also struggled to understand the concept of boundaries within a family setting, believing that when there were consequences to his actions people were against him.

6.9 Neither Rose or Shirley had or have any religious beliefs. Nick informed the chair that in the late 1990's he was a practising Mormon to '*get him off the drink'*. After 6 years, he left the Mormon faith and did not practise any religion but is now learning the Muslim faith in prison.

[7] https://dewischoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Practitioner-guidance-document-English-epdf_compressed.pdf
[8] https://dewischoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Dewis-Choice-Duluth-Wheel-1.pdf
[9] Choice Support | Domestic abuse

7. Dissemination

7.1 Southend CSP will ensure the documents are disseminated to the family, Domestic Abuse Commissioner, the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex, all partner agencies and services represented on the panel and Probation /Prison Service. The Overview Report, Executive Summary will be published on the SETDAB website[10].

7.2 The chair has worked closely with the family to ensure all key dates to avoid were considered with regards to publication. They have continued to be supported by Victim Support throughout this stage of the process.

7.3 The family fear for their safety should Nick be released from prison. There is likely to be a significant amount of time from publishing the report and Nick's possible release. Therefore, the final report will be shared with the Victim Liaison Officer and Probation Practitioner as soon as it is published. A record will then be held on his notes that the family have asked for this report to be included within the Parole Dossier as part of the Victim Impact Statements.

8. The homicide

8.1 During the evening of Rose's death, Shirley was in the living room watching TV and an argument started between Rose and Nick. During the argument Rose and Nick went outside to the front courtyard. There is evidence to indicate that Nick assaulted Rose whilst outside due to the injuries to her body. After assaulting her and whilst Rose remained outside, Nick went to the kitchen and selected a kitchen knife. He then went back into the courtyard of the bungalow and repeatedly stabbed Rose.

8.2 Nick called Essex Police reporting that he had been in a fight with Rose during which she had run into the knife he was holding, and that she was unconscious and appeared not to be breathing. He then went into the living room and told Shirley that he had called the Police, repeatedly saying he was sorry. Upon Police arrival, they found Rose in the front courtyard under some tarpaulin. Nick was initially arrested on suspicion of Grievous Bodily Harm. Paramedics attempted to save Rose's life but despite these attempts, Rose died a short time later. Nick was further arrested for murder; in May 2024 he pleaded guilty to murder.

9. Family and Relationship background – Information from friends and colleagues[11]

9.1 Shirley had Rose at the age of 20, whilst living in Yorkshire. Rose was the eldest sibling; she had two younger sisters and a brother (Nick). Shirley told the chair that she loved having her daughters but had always wanted a boy so was delighted when Nick was born. Shirley divorced the children's father in 1980. Over the next decade, Shirley had several relationships, which were described as abusive and controlling. Nick recalled domestic abuse when growing up and that this had a significant impact on his emotional wellbeing.

9.2 Shirley married her second husband in the mid-1980's. Rose also married in the mid-1980's (It is unclear how Rose met her ex-husband). Shirley believed Rose was unable to live independently and wanted Rose married so she could be looked after.

[10] https://setdab.org/

[11] Some family background has been included within the chronology to enhance the context of agency contact. For full family background, refer to the Overview Report.

9.3 Rose moved to Warrington after her wedding and was married for approximately 10 years, this relationship was reportedly abusive. Rose reached out to her family who collected her, and she returned to Southend. Rose then moved in with Shirley and divorced her abuser. The family informed the chair that Rose did not want to report the domestic abuse to the Police as he had been incarcerated for drug offences, she had moved away and felt safe.

9.4 Shirley told the chair she enjoyed Rose living with her. She also recalled the neighbours loving Rose as she would do anything for anyone. Rose would pay her 'weekly keep' (this is what Rose would call it). However, Nick was not working and therefore did not contribute towards the home (this caused friction between the two siblings).

9.5 During 2023, Nick decided to take out the bathroom, leaving Rose and Shirley with no toilet, bath, shower or sink. Nick hired a Portaloo in the front courtyard and a commode for Shirley to use. This decision created friction with the entire family.

10. Chronology[12]

10.1 In 2007, Nick attended the front office of a local Police Station reporting that he had been threatened by his stepfather and brother-in-law (not named). An incident was created, recording that Nick appeared to be suffering from mental-ill-health, was confused and was unable to provide an explanation as to why family members should want to harm him. Advice was given and no further action was taken.

10.2 Ten years later, one of Rose' sisters recall attending Shirley's home and seeing her stepfather (who was 95 years old at the time) in bed with black eyes and covered in bruises. He disclosed that Nick had punched him repeatedly whilst he was asleep, however, Shirley told her that he had fallen. Rose's sister was concerned for her stepfather's safety (believing Nick could kill him) and attended a local Police Station. She reported the assault and was told that due to her stepfather not wanting to make a complaint, no action could be taken. No information was taken by the officer, no advice was given, and no reports were recorded on the Police system.

10.3 In January 2021, Essex Police received a non-emergency telephone call from Nick reporting that one of his sisters (not Rose) and brother-in-law were trying to force Shirley to have a COVID-19 vaccination against her will. Nick alleged that during the argument his brother-in-law had verbally threatened him and raised a fist towards him. Officers attended, the allegation was recorded, and an investigation commenced. The incident was recognised as domestic related, and a DASH was completed assessing the risk to Nick as standard[13], a Safety Plan (DV5) was also completed. Nick initially stated he had a mobile recording of the threats but then informed officers that the footage did not exist. He provided a statement requesting that no further Police action take place.

10.4 In November 2021, Essex Police received a non-emergency telephone call from Nick reporting his sister (not Rose), had '*stormed into the house*' and had refused to leave. He had tried to leave, and she had placed her hand on his stomach preventing him from doing so. The incident was recognised as domestic related; a DASH was completed assessing

[12] The author has made every attempt to ensure Rose is central to the chronology however, due to such little interaction with agencies this has proved challenging.
[13] **Standard** - Current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.

the risk as standard and a Safety Plan (DV5) was completed. Due to there being no realistic prospect of a prosecution, the supervisor concluded that Nick be informed of no further Police action and further safeguarding advice be given.

10.5 Shirley's husband had dementia and was open to Adult Social Care and in receipt of home care. No concerns were raised by professionals regarding abuse, physical violence, potential conflict, financial hardship or financial abuse during this time. He died in May 2022, aged 100. After his death, Shirley started to get into debt with her energy company and council tax. These bills had previously been paid from Shirley's joint account; however, these funds were reportedly spent by Nick leaving no money to pay the bills.

10.6 At the end of June 2022, a telephone safeguarding referral was made to Adult Social Care by Rose's sister. Shirley had told her that Rose was bullying and controlling her finances. She was concerned about controlling and coercive behaviour by Rose and Nick and that they appeared to be taking advantage of Shirley's decline in capacity following their stepfather's death. An initial risk assessment was undertaken, with '*information and advice given only', as* Shirley had not consented to a further investigation. Her mental capacity was not in doubt, and she had the legal right to make this decision.

10.7 A month later Rose's sister made another referral to Adult Social Care due to concerns for Shirley's health and welfare because of Nick's mental health. As part of the initial risk assessment, Shirley was offered a referral to independent advocacy services to support her with a benefits check/application for Attendance Allowance, however, this was declined.

10.8 In November 2022, Rose's sister attended Shirley's home and found her very unwell and requested an ambulance. An argument ensued between Nick and Rose's sister, and as a result, Nick called the Police stating his sister had walked towards him and he thought she was going to punch him. Given the nature of the allegation and having undertaken a THRIVE risk assessment, it was determined that the incident be dealt with by way of an appointment. Nick repeated his allegation and provided CCTV footage of the incident. Whilst the footage showed a verbal argument it did not show any aggressive advances.

10.9 Officers spoke to Shirley, she informed the officer that her daughter (not Rose) '*likes to be a nuisance',* but said she wished to see her daughter. The officer advised Shirley that her daughter should not attend the house, given the problems this caused. It was recorded as a domestic incident, a DASH was completed, Nick's risk was identified as standard risk, a Safety Plan (DV5) was completed, and the incident was closed.

10.10 In January 2023, Essex Police received a 999 call from Barclays Bank Fraud Prevention reporting that a potential fraud was in progress with Shirley. Given the potential risk to a vulnerable person the incident was graded as a Priority 1 (emergency). Upon arrival, Shirley and Nick were spoken to where it was established that Nick had been speaking to the bank with Shirley in the background. They were making enquiries to commencing the process for Power of Attorney regarding Shirley's finances, the call had become confusing and had caused concern for the bank which in accordance with the Banking Protocol[14], had called the police. No offences were disclosed, and the incident was closed.

10.11 In March 2023, Rose attended the bank with Nick. She withdrew £18,000 from her account (in cash) and left the bank. There is no record of what this money was spent on

[14] https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/news/bank-branch-staff-and-police-team-up-to-stop-19-million-of-fraud-in-first-half-of-2020

or who it was given to. Additionally, in the last few months of Rose's life, direct debits were set up from her account which were to pay Nick's debts. It is unclear if Rose set these up, if Nick had access to her bank account, or if Rose knew about them.

10.12 Later that year, Shirley received a summons to court from Southend Council for non-payment of council tax.

10.13 In November 2023, Rose was killed.

11. Analysis[15]

The analysis will address the key lines of enquiry within the Terms of Reference.

11.1 This section will explore the following terms of reference together due to their close links:

- ***Consider how (and if there was knowledge of) familial abuse is understood by victims, family, friends, organisations, and the community.***
- ***Determine if Rose and/or the family faced any barriers reporting risks and accessing support services, including:***
  - ***The Equality Act 2010's protected characteristics[16].***
  - ***Possible learning difficulties.***
  - ***Mental ill-health.***
  - ***Familial abuse.***
  - ***Economic Abuse.***

11.1.1 Rose had never reported domestic abuse from Nick to agencies or to her family. This does not mean that abuse was not happening in the household, and as highlighted in the chronology, concerns had been raised by family members to both Police and Social Care, however, this was regarding Shirley and Rose's stepfather rather than Rose.

11.1.2 The family evidently had concerns regarding Nick's behaviour which had been present for many years. They were concerned that he had been violent to Rose's stepfather (who was frail, elderly and had care and support needs) and they were worried about his mental health. He also appeared to continue to use his position as the only son who was doted on by Shirley, to manipulate the family situation.

11.1.3 When speaking to Nick, it is evident his perception of the circumstances within the household are misplaced, if not fantasy. Nick believes he was the victim of abuse within the household and that Rose, and his other siblings were abusive to him. But upon speaking with Shirley and the family, this is far from the truth. Examples of these false accusations and/or exaggerated memories are:

- ***Nick was a child victim of domestic abuse; his father was abusive to Shirley and the children. His father had been in hospital receiving mental health support and electric shock treatment and was a chronic alcoholic. Nick would blame himself and think it was all his fault.*** There was no domestic abuse from the sibling's father, and the family recall him as supportive of all the children up until his death, and he did not have any addictions to alcohol. Their father did receive treatment for his mental-ill- health, which included electric shocks after he and Shirley divorced. There was domestic abuse from Shirley's other partners until she met her late husband. This abuse led to her two middle

[15] The chair and panel are aware that there is very little information regarding Rose, apart from that shared from her family. The analysis will be reviewing family and agency interaction with Rose, Shirley and Nick and have made attempts to ensure Rose has remained central to the discussions.
[16] This has been explored within the Equality and Diversity section of the report.

children leaving the home in their late teens. The siblings recall how they felt Shirley would choose the men over her children and that there was neglect within the household. The children do not blame Shirley but believe she would be trapped by the abusive men which impacted her ability to parent resulting in an adverse impact on them. Nick was much younger than his siblings therefore the impact of these relationships is likely to have impacted him differently. As part of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children are now recognised as victims of domestic abuse due to the adverse effects it has on their mental and physical health. It is evident that he also experienced other trauma as a child, such as a divorce and his father's poor mental health. These adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can impact children and young people's development into adulthood. Although they may be more likely to require additional support, these ACEs do not cause someone to be abusive. Domestic Abuse remains about choice, and Nick was in control of every choice he made throughout his time living with Rose and Shirley.

- ***Shirley was concerned that the carers coming in for her husband were very rough causing bruising. They would not clean him properly and Rose would have to clean up after they had been.*** No concerns had ever been raised about the carers by Shirley or the family, and they were happy with the support going in. Rose did help with the care, but this was when the carers were not present, and when he required help.
- ***Nick states he only came back to Essex after Shirley had called him between 30-40 times saying, 'If you don't come back, I can't go on any longer'.*** Shirley and the family dispute this and informed the chair they did not have a number for him, and he would either turn up, or they would have to wait for Nick to call.
- ***According to Nick, Rose was like Jekyll and Hyde, constantly blaming Nick for everything, would shout, slam doors and demand money from him. As a result, Shirley and Nick would try to avoid conflict as they were both in fear.*** Shirley disputed this, stating they had their 'ups and downs' but she had never been frightened of Rose and when they argued Shirley would tell them to stop. Rose managed her schizophrenia well, always attending her reviews with her GP and there were never any concerns regarding her behaviour. In fact, those who loved her and worked with her described Rose as kind and gentle, completely the opposite to Nick's description.
- ***He decided to rip out the bathroom and Shirley's bedroom after a flood and the builders had not done a good job.*** This is incorrect, the flood occurred after he had ripped out the bathroom leaving no toilet or cleaning facilities. Shirley explained that when Nick wanted to do something he would just do it, and she had no say in the matter.
- ***He installed CCTV outside the home and in the lounge, this was apparently to capture abuse from his sisters and neighbours.*** Shirley and Rose did not want the CCTV installed and there had never been any trouble with the neighbours. Nick had also taken the wall down so he could watch people parking (on a public road). This was funded through Shirley's finances.
- ***He stated living in the home made him exhausted as he did not drive and had to do things for Shirley. He claimed that Shirley smoked 4 packets of cigarettes a week, but after her husband died, she started to smoke 20 – 40 cigarettes a day. He would have to get them for Shirley, and it was expensive, causing financial difficulties.*** Again, Shirley and the family stated this was not true, Shirley used to smoke but only a few and has not smoked for years.
- ***He claims to have previously had an addiction to alcohol which got worse during COVID, however, he had sought support prior to this from the Mormon church. He has since completed an alcohol awareness course in prison.*** The family never remember Nick drinking alcohol and Shirley told the chair that he used to always tell her he did not like alcohol and would never drink it. No concerns were raised with agencies or his GP with regards to alcohol.

- ***He claims he has had a girlfriend in Ukraine for 10 years and would like to bring her to this country.*** The family (including Shirley) have never heard this before and no evidence of this was found on his devices by the police.

11.1.4 When these comments were discussed with Shirley, she asked why Nick would say these things. It was explained that it is possible Nick would make the comments to try to justify his abusive behaviours and minimise the impact he had on the household. Nick's comments are distressing for the family as they can see he has taken no responsibility for his actions and blames everyone other than himself. Minimisation, denying and blaming others is a common trait that so many abusers demonstrate, as explained within the Duluth Model[17]. Abusers will create a world that distorts their victims view on the world and on them. They will blame others or use stress and other factors such as alcohol and mental-ill-health to justify their actions. However, these are excuses, and they do not cause a person to be violent or abusive. They may contribute to how the abuser behaves but at the core of it all the aim of an abuser is to gain power and exert control over another, which Nick appears to have been doing within this home.

11.1.5 From speaking with the family and details provided for the review, financial concern was evident in the last few years once Nick had returned to the home. Economic Abuse is a recognised behaviour within the Domestic Abuse legislation, the 2021 Act widened the context of financial abuse to ensure it captured the range of perpetrator tactics. Surviving Economic Abuse[18] describes:

- ***Financial Abuse*** *- The misuse of money and exerting financial control, for example, controlling someone's bank account or forcing them to take out loans, denying or restricting access to money, or misusing another person's money.*
- ***Economic Abuse*** *- Encompasses many more ways in which an abuser may control someone's economic situation, including through sabotaging their employment or damaging their property, affecting their overall economic stability.*

11.1.6 It is essential those working with families and communities understand that economic abuse is a form of coercive controlling behaviour. Perpetrators target victims' independence restricting their access to vital documentation and services, creating a dependence and reliance, which may be perceived as supportive and helpful. It is important to recognise that economic abuse does not always cause dependency. Rather Nick's control of money was through exploitation; for example: taking Shirley's money. This did not cause her to depend on him, rather it created economic instability leading to problems paying the bills, including the council tax. This is relevant as Shirley was summoned to court for non-payment of council tax, potentially making it difficult for her to continue to support Nick and requiring him to get a job and/or support himself. In contrast, Rose contributed to the household.

11.1.7 When we explore Nick's use of financial and economic control over the household, he was not working and was not in receipt of any benefits. Yet he claimed that he would have to pay for most things such as the work on the bathroom, which Shirley paid for. With no income, he was completely dependent on the money either given by Rose or Shirley. Rose worked incredibly hard, was dedicated to her work and always saved her money. She ensured she paid her 'weekly keep' and voiced her frustration to Shirley that Nick was not paying towards anything within the house. There is no evidence Rose wanted to stop working, but it is possible that with the lack of financial contribution to the household and

[17] https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/
[18] https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/what-is-economic-abuse/

the increasing debt the family were finding themselves in, there was significant pressure on her to continue to work and bring in an income. It is not surprising Rose asked for her money back from him and felt frustrated when he did not pay it back.

11.1.8 Shirley informed the chair that if Nick wanted money, she would give it to him, or he would ask Rose for it. She explained that he would travel to London to meet friends (unknown who) and would then return in a taxi, demanding she pay the £80 fare. When asked how this made her feel, she explained she had no choice but to give it to him.

11.1.9 Nick stated that Rose bought all the food but on one occasion she had not entered the correct pin number on Shirley's card resulting in the card being blocked. However, when speaking with the family, this is incorrect. The card was stopped due to there being insufficient funds in the account to pay the direct debits/standing orders which was a result of his spending.

11.1.10 Shirley and Rose had never been in debt and had always managed to pay bills including the council tax and utility bills. Nick informed the chair he had made attempts to make repayments for the council tax and the energy bills; however, he had no income to pay this. Shirley was unaware of this debt, and the family also do not believe Rose was aware of them as Nick would shred any letters that came through the post. As a result, the debt continued, and Shirley received a summons to court from Southend Council.

11.1.11 Southend Council Tax team sent Rose and Shirley a reminder for non-payment in April 2023 with a payment made seven days later. A second reminder was then sent in May following a default of the May instalment, this was again responded to with a payment being received. The account was then subject to a final notice in June following a 3rd default, as a result this removed the right to pay by instalments. Although there was no contact with Shirley or Rose, a payment was made five days after the third default (at a reduced sum). A further two payments were then made in July and August (both were late payments). Even though these had been made, the payments prevented the issue of the summons. When this was reviewed in September, due to no contact from Shirley or Rose the council continued late payments and a summons was issued. Southend Council Tax team informed the panel they followed their processes correctly, and there was no indication on the account that the resident had any care and support needs. If this had been the case, they have a 'vulnerable' indicator on their system to ensure a more considered approach to recovery action is taken.

11.1.12 Although the council tax team felt they had followed their processes there was no attempt to engage with Shirley or Rose other than send the warning letters. Even if they had not been flagged as 'vulnerable' on the system, concerns should have been noticed by the team that Shirley was an elderly lady with no previous history of non-payment. Proactive attempts to engage and support her to make the payments would have meant the summons could have been avoided. Although never diagnosed with any learning difficulty, those who experience these can struggle to open and/or understand letters. If Shirley, Rose, and/or Nick struggled to understand the council's letters or court orders they may have avoided or not been able to follow the demands set out within these. Although for much of the community it would be the responsibility of the individual to have responded, when a resident is elderly or has/may have care and support needs, their welfare should have been explored by the council. This caring response is going to be even more important in the upcoming years with the cost-of-living crisis and the financial pressures on households. The family wanted to share their disappointment with

Southend Council and how they dealt with the outstanding summons after Rose's death, receiving calls only months after (they were informed of the murder) insisting the payments were paid or to expect bailiffs. The family found the experience traumatic and distressing, however, to ensure Shirley was supported they were able to arrange the payment of the arrears.

11.1.13 Another concern regarding economic abuse from Nick was when he called Barclays Bank with Shirley making enquiries to commencing the process for Power of Attorney regarding Shirley's finances. Nick informed the chair this was to get Shirley's card reinstated; however, this is not true. The family were unaware Nick was making attempts to become Shirley's power of attorney, and it is likely Rose was also unaware of this. It is reassuring Barclays were able to identify possible concerns around this and called the Police.

11.1.14 Financial abuse is also included in Safeguarding Adults guidance within the Care Act 2014[19]. Even though Police identified there were no offences present it was an opportunity to have spoken to Shirley and Rose away from Nick. It would have enabled them to try to understand the situation and dynamics at home, considered possible coercive and controlling behaviour and a referral to Adult Social Care. It is possible this was not explored as Shirley appeared to be complicit with the account given to the officers, however, officers need to recognise the complexities with mother/son dynamics, especially with regards to domestic abuse.

11.1.15 Although Nick had not obtained Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA)[20] he had made attempts to do so. Research by Dewis Choice[21] and Aberystwyth University produced a guidance document with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse Partnership[22] regarding the tactics and risks when an abuser has Lasting Power of Attorney, it states:

- *Ways that LPA can be used to perpetrate domestic abuse - A Property and Finance LPA can be used to make decisions around:*
  - *money, tax and bills*
  - *bank and building society accounts*

  The attorney(s) can start making decisions while the subject still has mental capacity if both the lasting power of attorney (LPA) says this can be done and the subject gives you permission

11.1.16 The abusive behaviour that appears to have been present within this case include:

- ***Control access to benefits, pensions and any other money the victim has – withholding the victim's bank card, using it without their knowledge to withdraw money, using their money to fund drug or alcohol addiction (the victim may feel guilty about refusing money for substance abuse for fear that the abuser will become unwell without it).*** As already noted, Nick was spending Shirley's money, creating debt and non-payment of bills, he was also insisting she paid for the work on the house and taxi fares. Shirley stated she did not feel she could say no to him as he was her son, and she would have done anything for him. Although she may not have been fearful, the thought that she would not be providing for him and the possible pressure he placed on her, meant she was unable to refuse his demands.
- ***Medical care or withholding care.*** Nick had argued with his sister that Shirley should not have the COVID-19 vaccination. He informed the chair this was Shirley's decision, and he was supporting her with this, but it is unclear what the truth was during that time.

[19] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-2014-part-1-factsheets/care-act-factsheets
[20] A Lasting Power of Attorney is when someone appoints another person(s) (attorney) to make decisions on their behalf.
[21] https://dewischoice.org.uk/information-and-advice/resources/
[22] https://www.cambsdasv.org.uk/web/older_people/567583

11.1.17 Where concerns are raised regarding an individual who has or may have care and support needs and there is a Lasting Power of Attorney, a referral to Adult Social Care should be made, a DASH should have been completed, and specialist support should be offered.

11.2 This section will explore the following terms of reference together due to their close links:

- ***Review agencies response, professional curiosity, interventions, care, treatment and or support provided to Rose, Nick and/or the wider family.***
- ***Analyse whether the 'Whole System' and 'Think Family' approach was considered and applied especially with regards to familial abuse, conflicting issues within families with adult family children and carer needs.***
- ***Consider whether the work undertaken by services was consistent with each organisation and local professional standards, domestic abuse and safeguarding policies, procedures and protocols and ensure adherence to national good practice.***
- ***Examine services and agencies response to the welfare of any adults at risk of harm especially with regards to familial abuse.***
- ***Review the communication between agencies, services, friends, family, and the community including the transfer of relevant information.***

11.2.1 Between 2007 and 2023, there were 5 relevant contacts with Essex Police due to issues between Nick and his sister (not Rose) and/or his brother-in-law. At no time during the police investigations into these matters were significant concerns raised or identified in relation to vulnerability, mental- ill- health, familial or financial abuse.

11.2.2 When Nick attended the Police station in 2007 and spoke with a member of staff wishing to report threats made towards him by family members and produced a handwritten note (which had obvious signs of alteration), the member of staff concluded that no offences had taken place and determined that the incident related to potential mental ill health. Nick was advised to speak with his doctor/GP, and an incident was created recording the interaction with Nick and the advice given. This was in line with practice at the time.

11.2.3 Since 2007, Essex Police has made significant changes to the way in which it deals with incidents involving mental ill health. In 2014, Essex Police introduced the Mental Health Street Triage Team to provide practical help, support and advice to staff dealing with anyone who is displaying mental-ill-health.

11.2.4 They have also developed training in recognising and dealing with persons displaying signs of mental-ill-health, which is now embedded into a variety of training courses provided to staff and officers resulting in an increase in staff awareness.

11.2.5 In 2023, a new process was introduced for highlighting and sharing concerns with partner agencies in relation to individuals displaying signs of mental-ill-health where there are indicators of serious violence, homicide, high risk of suicide or are a high service user, but who do not meet the Section 136[23] Mental Health Act 1983 criteria, in the form of a mental health referral process via an on-line form MHT1.

11.2.6 If Nick presented at a police station today, as he did in 2007, staff would have the option to seek advice from the Mental Health Street Triage Team to enquire whether Nick was

[23] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/20/section/136

open to Mental Health Services to ensure that all risk factors are considered to enable an appropriate response.

11.2.7 With the recent establishment of the Mental Health Team and the Mental Health Risk Management Board there is now an improved process to identify individuals posing a significant risk due to mental-ill-health, and a mechanism by which a partnership response to such individuals can be developed to manage the risk.

11.2.8 Rose's sister was proactive in trying to seek help for those living within the household. When she approached the Police, she raised; allegation of physical assault, an elderly gentleman (95 years old), vulnerabilities including dementia, care needs, him being bed bound, the alleged abuser being a family member and other family members within the home who also had care and support needs.

11.2.9 However, due to her stating her stepfather did not want to make allegations she was turned away, with no action or record taken. Nick was still present in the home and there was a vulnerable man with potential injuries who remained at risk of harm. An incident should have been created and a welfare check requested to see if there were any safeguarding concerns within the household. Why this was not done, we do not know, however, the impact on the family has been long lasting.

11.2.10 The family believed the Police should have protected their stepfather and acted on their concerns, especially as there had been such significant injuries. They voiced that they felt let down, as they could not protect their stepfather especially as he was bed bound and had no means to either protect or seek help himself. This impact meant they did not reach out to Police again and may never seek support from them in the future.

11.2.11 When the DASHs were completed with Nick in January 2021 and November 2021, he disclosed that he had depression (it is not recorded if this was diagnosed depression, or he was feeling depressed). There are no records of these disclosures being explored any further by the attending officers or what advice was given to Nick in response (i.e., seeking support from his GP or contacting partners within Mental Health). This may have been due to the disclosures not being of the nature that prompted the officers to consider immediate safeguarding or to seek the advice of the Mental Health Street Triage Team and were not indicative of there being any immediate risk to himself or others. That said, it may have been beneficial to have signposted him to support in the future.

11.2.12 During that same period, the catalyst for the domestic related incidents arose from concerns in relation to the care of Shirley and the family's access to the property. Although Shirley was recorded as having care and support going into the home and being present at one of the incidents, Shirley was never spoken to. Shirley's husband was living at the address but there are no records that Police knew an elderly male with care and support needs was present in the home (who had Adult Social Care support). Without these discussions they were unable to fully explore support options with either person.

11.2.13 Rose was recorded as being present in the STORM incident log of the domestic incident at the beginning of November 2021, but there is no evidence that she was spoken to. The incident recorded no witnesses to the incident; however, it is unclear how this was determined. Nick's statement, whilst detailing the events and naming his sister (not Rose) as the aggressor, made no mention of Rose, Shirley or his stepfather.

11.2.14 The incident in November 2022 recorded that Shirley had been spoken to but no details of what she said were recorded on the Athena investigation. With all these investigations Shirley was not recorded as an involved party within Athena despite her being central in the dispute between Nick and the wider family. This meant her wishes and feelings were never taken into consideration, and she had no voice during the Police involvement.

11.2.15 All recorded consideration of risk and vulnerability centred on Nick as the nominated victim of the investigations. Whilst this is in keeping with procedure, officers and staff must also be cognisant of the wider impact domestic abuse has upon the family. Taking a 'Whole Family' approach and where vulnerabilities are identified (either children or vulnerable adults) the necessary referrals to partners should be made. In this case there was an absence of professional curiosity in relation to the potential vulnerability of those living within the household, resulting in a missed opportunity to assess whether there was a need to share information with partners such as Adult Social Care.

11.2.16 When Nick made the allegations of threats or assault, the Police determined no further action would be taken. On the first occasion in 2021, Nick stated he did not want his sister and/or brother-in-law to be spoken to as it may antagonise the situation. His wishes were met, and no action was taken. However, he did not make these requests during the other two occasions, therefore this would have been an opportunity to have spoken to his sister. This may have enabled the officers to understand the concerns present within the family, enhancing their understanding of risk and any safeguarding concerns.

11.2.17 The family also feel they were let down when they raised their concerns of possible abuse to Adult Social Care and believe more intervention could have been offered to everyone living within the household, including Nick.

11.2.18 After Rose's stepfather died in May 2022, Nick moved permanently into the home. Rose's sister had significant concerns for Shirley and raised these to Adult Social Care alleging controlling and coercive behaviour by Rose and Nick in relation to Shirley's finances. Although Adult Social Care reported their response was appropriately and proportionately responded to, there were several opportunities missed to have further explored the dynamics within the home.

11.2.19 Shirely was seen by the social worker at her home address; Nick was present as was his sister who had raised the concerns. Rose was not present as she was at work. The Adult Social Care report states that Shirley was able to speak freely, give her views, make decisions and was provided with information and support. The social worker told the IMR author that they were not expecting Nick to be present as Shirley's daughter had arranged the meeting. When discussing this with the family, they informed the chair that Nick never left the house, and he had initially told them he was going to refuse the social worker access to the house. As a compromise, the sister felt even if he were present Shirley would still be seen. The main concern the social worker recalls were that Rose was not paying anything towards the household bills; however, Shirley told them this had been resolved, and she was clear that she did not want to take this matter any further. The family believe Shirley was trying to obtain more money from Rose to fund Nick. Rose's sister deeply regrets making these allegations against Rose, however at the time felt she needed to act to protect her mother, she also recalls briefly speaking with the social worker when they were leaving who raised their concerns regarding Nick's mental health but explained there was nothing they could do.

11.2.20 It was not appropriate to speak to Shirley in the presence of Nick as he had also been accused of abusing her. She should have been seen on her own, or with her other daughter so they could both share any concerns. Having Nick present would have undoubtedly created an uneven power dynamic within the meeting. The social worker never asked to speak to Rose, her not being present meant she did not have an opportunity to have her voice heard, yet Nick's was. The social worker has reflected on this and recognises they should have taken time to organise another visit to speak to Shirley on her own to confirm beyond any doubt that she did not want or need any support with her finances, or to take matters further. This omission should have also been picked up at the authorisation to close stage as it would have prompted the social worker.

11.2.21 The consequence of Nick being part of these discussions and Shirley's devotion to him, is likely to have meant that she would never have felt able to have raised any concerns in front of him. Therefore, the assessment was flawed from the outset.

11.2.22 Coercive control is still not fully understood or identified by those who work with individuals who have, or may have, care and support needs. It would have been expected that the social worker would have considered this with the allegations made and carried out appropriate risk assessments (such as the DASH) with Shirley. Too many times, victims of coercive and controlling behaviour are hidden in plain sight, especially when there is no physical abuse. It is essential therefore that social workers can recognise the signs and complete these risk assessments to enhance their knowledge of the situation at home. As Nick was present this would not have been appropriate, however, they could have gathered enough information to complete the form and evaluate the risk.

11.2.23 At times, the DASH can feel clumsy for those who are older or subjected to abuse from a family member, therefore the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough 'Older Persons DASH'[24] devised by Dewis Choice and Aberystwyth University may be of some assistance. This document was devised for those over 60 years old and/or those subjected to familial abuse, ensuring the questions are more appropriate for victims. Although many of the questions are the same as the SafeLives DASH, questions which may have given Shirley the opportunity to have highlighted the situation at home.

11.2.24 These questions may have enabled the social worker to have explored what was happening in the household, discussed Rose's sister's concerns, identify any abusive behaviours, evaluate the risk and seek appropriate support. There was no evidence that the social worker advised the family to report coercive or controlling behaviour to Police or offer specialist support regarding domestic abuse. Even if this advice had been declined, it would have been available to the family for future consideration.

11.2.25 Only a month later, Rose's sister made a further referral to Adult Social Care due to concerns for Shirley's health and welfare because of concerns regarding Nick's mental-ill-health, and both his and Rose's learning difficulties. Adult Social Care had no records to indicate that Rose or Nick had learning difficulties, nor that they had any care and support needs themselves. They were, however, concerned for Shirley and an assessment was arranged over the phone.

11.2.26 As part of the initial risk assessment, Shirley was offered a referral to independent advocacy services to support her with a benefits check/application for Attendance

[24] https://www.cambsdasv.org.uk/web/older_people/567583

Allowance, which was declined. The social worker followed this up, but again it was declined. This response was appropriate with the information known; however, it may have been beneficial to have cross-referenced the concerns raised the month prior and considered speaking with the family's GP.

11.2.27 Although Adult Social Care practitioners receive E-Learning regarding domestic abuse, it is unclear in how much depth the social worker completing the assessment considered domestic abuse and whether they felt confident asking about the dynamics in the household. Rose's sister had told social care that Shirley was very protective over Rose and Nick, and therefore this may have been a barrier for Shirley to have shared the true extent of the situation. As already noted, it is unclear whether Rose or Shirley realised what they were experiencing was familial abuse, therefore practitioners should be given the skills to feel confident and competent in not only asking questions but also being able to recognise other 'social cues' present.

11.2.28 Every contact Adult Social Care had with the family (including those when Rose's stepfather was alive), did not adopt a 'Whole Family' approach, to identify wider needs. This would have been particularly useful especially when exploring the concerns regarding the alleged financial and coercive control. Additionally, it would have ensured all members of the family were included in any support offered and/or planned.

11.2.29 Most importantly, if this had been explored further, both Rose and Nick would have been spoken to, to find out any pressures they were under, and what (if any) support was required. Rose would have had an opportunity to have a voice; she would have been able to speak to someone about what was happening and the impact it was having on her. Instead, she was an invisible resident within the house, working hard, supporting the household and alone. Nick remained at the forefront of any contact with any agency, with him calling the Police and being present during the social care visits.

11.2.30 He shared with the chair that his mental health was poor, however, this was never explored with him by the social worker. Again, if time had been taken to have explored the stress and pressure, appropriate intervention and support may have been offered to him. Although Social Care were involved when Rose's stepfather was alive, no Carers Assessment was ever offered to Rose or Shirley. After he died and Rose and Nick became Shirley's carers, there was an opportunity for the social worker to have suggested a Carers Assessment to see what help (if any) could have been offered.

11.2.31 After these meetings and involvement with the Police, Rose's sisters informed the chair that the wider family met to discuss how they could support Shirley due to feeling let down by agencies. As a result, they made the decision to manage the situation privately and would not contact agencies again. The impact of this response remains with them to this day.

11.3 Consider if the COVID pandemic impacted the health and wellbeing of Rose, Nick and/or the family as well as services provision and response.

11.3.1 There was evidently friction within the family when they disagreed about the COVID-19 vaccination. However, upon speaking with the family they do not believe the pandemic impacted on Rose, Shirley and Nick's health and/or wellbeing.

11.3.2 When reviewing agency responses, Police attended on each occasion, with Adult Social Care providing multiple in person and telephone contacts along with Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapist services (because of Rose's stepfather's care and support needs). Throughout the period, no concerns were raised by professionals regarding potential conflict, financial hardship or financial abuse by family.

11.4 Conclusion of analysis

11.4.1 The analysis distinguishes between what is evidenced within agency records and family accounts, and what represents professional interpretation informed by research. The documented evidence shows that no agency identified domestic abuse within the family prior to Rose's death, that Rose's mental health was stable and well-managed, and that both siblings had long-standing difficulties with relationships, boundaries, and independence. The circumstances of the homicide are also clear from the evidence: an argument escalated, Nick assaulted Rose, and fatally stabbed her.

11.4.2 Professional interpretation, grounded in this evidence and supported by national research on adult family violence, indicates that the dynamics within the household were consistent with a pattern of intra-familial abuse that is often hidden and under-recognised. Family accounts describe longstanding behaviours in Nick that align with known risk factors for harm, including entitlement, manipulation, and gendered expectations. Although agencies did not have clear indicators of imminent risk, the combination of entrenched family dynamics, dependency, and gendered power imbalance created conditions in which Rose was vulnerable to serious harm. This interpretation contextualises the available evidence without extending beyond it, highlighting how adult family violence can remain invisible to services until a crisis point is reached.

12 Learning and recommendations

12.1 Rose was invisible to all the agencies who interacted with this family. Although she was noted within records, she was never spoken to, and her voice was never incorporated within any assessment or care plan. Rose was an independent woman who was working hard to maintain a home for her and Shirley. Nick appears to have been taking advantage of Shirley, using his status as the only son and manipulating Shirley and Rose financially. As with most abusers, his voice was louder than Rose's or Shirley's and he appears to have had the control of the situation within the home. Family members were evidently concerned for Shirley and Nick's mental wellbeing; however, coercive control and the impact of his manipulation was never considered within any assessment. These were missed opportunities to have fully explored what was happening within this home.

12.2 In September 2023, Essex Police introduced the AWARE Principles with the primary focus to improve professional curiosity in relation to the Voice of the Child (VOTC). This was in response to several statutory reviews in which it had been identified Essex Police investigations were consistently failing to identify vulnerable children during domestic abuse investigations and taking steps to safeguard them. Any interaction with a child during an investigation, particularly investigations of domestic abuse in which there are children within the home setting, should be recorded on Athena utilising the Protecting Vulnerable People Tab. An entry should also be placed on the investigation log utilising the AWARE mnemonic to ensure a structured process helping officers assess any

potential vulnerability and act accordingly. The AWARE Principles have now been embedded into the Essex Police Parent Policy and Child Abuse Investigations.

12.3 Currently Flex Training of AWARE is being delivered to Local Policing Teams (front line staff) focusing on children rather than adults who have or may have care and support needs. Additionally, AWARE does not feature in any other Essex Police Policy and Procedure relating to children or vulnerable adults including, Essex Police Policy – Protecting Vulnerable People & Domestic Abuse.

12.4 The utilisation of AWARE is an effective framework to ensure officers and staff apply professional curiosity and in doing so identify potential vulnerability. Whilst the focus of Essex Police has been to ensure officers and staff apply the Principles to ensure that the Voice of The Child is heard (improving safeguarding and the exchange of information with partners), the principles are equally relevant to the improvement of the delivery of safeguarding and exchange of information to partners in relation to adults who have or may have care and support needs.

12.5 The importance of applying AWARE to adults with care and support needs has been recognised by Essex Police and as such the training has been revised with greater emphasis on utilising AWARE for both children and adults. This training was implemented in Summer 2024 and takes the form of mandated CBT for all relevant front-line staff. If applied correctly, it is envisaged that the use of AWARE will improve professional curiosity and in doing so improve upon the recognition of vulnerability, ensuring that safeguarding and support are in place where appropriate.

Recommendation 1
The Crime & Public Protection Command Senior Leadership Team should ensure that the AWARE Principles are embedded in the relevant Essex Police Force Policies & Procedures (i.e. Protecting Vulnerable People Procedure, Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy, Domestic Abuse Policy and Domestic Abuse Investigations Procedure).

12.6 Implementation will be demonstrated through the completed review and update of Essex Police policies to include the AWARE Principles, supported by audit activity showing consistent use of AWARE in adult safeguarding and domestic abuse investigations. Progress will be monitored through the Force Action Tracker and reported to SETDAB, ensuring the policy changes lead to measurable improvements in professional curiosity and identification of vulnerability.

12.7 We will never know if Rose was frightened of Nick as she was never asked and never sought help and support. It is essential therefore to raise awareness of familial abuse in the community and the behaviours that may be present to increase the public's ability to recognise and report the abuse. Any campaigns need to ensure the subtle tactics used by abusers are included ensuring the language used is relatable to the target audience.

12.8 Southend-on-Sea Domestic Abuse Strategy 2023-26[25] identified that domestic abuse in the area was under reported, with residents describing multiple barriers. Their survey indicated that 34% of residents had never disclosed to any professional about their experiences. Additionally, the strategy notes that only 60% of professionals had received

[25] https://democracy.southend.gov.uk/documents/s63147/Domestic%20Abuse%20Strategy%202023-2026.pdf

domestic abuse training, with only 33% feeling equipped to identify abuse. An objective set out within the strategy is to promote societal change and raise awareness.

12.9 As such, a campaign raising awareness of domestic abuse affecting older people was launched in 2024 by SETDAB called, 'It's Never Too Late'[26]. The campaign aims to empower older people to recognise abuse and seek help. The campaign uses content and visuals adapted from the 'Hidden Harms' animation, co-created by domestic abuse survivors aged between 60 and 93-years-old from Dewis Choice. It explores different types of abuse such as emotional, physical, sexual, and economic abuse, along with coercive control and encourages victims to seek help. Whilst this provides excellent awareness of familial abuse and domestic abuse to older people, a gap has been identified that domestic abuse between siblings is missing from the content and campaign.

12.10 When raising awareness, it is essential that systems are in place to deal with concerns raised by family/friends/community and that they are taken seriously, with different abusive behaviours being fully explored. This will enable the whole picture to be understood and ensure that relevant and appropriate support and intervention is offered. To achieve this, the whole family (not just those living in the home) should be spoken to, given a voice, are heard and involved in any care plan and decision making, ensuring the safety of everyone involved.

Recommendation 2
Southend-on-Sea Council and SETDAB to ensure any public awareness campaigns incorporate siblings within familial abuse, highlighting the complexities and possible tactics used by abusers.

12.11 Delivery will be evidenced through the inclusion of sibling-to-sibling abuse within the SETDAB Strategic Communications Plan and future public campaigns. Monitoring will take place through established communications governance processes, with evaluation of campaign reach and engagement to confirm increased public understanding of familial abuse. This will ensure the learning results in sustained improvements in awareness and earlier recognition of risk.

12.12 Raising awareness also needs to take place within the agencies who interact with families where familial abuse may be present (For example, where caring responsibilities are present). Adult Social Care, need to have domestic abuse at the forefront of their minds when there are concerns for a person's wellbeing. They should not be reliant on a disclosure being made but be proactive in seeking information and using their professional curiosity to understand the dynamics of the relationships. Without this, adults who have, or may have, care and support needs will continue to be hidden in plain sight.

Recommendation 3
Adult Social Care are to reinforce practice when working with families experiencing domestic abuse ensuring all significant family members are proactively involved where appropriate.

[26] https://setdab.org/resource/setdab-its-never-too-late-campaign-2024/

12.13 Implementation will be supported by delivery of the Principal Social Worker practice note, staff workshops, and a Quality Assurance deep dive on family involvement. Outcome measures will include audit findings showing improved documentation of family engagement and increased use of professional curiosity. Monitoring will occur through Adult Social Care's quality assurance framework, ensuring the learning is embedded and leads to sustained improvements in whole-family safeguarding practice.

12.14 The Citizen Advice Bureau report that council tax debt is the most common debt they encounter, and this has risen in the last three years. In 2022, it was recorded there were approximately 547,000 residents living in a Southend-on-Sea postcode. Therefore, it is essential that the council can provide support to those who are struggling to pay their debt. The Citizens Advice Council Tax Protocol was developed in partnership with the Local Government Association; the protocol offers practical steps aimed at preventing people from getting into debt and outlines how to ensure enforcement agents act within the law.

12.15 Shirley (and we believe Rose) were unaware of the non-payment of council tax as Nick was opening any mail coming into the home and then shredding it. Although the council are confident, they followed their process, they did not take into consideration that Shirley may be vulnerable due to her age and that she had never missed a payment previously. If time had been taken to contact Shirley (and/or Rose) other than via letter, their circumstances could be explored, and they could have been helped with regards to repayment and benefits.

12.16 Southend-on-Sea Council are currently working towards becoming an accredited member of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance[27]. This will ensure there is a continued commitment to support victims of domestic abuse. This will enhance support offered to any victim who approaches the council. However, to further improve the council's response to domestic abuse (including economic abuse) training should be introduced to the council tax teams.

Recommendation 4
Southend-on-Sea Council to ensure their safeguarding and domestic abuse policy and training includes economic abuse and all council tax staff attend.

12.17 Delivery will be evidenced through completion of safeguarding and domestic abuse training for Council Tax staff, with explicit coverage of economic abuse. Monitoring will be undertaken through existing workforce development structures, with audits assessing improved recognition of economic abuse and appropriate safeguarding referrals. This will ensure the learning translates into measurable improvements in identifying vulnerable residents.

12.18 The family feel the risk Nick poses to Shirley, them and the wider family was not fully recognised by the judge and or agencies who interacted with the family. They requested for the recommendation regarding this report to be included within the risk assessment at the parole board (which if he is eligible) will be in 2036. However, due to the significant amount of time that will have passed they understood this was not a practical recommendation to oversee by the CSP or SETDAB. However, a request has been to

[27] https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/

Nicks Custody Probation Officer that the review will be included in any risk assessment prior to any parole board.

13 Conclusion

13.1 This review found that although Rose, Nick and Shirley had contact with services, no agency recognised the presence of adult family violence or identified safeguarding concerns prior to Rose's death. The evidence indicates that the dynamics within the household were long-standing, complex, and not easily visible to practitioners, particularly as they did not fit the more familiar patterns of intimate-partner abuse. Professional interpretation of the available information suggests that entrenched behaviours, dependency, and gendered expectations contributed to an environment in which risk was present but unrecognised.

13.2 The learning from this review therefore focuses on improving professional curiosity, strengthening understanding of adult family abuse, and ensuring that safeguarding responses consider the whole family system. The recommendations reflect these findings by emphasising clearer identification of familial abuse, improved information-sharing, and enhanced multi-agency coordination. Embedding these lessons will support agencies to recognise similar patterns of harm earlier and respond more effectively in future cases.

13.3 The family concluded that, Rose had the right to live a happy, peaceful life and Nick had no right to take that away from her. The family spoke of their horror when they found out what Nick had done to Rose, but they explained they were not surprised. Both sisters have voiced that they are terrified for their', Shirley's and their family's safety if/when Nick is released from custody. They believe that if Shirley is still alive when he is released, he will manipulate her to live back in the home and he has the potential to kill her or one of them. Both said '*if he could kill Rose then he can kill one of us*'. It is vital therefore that the whole family are protected from him.

Final word from the family - Afterglow.

I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an afterglow of smiles when life is done.
I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly down the ways,
Of happy times and laughing times and bright and sunny days.
I'd like the tears of those who grieve to dry before the sun;
Of happy memories that I leave when life is done