

# Spotlight on domestic homicides as independent reviewer appointed

- expert QC to consider the need for further sentencing reform to better protect the public
- appointment follows the analysis of more than 100 cases by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ)
- findings will pave the way for potential future changes

Clare Wade QC – who was lead counsel in the high-profile case of Sally Challen – will examine the need to reform the law before presenting her findings and recommendations to the Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP. She will consider whether the law could better protect the public and ensure sentences reflect the severity of these crimes.

It follows an initial review carried out by the MOJ which looked in detail at more than 100 cases, including analysis of the sentences imposed, sentencing remarks, as well as information on the gender of perpetrators and victims and the method of killing. This was in response to a number of cases in which concerns were raised about the minimum term for murders committed with a weapon.

Ms Wade QC will now provide further analysis of this data and produce a report for Ministers to consider later this year.

Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

We want to take a closer look at how the law is working to ensure the public is protected and that sentences reflect the severity of these heinous crimes.

I am delighted Clare Wade QC can bring her unparalleled expertise to this complex piece of work before we consider any future proposals.

Ms Wade QC has decades of experience working on both murder and manslaughter cases and, in recent years, has specialised in domestic homicide. Ms Challen's murder conviction for killing her husband was quashed on the grounds that she had been subjected to coercive control for many years.

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, said:

I strongly welcome the review into domestic homicide sentencing, and the appointment of Clare Wade QC to lead this vital piece of work. It is time that we ensured that sentencing for domestic homicides truly reflect the reality and gravity of domestic abuse, which so often follows prolonged periods of abuse. Victims and

their families deserve no less.

The Victims' Commissioner for England & Wales, Dame Vera Baird QC, said:

I'm pleased the Lord Chancellor has reflected on the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's and my concerns and committed to this review and I'm delighted at the appointment of Clare Wade QC, an incredibly effective and well-respected individual and a former professional colleague.

Evidence shows that women are more likely than men to use a weapon to defend themselves against an abusive partner, but this attracts a longer sentence than violence without a weapon. The fear is women – who are themselves victims – are serving lengthy jail sentences for simply choosing to survive.

Today's (9 September 2021) announcement builds on the government's recent action to ensure that sentences reflect the severity of crimes whilst protecting the most vulnerable and better supporting victims. The landmark Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will see the most serious offenders locked up for longer and includes measures to introduce a sliding scale for youth offenders who commit murder which would set new minimum terms based on age and seriousness of offence, and reducing the opportunities for over 18s who committed murder as a child to have their minimum term reviewed.

## **Notes for editors**

- Ms Wade also has prior experience of working with the Law Commission on reform of the law of homicide
- Any recommendations from the review will need to be brought forward through an appropriate legislative vehicle.