

# Watford car chase gang have sentences increased

Three men who were part of a gang that stabbed a man to death have had their sentences increased after the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP referred the case to the Court of Appeal.

On 31 August 2019, the offenders, including Haroon Azad, 23, Umar Sarfraz, 23 and Mohammed Hamza Shah, 21, embarked on a car chase through the streets of Watford after a dispute escalated between themselves and one of the victims, Ryan Higgins. They deliberately collided with the car that Mr Higgins was driving and launched a violent attack on him and Luke O'Connell, 26, who was a passenger. The offenders used a wrench to smash through the window of the car, and weapons including a samurai sword and a machete to attack the victims who were trapped inside the car.

On 16 September at Reading Crown Court, all 3 men were found guilty of manslaughter for their involvement in Luke O'Connell's death. They were all also found guilty of wounding Ryan Higgins, who was stabbed in the leg, arm and back during the attack. They were each sentenced to 9 years' imprisonment.

Following the sentencing, the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP, referred their sentences to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme.

On 25 November the Court of Appeal found their original sentences to be unduly lenient and increased them to 12 years' imprisonment each for Shah and Sarfraz, and 13 years' imprisonment for Azad.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP said:

The violent actions of these men cost Luke O'Connell his life. My thoughts remain with Luke's family and friends who have suffered an unimaginable loss. I hope the Court's decision to increase these sentences acts as a warning to those who commit such violent crimes, that they can expect to spend a very long time in prison.