

Judicial Communications Office

15 March 2019

COURT SENTENCES NATHAN WARD FOR MURDER OF JAYNE REAT

Summary of Judgment

His Honour Judge Patrick Lynch QC, sitting today in Craigavon Crown Court, sentenced Nathan Ward to serve a minimum period of 17 years before he can be considered for release by the Parole Commissioners for the murder of Jayne Reat on 25 December 2017.

On 24 January 2019, Nathan Ward ("the defendant") pleaded guilty to the murder of Jayne Reat, the attempted murder of her daughter Charlotte Reat and the wounding with intent of his father, Joseph Tweedie. The court imposed a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment for the murder and today determined the minimum term of imprisonment that the defendant must serve before he can be considered for release by the Parole Commissioners. The defendant must serve this term in full and is not eligible for remission.

The court heard that Charlotte Reat had spent Sunday 24 December 2017 with her mother and Mr Tweedie visiting family and going shopping. They returned to the house Ms Reat shared with Mr Tweedie and spent the evening there along with the defendant who spent most of the time in his bedroom. As Charlotte was staying the night, the sleeping arrangements were that she and her mother would share a bedroom and Mr Tweedie would sleep in his son's room. The defendant entered the Reat's bedroom around 5.00 am. Jayne woke up and shouted and this woke Charlotte up. Jayne got out of bed. The defendant walked towards her. She turned towards the door but he started hitting her and then stabbing her. Charlotte tried to protect her mother but the defendant then sat on her and tried to stab her. Mr Tweedie came into the room and was able to overpower the defendant, grab the knife from him and throw it on the ground. He said his son calmed down and "just sort of changed and said "It wasn't me daddy I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know what I'm doing it's not me, I don't know what I'm doing". He then left the room ..."

The police arrived shortly after 6.00 am. Attempts were made to resuscitate Ms Reat and assistance was given to Charlotte and Mr Tweedie. The defendant was noted to have lacerations to his hands. He appeared very calm and when cautioned by police replied "Can I ask a question? Who was it that was murdered?"

Ms Reat died from a combination of the impact of six stab wounds. Charlotte received a number of lacerations to her face, neck and hands and Mr Tweedie sustained cuts to his head, upper abdomen and hand.

The defendant had extensive lacerations to both hands which appeared to have been the result of the handle of the knife breaking and him continuing to use the blade. When interviewed by the police he stated he was in what he described as a psychotic episode. He said he had previously thought of killing Ms Reat and his father but it was all fantasy. He said he had been angry with Ms Reat because of his relationship with her over the past two years claiming she had demeaned him and tried to get him out of the house. He had bought two machetes on two different occasions and had also purchased handcuffs, duct tape, a gas mask and a ski mask. He said he was originally planning

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on using the items to trap and torture her. The defendant stated he armed himself with a knife and went into the bedroom not knowing if he was going to kill Ms Reat or his father. He recalled lunging and stabbing Ms Reat.

Judge Lynch referred to a victim impact statement from Charlotte and said it was clear that she has been scarred both physically and mentally for life: “You, Ward, have robbed her of her life and prospects”. He noted that she had lost her mother who was very close to her and had not been able to say goodbye to her.

The court also received a pre-sentence report and two psychiatric reports in respect of the defendant. He said he had been fuming with Ms Reat on Christmas Eve as a result of her general attitude to him and specifically her attitude on Christmas Eve. The psychiatrist concluded that there was no evidence that the defendant fulfilled the criteria for any mental illness.

Determination of minimum sentence

Judge Lynch set out the relevant legal principles that the court should apply in fixing the minimum term¹ where it has imposed a sentence of life imprisonment. He also set out the sentencing framework under the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 when imposing sentences for violent offences and the assessment of dangerousness which apply to the offences of attempted murder and wounding with intent.

The judge noted that a multi-agency Risk Management Meeting had been convened and the defendant had been assessed as presenting a significant risk of serious harm (as defined by the 2008 Order) for the following reasons:

- High level of rumination/grievance thinking with premeditation/planning;
- Offending against three victims and significant physical and psychological harm caused together with victim blaming; and
- Use of a weapon.

Judge Lynch found that there is a significant risk to members of the public of serious harm occasioned by the commission by the defendant of further offences of violence. He also found him to be “dangerous”. Given that he had imposed a life sentence on the count of murder he did not need to consider whether an indeterminate sentence nor a life sentence on the other counts would be appropriate but said he would extend the sentences imposed on those counts by an additional period on licence in accordance with Article 14 of the 2008 Order.

The judge said there was no doubt that the defendant intended to kill as opposed to a case where the intent was to cause grievous bodily harm. For this, and the other reasons around the vulnerability of the victim and the gratuitous violence that he perpetrated, the judge said this was a case that fell within the higher tariff starting point of 15/16 years. This starting point may be varied up or down depending on the presence of aggravating or mitigating features. Aggravating features included the fact that the killing was planned and the defendant armed himself with a knife in advance. Mitigating features put forward on behalf of the defendant included his age (he was 19 at the time of the offences), his plea of guilty and the fact that he has expressed remorse.

¹ See Notes to Editors.

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It is a long and firmly established principle in sentencing law in this jurisdiction that where an accused pleads guilty the sentencer should recognise that fact by imposing a lesser sentence than would otherwise be appropriate. Judge Lynch commented that the defendant's plea in this case was not timely and he accepted an investigation into his mental state at the time was necessary and appropriate before he could be properly advised. Once the psychiatrist's report was received indicating that there were no grounds for raising the issue of diminished responsibility the defendant had asked to be rearraigned and pleaded guilty to all the charges.

Judge Lynch said that the sentences for the offences of attempted murder and wounding with intent should run concurrently with the tariff on the life sentence. He imposed the following sentences:

- Count 1 – Murder – the defendant must serve a minimum period of 17 years before he can be considered for release by the Parole Commissioners. Judge Lynch stated that if the defendant had not pleaded guilty to the charge and had been convicted after trial the minimum period would have been 20 years;
- Count 2 – Attempted Murder – 12 years imprisonment with an extension of licence period of five years;
- Count 3 – Wounding with intent – five years imprisonment with an extension of licence period of three years.

NOTES TO EDITORS

This summary should be read together with the judgment and should not be read in isolation. Nothing said in this summary adds to or amends the judgment. The full judgment will be available on the Judiciary NI website (<https://judiciaryni.uk>).

The minimum term is the term that an offender must serve before becoming eligible to have his or her case referred to the Parole Commissioners for them to consider whether, and if so when, he or she can be released on licence. Unlike determinate sentences, the minimum term does not attract remission. If the offender is released on licence they will, for the remainder of their life, be liable to be recalled to prison if at any time they do not comply with the terms of that licence. The guidance is set out in the case of R v McCandless & Others [2004] NI 269.

A Practice Statement, [2002] 3 All ER 417, sets out the approach to be adopted by the court when fixing the minimum term to be served before a person convicted of murder can be considered for release by the Parole Commissioners. It also sets out two starting points. The lower point is 12 years, and the higher starting point is 15/16 years imprisonment. The minimum term is the period that the court considers appropriate to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence having regard to the seriousness of the offence. This sentencing exercise involves the judge determining the appropriate starting point in accordance with sentencing guidance and then varying the starting point upwards or downwards to take account of aggravating or mitigating factors which relate to either the offence or the offender in the particular case.

ENDS

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