



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

**R v Delroy Wright and others, and**

**R v Reano Walters and others**

**Sentencing remarks of Mr Justice Openshaw**

**In the Manchester Crown Court**

**14 September, 2017**

**Introduction**

On 12 May, last year, 18 year old Abdul Hafidah, a member of one Moss Side street gang, the Rusholme Cripz, deliberately intruded with hostile intent, into the territory of AO or Active Only, another such gang; he was spotted by them, and chased through the streets of Manchester, and in broad daylight, in the presence of many horrified on-lookers, he was knocked down by a chasing car, beaten up, stabbed and left for dead in the middle of the road.

Thirteen defendants were charged with his murder, it was plainly unmanageable to try them all together, therefore, I heard two trials, at the first trial in Manchester Delroy Wright, Durrell Ford, Devonte Cantrill and Nathaniel Williams were convicted of murder; William George, Devonta Neish and [name] were acquitted of murder but were convicted of manslaughter. [Name] was only 14 at the time; he is still only 15, therefore, no report of these proceedings should name him or give any particulars by which he might be identified; I shall refer to him simply as S.

The second trial followed immediately upon the first; it was transferred to Preston, to reduce the risk of prejudice arising from the publicity given to the first trial; as that case was called on, Remekell Samuels pleaded guilty to manslaughter, which plea was accepted by



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the prosecution; after trial Reano Walters, Trey Wilson and Durrell Goodall were convicted of murder; Cordell Austin was acquitted of murder and manslaughter; the prosecution did not proceed against Shannon Burke.

Eleven defendants therefore fall to be sentenced; I must set out the facts.

### **Gang feuding**

The victim, Abdul Hafidah was at the time of his death aged just 18. He was of Libyan descent. I have heard the victim personal statement read by his sister, on behalf of all the family which movingly describes their grief at his death and at a life so needlessly taken from them; however, distressing, and perhaps surprising, as it may have been to them, there is no doubt that Abdul Hafidah was an active member of the Rusholme Cripz, whose members were mainly of Libyan or Somali heritage.

Although each denied it, I find as a fact that each convicted defendant was a member of the rival AO (or 'Active Only') gang, or at least was affiliated to it; some had AO signs or symbols on their mobile telephones; a couple had even referred to the gang as their 'family'; these matters were canvassed in detail during the trial and if it becomes necessary to review or consider these sentences, reference should be made to the gang related images collected together in the jury bundles of both trials. Furthermore, each habitually associated with others members and at places which were known AO assembly points, in particular on Westwood Street in Moss Side and, as I shall explain, each played his part in these events as if they were acting together, 'hunting like a pack of animals' as one eye witness vividly put it.

The gangs are strongly territorial, with clearly defined boundaries, which are patrolled and – if threatened – are defended by force. There is a long history of gang feuding and tit for tat violence between the rival gangs, which was set out in the agreed facts of both trials; I need not now recite it all but a few incidents seem to me to have particular relevance.

On 18 May 2015, in revenge for an attack by another AO member upon a member of the Rusholme Cripz a few days before, the defendant Durrell Ford was severely beaten by



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assailants wielding a baseball bat; he sustained a serious fracture to his elbow; as is common in cases of gangland violence, he refused to assist the police in their investigations. In spite of that, the police suspected that Abdul Hafidah and another young man were responsible, as Durrell Ford perfectly well knew; because he would not give a witness statement, neither was charged but I have no doubt that members of the AO gang in general, and Durrell Ford in particular, knew or believed that Abdul Hafidah had been one of his assailants.

On 3 May 2016, just nine days before Abdul Hafidah's murder, Reano Walters, a member of the AO gang, set out in a series of texts to his former girlfriend how he had been run down and injured by a car driven by 'some Libyan Kid' (as I have said, the Rusholme Cripz were largely composed of persons of Libyan heritage).

Just the day before the murder, the defendant Devonta Neish later reported to his social worker that he had gone to a part of Moss Side, which was within the territory controlled by the Rusholme Cripz; he was approached by someone whom he later realised was Abdul Hafidah, who put a knife to his throat and told him to get out of that part of Moss Side, otherwise he (Hafidah) would stab him. This gave Devonta Neish a strong motive to take revenge upon Abdul Hafidah; Durrell Ford said in evidence that Neish had told him what had happened; I am sure that this threat by Abdul Hafidah to Neish became common knowledge among the AO members, including these other defendants.

Therefore, having attacked Durrell Ford the year before and threatened Devonta Neish the day before, to these defendants, Abdul Hafidah was a marked man.

### **The narrative**

I turn then to the day of the murder, 12 May last year; some of the events are shown in the compilation video which was skilfully put together by the police from the footage recovered from various CCTV cameras; it shows parts - but only parts - of what happened; that was supplemented by the evidence of over 20 eyewitnesses. The evidence took six weeks in the



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first trial and three weeks in the second trial; in the course of sentencing remarks, I can only give an outline summary of what happened.

At 6 minutes to 5 (16.54 as shown on the telephone schedule adduced in evidence in the second trial) a call was made from an untraced telephone, number 1760, to Abdul Hafidah. Since there are numerous other calls made by that phone to William George, to Remekell Samuels and one call to Nathaniel Williams, all of whom are AO gang members, I draw the conclusion that whoever controlled that telephone was an AO member or supporter. There is no direct evidence of what was said in that call, since the user of the 1760 number is untraced and Abdul Hafidah is dead.

Within 5 minutes of that call, Abdul Hafidah walked into Westwood Street; this was – as he must have known – in the heart of ‘enemy’ territory. In view of what later happened, I find that he had a kitchen knife with him; I draw the inevitable and irresistible conclusion that he was up to no good; there must be have been some causal connection between the call from the 1760 phone at 16.54 and his appearance in Westwood Street at 17.00, but I do not think that I can go further without speculating.

The defendants, or most of them, were in Westwood Street at the time; it was the usual gathering place for many – if not most – of them.

Abdul Hafidah saw the group of AO members, including many of these defendants, in the street; he realised that he was in danger and, obviously to avoid them, he suddenly changed direction and then hid, in the shrubs in the grounds of a derelict house on the corner of Raby Street.

Shortly after this, two cars which had been parked on Westwood Street drove off; one was the Astra, driven by Remekell Samuels, with Delroy Wright as a passenger; that was followed by the Corsa, driven by Nathaniel Williams, in which Reano Walters was the passenger. The cars drove along Raby Street and past the derelict house.



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Abdul Hafidah, hiding in the grounds of the derelict house, must have seen the cars pass; he probably thought that he was now provided an opportunity to escape, so he broke cover and ran across Raby Street into the northern limb of Westwood Street. Whether he had been spotted before that, and if so by whom, is unclear but someone in those cars did spot him then, because both cars immediately turned around, to follow him.

I have no doubt that the defendants took his presence in the area to be a deliberate incursion into their territory, which they interpreted as an insult, a challenge and probably also as a threat; they decided to punish him and to deter others from doing likewise.

A minute or two later, the Astra and the Corsa returned to the assembly point in Westwood Street, presumably having lost sight of their target. The Corsa stopped at the junction of Westwood Street with Raby Street; Reano Walters got out of the car and ran off, in the direction of Raby Street. The Astra drove up fast, Delroy Wright got out and also ran off down Raby Street.

The defendants split up, I am sure that they did so to increase the chances of spotting their prey. At the same time, there was a call to arms in Westwood Street. Durrell Goodall, S, Devonte Cantrill, Trey Wilson, Durrell Ford, in that order, moved off more or less together, walking at first but then breaking into a run.

I point out that Devonte Cantrill had come to Westwood Street wearing a shoulder bag; S did not.

Durrell Goodall and Devonte Cantrill ran down the narrow alleyway which led onto Barnhill Street; S followed.

After them came William George, on his pedal bike; I have no doubt that he then joined the search, acting as a scout. Gang members on bikes are faster than those on foot and more manoeuvrable than those in cars and so perform a valuable - indeed vital - function in searches.



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After a few minutes, Durrell Goodall emerged from the alleyway, onto Westwood Street, turned and vaulted over the low wall into the garden of the deserted house, plainly intending to search there. He was followed by S, who did the same but by this time he (S) had a bag slung over his shoulder. Then Reano Walters also emerged from the alley way on foot; followed by William George on his bike.

William George cycled off, across Raby Street and onto the northern limb of Westwood Street. Reano Walters walked off down the alleyway.

A few minutes later, CCTV from a passing bus showed that Abdul Hafidah came out from behind another hiding place, the advertising hoarding on Moss Lane East; he crossed the road and ran off down the pavement.

Some of the defendants then returned to their rallying point on Westwood Street; Trey Wilson came back; Durrell Ford came back with Devonte Cantrill, now without his shoulder bag. S then handed the bag back to Devonte Cantrill. Cantrill has a previous conviction for possessing a bladed article, which he had concealed in a shoulder bag; I have no doubt that Devonte Cantrill had handed his bag to S, with a direction that he was to fetch a knife, and hand the bag, concealing the knife, back to him; S did as he was told.

I need not describe the precise directions in which they ran off for the second time but again they deliberately set off in different directions, so as to cover the ground more effectively, and to prevent Abdul Hafidah making off without being seen.

William George went up to Moss Lane East to scout there.

There is no further CCTV until the chase reached the junction of Moss Lane East with the Princess Parkway, but there was evidence from a number of the eye witnesses, who describe the chase down Moss Lane East; several saw that Abdul Hafidah had a knife himself, but a number of the witnesses say that at least one of the pursuers had a hammer and some say that another had a knife. Many then called the police, fearful even then that the chase would end in serious violence. Abdul Hafidah himself asked a passer-by to call the



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police; a gang member, such as Abdul Hafidah, would not turn to the police for help unless he felt himself to be in danger of really serious injury. Those in the chase at that time who were convicted of murder must have realised that some of their number were armed with deadly weapons and that those weapons would be used upon Abdul Hafidah once he was caught to cause some really serious injury.

The next CCTV footage is from a camera on the Bridgewater Hospital, which is on the corner of Moss Lane East and Princess Parkway (which is shown on the various maps).

Delroy Wright had by then overtaken Abdul Wahab Hafidah; he can be seen on the CCTV bouncing and bobbing from one foot to the other, like a light-footed boxer, as he was trying to head him off; Durrell Ford, in close support, just behind. They all ran across the Princess Parkway, dangerously weaving through the rush-hour traffic. William George, followed on his cycle.

Abdul Hafidah, by now realising that he was in mortal peril, tried to open the door of a passing car, but failed to do so and the car drove off.

As they entered the other side of Moss Lane East, William George on his bike overtook the other two, so as to be leading the chase; he got off his bike, and confronted Abdul Hafidah; he claimed that this was how a smear of Hafidah's blood was deposited on his sleeve, which is just possible if Abdul Hafidah was bleeding at this time having to hold his own knife by the blade, because the handle had broken or was breaking. I am sure, however, that most of the injuries to his hand were later defensive injuries, caused as he tried to ward off strikes by one or more knives.

Then Delroy Wright came up and threw a hammer at Abdul Hafidah; he missed, the hammer landed in the car park of the hospital, from which it was recovered; the hammer had DNA from both Delroy Wright and Durrell Ford, upon it; both had therefore touched it; one of the witnesses saw the hammer being passed by one participant to another.



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The pursuit down Moss Lane East continued after they had all crossed the Princess Parkway; Abdul Hafidah tried to get into another passing car; again, he failed. By now, probably exhausted, he was cornered; and there was another confrontation with Delroy Wright, Durrell Ford; they soon were joined by others, including Reano Walters, Trey Wilson and Durrell Goodall; this can just be seen as they went out of shot on cameras 11 and 12.

Trey Wilson had in the meantime picked up a broken umbrella from the street; he must have intended to use it as a weapon, although it was only flimsy and not in itself a deadly weapon.

This is where the blood trail started: Abdul Hafidah being severely cut on the right hand, as he tried to fend off an attack upon him by a knife; it is not possible to say who wielded that knife, but use of a deadly weapon was plainly intended by those convicted of murder.

Abdul Hafidah approached a third passing car, grappling with the door handle as he tried again to escape, again he failed; as he did so he told the driver that they were going to kill him; that was obvious to him and I am sure that it was obvious to those who were about to attack him yet again.

The Corsa, driven by Nathaniel Williams was following very close behind; it sped past this struggle, then it did a U-turn in the road, to drive back towards Abdul Hafidah, who was struck by the wing mirror, and knocked down; there were blood stains on the car, caused by Abdul Hafidah's badly bleeding hand as he slipped down the side of the car onto the road way. Nathaniel Williams drove on without stopping; he then did another U turn to return to the scene, whether he intended to have another pass at the victim or whether he was just returning to act as the get-away driver is not clear; but he did not in fact drive at the victim again.

There is the evidence from some of the eye witnesses to what followed. Hafidah tried to get up from the ground but he was punched and knocked down again, where he was kicked and even stamped upon; the pathologist found numerous bruises and abrasions and several 'patterned' marks, characteristic of the imprint left by footwear after kicks or stamps.



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Several eye witnesses describe how a number of young men joined in; I find that those who did so were Delroy Wright and Durrell Ford who were always at the forefront of the chase; I think that the verdicts of the jury must have been on the basis that Reano Walters, Trey Wilson also joined in (it is possible that Durrell Goodall did not; I will consider the evidence bearing on his role later); the combined effect of this last assault was to leave Abdul Hafidah lying unconscious in the roadway. Then Devonte Cantrill came up, with his knife, and quite deliberately, as described by at least one eye witness, he aimed and directed two knife thrusts to Abdul Hafidah's neck, which severed his carotid artery, the consequent blood loss, caused brain damage, cardiac arrest and death. All this happened in the view of many shocked and horrified on-lookers.

The next footage came from the camera on a mobile phone taken by a passer-by, by which time Abdul Wahab Hafidah was lying senseless in the road, fatally stabbed. It shows some of the defendants running off; the later footage shows some of them running down Crosscliffe Street.

Later that evening, the blood-stained Corsa was abandoned some distance away.

That is an overview of the attack. Having set out the circumstances, I seek to apply the relevant criteria as laid down by Schedule 21 of the Criminal Justice Act, 2003.

### **The aggravating factors**

I identify these aggravating factors. This was a killing in furtherance of gang feuding; the chase was undertaken by many members of the gang, acting together. At least one had a hammer and at least one person other than Cantrill had a knife, I cannot say who carried that other knife; I am sure the other defendants know, and they are not saying, I am sure they all knew perfectly well at the time that another or others had a knife; why else would they have the confidence to close on Abdul Hafidah, who they also knew had a knife.

In these incidents numbers really do count; the more people who were engaged in the search, the more likely it was that Abdul Hafidah would be spotted; the more people who



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joined in the chase, the more likely it was that he would be cornered, so that he could be attacked. The more people who attacked him, the more likely it would be that he would be over-come. Furthermore, the participants gain confidence from the presence of others, particularly if some are armed with deadly weapons; the more attackers there are, less likely it would be that anyone else would be tempted to intervene to protect the victim, and the more powerful the image that the gang would present to the community; their public display of force was intended to show their power. The chase was prolonged, continued over about a third of a mile, over the course of 10 minutes or thereabouts. A car was deliberately used as a weapon to knock the victim down. All this was in broad daylight; the chase crossed the Princess Parkway, one of Manchester's principal arterial routes, during the rush hour, in the sight of many passers-by; Abdul Hafidah was left for dead in the middle of the road, thereby causing great distress and anguish to eye-witnesses, and – I might add - outrage to the community and indeed to the city.

Their conduct displays an arrogance and ruthlessness characteristic of the membership of street gangs, which impose a strict code of silence upon its members. It is perhaps worth pointing out that one of the gang related images found on Delroy Wright's mobile phone was superimposed with the letters 'sn' or 'say nothing', which advice they all took.

One of the few heartening features of the case was the response of the decent citizens of Manchester who were distressed and terrified by what they saw. I mention by way of example, the driver who turned his tanker around and stopped across the carriageway of Moss Lane East to prevent other drivers from running over his body and the heavily pregnant woman, who got out of her car and ran after the defendants shouting for them to stop.

At the first trial 23 eye witnesses gave evidence, nine of whom had made calls to the emergency services as they witnessed what was happening. I think that because the defendants and fellow gang members had a code of silence, which I do not doubt that they sought to impose on others in their community, they had persuaded themselves that since



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no one would seek to oppose them, let alone to give evidence against them, they could do as they liked. I hope that these convictions may go some way to dispel their delusion that they were immune from prosecution and the process of the law.

Paragraph 5A of Schedule 21 of the Criminal Justice Act gives a starting point of 25 years ‘... if the offender took a knife or other weapon to the scene intending to ... have it available to use as a weapon, and used that knife or other weapon in committing the murder’. It may be that some of the defendants did not see S pass that knife to Delroy Wright but in my judgement, everyone who participated in the final attack must have known and intended that that the hunt for and chase of Abdul Hafidah would result in Abdul Hafidah’s death or serious injury by a weapon brought to the scene by one of them, so as to engage paragraph 5A and a starting point of a minimum term of 25 years for those over 18 at the time, namely Devonte Cantrill (19), Durrell Ford (19), Reano Walters (18), Trey Wilson (18) and Durrell Goodall (19); since all are still under the age of 21, the appropriate sentence is custody for life rather than life imprisonment; there is no practical difference in the two sentences.

For those under 18 at the time, namely, Delroy Wright and Nathaniel Williams, both of whom were 17, the statutory starting point is 12 years; but the aggravating factors I have identified plainly require a very substantial increase beyond that starting point. Because of their age; they are required to be detained at Her Majesty’s Pleasure, again that is for all practical purposes a sentence of life imprisonment.

**Mitigating factors**

For those convicted of murder, the only substantial mitigation is their age, which is allowed for under paragraph 11(g) of the Schedule.

I am, of course, familiar with the guidance given in the cases, starting with *R v Peters* [2005] 2 Crim App R (S) 101, which directs judges to use appropriate discretion to assess criminality and responsibility and to balance the various features to achieve a just result; youth therefore, subject to other factors, may require some reduction in the minimum term



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otherwise appropriate of those over 18, particularly those only just over 18 but an increase in the minimum term of 12 years for those who are just under 18. These factors are not susceptible of arithmetical calculation. I will identify the relevant factors as I deal with their personal circumstances but in my judgment, apart from Devonta Neish and S, none of these defendants is in any way immature, or easily influenced or in any way susceptible; they all knew exactly what they were doing, and no doubt they well knew the consequences which would follow upon conviction for murder in these circumstances.

I have particularly in mind that offences of murders committed by feuding street gangs are by their very nature offences committed by very young men and there is a danger than by allowing too large a discount, I may reduce the deterrent effect which must apply to such offences. I do not doubt that gang feuding is a long standing social problem in Manchester, and in some of our other great cities, I do not suggest that this social problem can be solved just by the courts by passing long sentences but I have no doubt that if all other social efforts at diversion from gang membership fail, it must be known within the community that murder and manslaughter committed in furtherance of gang feuding will be met with severe sentences, despite the offender's youth.

Against that must be set the possibility that these defendants may in due course change their ways, even though there are few signs at present that they are willing to do so and that none has yet shown any regret or remorse for what they have done but the fact is that with the passage of time attitudes of young men do change. One of the particular tragedies of this case is that some of these young men did show talent and promise, which had it been directed aright might have led to an entirely worthwhile life for the benefit of themselves, their families and indeed the wider community. All this they have thrown away and now the community – quite rightly – now expects them to pay the price.

I turn now to the individual defendants.

**Devonte Cantrill**

I start with Devonte Cantrill. He was at the relevant time aged 19.



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I realise that by the time the pack had crossed the Princess Parkway, he was at the back; I do not draw the conclusion that he had a secondary or subsidiary role. He was at the back simply because he could not run as fast as the others; they had gone ahead to bring Abdul Hafidah to close quarters; he would catch up with them in due course.

Devonte Cantrill arrived when Abdul Hafidah had been knocked to the ground by the Corsa and then beaten senseless by the others; he then crouched over his body and deliberately aimed the fatal stab wounds to the neck, plainly intending to kill him, which Mr Csoka QC on his behalf now says he admits. That does not amount to any mitigation since no such admissions were made during the trial.

Therefore, Devonte Cantrill falls to be sentenced upon the basis that he inflicted the fatal stab wounds. He did so with a knife which he had brought to the scene; starting point for the minimum term is therefore fully 25 years.

Further to the aggravating features which I have already identified, Cantrill personally directed the 14-year-old S to fetch the knife. S may have been very willing to do as he was told, but he is acutely vulnerable. He was used by Cantrill and I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that he was corrupted by him; certainly, if it was not for Cantrill, S would not now be facing a sentence for manslaughter.

I have no doubt that Cantrill intended to kill Abdul Hafidah but that is not, in itself, and aggravating feature. Neither is the fact, for such it is, that he has shown not the slightest regret or remorse for what he has done; those factors do however make it more difficult to show leniency.

He has a number of previous convictions for battery and for possession of a knife (to which I have already referred), indeed this offence was committed when he was on licence.

The aggravating factors I have identified require me notionally to raise the starting point.

The only factor in mitigation which requires consideration is his age.



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It is not helpful to add so much for each identified aggravating factor and to deduct so much for his age; all I can do it to balance the various competing factors features to achieve a just result.

**Delroy Wright**

Delroy Wright was only 17. However, despite that he was always at the forefront of the chase. He was the first to reach Princess Parkway, ahead even of Abdul Hafidah. He can be seen on the CCTV bobbing and bouncing about trying to halt Hafidah's flight. He ran across the road parallel to him, hoping to head him off, so that he could be brought to bay.

Shortly after they had crossed Princess Parkway, a heavy ball hammer was thrown at Abdul Hafidah. It was thrown with full force, since it travelled right across the car park of the hospital and hit the far wall. Since Delroy Wright's DNA is on the shaft of the hammer, I have no doubt that he had the hammer, and that he threw it.

It is worth noting that on his mobile phone were images depicting masked figures in red and blue with the slogan: 'Blodz and Cripz: it's on', hand sings making out 'Cripz killer' and a hammer wreathed in the Blodz red colours, with the slogan: '...Sch, it's only a bammer', from which I conclude that a hammer was his weapon of choice in his furtherance of gangland violence.

Delroy Wright was of the most prominent among those who confronted Abdul Hafidah on Moss Lane East, as he turned to face his pursuers. Although it is not possible to attribute particular punches, kicks or stamps to him, I have no doubt that he was among those who joined in that final attack, which left Abdul Hafidah lying senseless on the road, as Devonte Cantrill approached to stab him.

The jury have found that he assisted or encouraged Devonte Cantrill to attack Abdul Hafidah, with murderous intent.

He has no previous convictions, but when set against the gravity of the offence, that counts for little. He called quite impressive character witnesses which, as has been submitted on his



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behalf, might just suggest that he might be able to make something of his life upon his eventual release.

These factors do not balance out, in my judgment, justice requires a very substantial increase to the 12 year minimum term.

**Durrell Ford**

Durrell Ford was aged 19. He had a personal grievance against Abdul Hafidah arising out of the attack of the year before, when his elbow was smashed, since he knew or believed that Hafidah had been personally responsible for that attack.

Furthermore, as he said in the course of his evidence, he knew that the day before Abdul Hafidah had threatened Devonta Neish.

I cannot say at precisely what stage he realised that the intruder whom he was chasing was Abdul Hafidah, but I am sure that he realised this before the final fatal confrontation in Moss Lane East.

Therefore, so far as he was concerned, this was a revenge attack.

Since his DNA was also found on the shaft of the hammer, he must also have handled it at some stage.

He was also in the forefront of the pursuers, as can clearly be seen on the CCTV as they crossed the Princess Parkway and closed in on Abdul Hafidah as he tired in Moss Lane East.

When he was arrested, a couple of days after the murder, he had many abrasions to the knuckles of his right hand; Dr Wilson, the pathologist, said that these were characteristic of having punched someone in the mouth. Abdul Hafidah had injuries to his mouth and lips, characteristic of being punched. The jury must have rejected the various incredible explanations he gave for these injuries; I find as a fact that he punched Abdul Hafidah very hard in the mouth. He was among those who personally attacked Abdul Hafidah, rendering



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him senseless before Cantrill stabbed him to death. He may not have intended to kill but he personally bears a heavy responsibility for what happened; he must now pay the price.

Having said that, I have read the references written on his behalf, furthermore I recognise that I must make some allowance for his youth.

He has one previous conviction, for possessing a stun gun, the circumstances in which that offence were committed are not altogether clear; the better course is to find that this previous conviction is not, in itself, an aggravating factor.

**Nathaniel Williams**

Nathaniel Williams was within a few months of his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, but being under 18, the lower starting point of 12 years is engaged.

I accept that there is no evidence of his prior gang membership but he drove the Corsa, which was bearing false registration plates. It was regarded by all the gang members as a 'pool car', available for use by members of the gang as and when the need arose. In driving the car, he played a vital part in the search for Hafidah and in the ensuing chase, driving the searchers about, at speed and dropping them off and picking up again, as the exigencies of the situation required.

Once Abdul Hafidah had been cornered in Moss Lane East, Nathaniel Williams sped across the junction with Princess Parkway; having driven past him, which happened off camera, he executed a U-turn, and drove back towards Abdul Hafidah. What followed was described by two eye witnesses; one of whom said that he car sped back diagonally across the road and struck the victim, giving the impression that he had deliberately driven at him; the other eye witness said that a car – plainly this was the Corsa – 'clipped' him and then, to the witness's shock and surprise drove off without stopping. The Corsa struck him only a glancing blow but it knocked him down, allowing the others to close in on him, to attack and to finish him off as he lay on the ground. The jury must have found that in so doing he had assisted or encouraged Devonte Cantrill to inflict the fatal injury, as he did. I do, however, accept that



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since Abdul Hafidah did not sustain any serious physical injury resulting from this impact, such as broken bones, or massive bruises; he does not fall for sentence on the basis that he directly caused death by deliberately running him down.

Even then he had not finished, because he drove off and made it one more U-turn, whether he did so to have another pass at the target or simply to provide a getaway car, I am not sure, but plainly, he came back seen intending to give such assistance as he could. In fact, he turned into Quinney Crescent where he stopped to provide a getaway car for some of the assailants.

Later that evening, the car was abandoned.

He has no previous convictions, and indeed was able to rely on character witnesses who spoke on his behalf but when set against the gravity of the offence, that counts for little.

**Reano Walters**

I come to Reano Walters, who was aged just 18 at the time of the murder.

He has no convictions or cautions but that must be set against the gravity of the offence. I have also read with care the testimonials written on his behalf, which I do not discount but the punishment must meet the crime, which is truly grave.

He was a close associate of known AO gang members; his Snapchat page has AO symbols; there is no doubt that he was an active AO member. On 12 May, he was driving round their territory with Nathaniel Williams and Remekell Samuels in what the prosecution called this high-visibility patrols, intended to demonstrate the power that they exercised over the area.

Furthermore, there clear is evidence from text messages that he sent of his hostility to 'the Libyans', which I take to be a cryptic reference to the Rusholme Cripz. As recently as 3 May he was complaining that he has been injured as he was 'run over ... by some Libyan kid'. He, therefore, also had a personal grievance against members of the rival gang.



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It is clear from what I have already said that Reano Walters was one of the most active gang members during the search, at one point he even jumped out of a moving car, before dashing off down Westwood Street, no doubt in response to a message that Abdul Hafidah had been spotted there, so great was his sense of urgency. He was not far behind the leaders as they crossed the Princess Parkway; furthermore, despite his denials, he clearly crossed over from the far side of Moss Lane East to the Fire Station side, and he can only have done so intending to close in on Abdul Hafidah, to join the others to bring him to bay and to over-power him. Furthermore, I have no doubt that he followed Abdul Hafidah back across the road and joined in the final assault; what kicks or blows he personally landed, I cannot say but this was a joint attack in which all assailants played their part, including him. I accept that he personally did not have a weapon, and he may not have known that Devonte Cantrill had the knife but he knew perfectly well that others had deadly weapons, indeed he admitted that in evidence; he must have joined in and continued in this attack knowing and intending that someone would use a deadly weapon to cause at least some really serious injury.

I do not accept that he was acting under the influence of his elder brother Cordell Austin, who was acquitted by the jury, as I have already said.

**Trey Wilson**

I come to Trey Wilson. There are degrees of involvement even in cases of murder; Trey Wilson and Durrell Goodall seem to me to have played a lesser part than some others. Neither had any personal grievance against members of the Rusholme Cripz, let alone against Abdul Hafidah.

Trey Wilson is now aged 19; he was 18 at the time. There are some images of him making the AO gang signs. He has previous convictions for affray and robbery, committed after this murder and for which he is still serving a sentence, the time served pursuant to that sentence will not count towards this sentence.



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He was present in Westwood Street when the others ran off, and he ran with them. The first time he says that he did so in answer to a shout from Nathaniel Williams; if there was such a shout, I am quite sure that he interpreted it as a general call to arms. Similarly, on the second occasion, when he heard people shouting in Westwood Street he understood perfectly well that he was joining in a search for and chase of an intruder from the rival gang, which would end in very serious violence; but I accept that he may not have intended Abdul Hafidah's death.

He ran down the northern limb of Westwood Street into Moss Lane East, where he joined the others in chasing Abdul Hafidah across the Princess Parkway; having done so, he stopped to pick up a broken umbrella. It is clear from the footage on camera is 11 and 12 from the hospital that he then followed the others across the road to the Fire Station side of the road; he must have done so to help in cornering Abdul Hafidah and in bring him to bay.

Because the possible significance of the broken umbrella as a weapon was not recognised at the time, it was not recovered by the police; therefore, it was not examined by a forensic scientist; therefore, there is no evidence that it was actually used as a weapon. However, since Trey Wilson says that he dropped it at the scene, and since it was found close by Abdul Hafidah's body, as can be seen from the photographs, I am driven to conclude that he did join in the final attack upon him; as with the others, it is not possible to say precisely what blows he landed. I accept that he had no other weapon.

With the others, he then ran across the grass verge onto Quinney Crescent and down Crosscliffe Street and away.

I make clear that I do not accept that his entered plea to the count charging manslaughter amounts to any mitigation upon the charge of murder.

**Durrell Goodall**

I come then to Durrell Goodall.



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He was aged 19. He has no relevant previous convictions; however, there are images of him making obvious AO gang sign; he was plainly a keen member of AO.

It is clear from the CCTV footage that he enthusiastically joined in the search for Abdul Hafidah, and when he had been spotted he ran off with the others in the chase.

One of the captions to the photographs points out that he ran off with his hand in his back pocket, which had led to the suggestion that he was concealing a weapon. Mr Harrison QC entirely disposed of this point by showing footage of him doing so on many other occasions, which was entirely consistent with him holding up his trousers because his waistband had become loose. I accept this explanation.

It is also quite right that by the time he reached Princess Parkway he was fully 13 seconds behind Abdul Hafidah but he did thereafter gain on the others; if he slowed down as he crossed to the Fire Station side of the road, he only did so to assist the others to corner and engage him.

I sentence him on the basis that he did not personally carry a weapon. It is also possible that he did not personally join in the final attack after Abdul Hafidah had been knocked down by the Astra, indeed he may have stood on the other side of the road, but – as the jury have found – he was assisting and encouraging the others.

I accept therefore that his lesser role and his youth amount to mitigating factors.

I should perhaps make clear that I entirely reject his evidence given at the trial by which he suggested that he was sad and remorseful of the part that he had played in this attack; his defence statement contains a number of particularly objectionable lies, seeking to blame Abdul Hafidah for threatening him and indeed other members of the gang.

### **Sentences for murder**

Accordingly, following their convictions upon the charge of murder, the sentences will be as follows:



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Devonte Cantrill: will be detained for life, with a minimum term of 23 years.

Delroy Wright: who was under 18 at the time of offending, will be detained during Her Majesty's Pleasure, with a minimum term of 19 years.

Durrell Ford, will be detained for life, with a minimum term of 20 years.

Nathaniel Williams who was under 18 at the time of offending, will be detained during Her Majesty's Pleasure, with a minimum term of 19 years.

Reano Walters will be detained for life, with a minimum term of 20 years.

Trey Wilson will be detained for life with a minimum term of 18 years.

Durrell Goodall will be detained for life with a minimum term of 16 years.

It is important that these sentences are not misunderstood or mis-reported. The sentences are life sentences; the defendants will serve these minimum terms in full; there is no early release from such sentences. Even when the minimum term is served they will be released only if the Parole Board considers that they no longer present a continuing risk to the public; and even if released they will be subject to licence for the rest of their lives.

I order that a transcript of this judgment is taken to be sent to the prison to be put with their papers so that in due course the Parole Board may understand my findings.

### **The convictions for manslaughter**

#### **Manslaughter**

I come then to William George, Devonta Neish and S, who were acquitted of murder but convicted of manslaughter, and to Remekell Samuels, whose plea to manslaughter was accepted by the prosecution. Plainly, they cannot be sentenced as if they had committed murder but there must be some relationship between the minimum term prescribed for murder and the determinate sentences passed for offences of manslaughter where death is unintended but which results from unlawful violence used in the course of feuding by street



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gangs; this is a seriously aggravated form of manslaughter which – as it seems to me – justifies, indeed it requires severe sentences.

**William George**

I turn to William George; he was 20 at the time; he is now 21. I agree that some allowance must be made on account of his youth. He has no previous convictions; the gang affiliation evidence in his case was limited to one photograph; he called impressive character witnesses on his behalf; he has provided other references; he was playing as a semi-professional footballer with prospects – or at least the possibility - of a promising sporting career ahead of him. He has written a letter expressing evidently sincere regret; he even concedes that he was guilty of the offence for which he was convicted, which is a start for rehabilitation.

He arrived late at Westwood Street on his bicycle, just as the others were running off in pursuit of Abdul Hafidah, but he saw them ahead and joined in. As I have already said, having searchers on bicycle was very necessary, bicycles being faster than those on foot and more manoeuvrable than those chasing in the cars.

When he went down the northern limb of Westwood Street, I am quite sure that he went as a scout; in so doing he was performing a highly valuable service and he will be sentenced on that basis.

Once Abdul Hafidah had been spotted, William George's greater speed meant that he was able to overtake the others and he was therefore the first to come face-to-face with him in Moss Lane East. Because he did not himself have a knife, and Abdul Hafidah did, William George dismounted from his bike and held that up before him to protect himself from Hafidah who was no doubt flashing his knife at him. In confronting Hafidah in this manner, William George enabled the others on foot to catch up, as they did. The others then took over the offensive action, William George following close behind. He had by then played his part; he did not participate in the final attack, that no doubt is why he was the first away



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from the scene as they ran down Crosscliffe Street, having surrendered his bike to someone else; no doubt that is another telling reason why he was acquitted of the murder. However, this seems to me to be a very bad case of manslaughter, because he played a vital part in the search for Abdul Hafidah, he joined in the hunt and helped to bring him to bay.

### **Remekell Samuels**

Remekell Samuels was aged 18; he is now 19. He has a previous conviction which is irrelevant. I have read the personal references written on his behalf; he was working hard at college, with prospects. All this, as he well knows, he has thrown away.

His role was to drive the Astra. He drove it throughout the afternoon often in convoy with the Corsa, on their patrols of the gang territory.

It is unclear whether the vehicles originally drove off together because they had spotted Abdul Hafidah or whether they spotted him after they had set off but whatever the truth of that, once he had been spotted, Remekell Samuels and the Astra, in convoy, drove at speed round the area trying to find him. I am sure that they later received some report that he had broken cover on Moss Lane East and then both vehicles again drove up the northern limb of Westwood Street and into Moss Lane East attempting to find him there. One eye witness, suggested that Abdul Hafidah used his knife to puncture the tyres of one of the pursuing vehicles, which the witness implied was the Astra but the CCTV of the Astra after this phase of the incident does not show the car with a flat tyre. I accept that Remekell Samuels then disengaged from the chase. He did not give any information to the police in interview; he did not give any explanation for his actions.

In his defence statement, he said that he disengaged, perhaps at his girlfriend's request because he did not want to continue in a chase which he realised was likely to result in very serious injury.



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The fact is that he did disengage and I feel must conclude that he did so voluntarily.

Therefore, he did not cross the Princess Parkway and he played no personal part in what happened thereafter.

He has pleaded guilty to manslaughter on the basis that he knowingly joined in the search for and chase of Abdul Hafidah realising that some harm to him would result, not however intending the really serious injuries that he did on fact sustain.

His role is markedly less than William George. Furthermore, he is entitled to a discount of 10% for his late plea.

**Devonte Neish**

Devonta Neish was 17, he is now 18.

He had a personal reason to join in the attack on Abdul Hafidah, because of the threat that Hafidah had made to him the day before but I think that others may have regarded this as a more significant provocation than did he; he did not in any sense initiate this attack. Indeed, he arrived late on the scene, just seconds before the final chase started, as the others spread out to search for Abdul Hafidah, he and his cousin S went along Raby Street; this was to ensure that Abdul Hafidah did not double back down Princess Parkway; if he had done, he would have been spotted by Neish and S and they could have redirected the chase. In doing so he was performing a valuable - although admittedly a subsidiary – role. In fact, Abdul Hafidah did not double back down Princess Parkway and Neish was not required to do anything else. Although he followed the others across the Princess Parkway and down along Moss Lane East, he did not dismount from his bicycle and he did not physically join in the final assault; he was there as a bystander or spectator.

In fact, his contribution was not yet over, because he went back to the scene; he is shown on some film footage watching as the paramedic fought to save Abdul Hafidah's life. I am sure he did not go there out of idle curiosity as he maintained, he went there to report back. That, of course, was in no way causative of his death.



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In my judgement, his role was considerably more limited than William George; his criminality is less and this should be marked by a lesser sentence.

Furthermore, there is some considerable mitigation in his personal circumstances. I have read with care the helpful pre-sentence report. He was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as a child; he exhibited poor behaviour at school. The writer found him to lack emotional maturity, to be susceptible to the influence of others, easily led, and as a result prone to impulsive behaviour, being unable to consider the consequences of his actions. I accept all these findings, which drew him into the gang sub-culture. These character flaws were no doubt also features in his commission of his previous offences of robbery and attempted robbery, in 2016, in which knives were produced, and later that year in his possession of a knife. I also accept that he was making some progress following sentence for those offences.

The probation officer, although accepting that there is an obvious risk that he might commit further serious offences, questions whether he should be found dangerous, since there is a possibility that during his sentence, with help and advice, he might have the sense to distance himself from these negative influences. I also accept this assessment. I do not think it necessary to make a finding of dangerousness.

**S**

I turn to S, who was just a few months over 14. He has no previous convictions.

Each gang had a system by which younger males were recruited, being given at first menial tasks, earning respect and in that way, working their way up. These are called 'youngers'; they might be likened to apprentices or cadets. S was then aged only 14 and a few months; he has significant learning difficulties, and a host of other personal problems, as I shall explain later; but he was, as I find, an enthusiastic gang 'younger'.



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I have read with care the very helpful pre-sentence report from the Youth Justice Team, which supplements the reports on his capacity to understand the proceedings, which I received at an earlier stage before allowing him to give evidence through an intermediary.

He has a low, and maybe extremely low level of intelligence. He was diagnosed with ADHD as a child. Although he has a very supportive mother, who has done all she can to help him. He had a disrupted education; he was issued with a statement of 'Special Needs' and eventually attended a school for children with 'emotional, social and behavioural difficulties'. He is impulsive and acutely suggestible; this renders him acutely vulnerable to exploitation.

I have no doubt that he was corrupted and manipulated by others, and particularly by Devonte Cantrill, who saw him as a fetcher and carrier, a delivery boy as Mr Wright QC footage on his behalf, who could be relied upon to do what was asked of him and to keep silent, as he has done. He repeatedly lied to the police and indeed to the jury that I am quite sure that he did so not so much to protect himself but believing that in so doing he was loyally supporting the other more senior members of the gang. He has little or no awareness of the consequences of his actions, or their seriousness.

Having said that, he played an important role in these events because, as I have already made clear, Devonte Cantrill asked him - ordered him is perhaps a better way to put it - to get the knife, and he did so. Thereafter he made up the numbers by joining the chase, but I do not think that he played an active role in the final assault; hence his acquittal upon the charge of murder and his conviction upon the charge of manslaughter.

Making every proper allowance for his extreme youth and for his personal problems, I think that some very considerable reduction must be made from sentence which would otherwise be appropriate. But punishment is required, otherwise other vulnerable young people will be recruited with the added inducement that there would be no adverse consequences.



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Although I consider at the two year maximum for a Detention and Training Order would be wholly inadequate, I am anxious to preserve the considerable progress he has made whilst in custody and to avoid the potentially disastrous consequences of passing such an order that would require his transfer to an adult penal establishment at the age of 18.

He has no previous convictions, he does not fulfil the dangerousness criteria.

**Sentences for manslaughter**

Upon their conviction for manslaughter, the sentences will be as follows:

William George, who is now just 21, imprisonment for 12 years, of which the law requires him to serve one half in custody, the rest on licence.

The sentence on Remekell Samuels after a trial would have been 9 years; he is entitled to a reduction of 10% on account of his plea, which (rounding down the figures) will result in a sentence of detention for 8 years in a Young Offender Institution; of which the law requires him to serve one half in custody, the rest on licence.

To reflect Devonta Neish's substantial personal mitigation, the sentence will be 8 years detention in a Young Offender Institution, again, he will serve half in custody, the rest on licence.

S will be sentenced to 5 years detention under section 91 of the Powers of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000, of which he will serve half, which will allow for his release before he attains the age of 18.

Each defendant will have credit for the time spent on remand, including those convicted of murder (except trey Wilson who is in custody for another matter..

I make clear that in respect of each offender convicted of manslaughter; I have considered the dangerousness provisions but I do not consider that any met the relevant statutory criteria.

This is a case to which the appropriate statutory surcharge applies to each defendant.



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The prosecution formally offer no evidence against Shannon Burke, I order that a not guilty verdict be entered in her case. I also make the defendant's costs order in the terms sought.