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**-v-**

**CHRISTOPHER STOCKTON**

**PAULA ROBERTS**

**SENTENCING REMARKS**

1. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022 you, Paula Roberts, gave birth to a boy, who you named Charlie. He was two months premature and your fifth child. He died on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2024, aged almost 22 months. During his short life he suffered a number of inflicted injuries. On the day before he died he sustained a severe injury to his brain that caused his collapse and death. The jury found that you, Christopher Stockton, murdered Charlie, having caused his head to rotate or be thrown about with such force that his brain moved within the skull, resulting in irreparable damage and bleeding over his brain, in the spinal cord and within and around his eyes, a combination of injuries that are only seen in cases of very severe trauma, and that when you did so you intended to cause him at least really serious harm. The jury was also sure that, intermittently from May 2023 until his death, you assaulted and neglected Charlie in a way that was likely to cause him unnecessary suffering or injury to his health, the offence of cruelty charged as Count 2 on the Indictment.

You, Paula Roberts, admitted during the trial that you had neglected Charlie in a manner likely to cause him unnecessary suffering or injury to his health and pleaded guilty to the amended offence of cruelty on which you were charged, Count 3, neglect of Charlie between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023 and 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

2. Charlie lived with you, Paula Roberts, in a rented house in Darlington with your 9 year old daughter. Charlie's father, Barry Greenwell, with whom you had had a short relationship lasting about 4 months in the summer of 2021, did not see Charlie for the first 6 or so months of his life. apart from visiting him in hospital a few times; he was in Charlie's life as much as you would allow him to be. He

maintained a civil relationship with you, and Charlie would stay at his partner, Clare's house, and their daughters, who were about 10 and 4.

3. You are now 41 years of age and have had 5 children, two adult sons born when you were married and lived in Pakistan, another child who was adopted, your daughter, who is now in foster care, and Charlie. Social Services have had concerns about your parenting since 2004 and your children have been removed from you in the past. You have no previous convictions and worked at an indoor climbing centre at Newton Aycliffe.
4. Christopher Stockton, you are now 38 years of age and also have no previous convictions. You married in June 2015 and have a son who was born very prematurely in October 2017 and, sadly, had chronic lung disease and other congenital problems that required surgery. He has considerable caring needs and, although you separated from your wife in 2019 when your son was just over 1½ years old you would see him regularly and have him to stay every other weekend. Your former wife described you as being really good with your son, which is to your credit but makes your deliberate harming of Charlie the more troubling. You and Paula Roberts started socialising in January 2023 and entered into a relationship in March that year. You met Charlie for the first time on his first birthday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023. In the early summer of that year your work took you to Grangemouth in Scotland.
5. In early May 2023, the two of you were in Scotland with Charlie when he suffered bruising to his left ear, the pinna. Initially, you, Paula Roberts, thought it was hair dye but then it started to yellow, so was consistent with being a bruise. On 26<sup>th</sup> May, Charlie was taken to Darlington Hospital; he had bruising to his right ear, below the his eyes and the left side of his forehead. You, Paula Roberts, told staff that he had fallen multiple times, an explanation that was rejected by Dr Deborah Stalker, an experienced Consultant Paediatrician, who said the photographs taken at the hospital showed widespread bruising in the right ear that was a result of a direct blow to the ear. It was a non-accidental injury, caused by you, Christopher Stockton. As a result of these injuries, it was agreed with Social Services that the care of Charlie and his older sister would be undertaken by Paula Roberts' brother

while the matter was investigated. The result of that investigation at that time was that the children were returned to your care.

6. On 24<sup>th</sup> August, an Early Help practitioner visited the home and noticed purple on Charlie's left eye which you, Paula Roberts, said was a result of Charlie having got sand in his eyes on the beach he had cleaned it with eyewash in the car. When she later saw photographs, Dr Stalker said that there were at least 7 areas of dark blue bruising on the left upper eyelid which would probably have been caused by a direct blow and could not be explained by sand or eyewash. However, she accepted that it was possible that it had been caused by irritation and rubbing of the eye though Dr Stalker thought that was unlikely. It was around this time that you installed a camera in your home due to concerns you had as to how Charlie was coming by his injuries.
7. On 15<sup>th</sup> October, the health visitor had her last contact with the family.
8. On 7<sup>th</sup> December you, Paula Roberts, took photographs of an injury to the base of Charlie's penis that were caused by Christopher Stockton. Dr Stalker said the it was a laceration which went through to the deeper area of the skin and the surrounding skin was quite swollen. It would have happened no more than 1 or 2 days previously and was likely to have been a tractional or pulling injury caused by very firm pulling; it would have been excruciatingly painful at the time and very painful afterwards for several days. The scarring was still to be seen at the post mortem examination. You were aware of this injury, Paula Roberts, but say you thought it might be like a sclerosis so treated it with Sudocrem. It must have been obvious that this was an unusual injury and very unlike sclerosis. This was a further unexplained, non-accidental injury of which you were aware but chose to do nothing by way of protecting Charlie.
9. On 23<sup>rd</sup> December you, Christopher Stockton, took a photograph of Charlie standing in the corner of the living room in your house and sent it to Paula Roberts saying you had told him to go to the naughty corner. Charlie had turned round and hit you in your chest with his arm, probably not intentionally, you said, but you thought he had to be told that it was wrong and you asked her if it was OK to do

this. This was a wholly inappropriate action, demonstrative of your cruel behaviour towards an innocent child. of which you were aware, Paula Roberts, but you did not contradict or question him. As a result Christopher Stockton stayed on in your household and Charlie remained at risk of suffering further injury, including serious injury.

10. On 9<sup>th</sup> January 2024 you messaged a friend, Paula Roberts, saying Charlie had fallen out of his bed the other day banging his head, and you thought he had got concussion and were taking him to the doctors – urgent care. You described Charlie as being really pale, grey; he'd got a bump on his head and had been sick. You didn't take him. You, Christopher Stockton, messaged your mother referring to your not having slept – you had pneumonia at the time - and was dealing with Charlie as he had fallen out of bed and banged his head. In fact, it was evident that Charlie had suffered non-accidental, purposefully inflicted injuries to both ears as a result of direct blows in the form of a clip or a hard slap delivered by you. The very extensive bruising over the top of and into the left ear which, in due course, Dr Stalker saw in photographs, will have been very painful, the ear will have throbbed, Charlie will have been distressed and the bruising would have been obvious. The force applied will have been significant. The bruising to the right ear was not as extensive as in the left ear.

It was in the context of this history of violence towards Charlie and the neglect of his physical well-being and care or seeking medical attention that the event causing his death occurred a few days later.

11. On the morning of 12<sup>th</sup> January last year, shortly after Paula Roberts had left the house at around 8:40 to go for an eye appointment you, Christopher Stockton, fatally injured Charlie. You had spent the night online gaming on your X-box and watching an American Western series until about 5:30 in the morning. You said that you were getting tired easily with pneumonia and out of breath. At 09:03:05 you dialled 999 requesting an ambulance. Charlie had stopped breathing and was only taking occasional gasps. You told the first paramedic who arrived that Charlie had choked on a biscuit, and appeared to recover before he stopped breathing. The paramedic said there was no obstruction to his airway; he was

not breathing and appeared cyanosed and she commenced resuscitation. Charlie was taken to hospital. To all the professionals trying to save his life and to the police you maintained the same account that nothing untoward had happened to Charlie other than having banged his head three days earlier and his appearing to choke on a biscuit. The treating clinicians found signs of bleeding into the brain and into his eyes consistent with a severe traumatic injury and inconsistent with your accounts, as well as bruising that was very strongly associated with non-accidental literature. It was clear he was not going to survive and Charlie died the following afternoon.

12. The Pathologists concluded that he had suffered an extremely severe hypoxic-ischaemic brain injury – in other words his brain was starved of oxygen and blood — which caused a cardio-respiratory arrest and, although he was eventually revived, the injury was not survivable and resulted in an almost instantaneous collapse and his death. A significant or substantial degree of force must have been used by way of a shaking type injury or a combination of a shaking and an impact with a soft surface; the extent of the bleeding was only found in cases of very severe trauma such as fatal motor vehicle collisions, head crush injuries or high level multi-story falls on to concrete.
13. You repeated to the jury that you had done to harm Charlie. They rejected your evidence. Although I cannot be sure you intended to kill him, you had, intermittently, been cruel and violent, assaulting Charlie in the ways I have summarised, causing him serious injuries, and had concealed your actions and their consequences by false claims of accidental falls or natural events. Finally, you took his life. Only you know the reason or reasons for your actions. Not only have you deprived a young child, who was resilient and exuberant, of his life, you have robbed his family of the joy of bringing up a child and sharing life events with him and caused them immense grief, the full impact of which is revealed in the moving personal statements that I have read. Reference is made to Charlie's future being stolen from him by your violent and senseless actions, which, to his loving wider family are incomprehensible. No court can undo the harm you have caused.

14. The sentence for murder is fixed by law and is imprisonment for life. Pursuant to s. 321 of the Sentencing Act 2020, the early release provisions will apply and I must fix the minimum term you must serve, taking account of the seriousness of the offence, before consideration can be given to your release on licence. I apply the provisions of section 322 of and Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020 in fixing the minimum term. I incorporate into the minimum term the additional culpability for the offence of cruelty and will order the sentence of the offence of cruelty be served concurrently with the sentence for murder, guarding against double counting of any factors and taking account of the fact if that sentence stood alone, you would not serve the full term. The starting point for the minimum term under the Act is 15 years. However, the seriousness of the offence is considerably aggravated by the following factors. It was committed in a domestic setting in which you were in a position of trust, caring for Charlie who was very young and particularly vulnerable, having limited communication skills, and who had suffered mentally and physically before his death. In relation to mitigating factors, although I cannot be sure you intended to kill him, you must have appreciated that the very severe degree of force used upon such a small child would inevitably have caused the gravest of injuries, if not death. Similarly, your lack of previous convictions and the fact that this was not a premeditated act can count for little given your acts of cruelty over the preceding months. The number and gravity of the aggravating factors very significantly outweigh the mitigating factors and there must be a substantial increase in the minimum term.

15. The offence of child cruelty, by reason of multiple incidents and the use of significant force and the serious harm caused, was an offence of high culpability and Category B harm under the definitive guideline. Accordingly, the starting point is 6 years' custody with a sentencing range of 4 to 8 years. It was aggravated by the Charlie's particular vulnerability and limited ability to communicate.

16. Christopher Stockton would you stand. On Count 1, the offence of murder of Charlie Greenwell, the sentence of the court is imprisonment for life. I set the minimum term you must serve as one of 25 years. To date you have served 378 days in custody on remand, The sentence, therefore, is if one of imprisonment

for life with a minimum term to serve from today of 23 years and 352 days. For the offence of cruelty child, Count 2, the sentence is one of 8 years imprisonment which I order to be served concurrently. At the expiry of the minimum term it will be for the Parole Board to decide if and when you should be released and the conditions to be attached to the licence. If and when you are released, you will be on licence for the rest of your life, making you liable to be recalled to prison at any time if breach the terms of your licence and it is revoked.

I order payment of the statutory surcharge in the appropriate amount.

17. In your case, Paula Roberts, there is a very detailed and helpful Pre-sentence Report, in which the writer states that, on all the information available to her including liaison with Children Social Services, it is apparent that you prioritise your relationships over responding to the needs of your children. There is a longstanding record which highlights your inability to safeguard your children which has led to continuous neglect in all your children's lives. This offence falls into the pattern of similar behaviour. You were aware of Charlie's injuries but you failed to raise or act on those concerns. I take appropriate account of your having been neglected as a child, entered into an arranged marriage when you were young, have since sought attachment from short term relationships and have been diagnosed with anxiety, depression and borderline personality disorder. There is no formal psychiatric or psychological evidence. You now say Christopher Stockton was coercive and controlling in your relationship but you were quite able to dictate arrangements in relation to Charlie's father and had long experience of the help that can be provided by other service providers and never shared your suspicions that Christopher Stockton was harming Charlie and misled others. You now recognise that you contributed to his neglect, in effect turning a blind eye to what you must have known was the reality of the situation. being in a state of denial. You remain a risk to any children in your care.

18. There were two incidents of serious neglect and a failure to take any steps to protect Charlie from acts of cruelty. Reaching a fair assessment of your culpability, on the guideline characteristics, I place this as an offence of medium culpability offence. However, your culpability is significantly aggravated by

Charlie's very young age and vulnerability. He suffered physically serious harm so this was a Category 1 offence. Some account has to be taken that, by reason of your failure to act, Charlie was exposed to the risk of an event which materialised, and he died, though, of course, I am not sentencing you for causing or allowing his death. Despite the difficulties in your earlier life and your experiences with your older children, you continued to behave in the way that you had behaved previously, prioritising yourself and your lack of previous convictions is not a significant mitigating factor. I take into account your anxiety, depression and borderline personality order. This is a specified offence for the purposes of the dangerous offender provisions but I am satisfied that such risk as you present can be managed appropriately by a determinate sentence. Had you been convicted after a trial, the sentence would have been 4 years 6 months' custody. Despite the lateness of your plea I do afford you some very limited credit for your guilty plea and your remorse.

19. Paula Roberts, balancing all these factors, and affording you around 10% credit for your guilty plea, the sentence for the offence of cruelty is 4 years' imprisonment. You will serve no longer than one half of that term in custody and then be released on licence for the rest of your sentence during which period you will be subject to being recalled to prison if you breach the terms of your licence.

I order payment of the statutory surcharge in the appropriate amount.

Mr Justice Goss  
Teeside Crown Court  
7/02/2025