

The King

-v-

Zach O'Keeffe

Harrison Carpenter

Joseph Dawe

Sentencing Remarks of HHJ Morgan

Chelmsford Crown Court

Thursday 23rd October 2025

Zach O'Keeffe, Harrison Carpenter and Joseph Dawe: you may remain seated for the time being.

I have to sentence you, Zach O'Keefe, for the offence of murder. Harrison Carpenter and Joseph Dawe I have to sentence the two of you for the offence of manslaughter.

Kieran Shepherd was aged 30 years of age when he was stabbed to death on Tuesday 15th October 2024. He was addicted to drugs, including heroin. On occasions when he couldn't find the money to purchase drugs for himself and his partner Alice Archer, he resorted to theft and robbery, armed with a lock knife.

Background.

You, Zach O'Keeffe, were a drug dealer with your own drug line known as the ZK line. On the 17th day of June 2023 you were stopped by Police in Billericay. You had 24g of cannabis in your possession which you admitted you intended to supply. The Police also recovered a telescopic baton, £642 in cash and 3 phones including a 'burner phone'. Recovered from one of the phones were a number of videos depicting you handling an extendable baton and two knives. In one you videoed yourself opening and closing a lock knife with one hand; in another unsheathing a large hunting knife. The hunting knife is very similar to one seen in a further video referred to as the 'advert' as it was advertising an array of knives.

A later search of your bedroom led to the recovery of a further £5500 in cash.

Your arrest did not stop you from dealing drugs. One of the people you supplied was Kieran Shepherd. Sometime before the 15th October 2024 you had agreed to supply him with drugs. The deal took place in an alleyway. Harrison Carpenter had accompanied you. As the exchange took place, Kieran Shepherd produced a knife and robbed you. A few weeks later Kieran Shepherd either robbed or attempted to rob a 14 year old child called Alfie of drugs he intended to supply. Archie was an associate of yours. Both you, Harrison Carpenter and you, Joseph Dawe, were aware of O'Keeffe's drug dealing and came to know of the robberies: after all, you Harrison Carpenter had been present when O'Keeffe was robbed.

I am sure that you, Zach O'Keeffe, were extremely angry about what had happened to you and Archie, and unable to report matters to the Police, decided to seek retribution. Retribution was taken by you on the 15th October 2024 when you stabbed Kieran Shepherd twice in the back.

You, Harrison Carpenter, and you, Joseph Dawe were willing participants in a joint attack; prepared to assist your friend, Zack O'Keeffe in exacting retribution.

15th October 2024.

On the 15th October the three of you came together under the pretext of going to the gym in Victoria Street, close to the Police Station and Crown Court. You, Harrison Carpenter, were with your girlfriend, Olivia McElveney when Zach O'Keeffe and Harrison Carpenter picked you up in the car park outside (xxx). Instead of going to the gym, the three of you made your way to the Meadgate Avenue area in Gt. Baddow in order for you Joseph Dawe to buy a drink and get some food.

Having parked up, the three of you got out of the car together. The explanation for stopping the car was that Zach O'Keeffe had seen a person who on one account owed you £10, on another you had lost his contact details. Olivia was told to wait in the car. She was later to understand from conversations in the caravan that it was not the person you thought it was. The three of you returned to the car approximately 30 minutes later.

Your movements in that 30 minutes are captured to an extent on CCTV. The three of you are seen in the Newsagents on Meadgate Avenue.. All three of you are by now wearing 'hooded tops'.

Keiran Shepherd had on two occasions that morning been out in the Meadgate area buying drugs, He went out to buy drugs on a third occasion with his dog. He had a 'bank card' belonging to an associate, which was to be used to withdraw money. He never returned.

The three of you came across Kieran Shepherd as he walked towards Meadgate Avenue. He was on his phone. CCTV shows him turning towards the three of you. I am sure that something was said by one of you that caused him to turn. You, Joseph Dawe, are closest to him. Within seconds, you are chasing him as he ran off; the CCTV showing you pulling your hood over your head. I do not accept that you pursued him merely to ask him why he had said the 'dog bites' or words to that effect. I am satisfied that you ran after him as you knew he was the man that had robbed Zach O'Keeffe. You, Harrison Carpenter, followed Joseph Dawe almost immediately.

You, Zach O'Keeffe, are the last to run after Kieran Shepherd. Enhanced CCTV stills show that your right arm is 'crooked' at the elbow; your right hand close to your waistband as you join in the pursuit. As you pursue Kieran Shepherd, your right arm remains 'crooked' at the elbow. You maintained at trial and in your account to the author of the PSR that you were preventing your 'bottoms' falling down due to the weight of the keys in your pocket. I am quite sure on all the evidence that you had a sheathed knife concealed in the waist band of your trousers. The CCTV can leave no doubt that the three of you were moving and acting as one. I am sure that this was a joint enterprise, and that each one of you knew that unlawful violence would be used if Kieran Shepherd was caught.

The CCTV shows Kieran Shepherd making a desperate attempt to out run the three of you. He was running for 'his life'.

The actual circumstances of how Kieran Shepherd went to the ground are not caught on CCTV. Only the three of you know what really happened. You, Joseph Dawe, claim that Kieran Shepherd

tripped as you closed on him from behind. It should be noted that you had the skill, acquired from playing rugby, to bring him down as he ran.

It is of no real importance of how he ended up on the ground as he only tripped in his attempt to escape. Had he not done so, I am sure that you intended to put him to the ground so that he could be attacked. And that is what happened. Within seconds you, Harrison Carpenter, were punching Kieran Shepherd as he was on the ground, He was defenceless. You, Zach O'Keeffe, then stabbed him twice in the back. I am quite sure on all the evidence that you did not genuinely believe he was a threat to you or your friends.

The attack on Kieran Shepherd was over in moments. The three of you then made off, avoiding CCTV cameras. You were, however, seen by Ms Duffett. Her evidence that you, Zach O'Keeffe had a 'shank' and an object which she assumed was a sheath in the waistband of your bottoms. Although this was a fast moving incident and a traumatic one for her, she was in my judgement doing her best to accurately describe three men; their clothing and the attempt to conceal a knife. It can have been no mistake, as she could not have known that minutes later you were handing a sheathed knife to Harrison carpenter.

The three of you returned to the car having split up: Zach O'Keeffe taking one route alone, you, Carpenter and you, Dawe, taking another route together. You all arrived at the car which was driven off almost immediately and within moments you, Zach O'Keeffe, handed Harrison Carpenter a large knife in its sheath. You, Harrison Carpenter handled the knife without comment, putting it into the footwell in front of you. You then handed Zach O'Keeffe a mobile phone, which he took without comment. You Zach O'Keeffe, almost immediately began making mobile telephone calls to Sictorness.

You made your way to Carpenter's grandmothers house. Over the next hours you all set about destroying the evidence that linked you to the attack on Keiran Shepherd. Clothes were burnt, the knife, which you, Zach O'Keeffe, claimed was Kieran Shepherds was disposed of. It has never been recovered. It therefore follows that the police were unable to make a comparison with the knife used to murder Kieran Shepherd and the knives that you were seen handling in the video recordings you made. I am satisfied that you were aware that if caught with the knife the police would eventually make that comparison.

You then set about disposing of mobile phones so that you couldn't be traced. You also disposed of Kieran Shepherds mobile phone, but only after you Zach O'Keeffe, had gone through its messages as you sat in the caravan.

VPS.

In those few brief moments you took the life of Keiran Shepherd, who despite his drug addiction had his whole life ahead of him. In moving personal statements read to the court, his parents describe the devastating impact of their loss not only on them, but on his sisters, and on his daughter. His mother states that there are no words to describe or explain how it feels to lose a son, your child that you had brought into the world, nurtured and loved. Their lives have been shattered and they live in a constant state of grief, disbelief at the senseless violence that led to Kieran's death and the 'huge hole' left in their hearts. No sentence I pass will reflect the depth of grief suffered by Kieran Shepherd's family. For them, his loss is in a very real sense a life sentence.

Zach O'Keeffe.

The sentence for murder is fixed by law. This means there is only one sentence which I can give you. As you were under 21 at the date of the offence, the sentence is custody for life. (s.275 SA 2020).

The law then requires me to fix the minimum term that you must serve before you can be considered for release by the Parole board. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically be released, but is the minimum time that you will spend in custody before your case can be considered by the Parole Board. It will be for the Parole Board to say, at that time, whether or not you will be released. If and when you are released you will still be subject to licence; and this will remain the case for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were revoked, you would be recalled to continue to serve your life sentence in custody.

The appropriate starting point.

The prosecution contend that Schedule 21, paragraph 4 applies in your case, as you took the knife used to kill Kieran Shepherd to the scene, intending to use it to commit any offence or have it available to use as a weapon. The starting point is therefore 25 years before consideration of aggravating and mitigating factors are taken into account. Mr Borrelli KC submits that the Court cannot be sure on the evidence adduced at trial that you carried the knife to the scene. The appropriate starting point where the Court cannot be sure the knife was taken to the scene is 15 years (Schedule 21 paragraph 5).

The submissions made by both prosecution and defence are set out in detailed sentencing notes. In my assessment of whether I am sure the knife was yours, or may have been Kieran Shepherd's I do not propose to repeat the detailed submissions made on your behalf. I am satisfied having considered the following pieces of evidence that you took a knife to the scene.

2023 Videos.

The video's demonstrate firstly that you had access to knives. Your case was that you handled them in the 'trap house' from which drugs were dealt. This is a clear association with drug dealing in which you were involved then (2023) and at the time of Kieran Shepherd's murder (2024). There can be no other explanation for your handling knives. The videos demonstrate more than a passing interest. You are in my judgement handling the lock knife in a manner that would enable you to open and close the blade without difficulty should the need to use it arise. It is no coincidence that you are demonstrating in another video the use of the extendable baton which was found on you when arrested for drug supply. This conviction demonstrates that you are prepared to carry a weapon.

The videos were shared within the Three Musketeers WhatsApp group.

CCTV footage.

Having watched the CCTV footage of the start of the chase, I am sure that the movement of your right arm and hand is you holding a knife concealed in your bottoms. The arm remains in this position for the duration of the pursuit. Your explanation that you were holding your bottoms up because of the weight of keys is not credible. You also say that you were only running to ensure

that Dawe came to no harm. Yet you made no attempt to warn him of the threat you say Kieran Shepherd posed.

The use of the Knife.

You maintain that you saw a knife on the floor in a sheath. Having picked it up you unsheathed it in moments. You did not discard the sheath but continued to hold it. You used the knife and then left the scene. I am satisfied that Ms Duffett saw you place the knife back into the waistband area of your trousers where she saw another object which she assumed was a sheath. You have accepted that you took the knife and sheath from the scene. It follows that by the time you got back to the car you must have sheathed the knife and concealed it from view, only handing it to Harrison Carpenter as you drove off. The unsheathing and sheathing after use is indicative of a familiarity with handling a knife in its sheath.

The evidence of Olivia McElvaney.

D Sentencing Note: Paragraph 13. I accept that I should approach her evidence with caution. I approach her evidence on the basis not that you made a 'clear admission' but that OM from the conversation in the caravan made an assumption on all that she heard you and the others say. However, her assumption was made on undisputed evidence; namely the passing of the knife to HC. (RE-X). Page 6. Read.

I am satisfied that you passed the knife to Carpenter because it was yours. Carpenter did not question who's knife it was. He took and placed it calmly in the footwell.

Disposal of the Knife and consequences.

The knife was deliberately disposed of. You told the jury that you wanted to dispose of it so that you could not be connected to the assault. The knife, had it been recovered, would have been compared with the knife or knives you were seen handling in the 2023 videos. I am sure you would have understood the significance of such a comparison to a crucial part of the police investigation into the circumstances of Kieran Shepherd's death.

Alice Archer.

I accept your analysis of her evidence. (Para 15) of the carrying of a knife by KS. She did not say however that he always left the house to rob others of drugs or money. On the 15th October he left with his dog. The knife she described that she knew he carried was recovered from his flat. There is of course always the possibility that he had another knife, but there is no evidence that he had a knife on the 15th other than your account. It is significant in my judgement that at no stage during the pursuit did he turn and pull out a knife to warn you, Carpenter or Dawe to back off.

Having considered all the evidence I am sure that you had a knife in your possession and took it to the scene intending to use it as a weapon Schedule 21 paragraph 4 applies in your case.

From the starting point of 25 years, I have to consider what aggravating and mitigating factors exist which should cause me to depart from the starting point.

Aggravating factors.

- (a) I have identified the following aggravating factors in your case. The carrying of a knife in the context of drug dealing is a particularly serious aggravating factor. However, this factor

is incorporated into Schedule 21 paragraph 4. On the facts of this case I will not treat it as a separate aggravating factors. I adopt the same approach in respect of the offences of PWITS and Possession of the baton.

- (b) You were acting as a group.
- (c) This murder took place in public and in broad daylight. As chance would have it, no-one else was around at that precise time to see it. However, Ms Duffett saw you and came across the aftermath.
- (d) You disposed of the knife and evidence that would link you to the murder.

I do not consider there to be a 'significant degree of planning' that would aggravate your case, although I am satisfied there to have been some agreement should the opportunity to confront Kieran Shepherd arise,

Mitigating factors.

- (a) I accept that you had an intention to cause really serious bodily harm rather than to kill, although this factor is of limited weight given the use of a knife to inflict injury.
- (b) Age. You were a 19 at the time of the murder. Your age is in itself a mitigating factor.
- (c) I accept all that is said as to the approach to sentencing young people and the need to carefully assess maturity (Para 38 and 40 Defence Sentencing Note).
- (d) I have read the PSR and addendum in this case. In my judgement your level of maturity affords you some degree of general mitigation, although the impact on your culpability is limited. You knew perfectly well what you were doing.
- (e) Remorse. I am satisfied that you have whilst in custody been able to reflect on the devastating consequences of your actions on Kieran Shepherd, his parents and family. You also recognize the distress you have caused your own family. Although late, I will treat as a mitigating factor as it is part of your developing maturity.

PWITS. Facts.

Guidelines: Significant role. (aware of the scale of drug dealing and expected and received on the evidence significant financial gain. and Cat 3 harm 'selling directly to users. SP 12 months before considering aggravating/mitigating features.

Aggravating feature is the carrying of the baton.

Mitigating factors.

- (a) At time of offence you were of good character.
- (b) Also take into account your age.

Zach O'Keeffe please stand.

For the murder of Kieran Shepherd I sentence you to custody for life. Balancing the aggravating and mitigating factors, and having particular regard to your age at the time of the your offending, I have reached the conclusion that the appropriate minimum term in your case, taking into account the modest separate sentence appropriate for your drug dealing and carrying the baton before time spent on remand is taken into account would be 23 years.

I must take into account time spent on remand which I am told is 371 days. The minimum term in your case therefore is 21 years 349 days.

The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically be released, but is the minimum time that you will spend in custody before your case can be considered by the Parole Board. It will be for the Parole Board to say, at that time, whether or not you will be released. If and when you are released you will still be subject to licence; and this will remain the case for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were revoked, you would be recalled to continue to serve your life sentence in custody.

Sentence for PWITS.

Appropriate sentence: 9 months. Credit @ 1/3: 6 months concurrent to Custody for life.

Weapon: Marked as aggravating feature of drug dealing. 28 days concurrent to PWITS and concurrent to sentence of custody for life.

Ancillary orders.

Harrison Carpenter.

Am I satisfied that you knew O'Keeffe had a knife

Given your friendship it is inconceivable that you would not have known O'Keeffe carried a knife. It is Inconceivable that after O'Keeffe was robbed, you did not discuss who it was and what action would be taken.

You had received the videos of knives. Silent as to conversation between you as to why you had been sent those videos. Answer is that you were the 3 Musketeers. Stand by each other.

15th October. Journey to Meadgate Avenue?. Conversations; query why not going to gym as planned. You could get food or a drink in the centre of Chelmsford. No real explanation as to why you got out of the car.

O'Keeffe had his mask/snood to cover his face when drug dealing. Observed by Olivia as O'Keeffe got out of the car. MEADGATE AVENUE area is where O'Keeffe dealt drugs, and Kieran Shepherd purchased drugs.

All three acted together.

You were passed the knife by O'Keeffe in the car without question. You calmly placed it in the footwell in front of your seat before passing Kieran Shepherd's phone to O'Keeffe.

This was a joint enterprise where it I am satisfied that you knew that O'Keeffe was carrying a knife.

Appropriate guideline that relating to unlawful act manslaughter. Culpability Category B applies as you knew O'Keeffe had a knife. Your intent was just below an intent to cause GBH therefore. SP12 (8-16 years.)

Aggravating Factors.

- (a) SN page 4. Previous conviction. Assault. I will not treat this as an aggravating factor.
- (b) Disposal of evidence including the knife.

Mitigating Factors.

- (a) Handing yourself into Police. But this factor is limited in its effect. Limited because whatever the real reason for your silence in interview, the effect was to protect yourself; O'Keeffe and Dawe. Your account of events did not emerge until later,
- (b) Remorse.
- (c) Age.
- (d) Maturity as it relates to 18-25 year olds. (See Report of Dr Lewis).
- (e) Testimonials and Prison report. (Developing maturity. Confirms the remorse you evidently have and which I treat as genuine).

Balancing the aggravating and mitigating factors, and having particular regard to your age at the time of the your offending, I have reached the conclusion that the appropriate custodial sentence in your case is one of 11 years detention.

(Dangerousness. Age combined with limited convictions, and an assessment of the PSR and reports any risk can be managed by a determinate sentence of detention).

Serve 2/3rd before release. Released on licence. Breach any terms of your licence, returned to serve the balance.

Joseph Dawe.

I am also satisfied in your case that you knew O'Keeffe had a knife. You were a willing participant in a joint enterprise to harm Kieran Shepherd.

Called Carpenter and persuaded him to meet yourself and O'Keeffe. You to had received the 2023 videos. Aware that Kieran Shepherd had robbed O'Keeffe. You were the first to confront Kieran Shepherd and as you began your pursuit you pulled up your hood. You didn't want to be identified. You said nothing in the car as the knife was passed between O'Keeffe and Carpenter. You willingly participated in the destruction of evidence and disposal of the knife.

Aggravating Factors.

- (a) Disposal of evidence including the knife.

Mitigating factors

- (a) Age.

- (b) Maturity. Maturity as it relates to 18-25 year olds
- (c) Good character. (distinguishing factor from Carpenter). Treat you as positive character. Modest reduction to sentence.
- (d) Remorse. Read testimonials and references. PSR Genuine insight and remorse.

(Dangerousness. On all that I have read and looking at circumstances of offence I am satisfied that a risk can be managed by a determinate sentence of imprisonment).

Sentence: 10.5 years imprisonment.

Serve 2/3rd before release. Licence breaches. Breach any terms of your licence, returned to serve the balance.

HHJ C J Morgan