

These sentencing remarks are subject to an order pursuant to section 45(3) and (8) of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 directing that no matter related to the two children shall while they are under the age of 18 be included in any publication if it likely to lead members of the public to identify them as a person concerned in the proceedings. The matters include in particular their names, their address, the identity of any school or other educational establishment attended by them, the identity of any place of work or any still or moving image of them.

IN THE CROWN COURT AT NORTHAMPTON

Rex v. Paul Knight

Sentencing remarks

1. Paul Knight you may remain seated until I say otherwise. I must sentence you for the murder of Isobella Knight, your wife and the mother of your children. No sentence that I can pass today can compensate or comfort your children and Isobella Knight's family for the loss of their greatly loved mother, daughter, sister and family member. She was greatly loved by all around her and her untimely death has caused incalculable suffering. I have heard the Victim Personal Statements of her father Timothy Davies, her mother Helena Sharratt and her sister Georgina Noblett, read in Court today.

Facts

2. You were 35 years old at the time of the murder and Isobella Knight was 32 years old. You lived together in a house in Burton Latimer, Northamptonshire, with your two children, aged 5 and 2, and your family dogs. The family appeared to live a conventional life. The marriage began to break down in 2024 and although there was a reconciliation by June 2025 it had finally broken down and you were sleeping in separate bedrooms. No other person was involved in the breakdown of this marriage. It is clear from the evidence that you were in the grip of an entrenched

drug habit with the consequential financial cost, placing pressure on the family resources and the marriage. Isobella had fallen out of love with you. You were both preparing for financial separation and seeking new homes. The neighbours heard arguing about where family money was being lost on the 12th of June and you argued about your drug use. Overnight on the 12th and 13th of June 2025, whilst under the influence of cocaine, you lost your temper and in a fit of rage killed Isobella Knight by strangling her in the bedroom she occupied, whilst the children of the family were asleep in another bedroom. It is a reasonable inference to draw from the suicide note and the injuries that you also held a pillow over her face to avoid Isobella being heard as you killed her. Whatever the precise nature of the disagreement was between you that day or evening, nothing justified or excused your violent attack. According to the pathology this must have been a sustained violent attack by you gripping Isobella Knight's neck. Dr. Biggs' evidence is that "the pressure would need to be maintained for a significant period of time both before and after loss of consciousness in order for death to occur". Isobella Knight had additional injuries indicative of a struggle. You wrote a suicide note admitting the killing and the police apprehended you as a result of your erratic driving after you had made a variety of unsuccessful attempts to harm or kill yourself. You made no comment in interview by the police.

3. You admitted that you had unlawfully killed Isobella Knight and pleaded guilty to manslaughter upon first arraignment. After a consultation with Counsel on the 23 December 2025, on the morning of the following day your solicitors informed the prosecution and court that you intended to plead to murder. You entered your plea of guilty on what would otherwise have been the first day of the trial.

Starting point

4. You have pleaded guilty to murder, the sentence for which is fixed by law as one of life imprisonment. The Court must determine the appropriate minimum term. This case falls within the 15 year starting point pursuant to Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act 2020, paragraph 5.

The domestic circumstances

5. Section 269(5) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 requires the court not only to have regard to (a) the general principles set out in Schedule 21 but also to “(b) any guidelines relating to offences in general which are relevant to the case and are not incompatible with the provisions of Schedule 21”. I take into account the Sentencing Council Guidelines overarching guideline on domestic violence. 'The domestic context of the offending behaviour makes the offending more serious because it represents a violation of the trust and security that normally exists between people in an intimate or family relationship.' I remind myself that in Attorney General's Reference (R. v Crook) [2025] EWCA Crim 156 at paragraph 32 Dingemans LJ said 'It should be emphasised that any killing in domestic circumstances will always merit an upward adjustment before further adjustments are made for aggravating and mitigating features from the starting point of 15 years set out in the schedule to the Sentencing Act 2020.'

6. The further aggravating features are:

- (1) The presence of the very young children of the family in the house when the murder took place and the risk taken by the defendant that they might have observed the commission of the offence or their mother's body afterwards. This is a particularly serious aggravating feature.
- (2) The new provisions in paragraph 9(ca) of Schedule 21 that render strangulation a statutory aggravating factor do not apply because they were not in force at the time of this murder. However, the aggravating facts are a non-exhaustive list. The strangulation is an aggravating factor pursuant to paragraph 9(c) because it is a particularly brutal way to end a life, given the mental suffering from terror which I am sure Isobella Knight must have experienced as she was choked to death by strangulation with a pillow over her face as well as the physical suffering before she lost consciousness.

(3) The offence was committed under the influence of drugs. You had an established and substantial cocaine habit that had significantly contributed to the family's financial difficulties. You had purchased 7g of cocaine 2 days before the murder and I am sure you had consumed it before and after the murder. You admitted to police staff that you were addicted to cocaine and had used what you had purchased by the time of your arrest. You yourself believe that the drug made you paranoid, fixated and caused you to spend money you didn't have.

7. The upward adjustment for the domestic circumstances and the aggravating factors raise the minimum term to one of 21 years.

Mitigating Factors

8. There is no mitigation of the kind that would apply had the intention been cause grievous bodily harm rather than to kill. There is overwhelming evidence of an intention to kill in this case which is demonstrated by the fact that sustained pressure was applied to Isabella Knight's neck for a significant period of time both before and after she had lost consciousness.

9. There are mitigating factors as follows:

(1) There is no evidence of premeditation.

(2) There is remorse expressed in your suicide note and in your letter to the court, but that is limited and must be seen in the context of your plea of not guilty to murder at the plea and trial preparation hearing on the 15 October 2025. I accept that although inept the suicide attempt by hanging you in the house was a genuine but failed attempt to take your own life. I accept that you are remorseful.

(3) You have no previous convictions recorded against you. You have a good side to your character demonstrated by the character references that I have read from friends, family and a prison officer. You have a good work record. In custody you have made good use of your time, accepting responsibility for your actions and are a model prisoner.

10. After taking these features into account I reduce the minimum term to one of 19 years.

Reduction in the minimum term for your guilty plea

11. The maximum reduction in the minimum term permitted following a plea at the earliest opportunity is 1/6th or 5 years whichever is the lesser and 1/20th on the day of trial. In light of late plea but ahead of the trial, the reduction in sentence is one of 1/10th, reducing the minimum terms to one of 17 years and 1 month. From this will be deducted the 227 days you have already spent in custody on remand so that the minimum term you will serve before the Parole Board may first consider your possible release is 16 years and 168 days. The Parole Board will then decide whether you can leave custody at that stage, and if so on what terms. If you are refused parole at that time you will remain in custody, subject to regular reviews by the Parole Board. If and when you are released you will be on licence for the rest of your life. If you break the terms of your licence you will be liable to return to custody.

12. If the victim surcharge applies the order can be drawn up in the appropriate amount and a Collection Order made.

HHJ Lucking KC

29th January 2026

