



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

**IN THE CROWN COURT AT INNER LONDON**

**THE KING**

**— v —**

**ROBERT RHODES**

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**SENTENCING REMARKS OF THE HONOURABLE MRS JUSTICE ELLENBOGEN DBE**

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Robert Rhodes has declined to attend for sentence today, albeit fit to do so. I am told by Leading Counsel that the Defence team remains instructed on his behalf and that the reason which it has been given for non-attendance is that he maintains his innocence of the charges of which he has been convicted. To the malignant characteristics of which his crimes speak, the Defendant has now added cowardice. I shall address these sentencing remarks to him so that, if and when he develops the courage to read them, he will know exactly why he has received the sentences which I shall impose.

Robert Rhodes,

1. On the evening of 2 June 2016, you brutally murdered your estranged wife, Dawn Rhodes, in the kitchen cum dining room of your family home. She was 38 years old. You did so having enlisted the assistance of your child, then under the age of 10, to whom, by reason of reporting restrictions in this case, I shall refer throughout these remarks as 'X' and whose gender I shall not identify.

2. In 2017, you were acquitted of Dawn's murder, having given false evidence to the effect that you had killed her whilst defending X and yourself from her unprovoked attack with a kitchen knife. At that time, you were, broadly, supported in that account by X, whose own account of events to the Police was accepted as truthful by the Prosecution and the Defence. You were to repeat your evidence in proceedings before the Family Division of the High Court, in May 2018. Your re-trial before this Court followed X's courageous decision, in 2021, to inform trusted others that the account which X had previously given had not been truthful. With the leave of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division), you were re-tried for murder (Count 1); and were charged, additionally, with cruelty to a child — X (Count 2); doing acts tending and intended to pervert the course of justice (Count 3); and two counts of perjury, relating, respectively, to the earlier criminal and family proceedings (Counts 4 and 5). On 12 December 2025, the jury found you guilty on all counts. I now sentence you.

### **Victim impact**

3. Your wicked, callous acts have had a devastating and divisive effect on Dawn's family, and on your own. The victim personal statements of Dawn's mother, sister and brother spoke, movingly, of the warm, vibrant woman whom you violently deprived of life. Evidence given in the course of your trial by Dawn's friends and colleagues painted a picture of a caring, effervescent person, who had managed to find happiness with another partner following her increasing unhappiness in her relationship with you. Your brother, who had supported you in the earlier proceedings, at a time when X's original account had been accepted as truthful, and who, together with his wife, became X's legal guardian in September 2018, also spoke of the heavy toll which the fractured family relationships have taken, and of the sense of betrayal for which you are responsible.
4. Most significantly, Dawn was a mother. The damaging effect of your actions, on X in particular, cannot be overstated. For the rest of X's life, X will have to live with X's involvement in Dawn's death, and the family rifts to which it has inevitably given rise. Unsurprisingly, the circumstances of that death, and all that followed, have had a substantial and enduring impact on X's mental health.

5. In the course of your trial, you depicted Dawn as a violent and volatile individual; an uncaring and indifferent mother, who had embarked upon an extra-marital relationship heedless of its effect upon her family, notwithstanding which you had been desperate to save your marriage and to keep the family together. You accepted no responsibility for the unhappiness which she had felt; her reaction to it; or the conflict in her relationship with X. Having taken her life, you sought also to deprive Dawn of her good name, thereby increasing the pain caused to her family.
6. The many people whom you have affected by your selfish and self-centred actions are to be commended for their exceptional resilience and determination. In no-one are those characteristics more remarkable than in X, to whose fortitude I also pay tribute. I express my hope that all those whose lives you have damaged will now feel able to focus on moving forward, rather than on past events.

### **The facts**

7. I now summarise the facts of this case. Where I make findings in relation to matters which were in dispute at trial, I do so to the criminal standard, that is on the basis that I am sure of them.
8. On Christmas Eve 2015, Dawn told you that she had formed an intimate relationship with someone else, your having confronted her with evidence of that relationship which you had discovered by opening a card which you had taken from her handbag, and by reading messages on her phone, whilst she had been asleep, following her return from an evening out with colleagues. By early January 2016, you were sleeping in separate bedrooms and Dawn told you that the marriage was over. You told the jury that she had become very selfish and that she would spend evenings and nights with her new partner, whilst you assumed responsibility for childcare. Your evidence was that, from January 2016 onwards, Dawn would take her frustration out on you physically and that her fuse had become shorter. In March 2016, other than for two days between 13 and 15 March, Dawn moved out of the family home, though she

remained actively involved in childcare, routinely visiting the house early in the morning and on certain evenings each week for that purpose.

9. The material retrieved by the Police from your electronic devices speaks of a man obsessed with Dawn's new relationship. From Christmas Eve onwards, you conducted internet searches, variously, for how to track a mobile phone; how to read WhatsApp messages; how to unlock and clone a mobile phone; how to hack a Facebook account and bypass passwords on a laptop or tablet (including *'I want to unlock my cheating wife's tablet'*); how to delete the user log on a computer; how to bypass or immobilise a scanner on a mobile phone; how to send an anonymous text from a different number, or online; and how to intercept text messages. You researched her new partner and his wife; contacting her, including through the adoption of a false persona, informing her of her husband's affair and that he was planning to leave her, and, later, arranging to meet her and exaggerating the intimacy which you had observed between her husband and Dawn, with a view to manipulating her to your own ends. You asked a colleague whether he knew of someone who could give Dawn's partner *'a slap'* and how much that would cost — as you put it in cross-examination, *'I was looking for someone big and scary to make him want to leave my wife alone'*, though your colleague dissuaded you from that course.
10. You also searched for photographs of Dawn's partner and his wife which had been posted online, as well as researching the whereabouts and interests of Dawn and her partner. On your own account at trial, in January 2016 you had, on more than one occasion, rummaged through Dawn's handbag looking for condoms, because, as you put it, *'I was being stupid and I was jealous that someone else was sleeping with my wife. I wanted to know if she was having sex...In order to find out, I was prepared to invade her privacy, rummaging through her handbag without her knowledge.'* You told the jury that you were prepared to spy on Dawn in the end; to snoop, without her knowledge. All of that is consistent with the view contemporaneously expressed by Dawn to others that you were controlling, and with the explanation which she gave to a close friend for her own explosive reaction to your refusal to accept that your marriage was over, and upon discovering that you had allowed your own new partner

(with whom you had commenced a relationship in March 2016) to stay overnight at the family home, contrary to the agreement which you had made with Dawn. Dawn's mother — Elizabeth Spencer, spoke of your constant goading of her daughter. Others gave evidence of Dawn's own comments to them to similar effect. Her Manager described the concern which he had had that, between January and May 2016, Dawn was becoming overwhelmed by everything which was going on in her life. I reject Ms Grahame KC's submission, on your behalf, that assertions of your controlling behaviour are undermined by the efforts which Dawn had made to break free from it, or that any inappropriate behaviour towards you or X by Dawn herself detracts from its gravity.

11. More sinister were the online searches which you conducted, between 19 January and 13 March 2016, for: household and other poisons, including those which kill instantly; classified drugs having the capacity to sedate, render a person unconscious, cause amnesia and/or kill, and their effects; the consequence of an overdose; where to obtain such drugs and how to remove their taste; how to hypnotise someone instantly; covert hypnosis training; tasteless liquid laxatives; how to make someone thirsty; and drug addicts in Redhill. In particular having regard to subsequent events and the lack of any plausible explanation for those searches, viewed in the round, I reject your evidence that all such searches had related to your own suicidal thoughts, and I note that, between 31 January and 1 February 2016, they were interspersed with the search terms '*sayings about vengeance*' and '*hate liars*'. Furthermore, in early February 2016, you had informed your GP that you were no longer feeling suicidal. I reject your evidence to the effect that that had been untrue and had been said because, at that stage, you had not wanted help and because an honest account might have affected contact as a father — your GP had previously prescribed medication for you as a result of earlier discussions, and in a quantity which, I note, would have enabled you to take an overdose had you been so inclined. Your statement to him also reflected the information which you later provided, as recorded by the custody officer on 3 June 2016, when conducting a risk assessment: '*Thought about killing myself about 6 months ago, after found wife having an affair*', and the evidence which you gave in both the 2017 criminal and the 2018 family proceedings.

12. By the end of January 2016, at the latest, I am satisfied that you had realised that your relationship with Dawn was beyond repair and that your jealousy at the relationship which she had formed with someone else had been such that you were contemplating taking her life by one means or another. In connection with that plan, you fostered the strained relationship which had developed between Dawn and X, as X, then a young child, naturally struggled to come to terms with the absence of X's mother from the family home; her new relationship; and the arguments which X had overheard between you and Dawn, as your own relationship deteriorated. As X put it in evidence, which I accept, *'After Christmas 2015, my life definitely changed a lot. There were more arguments at home and it was very much whose side I was on, and my Dad definitely made it his mission to make sure I was on his side.'* An example of your manipulation of X may be found in your exchange of text messages with X on 30 March 2016:

*'...Wish I was with you ...at home...You could ask Mum to stop off at home on the way to Nanna's so you...can see me. What do you think?'*

*'OK, but what will be the excuse?'*

*'You...want to see me and give me a kiss good night because you didn't get to see me for long on Monday.'*

13. In the days running up to the bank holiday weekend which immediately preceded Dawn's death, you made repeated searches for 'UK Garrison' events (being those which you knew that Dawn and her new partner liked to attend), and also searched for an image of Dawn's partner and his wife. You sought to persuade Dawn to join a family outing to the park. She had existing plans and declined to do so, fuelling your jealousy and resentment. On 31 May, when your childminder informed you that she had dropped X off at Elizabeth's Spencer's house, you enquired whether a car belonging to Dawn had been there at the time.
14. At some point in the course of that bank holiday weekend, I am satisfied that you decided that the time had come to murder your wife, and to involve X in that plot. You

asked X whether X wanted to get rid of Mum. Too young fully to comprehend your meaning and inevitably upset by and resentful of the breakdown of your relationship with Dawn and her absence from the family home, X agreed, albeit having no real understanding of what would happen, or when.

15. Ms Grahame placed great emphasis on the fact that, on the bank holiday Monday (30 May) there would appear to have been no visit to your mother's house, en route to which, on X's account, the fateful conversation had taken place in the car, nor had X been alone with you in the car on that day. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that, in general terms, the truthfulness of X's evidence must have been accepted by the jury, and you acknowledged in evidence that you would have had ample opportunity to have spoken to each other alone during that weekend. To the extent that it is necessary for me to make any further finding, having observed X giving evidence over a substantial period of time, I am sure that X gave a truthful account of the conversation which you initiated, consistent with events as they were later to unfold. Generally, having regard to X's age at the time; the trauma which X has experienced; and the passage of time, it is unsurprising that elements of X's account were inconsistent or inaccurate. That does not serve to undermine X's evidence on the key issues, as the jury found.

16. At around 6:00pm on 2 June 2016, Dawn arrived at the family home, by prior arrangement with you. Elizabeth Spencer dropped X off at a similar time, having taken X out on a day trip during the school holiday. She was clear in her evidence that Dawn had been intending to spend that evening with her partner, and to leave the house shortly after Ms Spencer had done so, at around 6:30 that evening. Dawn's partner had been expecting her return between 7:00pm and 8:00pm, as usual. By that stage, as you acknowledged in evidence, Dawn could no longer bear to be in your company, spending only such time as would enable her to maintain a maternal relationship. Ms Spencer described you as having behaved peculiarly — like a cat on a hot tin roof, that evening. Cocaine was detected in a sample of your urine, taken at 4:05am on 3 June 2016. The expert toxicology evidence was that Cocaine can be associated with increased energy and excitation; that it can also have a tendency to increase

aggression; and that it is detectable in urine for approximately 24, and, possibly, up to 48, hours following its consumption. The findings made were said not to have been inconsistent with your use of Cocaine at around the time of the incident, albeit that its use at that time could not be stated with absolute certainty. Your own evidence was that you had taken Cocaine at around 11:00pm on 31 May in order to cheer yourself up, following an unhappy evening during which, on your account, Dawn had assaulted you having discovered that your new partner had stayed overnight at the family home. If that were true, on the expert evidence, the drug was unlikely to have been detectable in a urine sample taken 53 hours later. You told the jury that you were not still feeling the drug's effects on 2 June, yet your behaviour as described by Elizabeth Spencer was consistent with its consumption that evening and, on your account, you had never previously used Cocaine to lift your spirits when alone, despite its presence in your home since 2015 and the turmoil of your marriage breakdown. You failed to disclose to the custody officer, or to mention in your police interview, on 3 June 2016 that you had taken it on 31 May, whilst volunteering that you had taken a cold remedy on the previous day. Your explanation for that omission was unconvincing. At the end of your interview on 4 June, you volunteered to Police that they would find a small quantity of Cocaine in the principal bedroom of your house, stating that you and Dawn used to use it *'just for a bit of fun...I just wanted you to know it was there'*. You made no mention of having taken Cocaine on 31 May or at any later time. Having regard to all such matters, I am sure that you had taken Cocaine on 2 June, to strengthen your resolve to carry out your murderous plan.

17. After Ms Spencer had left to go home, and in line with your earlier discussion with X, whilst Dawn was in the kitchen X suggested that she close her eyes and hold out her hands to receive a surprise. Having pre-selected a drawing to give to Dawn, X went to retrieve it from the living room. Whilst Dawn was in that vulnerable position, you slit her throat, in a rapid and forceful action which caused an incised wound 13 centimetres long, severing her carotid artery; jugular vein; trachea; oesophagus; and thyroid gland, also causing muscle damage, and missing her spine by just a couple of millimetres. She was rendered unable to speak, or scream. The incision caused an arterial spray which covered the floor and much of the walls in her blood. Having



regard to the expert pathology evidence, and the jury's rejection of your evidence that it was Dawn who had been the aggressor, I am sure that you inflicted that fatal wound from behind — attacking her from the front would have made it more likely that she would have been able to avoid your attack and defies logic where self-defence or defence of X has been rejected by the jury. Furthermore and irrespective of X's mistaken recollection of the presence of a breakfast bar in the kitchen on 2 June, on your own evidence you had left the murder weapon in the sink or on the draining board at an earlier stage, and, thus, it was readily to hand in the kitchen area to which Dawn had had her back. Having instructed X to go upstairs and wait until you called X to come down again, you inflicted two wounds to your own head (the jury having rejected your account of an attack by Dawn), and, subsequently, a wound to X's left forearm — visible to this day and serving as a constant reminder to X of your heinous acts — with a view to supporting your account of self-defence. It was in that way that X had become aware, and been able to indicate to the call handler who had answered the 999 call, that Dawn was then lying on the floor of the kitchen.

18. Having murdered X's mother in the most brutal way, you came to appreciate — at the latest by the time of your abortive first criminal trial, which had ended in December 2016, after X's video-recorded Police interview had been played in court — that significant aspects of X's account had been at variance with your own. During supervised contact visits thereafter, as you acknowledged in evidence, you had opportunities to speak to X, about what had happened and other matters which you were forbidden to discuss. I am satisfied that you reinforced the importance of X 'sticking to the plan', telling X that you would otherwise go to prison and that X would never see you again and thereby encouraging X to perpetuate a false account. In X's words, *'I was made to feel like, if that were to happen, it would be all my fault and I'd lose my Mum and my Dad over the same event.'* I find it unsurprising that X craved your affection and attention during these visits, given X's age, the trauma which X had experienced, and the fact that X's mother had, first, left the family home following the breakdown of your marriage, and then died.

## **Sentence**

19. I turn to the sentences to be imposed for your crimes. I have given very careful consideration to the evidence received at trial; to the helpful and detailed written notes on sentence and oral submissions received from the Prosecution and the Defence; and to all of the caselaw to which I have been referred. I am obliged to sentence you in accordance with all applicable statutory principles, sentencing guidelines and caselaw and to explain my approach. I am very conscious of how detached and tortuous that exercise might appear, to all those affected by your actions and to the general public. It in no way minimises or loses sight of the human impact of your offending, at which no right-minded person could feel anything but revulsion.
20. I take your offence of murder as the lead offence, the sentence for which will reflect the overall criminality of your offending.

## *Murder*

21. The sentence for murder is fixed by law. It is a mandatory life sentence. Section 321 of the Sentencing Act 2020 (to which I shall refer as 'the 2020 Act') requires me to decide the minimum term which you must spend in custody before you can be considered by the Parole Board for release on licence, unless I am required by section 321(3) to make a whole life order, whereby you would never be released. Such an order is mandatory where the Court is of the opinion that, because of the seriousness of the offence of murder, or of the combination of that offence and one or more offences associated with it, it should not make a minimum term order. On your behalf, Ms Grahame acknowledges that Counts 2 to 5 are offences associated with your offence of murder, within the meaning of section 400 of the 2020 Act.
22. By its nature, murder is an extremely serious crime. The period which a murderer must serve in prison does not reflect the value of the life taken, nor does it attempt to do so. Grave though your wife's murder and associated offences were, your offending did not include any of the non-exhaustive factors set out at paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 21 to the 2020 Act, and I do not consider it to be one of those rare cases the facts of which nevertheless merit a whole life order. I am satisfied that a very lengthy finite minimum

term will afford just punishment. I must therefore consider the appropriate starting point for determination of the minimum term which will apply. It is important that you and the public understand that a minimum term is just that — it is the shortest period which you will spend in custody before you can be considered for release. There is no guarantee that you will in fact be released at the end of that period, or at any later time. It is only if and when the Parole Board decides that you are fit to be released, that you will be released, and you will then remain subject to licence for the rest of your life. If you re-offend, or fail to comply in any other way with the conditions of your licence, you may be re-called to continue your life sentence. It is in that way that a life sentence protects the public for the future.

23. As Ms Grahame concedes, in all the circumstances your offence of murder, in combination with your associated offending, might properly attract a starting point of 30 years. I am in no doubt that the seriousness of your offence of murder, in combination with your associated offending, was particularly high. I reject the Crown's submission that I should treat your offence as a murder done for gain — whilst, in the event, you benefited from your wife's estate and life insurance policies following her death, I have found that your motivation for her murder was sexual jealousy, and the Prosecution case was advanced on that basis. Nevertheless, the following factors lead me to the conclusion which I have reached:

- a. First, your significant premeditation and planning, including consideration of various means by which you might kill your wife, and your decision that involving X would bolster your intended claim to have acted in lawful defence of yourself and X, an approach also serving to blacken your wife's name and, thus, to increase the distress caused to her family.
- b. Second, your grotesque involvement of X, then under 10 years old, by manipulating and/or nurturing X's conflicted feelings towards your wife, before soliciting X's participation in the plan to kill her, and, thereafter, suborning X to conceal the true circumstances of her death — encouraging X to lie to the Police over a protracted period, reminding X of the need to 'stick to the plan'; and

indicating that a failure to do so would mean that you would go to prison and that X would never see you again.

- c. Third, your infliction of physical injury to X — and using the knife with which you had recently killed X's mother — which has left additional enduring physical and mental scarring.
- d. Fourth, as apparent from the content of the 999 call made on the evening of Dawn's death, causing another person to believe that Dawn had attacked you and X, and to witness the aftermath of your actions.
- e. Fifth, that Dawn's murder was committed in a domestic context, in the family home, on an occasion on which she had been present in order to visit X.
- f. Sixth, your use of Cocaine, in advance of Dawn's murder, in order to boost your confidence to commit it.
- g. Seventh, and using your words, the 'great distress and anxiety' which Dawn Rhodes had experienced by reason of your actions, in the period prior to her death, when she had come to fear that her telephone was being hacked and that she was being followed and at risk. I reject your account that, notwithstanding the multiple online searches which you had conducted, you did not in fact access her personal or work telephones, whether by hacking or otherwise.
- h. Eighth, over the same period, your emotional manipulation of Dawn Rhodes, including by goading her and by threatening suicide and self-harm, threats which were of sufficient concern to her that she contacted the Police in January 2016.
- i. Ninth, the enquiry which you made of your colleague as to whether he knew of someone who could injure Dawn's new partner in exchange for payment, and your exploitation and manipulation of his wife's emotional vulnerability (of which you had been aware), including by the adoption of a false persona.

- j. Tenth, the circumstances surrounding the two counts of perjury of which you have been convicted, arising from your prolonged and persistent giving of false evidence — first, in earlier criminal proceedings, to avoid conviction (remediable only via a retrial by order of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division)), and then in family proceedings. That criminal conduct delayed justice by more than eight years and risked a different outcome in the family proceedings, with all that that would have entailed, including the prospect that X would have felt unable to give a true account of events.

24. In those circumstances, the appropriate starting point, in determining the minimum term, is 30 years. I must then consider any relevant aggravating and mitigating factors. When considering the former, I bear firmly in mind the need not to double-count any factor which has inclined me to consider that the seriousness of Dawn's murder, in combination with one or more of your associated offences, is particularly high, so as to have resulted in the selection of the appropriate starting point. I am satisfied that the significant degree of planning and premeditation to which I have referred is reflected in that starting point and that there is no separate statutory or other aggravating factor which applies. The only mitigating factor in this case is the absence of any prior conviction for violence, or, in all the circumstances, other relevant conviction. You will receive some credit for that, though, inevitably given the nature and gravity of your offending, it can be of very limited significance.

25. Ms Grahame advances as additional mitigation the provocation which she asserts to have been constituted in your wife's admitted infidelity, correctly observing that, as a matter of law, provocation of that type is capable of providing relevant mitigation for murder, even if not amounting to a defence. I am satisfied that there is nothing in this case which could properly amount to provocation by Dawn Rhodes serving to mitigate your offence. She had become increasingly unhappy in your marriage, considering that you were controlling. It was a marriage from which she wished to extricate herself; a decision which was for her to make. Furthermore, in late October and early December 2015, prior to your awareness of Dawn's extra-marital relationship, you had yourself conducted three searches via a dating app. I reject your explanation at trial that you

were simply being nosey following the mention of that app by your colleagues. More generally, I am satisfied that Dawn's new relationship was, in large measure, a reaction to your own conduct — you will receive no downward adjustment for provocation.

26. Having regard to all of the above, I consider that the appropriate minimum term in your case is one of 29 years and 6 months, from which the time which you have already spent on remand will be deducted, as I shall explain later in these remarks.

### *Child cruelty*

27. Your offence of cruelty to a child was constituted in your wilful assault by infliction of a wound to the left forearm of your own child. That offence was committed prior to 28 June 2022, such that the maximum sentence which applies is 10 years' imprisonment (whereas, for an offence committed on or after that date, the maximum custodial sentence is one of 14 years). Having regard to the applicable sentencing guideline, I assess your offence to have been of very high culpability — Category A — by reason of a combination of your use of very significant force; your use of a weapon; and your deliberate disregard for the welfare of X. The harm caused I assess to be Category 2, being physical and related psychological and emotional harm falling between Categories 1 and 3, as detailed by X in X's victim personal statement. For an offence so categorised, committed on or after 28 June 2022, the starting point is one of six years' custody, with a category range of four to eight years' custody. Aggravating your offence was the fact that it was planned and committed with a view to concealing your wife's murder; your deliberate concealment of the offence itself, including by procuring X's continued false account of the way in which it had come to be inflicted; its commission under the influence of Cocaine; the fact that another person was caused to witness the aftermath; and the blame which you wrongly placed upon Dawn Rhodes. Your lack of previous convictions for violence affords your only mitigation, and, once again, in all the circumstances, can be of very limited effect. In light of the sentence to be imposed on Count 1, the question of dangerousness does not arise for consideration. Had your offence been committed on or after 28 June 2022, the custodial sentence which I would have imposed would have been one of seven years

and nine months. Having regard to the lower maximum sentence applicable to your offence, in my judgement the appropriate sentence is one of six years and nine months. I shall explain my approach to totality at the end of these sentencing remarks.

*Acts tending and intended to pervert the course of justice*

28. I turn to consider Count 3. Six acts were particularised as tending and intended to pervert the course of justice. In each case, you disputed that you had acted as charged, subject to which you did not dispute any other element of the offence. As Ms Grahame acknowledges, in light of that, and of your conviction on Count 2, the jury must have been satisfied that the third and fourth particularised acts (the infliction of a wound to X's left forearm; and causing X falsely to tell the Police that that wound had been caused by Dawn Rhodes) had been proven. Similarly, your conviction on Counts 4 and 5 indicates that the jury must have been satisfied of the second particularised act (inflicting a wound or wounds to your own head and left hand), because it must have been satisfied that there had been no prior knife attack by Dawn Rhodes. By parity of reasoning, it must also have been satisfied of the fifth and sixth particularised acts (causing X falsely to tell the Police that wounds, respectively, to your head and back had been caused by Dawn Rhodes). I cannot be sure that you in fact caused X to inflict a wound or wounds to your upper back (the first particularised act), acknowledging that the superficial nature of those wounds does not correspond with the force with which, on X's evidence, you caused X to inflict them, however, given the nature and number of the acts of which the jury must have been satisfied, I consider that any such additional act would not materially have added to the gravity of the offence charged by Count 3, for sentencing purposes.

29. Having regard to the relevant sentencing guideline, I assess your culpability as high — Category A, encompassing as it did conduct over a sustained period, which was planned and related to an underlying offence of the utmost gravity. I am satisfied that the harm caused was Category 1, given the serious consequences for X and the wider Rhodes and Spencer families; the serious impact on the administration of justice; and the substantial delay caused to the course of justice. For a Category A1 offence, the starting point is four years' custody, with a range of two to seven years' custody. In my

judgement, the number and nature of your acts and the presence of multiple factors within the category, requires an upward adjustment of the starting point, before consideration of aggravating and mitigating factors, taking it to the top of the category range. There are no aggravating factors which have not been taken into account when selecting that starting point. Very limited mitigation is afforded by the absence of relevant recent convictions. Thus, and subject to totality, the appropriate sentence on Count 3 is one of six years and nine months' imprisonment.

#### *Perjury in 2017*

30. Count 4 concerns your offence of perjury at your criminal trial, in May 2017. There is no applicable sentencing guideline. I have had regard to the caselaw to which I have been referred. By section 1(1) of the Perjury Act 1911, the maximum sentence is seven years' imprisonment.

31. As I have already observed, your offence resulted in your acquittal and the denial of justice for a period exceeding eight years. It was a deliberate, planned offence which drew in the young child whom you shared with the deceased. Its purpose was to avoid conviction for the most serious of offences and it is deserving of punishment commensurate with the gravity of that offence. Once again, your lack of recent relevant convictions counts for very little by way of mitigation of this serious offence. Subject to totality, the appropriate sentence is one of four years' imprisonment.

#### *Perjury in 2018*

32. Count 5 concerns your separate offence of perjury in proceedings in the Family Division, in May 2018. Once again, that offence was deliberate, planned and drew in X. It had the capacity to affect the ultimate outcome of those proceedings, though did not, in the event, do so, and marked a persistence in the lies which you had told in the criminal proceedings, a year earlier. Some, very limited, mitigation is afforded by your lack of recent relevant convictions. Subject to totality, the custodial sentence which I impose is one of three years.



### *Totality*

33. But for the sentence imposed for the lead offence of murder, I would have imposed concurrent sentences on Counts 2 and 3, with the sentence for Count 4 running consecutively to those imposed on Counts 1 to 3, and the sentence for Count 5 consecutive to that imposed on Count 4. Having regard to totality, I consider that the appropriate approach, reflective of all of your offending and resulting in a just and proportionate total sentence, is to impose the sentence which I have identified for each of Counts 2 to 5 concurrently with the sentence to be imposed on Count 1.

34. I shall now summarise the sentence which you will receive and what it means for you:

- a. For the murder of Dawn Rhodes, I pass the only sentence which the Law allows me to pass, being life imprisonment. You will remain in custody until the Parole Board decides that you are suitable to be considered for release. The shortest period of time during which you must remain in custody is 29 years and six months, less the number of days which you have spent remanded in custody, including in relation to the related offences charged by Counts 2 and 3. I have been told that, as at today's date, that period is agreed as being 590 days. **Therefore, the minimum term which I impose in your case is 27 years and 321 days.** I remind you that there is no guarantee that you will in fact be released at the end of that period, or at any later time, and that, if and when you are released, you will remain subject to licence for the rest of your life, and may be recalled to continue your life sentence if you re-offend or fail to comply in any other way with the conditions of your licence.

### *Cruelty to a child*

- b. For your offence of cruelty to a child, **I impose a sentence of six years and nine months' imprisonment**, to run concurrently with the sentence imposed on Count 1 and with all other sentences.

*Perverting the course of justice*

- c. For your offence of perverting the course of justice, **I impose a custodial sentence of six years and nine months**, to run concurrently with the sentence imposed on Count 1 and with all other sentences.

*Perjury (2017)*

- d. For your offence of perjury in 2017, **I impose a custodial sentence of four years**, to run concurrently with the sentence imposed on Count 1 and with all other sentences.

*Perjury (2018)*

- e. For your offence of perjury in 2018, **I impose a custodial sentence of three years**, to run concurrently with the sentence imposed on Count 1 and with all other sentences.
- f. In light of the sentence imposed on Count 1, you will not benefit from the early release provisions which would otherwise apply to the sentence imposed on each of Counts 2 to 5.
- g. **Therefore, the total sentence which I impose is one of life imprisonment, with a minimum term of 27 years and 321 days, taking account of the time which you have spent on remand.**

*Ancillary orders*

35. The Prosecution contends that you have benefited substantially from your criminal conduct, from your wife's estate and the proceeds of certain life insurance policies. An order prohibiting disposal of assets was made by Guildford Crown Court, on 28 February 2025. In due course, the Prosecution will seek a confiscation order relating

to such wealth as remains and represents 'realisable assets'. In that connection, I have made agreed orders and directions under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. For that reason, no order is made, at this stage, for compensation, or for payment and collection of a victim surcharge. An order for forfeiture and destruction of the knife was made at an earlier stage.

That is all.

**16 January 2026**