



Courts and Tribunals Judiciary

CHESTER CROWN COURT

27 FEBRUARY 2026

REX

v.

TONY DEVENPORT

SENTENCING REMARKS OF MRS JUSTICE STEYN DBE

The defendant is to remain seated until told to stand

INTRODUCTION

1. Stephanie Blundell died on the morning of Sunday 20 July 2025, as a result of fierce, repeated and sustained assaults inflicted by you over the preceding day or two. Her father had the most terrible experience a parent can face of visiting her shortly after midday on that Sunday, only to discover that his beloved daughter lay dead, with the marks of the severe beatings you had meted out abundantly clear. She was pronounced dead at 12.36pm.
2. Tony Devenport, on 25 February 2026, you were convicted at this court, after a trial, of the murder of your partner, Stephanie Blundell, on 20 July 2025. It is now my duty to sentence you.
3. I have had the benefit of arguments on sentence from Mr Gordon Cole KC, ably assisted by Mr Gareth Roberts, on your behalf, and from Mr Owen Edwards KC, ably assisted by Mr James Coutts, for the Crown. I take account of everything they have eloquently said.
4. I have heard and read the extremely moving victim personal statements from Stephanie's mother, Joy Blundell, her father, Phillip Blundell, and her sister, Jessica Littler. Stephanie's father and sister bravely read their own statements to the court this morning,

and I also heard directly from them during the trial. Several of Stephanie's friends also gave evidence. The loss of each speaks vividly from their words.

5. It is clear that the person they knew and loved so very dearly was compassionate, kind-hearted and courageous. She always saw the good in people, including you, never giving up on them. She had an enormous capacity to love and a bright smile that could light up a room. Stephanie was, as her mother put it, "so much to so many people, a funny, stylish, loving, kind daughter, sister, aunty and friend".
6. Stephanie was a talented young woman who, as her sister said, "had her struggles but battled them so bravely". She had health issues, but with simple treatment she could and very probably would have survived and recovered. As her parents said, she had "so much more to give", "so much more living to do", "so much more laughter, joy and adventures to experience".
7. You took a daughter away from her mother and father. You deprived Jessica of her big sister and her young nieces of their aunty. For her friends, too, the loss of Stephanie has left a dark void. The taking of a life is a terrible thing, not only because of the life which is cut cruelly short, but because of all the other lives which are damaged as well.
8. It is plain to me from these statements, and from the evidence that I heard at trial, that losing Stephanie in such an awful way has been absolutely shattering for her family, and their lives will never be the same again. Their grief is palpable. Jessica has described a "constant heaviness inside" that they "cannot escape" since their "world was destroyed". In the words of the poem cited by Stephanie's mother, "there seems to be no coming end to this sorrow". Their pain is beyond words but I am sure that all of us hope that they can find the strength to comfort and sustain each other.
9. The sentence I will pass is not intended as a measure of the value of Stephanie's life. That is beyond measure. Nor can it begin to put right what you have done. That is not possible. It cannot be undone.

SENTENCING PRINCIPLES

10. There is only one sentence that the law allows me to pass for the offence of murder. That is a sentence of imprisonment for life. That is the sentence that I will pass.
11. I am then required by section 322 and Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020 to specify the minimum term.
12. The minimum term is not your sentence: your sentence is imprisonment for life. It is important to explain to you – and everyone concerned with this case or reading or reporting this sentence – that a minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically qualify for release. A minimum term is exactly that: it is the shortest period

that you will serve in custody before the Parole Board can conduct its first review of whether, and, if so, when you might be released on licence.

13. Let me make this quite clear. You will not be released before that minimum term has expired. There is no guarantee that you will be released at that time, or at any particular time thereafter. After that period elapses the Parole Board will consider your case. It is then only if the Parole Board decides you can safely be released that you will be released. If the Parole Board concludes that it remains necessary for public protection, you will continue to be detained.
14. If and when you are released, you will be subject to licence and this will remain the case for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were to be revoked, such as if you reoffend, you will be recalled to continue to serve your sentence in custody. It is in these ways that a life sentence protects the public for the future.

THE FACTS

15. In deciding upon the minimum term, I have taken into account all of the relevant circumstances. I set out my conclusions upon the evidence that has been called in this trial. I must fix the minimum term only upon the basis of the facts of which I am sure. If I am not sure about something I must give you the benefit of the doubt.
16. You were in an intimate personal relationship with Stephanie Blundell for two years, from July 2023 until her death. You lived together at 16 Canal Street. You were 57 years old at the date of the offence, and you are of the same age at sentence. Stephanie Blundell was 41 years old at the date of her death.
17. As a young man, you set up a successful go-karting business with your brother. You sold the business in about 2014/15 and invested some of the proceeds in property. You have taken drugs since you were in your early 20s but with the sale of your business you have had more time and money, and at times since then your abuse of drugs and alcohol worsened. When you met Stephanie, she had been struggling with alcohol use disorder for many years. You use crack cocaine and cocaine. Stephanie only ever took drugs with you, and she rarely did so.
18. Throughout your relationship there have been lengthy periods of sobriety when you both abstained from alcohol and drug use. One such period began in January 2025 and continued until you took a trip to Slovakia together in May 2025. You decided to drink. She strongly tried to resist but, as you put it in evidence, you directed her to join you because you wanted a drinking partner. You drank heavily throughout that period from 19 May until Stephanie's death. I am sure that you also took drugs during that period. Your evidence to the contrary was not credible given the evidence of your cravings, use of drugs and alcohol concurrently, ease of access to crack/cocaine, cash withdrawal, contemporaneous messages, and presence of cocaine in your blood two days after arrest.

19. Your behaviour towards Stephanie during your relationship was controlling and coercive. Although you lived together for nearly two years, she had no key to your shared home, and it was not possible to open the front door from the inside without a key. On 30 May 2025, Stephanie was in the house and told a police officer who was outside that she was unable to open the front door; and on 1 July 2025 she told a police officer that “he’s kept me in here for four days”. I am sure those statements were true. You escorted her to and from her work, as well as when she met her friends, and kept her bank card and driving licence in your wallet. You exhibited paranoia, accusing her of having affairs, and interrogated her phone, prompting her regularly to delete her messages. When intoxicated, you were abusive, aggressive and violent towards her on occasions prior to her death, leading her to express a prescient fear to police that you would murder her, although, as is so often the way with victims of domestic abuse, she was never prepared to maintain a complaint against you.
20. Stephanie died at some time on the morning of Sunday 20 July 2025, in your home. Ten days earlier, on the morning of 10 July 2025, you were arrested on suspicion of assaulting Stephanie. She had phoned the ambulance service asking for help for you because she thought you were in some sort of psychosis. You were highly abusive, handled her very aggressively, shoving her out of the door, and you assaulted her during that call, splitting her lip. Your evidence that you tossed her phone to her underarm, accidentally causing her lip to be injured when she failed to catch it, was not credible. The moment when you assaulted her can be heard on the call to the ambulance service, she had her phone which she had been using to take videos and then make that call. Two independent witnesses saw the way you abused and aggressively grabbed her.
21. You were released that evening, subject to police bail conditions which precluded you from contacting Stephanie or being in her company for 28 days. Within minutes you breached those conditions. You rang her phone and when you failed to reach her you ring her via her mother’s phone. You then arranged for a taxi to pick up Stephanie from her parents’ house. Stephanie was dropped off at 21:44 on 10 July and she never left your house again.
22. During that period from 10-20 July 2025, Stephanie had no means of contacting anyone. She had lost her phone. You controlled her ability to leave the house. On Saturday 12 July 2025, Stephanie’s father visited 16 Canal Street. Stephanie did not come downstairs, saying she was in a state of undress, but her father spoke to her. She sounded sober and well. In the period from 10-19 July you bought more than 12 litres of vodka and 72 cans of beer. While Stephanie valiantly sought to help you and to resist her own addiction, you had no interest at that time in giving up alcohol or drugs, and within a couple of days of returning to live with you she, too, was drinking heavily.
23. It is clear from the evidence of the pathologists that on two separate occasions in the day or two before Stephanie died you strangled her. The first time you did so it was not fatal, as was evident from the healing change to the fractured right superior thyroid horn. The second time you strangled her may well have been the final event that ended her life, but I cannot be sure of that. What the pathologists were able to say was that the second

strangulation occurred within nought to two hours of Stephanie's death. Your denial that you strangled her was a lie; one of many that you told when giving evidence.

24. In the 48 hours before she died, you gave Stephanie such ferocious, repeated and sustained beatings that she suffered significant (albeit survivable) brain injuries, namely subdural haemorrhage, subarachnoid haemorrhage, a focal contusion to the right parietal lobe and traumatic axonal injury. She was left with two swollen black eyes, severe bruising to her face, head and neck, and extensive bruising to the rest of her body. It is possible that a small number of the 102 bruises on Stephanie's body were not deliberately inflicted by you, but I am sure that the vast majority were the result of your violent acts in the 48 hours before her death.
25. Only you know the full detail of what happened. I am sure that you have not told the truth about what you did. In interview you claimed to have done nothing more than held Stephanie tightly around the tops of her arms and pushed her onto the bed. In evidence, faced with what you had said in phone calls from prison, you said you had slapped her hard two or three times on the left cheek. That was an admission of appalling behaviour. But her terrible injuries were caused by you fiercely beating and throttling her, not by three slaps.
26. Stephanie developed alcoholic ketoacidosis and acute pancreatitis. With treatment, she would have had a good prospect of recovering from those conditions. But she was reliant on you for help. You gave and sought none, choosing instead to beat her up. As I have said, I cannot be sure that the final event was fatal strangulation and so, in those circumstances, ketoacidosis and acute pancreatitis must be treated as causes of Stephanie's death. But it is evident from the jury's verdict that they were sure that the injuries inflicted by you were at least a significant cause of her death. There were many ways in which the injuries she sustained may have caused Stephanie's death. I am sure, at the very least, that her conditions were worsened by the numerous serious injuries you inflicted, including due to the impact of the physiological stress response and her weakened state reducing her body's ability to tolerate illness.
27. Acute pancreatitis is an extremely painful condition. While she was conscious, Stephanie is bound to have been pleading with you for help. She was extremely vulnerable. She had no means of contacting anyone but you. She was bed-bound, unable even to venture downstairs. You sought no help and gave her little by way of nourishment or hydration, save for alcohol.

THE PRINCIPLES APPLIED

28. I must first determine the statutory starting point. Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of Schedule 21 are inapplicable. The Prosecution did not contend otherwise but, quite properly, submitted that I should give due consideration to whether the case falls within paragraph 3, with a starting point of 30 years, on the basis that the seriousness of the offence is particularly high. Having regard to the types of murder cases specified in paragraph 3(2), albeit that list is not exhaustive, it is clear paragraph 3 does not apply here.

29. This means that the case is one to which paragraph 5 of Schedule 21 applies. The starting point for setting the minimum term laid down by Parliament is therefore 15 years. However, 15 years is only the starting point not the end point. These provisions must not be applied mechanistically and I must decide whether to adjust the minimum term taking into account any aggravating and mitigating factors.
30. There are a number of statutory aggravating factors:
- a. First, Stephanie was particularly vulnerable because of disability (paragraph 9(b) of Schedule 21), in circumstances where during the last 48 hours of her life she was unable to walk unassisted, even the short way from her bedroom to the bathroom.
 - b. Secondly, you had repeatedly engaged in behaviour towards Stephanie that was controlling or coercive while you were in an intimate personal relationship with each other (paragraph 9(ba) of Schedule 21). I consider Stephanie's vulnerability by reason of being effectively trapped with no means to communicate, no ability to report what you had done, and the fact that she was killed by you, her partner, in her home, where she was entitled to feel safe, is encompassed within this statutory aggravating factor. I have had regard to the sentencing guideline *Domestic Abuse: Overarching Principles*.
 - c. Thirdly, you inflicted mental and physical suffering on Stephanie before her death (paragraph 9(c) of Schedule 21). There was more than one infliction of severe force over an extended period, including strangulation at least 12 hours apart. As a result of your actions Stephanie would have been in pain and fear, and you kept her there, offering little but vodka.
 - d. Fourthly, the offence was committed while you were on bail (s.64 of the Sentencing Act 2020).
31. In addition, there is the non-statutory aggravating factor, identified in the *General Guideline: Overarching Principles*, you were voluntarily intoxicated at the time of the offence. In determining that your intoxication was voluntary, although you were addicted to drugs and alcohol, I have had regard to the fact that you chose not to engage with the help available in dealing with addiction, taking the view that you did not wish to give it up, and did not need to because you had money.
32. I have borne in mind that there is overlap between the aggravating features and avoided double-counting.
33. I turn to the mitigating factors. A person who commits murder with an intention to cause serious bodily harm rather than to kill can rely on that fact in mitigation (paragraph 10(a) of Schedule 21). Although you twice asphyxiated Stephanie by compressing her upper neck, having regard to the whole of the evidence, I am not sure that you intended to kill Stephanie. I accept your Counsel's submission that I should proceed on the basis that you intended to cause her really serious physical injury but not to kill her, and so this statutory mitigating factor applies. It is however the case that the degree of harm that you

intentionally inflicted, and the risk of death from asphyxiation, means any allowance must be significantly limited.

34. I accept that your two previous convictions are not relevant, given their age and minor nature. The fact that you have no relevant previous convictions is a mitigating factor but in the circumstances it carries very little weight.
35. Your Counsel has relied on a number of further factors in mitigation which I consider carry little, if any, weight. Your brother, Ian Devenport, and friend, Andrew Knapp, said that you are not a violent man. I accept that was their experience and their honest belief, but it is belied by the violence you inflicted on Stephanie Blundell. There were other contributory causative factors, namely ketoacidosis and pancreatitis, but that does not in any way reduce your culpability for what you did. I accept that you suffer from anxiety, depression and alcohol dependency, however, I am not persuaded that those conditions reduce your culpability or warrant any reduction in the minimum term.
36. Finally, reliance is placed on your age. Your age at the time of the offence obviously does not in any way reduce your culpability. But I bear in mind that imprisonment may have a more severe impact on a person as they reach old age, and I give that factor some weight.
37. Taking all these matters together, I am satisfied that the balance of aggravating and mitigating factors weighs against you and raises the minimum term substantially above the starting point.
38. The statutory surcharge will apply.

THE SENTENCE OF THE COURT

Tony Devenport, please stand.

39. Tony Devenport, for the murder of Stephanie Blundell, I sentence you to imprisonment for life. Taking account of all the relevant circumstances, and the aggravating and mitigating factors that I have set out, the minimum term I impose is one of 22 years' imprisonment less the 219 days you have spent on remand pending trial. That is a minimum term of 21 years and 146 days.

Mr Devenport, you will go now to begin your sentence.

Before leaving this case:

I want to recognise and thank all Counsel involved for their diligence on behalf of their clients, the teams sitting behind them and all those supporting them in Court, the CPS, the police, and all those who have played their part in bringing the defendant to justice. The police officers

who played their part in this investigation are to be commended for the extremely professional and skilful way in which they carried out their duties.

I would also like to thank the jury members for their commitment to the case, and the Court staff, so often unsung heroes, whose work in this trial was exemplary.

Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to pay tribute to the dignity, fortitude and restraint of Stephanie Blundell's family throughout this difficult trial.