

IN THE CROWN COURT AT CARDIFF

24 FEBRUARY 2026

R

V

KAI PENNELL

SENTENCING REMARKS

An order pursuant to section 45A of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 is in place no matter relating to those named in that order (who are not named below to assist preserving their anonymity but whose names were referred to orally in court) shall during that person's lifetime be included in any publication if it is likely to lead members of the public to identify that person as being concerned in the proceedings. Those matters include (a)the person's name, (b)the person's address, (c)the identity of any school or other educational establishment attended by the person, (d)the identity of any place of work of the person, and (e)any still or moving picture of the person.

1. It was heartbreaking to hear the victim impact statements that have been read to us today and learn of the devastating effect that your murder of Duane Keen has had on his family and friends. He was only 47 years old. His was a close knit family. His mother, Sandra is suffering the agony of outliving her child and is grieving her son; his grown up sons Corey and Joshua and his 12 year old young son are grieving their father, and his four grandchildren are struggling to comprehend how their adored grandfather who played such an important role in all their lives has gone. His siblings Samatha and Ryan are struggling to come to terms with their beloved brother's death.

2. His young son and the grandchildren will grow up without their father and grandfather witnessing their milestones on life's journey, celebrating their achievements that he would have been so proud of, cheering them on as they reach adulthood. Their sense of safety ripped from them by the manner of his death which it will not be possible to hide from all of them forever. He competed at a high level in Mixed Martial Arts and was a coach of many others. The boxing community has lost one of their own –so much so that the name that has now been given to Duane is The Legend.
3. Everyone has described Duane's kindness and care for others – nothing was too much trouble for him and he would always go the extra mile to be there for family and friends. His children and grandchildren relied on him. His love of the countryside and his dogs, his sense of humour and sense of fun. Many described him as their protector.
4. In his short life Duane reached so many people that thousands attended his memorial service online and in person. His life and achievements and outstanding qualities and commitment to his family and friends will be talked about and kept alive as the coming years pass and he has indeed become legendary. His family and friends can feel rightly proud of him.
5. On the night and into the early hours of 16 October 2025 Duane lost his life when he tried to protect your ex, Rebecca Phillips, who feared for her own and her young son's safety, and you killed him.
6. My task today is to sentence you for Duane's murder. I am conscious that no sentence that this court can give will compensate his family and his friends for his loss.

The Facts

7. In 2025 you moved into Riverside Drive in Blaenavon. Rebecca Phillips lived upstairs from you with her 4 year old son and in July 2025 you and she started seeing each other and she became pregnant. Ms Phillips ended the relationship, such as it was, in September 2025, but you appeared unable to accept that she did not want to be in a relationship with you and sent her demanding and controlling messages. You would not leave her alone and you became fixated on whether she was seeing anyone else including her ex, Duane Keen, who also lived nearby when it was absolutely none of your business.
8. On 16 October 2025 you were pestering Ms Phillips including angry and disturbing text messages and knocking on her door and trying to barge into her flat. In the evening you snatched her phone and at one point even grabbed her son briefly. After returning her phone you bombarded her with messages and calls – for example 13 calls in just one minute at 11.30pm – as well as banging on her door and shouting horrible things and asking her to let you in. She sensibly refused. Ms Phillips did nothing to encourage your attention and did not reply to your messages or respond to your attempts to contact her and was at all times trying to be reasonable and defuse the tension. But she was scared enough to call Duane and he offered to come over to protect her. He only went over because of your threatening and disturbing behaviour towards Rebecca Phillips.
9. You must have decided to attack Duane Keen with a knife shortly before 1am because you put a small knife in the pocket of your hoodie as you saw Duane approach the flats. You were then seen “sneaking up” to Rebecca’s flat wearing a black balaclava and listening at the door and trying to look through

the peephole before returning to your flat by climbing through the window rather than your front door to avoid the CCTV. Once home you swapped the small knife for a much larger one. At 1.20am you climbed out of the window of your flat with the large knife in your pocket and once again made your way to Rebecca's flat. Some time earlier you had stolen her spare key and you used it to let yourself in and forced the door chain. On hearing the noise Duane came to the door to see what was happening. You pounced on him and stabbed him to death in the hallway with the large kitchen knife that you had brought for the purpose. You ignored Rebecca's pleas to you to stop and to think of her son. You stabbed him five times and slashed him with the knife three times. Some of those injuries were to his hands and arms as he tried to defend himself from your unprovoked attack. He stayed on his feet as long as possible, as you pushed him into the corner. One of the stabs was fatal. But you had stabbed him through the heart and he died on the floor of the flat.

10. Rebecca rushed to a neighbour to get help and they both returned immediately to see Duane on the floor and blood all over the flat. You were still there and still holding the knife and you followed Rebecca into her bedroom where she had gone to check on her son. You turned on the light waking him up, and told her she would be next. You accused her of making you like this before you walked out of the flat threatening to kill yourself. You then smashed the windows, let down the tyres of Rebecca's car and fled to a nearby wooded area where you were found by the police. You attempted to discard the knife. You carried on trying to ring Ms Phillips and spoke to a police negotiator. You were still trying to control events and threatened to kill yourself if she did not speak to you. She did not want to talk to you and you

were soon found by the police in the woods who were also able to locate the knife that you had used to kill Duane.

11. You were 34 years old at the time of the murder. You were diagnosed with ADHD in 2000 and have a learning disability and dyslexia. You managed reasonably well for many years with loving parents and had your own family and a supportive partner. Your GP was proud of your achievements. At one point you hoped to join the British army. But your relationship with the mother of your children ended and you are now estranged from them and have drug and alcohol problems and mental health issues and you suffer from anxiety and low self-esteem. By 2023 you had moved back in with your mother and were briefly sectioned under s.136 Mental Health Act 1983 after threatening suicide. Your drug problems have continued and heroin, methadone and cocaine were found in your urine but it is not known if these were taken before or after you had killed Duane or whether you were under the influence of drugs at the time of the killing.

Sentence

12. The sentence for murder is life imprisonment. The court is also required to specify the minimum term of imprisonment which you will be required to serve before the parole board can consider you for release on licence. by reference to Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020. The starting point for your offence is **25 years** as you took the knife to Rebecca's flat intending to attack Duane and you used it to commit the murder (paragraph 4 of Schedule 21). However 25 years is the starting, not the finishing point and the next task of the court is to consider any aggravating and mitigating features that apply and to consider

any appropriate adjustments upwards and downwards to reach a final sentence.

13. You formed your intention to attack Duane Keen some 25 minutes before you killed him. The planning was not extensive – it involved wearing a balaclava, leaving your flat by the window in an attempt not to be detected and listening at the door before going back to your flat to get a bigger knife. The taking of the knife to the scene is not itself an aggravating feature as that is what gives rise to the starting point of 25 years and has already been taken into account. The most disturbing aspect is perhaps your returning home to get a bigger knife, but whilst this makes me sure that you intended to kill, and not just cause really serious harm to Duane, it does not amount a significant degree of planning or premeditation. You were increasingly volatile during the course of the day and your behaviour escalated until you were, as described by Rebecca, acting like a demon. That is not the same as undertaking significant planning and premeditation. You were spiralling out of control.
14. I cannot be sure that your drug abuse is an aggravating feature in your case, since not enough information is known about it.
15. The aggravating factors that apply in your case are that you forced entry into your ex-partner's flat, knowing that her young son would be there. A person's home is meant to be their sanctuary and place of safety. You then deliberately killed Duane in Rebecca's presence, intending to get at her, to hurt her psychologically, then threatened her with physical violence in front of her son, but took it out on her car instead. You did all that to her knowing that she was pregnant with your baby. Attacking her car was consistent with your attempts to control and dominate her. As she has explained in her victim personal

statement, her car was for her to learn to drive so that she could lead a more independent life and give more opportunities to take her son out and about. It is a further aggravating feature that in your twisted and self-piteous logic you told her that your murder of Duane was somehow Rebecca's fault. You are wrong to say that. The only person who is to blame for Duane's murder is you. Rebecca is in no way responsible for your actions and she should not feel any sense of guilt. What happened to Duane was not her fault. It was yours. The impact on Ms Phillips was movingly described in her victim personal statement has been devastating.

16. The combined aggravating features lead to an **upward adjustment of 2 years** to the 25 year starting point before consideration of mitigating factors.
17. None of the statutory mitigating factors apply in your case. I am sure you went back to your flat to get a bigger knife in order to kill Duane, not just cause him really serious harm. This was not a spontaneous attack and it was unprovoked. I have read your medical records carefully. Although you have had mental health issues and a learning disability there is no evidence that it lowered your culpability for this offence, but I accept that your ADHD and learning disability will have made life more difficult for you and affected your reasoning and processing of information which I have taken into account in considering your culpability. You were motivated by sexual jealousy and anger when you killed Duane and as a way to try and control and punish Rebecca for breaking up with you and remaining friends with Duane.
18. You have a few minor convictions which are not relevant and are neither aggravating or mitigating factors in your case.

19. You have however now had the courage to plead guilty and you should receive a reduction to your sentence for sparing the witnesses and Duane's family from the ordeal of a trial. It is particularly important as Rebecca's baby is due at around the same time as your trial was scheduled and it would have put her under tremendous additional stress during her pregnancy.
20. The Sentencing Council Guidelines state that the reduction must be no more than whichever is the smaller of one sixth of the sentence or five years, depending partly on how quickly guilt is admitted. It is not a mechanistic exercise but must be considered in the overall context of the case. You pleaded guilty on 6 February 2026 which was your third crown court appearance after a preliminary hearing on 21 October and a PTPH on 21 November 2025. You did not plead guilty sooner because your lawyers were awaiting the report of a forensic consultant psychiatrist about your fitness to plead. As soon as your lawyers were able to speak to you after obtaining the medical report you pleaded guilty plea on the same day at the PTPH. Time was of the essence given that Rebecca was approaching the third trimester of her pregnancy at that time. Taking all matters into account and the aggravating factors, I allow a four year reduction for your guilty plea.
21. I therefore set the minimum term that you will serve at **23 years**.
22. The 127 days that you have spent on remand since you were arrested on 20 October 2025 will be taken into account so that the minimum term takes account of the entire period of your incarceration in respect of these offences. With arithmetic, the minimum term of 23 years less the 127 days spent in custody is therefore **22 years and 238 days**.

23. It is important that you and everyone concerned with this case should understand what this means. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically be released. It is the term that must be served before the Parole Board can undertake their first review of the case. They will review the risk that you present at that stage and will consider whether you can properly be released from custody subject to licence and, if so, on what terms.
24. If you are released you will be subject to licence for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence is revoked, you will be recalled to prison to continue to serve your life sentence in custody.
25. It follows that unless and until the Parole Board consider that your release is appropriate you will remain in custody.
26. I order count 2 threats to kill Rebecca Phillips to lie on the file. I order that there be no separate penalty for count 3, the criminal damage to Rebecca's car, as I have taken that into account in setting the minimum term. I impose a restraining order to prohibiting you, which means forbidding you, from contacting her either directly or indirectly for an indefinite period in order to protect her from further harassment or contact from you. This means that you must have absolutely no contact with her whatsoever in any form other than through solicitors about your child. The terms of the order will be given to you after the hearing. I must warn you that if you disobey the order you would be committing a further offence, punishable with up to five years imprisonment. The statutory surcharge will apply. I order the destruction of the knife.

Mrs Justice Stacey

24.ii.2026