



Judiciary of England and Wales

Rex

-v-

(1) Melanie James

(2) Kenneth Newton

Stafford Crown Court

25 September 2026

Sentencing remarks

1. Rubin Blount died on 30 November 2022. Rubin was born on 24 May 1994 so at the time of his death he was only 28 years old. He had been admitted to hospital only a few days earlier on 26 November. At the time of his admission, he was emaciated and suffering from pneumonia which led to sepsis and multi-organ failure. He was already so ill that he suffered a heart attack in A&E. He was found to have suffered 45 rib fractures in the days and weeks before his admission which had caused or significantly contributed to the pneumonia. He could not survive and on 30 November the heartbreaking decision was taken to withdraw care. Rubin died shortly after.
2. Rubin was a highly vulnerable young man. He was of very low intelligence. An assessment of him in 2016 concluded that in 1000 people only 2 would be less intelligent. He had been diagnosed with ADHD and displayed characteristics on the autistic spectrum. He was clearly unable to live independently. He could make tea and toast but little or no more. He had little grasp of, or concern for, personal hygiene. As you, Melanie James and Kenneth Newton, both knew, Rubin had also reported that he had been sexually abused. That is not something that I can or do make any findings about but you both knew that that was what Rubin had reported.
3. You, Melanie James and Kenneth Newton, were not blood relatives but you were part of Rubin's extended family. Kenneth Newton – you had been brought up by Eric Blount as if he was your father. Eric Blount was the biological father of Rubin. When it suited

you, you described Rubin as a step-brother or, given the age difference between you, said that you loved Rubin like a son. You, Melanie James, were the long-term partner of Kenneth Newton.

4. Rubin came to live with you at 9 Edale sometime in 2015. Whatever the circumstances in which he came to live with you, you clearly took on responsibility for caring for him and understood his challenges and needs. Although you both took on that responsibility, it is also clear that it was you, Melanie James, who bore most of the burden of caring for him and, at first, I accept that you did take some good care of Rubin.
5. Rubin was well-known and well-liked in the local community. He was described as kind, sweet, caring, polite. People living and working locally understood that Rubin had learning difficulties and challenges and they made efforts to support him and integrate him into the community. I do not intend to recite all of the evidence heard at trial about those who treated him with respect, engaged with him, provided him with food and found jobs that he could do to make him feel valued - but I commend them for what they did for him and for coming to court for him. In their moving personal statement, Rubin's parents and brother ask that Rubin be remembered not just as a victim but as a human being who was loved, who deserved to be treated with dignity, deserved to be valued and deserved to be protected. No-one who heard the evidence from so many who knew him throughout his short life could doubt that he was indeed loved and valued in life – his life did matter and he will be remembered.
6. Those who knew him and saw him shortly after he had come to live with you, Melanie James and Kenneth Newton, said that he looked better than he had before. Although always thin, he put on some weight; his hair and beard were kept neat; his clothes were clean. Melanie James, you also helped him with obtaining assessments, including his assessment in 2016 for intellectual abilities, and you supported him in attending college to learn life skills. The photo of him on his 21st birthday shows him well and happy.
7. All was not, however, well. I am sure on the evidence from Rubin's brother, Kieron, who also lived with you for a time, that you did slap Rubin and speak to him harshly. Kieron did not exaggerate his evidence and, having seen you both give evidence, I have no doubt that this was the way you both habitually behaved. Further, and, particularly after he had left college, his appearance and hygiene deteriorated.
8. By 2022, things had become very significantly worse in a number of respects. Your home in general was in a condition that can only be described as disgusting. Rubin's

room was no exception and, whether or not this was a long term problem, Rubin was wetting himself and the bed, and lying on filthy bedding.

9. The way in which you had come to treat Rubin was repugnant and, for reasons that remain unclear, you recorded some of your appalling behaviour.
10. On 30 April 2022, you made an audio recording. You are both heard on the recording. Both of you speak harshly to him and aggressively. There are many references to Rubin getting a bollocking for wetting the bed and you, Kenneth Newton, describe rubbing a piss wet T shirt and wet pillow in Rubin's face.
11. You looked after a dog, Tyson, belonging to your son, and Rubin regularly walked the dog. On 25 April 2022, so shortly before this recording was made, there was an incident in which the dog bit a child. There may well have been a further incident of this nature. These incidents seemed to make you, Kenneth Newton in particular, very angry and bizarrely angry with the neighbours who had not reported them to you immediately because they understood Rubin's difficulties in managing the dog and did not blame him. These incidents may have been behind your behaviour towards Rubin but, whatever the reason, the cruelty on the recording speaks for itself.
12. After this you stopped Rubin walking the dog and he was seen less and less out in the community. Rubin more or less disappeared from view. By your own admissions, he had not left the house for about 2 months before his death.
13. Over the course of the summer, and at a time when I am sure Rubin was seen in public very little, things got worse.
14. You, Melanie James, were the sole tenant of your house. You were liable to pay rent to the council but you also received housing benefit. The three of you received other benefits but you, Melanie James, controlled Rubin's bank account. You spent a large part of the total household income on cannabis and I am sure that you needed and used Rubin's money for other expenses. Despite this, by August 2022, you were significantly in rent arrears. You were already in arrears the previous year. At that time you had said that Rubin was moving back to his parents and you had discussed with the council moving you to smaller accommodation. Eviction had been suspended. In 2022, further proceedings were commenced to evict you and the council became involved again.
15. This prompted you to start making complaints about Rubin and to tell what I have no doubt were wicked lies about him both to the council and social services and to others.

Most of that was down to you, Melanie James, since you were dealing with these matters but I have no doubt that Kenneth Newton knew and adopted what you were saying. Amongst other things, you claimed that Rubin was becoming aggressive, threatening and even violent, that he was searching online for child pornography, and that he exhibited inappropriate sexualised behaviour. As I have said, these were wicked lies but you were sufficiently convincing to make people think that you were at risk.

16. Why you did this is unclear. It may have been to gain sympathy or to encourage the council to re-house you and find different accommodation for Rubin. It may have been to cover what was really happening in the home where you were abusing Rubin.
17. That abuse was recorded by you on 2 November 2022 in a series of short video recordings. The videos that you made together on that day showed Rubin emaciated, gaunt, stooped and broken standing in the doorway to your bedroom. You accused him of putting on his poor physical state. You mocked him, you flung abuse at him and you made threats of physical violence to him. You laughed and seemed to find this abhorrent behaviour amusing. He was unable to do anything to defend himself and unable even to walk away from you.
18. On the evidence as to the timing of the rib fractures, the first 25 were inflicted either shortly before or after this recording was made. The ribs, healing but weakened, were then broken again – there were 20 re-fractures which occurred sometime between 21 and 25 November. There was evidence that earlier fractures had also been caused.
19. All these fractures were undoubtedly inflicted in the home behind closed doors and Rubin was not seen out and about in a position to be asked about his injuries or to tell anyone what had happened to him. It is impossible, therefore, to know exactly how the rib fractures were caused – whether by punching or stamping for example. I do not accept, as counsel for Mr Newton submitted, that it is more likely that they were caused by punching. The evidence did not go that far. But even if that were the case, it would have been obvious that punching could cause really serious harm and yet you did it again.
20. It is also impossible to know whether the rib injuries were physically caused by one of you or by both of you. But the jury was sure, as am I, that you did this together and that whether one or both of you physically assaulted Rubin, you were encouraging each other to seriously harm him.

21. When Rubin was first assaulted and his ribs broken, he must have been in significant and debilitating pain and unable to breathe properly. You did nothing for him. In fact, you assaulted him again, and again you did nothing to help him. Your evidence at trial that he was not in pain and was fine even the night before he was admitted to hospital was completely fanciful.
22. I have no doubt that you eventually took some action not out of concern for Rubin but for fear of what might happen to you if you continued to do nothing. Even then, your actions were motivated by self-interest. Instead of calling an ambulance, you, Melanie James, went to Rubin's parents' home and claimed that you wanted his mother's help because Rubin was refusing to eat or not doing as he was told – as if that would explain the state he was in. It was Jeanette Blount who called an ambulance but, because she was asked to deal with her distressed husband, you took over the call and tried to portray yourself as concerned and caring and told the operator that Rubin had been suicidal. Kenneth Newton – almost the first thing you said to the police when you were interviewed was about falls that you claimed Rubin had had. Although you did not then, and did not at trial, assert that that was what had caused the rib fractures, I have no doubt that you were trying to create the impression that Rubin often injured himself. You too claimed that Rubin had been talking about taking his own life.
23. The jury convicted both of you of murder and the only sentence that I can, therefore, pass on you is one of life imprisonment. I have to set the minimum term that you will serve. That means what it says. It is the minimum term, the least period of time, that you must spend in prison before you are eligible to be considered by the parole board for release on licence. At the end of that minimum term, you will not necessarily be released on licence. If you are not released, you will continue to be reviewed. If you are released, you will remain on licence for the rest of your lives and you may be recalled to prison if you breach any conditions of your licence.
24. In considering the minimum term, I have to have regard to Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020.
25. In both your cases, the starting point is a minimum term of 15 years imprisonment.
26. In both your cases, there are significant aggravating factors, both statutory and non-statutory.

27. Both of you were in a position of trust in respect of Rubin and you abused that trust not only in repeatedly assaulting him but in the verbal abuse to which you subjected him and your abject failure to help him when he was in pain and suffering.
28. There are two other statutory aggravating factors which I consider apply. Rubin was particularly vulnerable because of his learning disabilities and diagnosed condition – he was obviously unable to defend himself verbally or physically. You also clearly inflicted mental and physical suffering on him before his death. But I am conscious that there is a risk of double-counting and I treat these matters as going to the seriousness of the abuse of trust.
29. In this context, I also take into account that Rubin was subjected to verbal abuse over a lengthy period of time (measured in months at the least) and that he was uncared for both in terms of his hygiene and provision of food over a lengthy period of time.
30. Further I regard your behaviour in which you tried to portray Rubin as responsible for his own horrifying condition as an aggravating factor.
31. The principal statutory mitigating factor is, I accept, that you did not intend to kill Rubin and that you intended to cause really serious harm.
32. In your case, Melanie James, you are effectively of good character but, in the circumstances of your prolonged abusive behaviour in this case, that carries little weight. I accept that in 2022 you were suffering from and being treated for depression. I have considered the report about you prepared by a consultant forensic psychiatrist who identified a recurrent depressive disorder, PTSD and unresolved grief. These are all related to the death of your son in 2018 in the tragic circumstances of a road accident. Not only did that affect you profoundly at the time but a year later you attended the inquest into his death and saw the CCTV recording of the accident which understandably affected you further. I also accept that the state of your mental health and your depression made it harder for you to cope with your home and particularly with Rubin. Nothing can excuse the way in which you and Kenneth Newton treated Rubin before his death or reduce your culpability for the assaults that led to his death but your state of mental health is a matter to which I give some limited weight as personal mitigation. You also suffer with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder.

33. You are 64 years old and it is, therefore, likely that any lengthy sentence will mean that you spend most of the rest of your life in prison. I sentencing you, I take account of your age and state of health.
34. Kenneth Newton – you are 58 years old. You have a history of offending including offences of assault occasioning actual bodily harm in 1990 and 1991. Your last offence was committed in 2006. None of these offences resulted in a sentence of immediate custody. I regard these offences as historic. They say something about your character but I do not treat them as aggravating factors.
35. You have only one lung and also suffer with COPD. The effects of this were seen during the trial when you had a chest infection which was resistant to treatment and caused the prison to deem you unfit to attend court on a number of occasions. You are, however, not as physically unable to do things as you tried to present yourself as being. You could and did walk the dog; you could and did walk over to the Blounts' house while Rubin was in hospital to argue about money. Whilst I take account again of your age and state of health, I do not consider that your health means that being in prison will cause you any particular hardship beyond the norm.
36. In short, in both your cases, in my view, the aggravating factors far outweigh the mitigating factors and, given your respective states of mental and physical health, I do not consider that there should be any difference in the sentences passed on you.

Will both defendants please stand

37. Melanie James – in your case the minimum term that I fix is one of 21 years' imprisonment. You have spent 309 days on remand and those days will count against your sentence so that the minimum term that you will spend in prison from today is 20 years and 56 days.
38. Kenneth Newton – in your case the minimum term I fix is one of 21 years' imprisonment. You have spent 309 days on remand and those days will count against your sentence so that the minimum term that you will spend in prison from today is 20 years and 56 days.
39. Lastly, these are cases to which the statutory charge applies and the orders will be drawn up accordingly.