

INQUEST OF CARL SARGEANT

FINDINGS OF FACT

Carl Sargeant was born on the 27th July 1968 at St Asaph.

At the time of his death he was living at 37 Englefield Avenue, Connah's Quay, Flintshire and was an Assembly Member by occupation, having been appointed to represent Alyn & Deeside constituency in 2003.

As a result, most probably, of problems in his personal life (referred during the Inquest for reasons of sensitivity, as a life event), coupled with the pressures of his role, he was diagnosed with depression in March 2012 and was commenced on anti-depressants at that time, although it would appear that he only took them at this stage for a very short period of time.

In September 2014 he had a single consultation with his GP at which he was prescribed a sleeping aid and then was next seen again by his doctors regarding depression between July and November 2016 at which time he again began a regime of anti-depressants.

It's probable that he found the medication to be helpful as he continued to take this and by November 2016 he reported to his doctor that he was emotionally more able to cope and that his sleep was improved.

During 2017 he continued to be prescribed anti-depressant medication, namely Sertraline, although it is doubtful that he was as meticulous in taking this as routinely as he should have been.

It was either known or suspected by a number of friends and colleagues that Carl Sargeant had struggles associated with his mental health and this had been brought to the attention of Peter Greening (Head of Cabinet Division) by Imelda Francombe (Carl Sargeant's Senior Private Secretary) at some point, although the exact date is unknown.

In 2017 the First Minister for Wales was Mr Carwyn Jones and he had first met Carl Sargeant in 2001 at which time they had become friends as well as work colleagues.

Mr Jones was aware of the life event in 2014, but did not recognise that there were any ongoing mental health issues thereafter affecting Carl Sargeant despite working closely with Mr Sargeant after this.

Mr Jones also knew in 2014 that there had been an allegation made against Carl Sargeant by an unknown person which suggested that “he was not fit to be around women” and he discussed this allegation with him at the time. Mr Sargeant’s wife was also aware of the allegation.

In or around October 2017, rumours were circulating in relation to allegations of inappropriate behaviour by Carl Sargeant towards women and allegations alluding to this were specifically made to Matt Greenough a Special Advisor to the First Minister.

I remind myself that the veracity of those allegations has not formed any part of my investigation, I have sought to remain within my statutory remit as Coroner, however the absence of the investigation of those allegations at this Inquest should in no way be seen as a diminution of the seriousness of these matters, nor as any slight to those women who brought their complaints to the attention of the Welsh government,

Between the 18th of October and the 1st November 2017, acting upon the instruction of the First Minister, Matt Greenough, a person with no qualifications, or skills in witness statement taking or evidence gathering, nor any training in the particular sensitivities associated with allegations of a sexual nature, made contact with the complainants. They confirmed that they were prepared to put their complaints in writing, as a result of which the decision was taken by the First Minister that it would be necessary to refer this matter to the Labour Party for investigation which was duly done.

The First Minister had also decided on the 1st November 2017 that Carl Sargeant could no longer continue to be a Cabinet Minister and that he would be removed from office in the imminent reshuffle (a reshuffle of Cabinet having been under consideration for a number of weeks by that time)

Arrangements were put in place for the reshuffle and removal of Mr Sargeant from office to take place on Friday 3rd November 2017.

It is probable that Carl Sargeant anticipated that he would lose his ministerial appointment in the reshuffle but it is not possible to determine from the evidence whether he had any prior warning of the existence of allegations and hence the reason for his removal from office.

The evidence however does clearly establish that no official arrangements were put into place by way of seeking to provide support to Carl Sargeant following the re-shuffle despite the probability that the First Minister knew of Mr Sargeant's vulnerability in relation to his mental health and that it is likely that the removal, and particularly the reason for the removal, would generate significant media interest, thereby placing him firmly in the media spotlight, a position which undoubtedly added to Mr Sargeant's pressures.

On the evening of the 3rd November, an Assembly Member Ann Jones became aware of a message sent to her earlier that day by Matt Greenough, indicating that Mr Sargeant had taken his removal from office badly and asking her to contact him over the weekend.

I find that this was not support which was being provided in the nature of pastoral care, despite contradictory information being given to me by the First Minister, Carwyn Jones. However, I accept that he had erred in his original evidence to me and that he properly and appropriately corrected his error, albeit only once the true picture came to light by virtue of the information provided by Ann Jones.

At a meeting on the 3rd November 2017, Carwyn Jones informed Carl Sargeant that he had received allegations that Mr Sargeant had behaved inappropriately with women, but for reasons which are entirely understandable, he was unwilling to tell Mr Sargeant either the identity of the complainants or any further detail of the allegations and those matters were referred to the Labour Party for investigation.

By law, the appointment and removal of a Cabinet Minister to and from office lies wholly within the discretion of the First Minister and in the proper exercise of that discretion, Carwyn Jones removed Carl Sargeant from his post as a Cabinet Minister around lunch time on the 3rd November 2017.

Immediately following his removal from office, Carl Sargeant was taken into the city centre by a ministerial driver to whom Mr Sargeant disclosed that he considered that it was his own fault and that he'd brought it on himself.

Regardless of the reason for the loss of his position in Government, the effect of removal from office was that Mr Sargeant's mental health deteriorated significantly and this became immediately evident to his wife Bernie following a phone call with Carl. She was so concerned for her husband, that she and her children travelled to Cardiff that evening to be with him and to provide family support for him.

No medical support was sought for Mr Sargeant either over that weekend or when he returned to his North Wales home on the afternoon of Monday 6th November 2017 and although there was nothing to prevent anyone in Welsh Government or the office of the First Minister contacting Mr Sargeant over the course of that weekend, no one did, although he did have the support of family, friends and other colleagues.

By this time there had been significant media interest in both the fact of Mr Sargeant's removal from office and speculation as to the reasons for this, all of which continued to impact negatively on Mr Sargeant's mental health and this was further exacerbated by a visit to the family home by a reporter on the afternoon of the 6th November 2017.

On the same evening, Mr Sargeant asked a friend, David Taylor whether it was possible to pre-programme a text to go out at a later time.

On the morning of the 7th November 2017 on more than one occasion Carl Sargeant spoke to another friend Sophie Howe who tried to reassure him suggesting that he should call the Labour Party to attempt to find out what was going on. He did this around 9.00am but was unsuccessful in speaking to the Head of Disputes at that time, Sam Matthews, as he was about to get on an underground train. He would not have been able to speak to Mr Sargeant regarding what he already knew was the sensitive matter of his suspension from the party for the investigation of allegations of "unwelcome attention, inappropriate touching and groping" as this information had been conveyed by him to solicitors whom Mr Sargeant had consulted on the previous Friday afternoon.

Between 9.05am and around 10.35am on the 7th November 2017, Carl Sargeant wrote a note to his wife, children, family and friends and I remind myself now of that. He then placed a ligature around his neck and ended his life by hanging himself.

He was found on the floor of the utility room by his wife Bernie, shortly after 10.35am and despite the efforts of both family members and paramedics, he was verified deceased at his home at 37 Englefield Avenue, Connah's Quay at 11.30hours.

From these findings of fact, I am able to complete box three of the Record of Inquest which requires me to record how, when and where Mr Sargeant came by his death and I do so in the following terms:-

That on the morning of the 7th November 2017 at his home address, Carl Sargeant deliberately placed a ligature around his neck and took his own life by hanging.

Those findings lead me therefore to the conclusion that I am satisfied not simply to the appropriate legal standard but so that I am sure he took his own life and intended to do so. For the purposes of the law I must therefore record the formal conclusion as suicide.

