

Ulster says Noah

The PSNI has been lackadaisical in investigating mysterious death of teenager and communicating with family

by Michael Smith

Fourteen-year-old Noah Donohoe was an intelligent child who attended St Malachy's grammar school in Belfast. He played the cello in the school orchestra, he sang in the school choir. He was a founding member of the school rugby team, he played basketball, and his team have recently introduced an annual 'Noah Donohoe Spirit Award' to reflect his enthusiasm and sportsmanship. He loved reading and cooking: he could complete the Rubik's cube in 40 seconds.

Social media is as alive with criticism of, as mainstream media are quiescent about, the handling by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) of the tragic death of Noah whose naked body was found 950 metres into a storm drain in the north of Belfast in June 2020, six days after he went missing. This is not helped by the PSNI's failure to answer questions, even for example about the evolution of its investigation.

Village suggests police forces in other jurisdictions would not be so evasive.

Noah disappeared on Sunday 21 June last year when he left his home at 5.30pm to travel by bike to Cave Hill country park to meet friends. For six days while Noah was missing the people of Belfast came together in their thousands to search for him.

During this time the PSNI repeatedly stated at its press conferences that Noah had cycled approximately four kilometres across the city from his home in south Belfast to north Belfast, where police said they believed he may have fallen off his bicycle and hit his head. He was seen discarding his clothes and cycling naked, actions which police and his family said were "completely out of character". The police's main line of inquiry was that he may have suffered some form of trauma which had left him either disorientated or incapacitated.

Noah was found on the morning of Saturday 27



Noah: Enthusiasm and Sportsmanship

June. The PSNI immediately stated "But there is no evidence to suggest foul play". The PSNI decided this within hours and appear to be pushing the Inquest to find death by 'misadventure' or 'suicide'.

The family demur, and claim the police investigation was flawed from the start. There is a Facebook group supporting the family with over 110,000 members from around the globe and a twitter account with 27,000 followers.

The central mystery centres on the reality that no humble, awkward 14-year-old child would willingly remove his own clothing and proceed naked through the streets of a densely-populated, unfamiliar area to a storm drain. The PSNI implied that Noah removed his clothing by choice, yet no one saw this. There is no CCTV available showing Noah removed his clothing. Noah is last seen on CCTV with no clothing but anomalously there is no clue how, and where, he was separated from this clothing.

Police officers found the teenager's backpack and laptop in a search on June 26. The items had allegedly been 'picked up' by a known criminal, Daryl Paul, who has 194 convictions. It is continually stated that... "Paul is not suspected of having any direct contact with the teenager told the police he found the computer".

As there are so many anomalies, this article focuses on the questions *Village* asked the PSNI, but to which it failed to get answers. It has highlighted them in bold type.

How could the PSNI conclude before his post-mortem had taken place that there had been no foul play and suggest to the Inquest that it should find death by 'misadventure'?

The woman who witnessed Noah fall from his bike stated publicly that she told the police several times that he did not hit his head. Noah also had a

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protective hat on. Yet the PSNI insisted in all its reporting, with an unexplained prescience, that there is likely to have been a concussion due to hitting his head.

If, as stated by PSNI Superintendent Muir Clark, "In [my] 30 years in the police, this is one of the most unusual missing person inquiries that I have dealt with", why was it not fully investigated? If this case was so 'unusual' you would expect an exhaustive police investigation pursuing every line of enquiry, yet the police settled on conclusion of 'no foul play' and they quickly excluded all other lines of enquiry.

Extraordinarily the coroner then stated that Noah had a bump to his head that was so minor that it would not cause an injury, when his head injury of about 16cm in circumference was visible to the family.

Since he did not hit his head it would seem reasonable that they would investigate the possibility of an assault.

Why did the PSNI not straight away seal-off the area between where Noah was last sighted, and where he was found? Why were search dogs (operated by volunteers in SARDA) on standby but never deployed by the PSNI?

There were problems with the PSNI investigation even before Noah was found. This was a missing child; it was totally out of character for Noah not to be in contact, yet there was no police search.

The search was being carried out by the public and the Community Search and Rescue (CSR). Although the support from the public in searching for Noah was helpful, it was improper for the police to allow thousands of people to walk across and contaminate a potential crime scene. Best police practice would have been to straight away seal-off the area around where Noah was last sighted, and for the Police to be involved in the control of the searches.

Search dogs (operated by volunteers in SARDA) were on standby but the PSNI never sought their deployment.

Why were the bin lorries emptied?

On the Tuesday morning, while Noah was still missing, in the densely populated area of Northwood where he was last sighted by CCTV, the Council bin lorries were allowed to empty bins though a crime appeared to have been committed. The family was outraged by this as they had asked for the officers to prevent the bins from being emptied, to no avail.

Some of the child's clothing was found in the street but not all items have been retrieved: his underwear, shorts, and 'North Face' raincoat are missing.

It is strange that no-one has ever come forward to say they found or saw these items of clothing.

Why did the PSNI decline requests from the family to see the CCTV, saying the release of any footage must comply with the National Police Chiefs' Council policy which govern this process.

Is this really a legitimate reason to keep the footage from a concerned and grieving family?

The family was shown a sequence of clips by the PSNI and Coroner - no longer than four or five seconds each at a rough estimate - from 22 cameras, some of which were dashcam, residential and private cameras.

One of the clips appears to be from a camera belonging to Ulster University but strangely for a camera that was so close and in a very bright walkway on a summer afternoon, it is virtually impossible to make out Noah in this clip

An argument could be that this is all the PSNI have but then it was apparently clear enough for the PSNI to surmise that Noah was not attacked/approached by anyone and 'left' his bag and laptop in the city centre.

Why did the PSNI not get CCTV images?

The family has since approached businesses asking for them to share CCTV images. They have been told that the PSNI did not request these. When one business approached the PSNI they were told that someone would be down to collect as it could be significant. The



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following day, the police attended the business to say it was not necessary to take the CCTV as what happened was a tragic accident.

Members of the public have also offered dashcam that the PSNI did not appear to want.

Why have two people featured on CCTV not been tracked down?

The family has revealed how minutes before Noah was last seen, two potential witnesses were picked up on a CCTV camera passing him.

These individuals have never come forward to police.

In the CCTV there's a silver car which turns just as soon as Noah turns [onto Northwood Crescent] and there is somebody at the top of the CCTV that can be seen walking.

Why has the timing of Noah's last sighting - on the sections of CCTV chosen to be shown to the family - changed three times to suit the PSNI's shifting narratives?

Considering the last time shown in the CCTV, it is extremely questionable when Noah had the time to remove his clothing and place some items neatly on a wall.

One house in the area that Noah disappeared has six CCTV cameras covering three angles but the PSNI has not requested these.

Why will the PSNI not carry out the necessary reconstruction?

However, no-one can be sure of the timings of Noah's journey as the PSNI will not carry out the necessary reconstruction to confirm times or help jog memories. In those circumstances the family poignantly plan to do it themselves.

The PSNI told the family that they had distributed leaflets to the houses in the area asking for information. A local reporter asked the PSNI for a copy (on behalf of the family), but was told that no leaflets existed and obviously had not been distributed. What really happened?

Who locked the drain and why was it open in the 1st place? Has





the PSNI determined who had access to the storm drain?

The drain was difficult to find so that even people who had lived in the street for 20 years did not know one was to be found at the rear of three properties.

The PSNI has launched a Corporate Manslaughter investigation centring on the access to the storm drain, which is owned by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). Noah's body was found 950m into the drain which it is believed was unlocked and had been locked after he, allegedly, entered it.

Why were no water samples ever taken from the drain to see if they matched the water in Noah's lungs presumably to be found if he drowned in the drain?

Noah was found in a drain after six days. It was not then known whether he had died from drowning. The family has asked for water samples and were assured that samples would be taken. Yet no water samples were taken from the drain.

When the lack of samples was questioned the Coroner said he did not think it was important as they already knew Noah had died by drowning. But there was no way they could have been – forensically – certain of this when Noah was found, and they could not know whether the water in the drain was the same as the water in his lungs.

Has the PSNI followed up on the statement about the homeless community and those struggling with addiction issues?

After a preliminary hearing on 18 January, Niall Murphy, the family's solicitor stated: "We have reason to believe that there is a particular and specific knowledge of this assault in the homeless community and with those struggling with addiction issues, both in the city centre and also from people who were residents at Queens Quarter housing association in University Street, specifically people resident there in June. The court will be aware that Noah lived metres away from Queens Quarter on the day he went missing".

The family have a witness who came forward to them in November and provided the PSNI with information. The witness lived in a hostel located metres from Fiona and Noah's home in Belfast. The witness gave a statement to the PSNI naming four individuals

who allegedly intercepted Noah in the vicinity of Royal Avenue. This was being talked about within circles she was part of but she would not remember where she was at the time. The four named individuals are career criminals and also lived in the same hostel, one of the 4 moved out of the hostel the next day.

Noah's laptop was recovered from her room in this hostel after it was reported that she and Daryl Paul had tried to sell the laptop to Cash Converters. The shop refused and called the PSNI.

The witness is a known associate of Daryl Paul, who visited her hostel daily. It was Daryl Paul who then apparently found Noah's laptop in the city centre.

The family do not believe that the PSNI have acted on the statement beyond 'inviting' one of the four people in for questioning. This person agreed to this three weeks later.

Is the PSNI open to the possibility he died some way other than by drowning?

There have been other attacks in the area where Noah was found. Teenager Flynn Maguire was left with an enormous gash to his head by a marauding mob. This assault occurred just a few weeks before Noah went missing on his way to Cavehill, yet the police refuse to entertain a similar incident with a possible sectarian element being linked to Noah's disappearance.

Why, after Noah was found, has the PSNI never requested any more information from the public and without explanation removed the early posts from its website?

After Noah was found the PSNI never requested any more information from the public and have inexplicably removed the early posts from their site. And there have been no calls for information from the public.

The PSNI's communication with the family has been poor. The family's distress is compounded by having to find out details on social media or from, sometimes, inaccurate newspaper reports.

The coroner has threatened contempt of court proceedings against those asking probing questions. The PSNI spuriously justified closing down media inquiries on the basis that the family needed privacy. Many politicians and journalists seemed content to take this as their lead.

The family now have their own investigation team working with them. It includes Donal MacIntyre who is documenting what is happening. And Detective Clive Discroll who was instrumental in finally getting convictions in the Stephen Lawrence case where a London teenager was murdered for racist reasons. It resulted in a famous inquiry finding institutional racism in London's Metropolitan Police Force. The Lawrence family has been supporting the Donohoe family from the early days. The team also includes pathologists and other technical experts. 



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