# Zara Aleena vigil exposes urgent need for probation and police reform



Mourners are preparing to gather in east London for a silent walk to mark the third anniversary of law graduate Zara Aleena's tragic murder. The 35-year-old was attacked and killed by Jordan McSweeney on 26 June 2022, while walking home from a night out in Ilford, just minutes from her front door. Her family and supporters describe her killing as “preventable” and have been vocal about the systemic failures that contributed to the tragedy.

McSweeney, who had been released from prison only nine days before the attack, was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 38 years after admitting to sexually assaulting and murdering Ms Aleena. However, in November 2023, he successfully appealed to reduce his minimum term to 33 years. The Ministry of Justice has been approached for comment on this development.

The vigil includes a moment of reflection and a walk past the location where Ms Aleena was murdered. Her aunt, Farah Naz, emphasised the importance of the day not only for honouring Zara's life but also as a protest against systemic failures. “Zara’s death must mean something — it must lead to something better,” she said, highlighting a demand for accountability and change. She further stated, “Protest against a system that failed her. Protest against a culture that excuses violence. What happened to Zara is not acceptable. It is not inevitable. It is not human. We must not look the other way.”

The inquest into Ms Aleena's death, held in 2023, revealed significant shortcomings across multiple state agencies, including the Metropolitan Police and the Probation Service. The jury found that failures in adhering to policies and procedures—particularly in risk assessment, information-sharing, and coordinated responses—contributed to her death. The coroner, Nadia Persaud, issued a Prevention of Future Deaths report, warning that without urgent improvements, similar tragedies could occur again.

Central to the findings was the Probation Service's critical under-resourcing. At the time of the inquest in June 2024, staffing levels were at just 58%, which severely impaired the service’s ability to adequately assess risk, supervise offenders, and maintain proper records. A lack of “professional curiosity,” alongside the cumbersome nature of the Offender Assessment System (OASYS) used for risk management, were identified as significant barriers to effective protection. The coroner's report demanded urgent reforms, highlighting the need for improved staffing, better information-sharing, and more rigorous investigations.

The Metropolitan Police also faced criticism, particularly over incomplete investigations and poor coordination. An independent review revealed shortcomings that senior Met officers initially rejected, raising concerns about accountability. Attempts to arrest McSweeney were hindered by inaccurate data and insufficient follow-up actions, further compounding the risk that led to Ms Aleena's murder.

Media reports have detailed how missed opportunities to recall McSweeney after he failed to attend probation appointments were emblematic of systemic problems, including delays caused by underfunding and stretched resources in the Probation Service. Such failures allowed him to remain free, ultimately enabling the fatal attack.

As the community gathers to remember Zara Aleena, her family and supporters continue to call for meaningful systemic change to honour her memory. They stress the importance of not only mourning her loss but also demanding accountability and reform to prevent future deaths from similar institutional failings.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/vigil-to-mark-three-years-since-zara-aleenas-murder/a1589075777.html), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/aug/02/coroner-warns-met-failures-leading-to-of-zara-aleena-could-happen-again)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/vigil-to-mark-three-years-since-zara-aleenas-murder/a1589075777.html), [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/01/24/probation-blunders-left-zara-aleenas-murderer-free-roam-streets/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/vigil-to-mark-three-years-since-zara-aleenas-murder/a1589075777.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/vigil-to-mark-three-years-since-zara-aleenas-murder/a1589075777.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv22gy04j0xo), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/aug/02/coroner-warns-met-failures-leading-to-of-zara-aleena-could-happen-again)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.judiciary.uk/prevention-of-future-death-reports/zara-aleena-prevention-of-future-deaths-report/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cydvdj2zmmpo)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jun/26/zara-aleena-agencies-failures-contributed-to-death-inquest-finds), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cydvdj2zmmpo), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/aug/02/coroner-warns-met-failures-leading-to-of-zara-aleena-could-happen-again)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/01/24/probation-blunders-left-zara-aleenas-murderer-free-roam-streets/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/vigil-to-mark-three-years-since-zara-aleenas-murder/a1589075777.html), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/aug/02/coroner-warns-met-failures-leading-to-of-zara-aleena-could-happen-again)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/vigil-to-mark-three-years-since-zara-aleenas-murder/a1589075777.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.judiciary.uk/prevention-of-future-death-reports/zara-aleena-prevention-of-future-deaths-report/> - The Prevention of Future Deaths Report concerning Zara Aleena highlights several critical issues within the Probation Service. Staffing levels were alarmingly low, with only 58% of positions filled at the time of the inquest in June 2024. This shortage led to inadequate risk assessments, insufficient supervision, and poor record-keeping. The report also criticised the lack of professional curiosity and the unwieldy nature of the OASYS risk assessment tool, which hindered effective risk management. The coroner's recommendations aim to address these systemic failures to prevent future tragedies.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jun/26/zara-aleena-agencies-failures-contributed-to-death-inquest-finds> - An inquest into Zara Aleena's death found that multiple state agencies failed to act in accordance with policies and procedures, contributing to her death. The jury identified significant failures in risk assessment by the HM Prison and Probation Service, inadequate information-sharing, and a lack of professional curiosity. The Metropolitan Police's attempts to arrest the offender were impeded by inaccurate data and insufficient follow-ups. The coroner's report highlighted these systemic issues and called for urgent reforms to prevent similar incidents in the future.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cydvdj2zmmpo> - The BBC News article discusses the coroner's findings regarding the Metropolitan Police and Probation Service's handling of Zara Aleena's case. Despite an independent investigation revealing clear shortcomings, senior officers within the Met rejected the findings, raising concerns about accountability. The article also highlights the under-resourcing of the Probation Service, with staffing levels at 58% during the inquest, leading to poor risk assessments and inadequate supervision. The coroner's report calls for significant improvements to prevent future deaths.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv22gy04j0xo> - The BBC News article reports on the inquest jury's conclusion that failures across multiple agencies contributed to Zara Aleena's death. The jury found that the HM Prison and Probation Service failed to appropriately assess risk, and the Metropolitan Police's attempts to arrest the offender were impeded by inaccurate data and a lack of professional curiosity. The article details the timeline of events leading up to Ms Aleena's murder and the systemic issues identified by the jury.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/aug/02/coroner-warns-met-failures-leading-to-of-zara-aleena-could-happen-again> - The Guardian article discusses the coroner's warning that the Metropolitan Police's failures in Zara Aleena's case could lead to similar incidents in the future. The coroner expressed concerns over the rejection of internal criticism by senior officers and highlighted the under-resourcing of the Probation Service, with staffing levels at 58% during the inquest. The article also addresses the lack of professional curiosity and inadequate information-sharing between agencies, calling for urgent reforms to prevent future tragedies.
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/01/24/probation-blunders-left-zara-aleenas-murderer-free-roam-streets/> - The Telegraph article examines the probation service's failures that allowed Zara Aleena's murderer, Jordan McSweeney, to remain free and commit the crime. It details missed opportunities to recall McSweeney after he failed to attend probation appointments and the delays in initiating his recall to prison. The article also discusses the broader issue of under-resourcing within the Probation Service, which hindered effective monitoring and risk assessment, ultimately leading to Ms Aleena's death.