

**OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF
THE CHIEF CONSTABLE OF LANCASHIRE CONSTABULARY**

Introduction

1. This Opening Statement is made on behalf of the Chief Constable of Lancashire Constabulary ("LC"), in accordance with the Inquiry Team's 'Directions for Phase 1 Opening Submissions' document dated 18 August 2025.
2. LC's objective is to provide maximal assistance to the Inquiry, with candour, reflection and a desire to learn and improve.

LC's involvement with the perpetrator AR

3. LC has identified 7 incidents during the period October 2019 to March 2023 in which LC officers or staff were involved with incidents relating to AR. The following describes those incidents in summary, not suggested or intended to be a full description or analysis of each incident.

LC Incident One: 7 October 2019

4. On 7 October 2019 LC received a call about AR from the National Crime Agency, then aged 13. It was reported that AR had stated to Childline that he had been repeatedly bullied at school and had taken a knife into school before and would use it if he got really annoyed with the bully, and that when he saw them he wanted to kill them. Two LC officers attended AR's home that day and AR was spoken to. AR's parents reported that AR may suffer from Autism but this had not been confirmed.
5. The attending officers submitted a high risk vulnerable child investigation and sent it to the Police Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub ("MASH"). The Police MASH made a referral to

Children's Social Care, Health and Education, due to the risk of harm to others and to AR. An Operation Encompass ("Op Encompass") referral was sent to Lancashire County Council ("LCC"). AR's school, the Range High School in Formby ("the Range School"), was outside of the force area and LC alerted the Range School of the incident and subsequently liaised with the school.

6. LC was subsequently informed that AR had made full and frank disclosures and that the Range School were taking safeguarding action and, in November 2019, that AR had been excluded from the Range School.
7. LC recognises that one of the alternative options available to LC officers on 7 October 2019 would have been to arrest AR for the offence of possession of a bladed article and / or pursue a criminal justice outcome in respect of this. However, considering the age of AR at the time of this incident (13), the fact that he had not been found in possession of the knife, the suggestion that AR may have had autism, and the safeguarding steps taken by LC and the school, the decision instead to submit a vulnerable child investigation to refer to other agencies was, in LC's assessment, reasonable and proportionate. The submission of a vulnerable child investigation was necessary to allow for more appropriate agencies to receive the information and offer appropriate support and intervention to AR.
8. LC accepts that it could be suggested that officers should have acted with greater urgency in asking Merseyside Police to record a crime of possession of a knife on school premises. However, LC respectfully suggests that the officers acted appropriately in taking steps to manage the safeguarding of pupils within the school.
9. LC recognises that its officers should have ensured that the child AR said was bullying him (and that child's parents) knew of this information. It would have been appropriate for LC officers to have contacted the other pupil's family themselves or to have agreed with the school that they would pass on the information.
10. LC recognises that when further information was provided by AR's school to LC and which was placed onto the vulnerable child investigation, it should also have been re-shared with

the MASH for further assessment and so that the further information could have been shared with other agencies.

LC Incident Two: 11 December 2019

11. On 3 December 2019 the Acorns School emailed LC outlining concerns in respect of AR. LC was made aware that during a lesson, AR had been searching on the internet for school shootings in America. Further, when asked about business ideas, AR had said that starting a new business in the area would not be a good idea as people would think he would kill them and that people do not trust others in case they get murdered. During a lesson, and whilst painting 'Call of Duty' images, AR said, "Why can we have these with guns but can't look at guns on the internet". AR also asked for a picture of a severed head.
12. On 11 December 2019 LC received a call from the Acorns School reporting that they had received information that AR had travelled to his previous school, the Range School. Due to concerns raised by the Acorns School, and as the Range School was within the Merseyside Police area, LC contacted Merseyside Police to pass the information. Merseyside Police confirmed that AR had been arrested. LC liaised and passed information to Merseyside Police and Counter Terrorism Policing North West ("CTPNW"). Merseyside Police sent LC a safeguarding referral which was forwarded to Children's Social Care.
13. On 17 December 2019 LC officers attended a multi-agency Strategy Meeting and on 19 December 2019 LC was told that there was no further role for LC in relation to the matter.
14. LC considers that its response to the incident on 11 December 2019 was appropriate given that the incident was within the Merseyside Police area.
15. LC liaised with the school, Merseyside Police, CTPNW and Children's Social Care in sharing information and ensuring relevant agencies were put in touch with one another. LC was appropriately represented at the Strategy Meeting and it was not necessary for LC to attend the follow up meeting, given Merseyside Police's primacy for the criminal investigation. CTPNW had confirmed Prevent involvement and during the Strategy

Meeting CTPNW confirmed that they would be completing an assessment for AR with a view to considering whether to refer him to the Channel programme.

16. LC has identified one point of learning from this incident in relation to the recording of information on LC systems. Officers involved in the matter received information in relation to AR and the actions taken by other agencies which should have been, but was not, recorded on the Connect system. This would have allowed officers who dealt with AR in the future to be more fully informed based on what was stored on the LC IT systems.

LC Incident Three: 5 November 2021

17. On 5 November 2021 LC was contacted by Merseyside Police after AR's parents called police because AR, then aged 15, was damaging his home, apparently having become agitated by a stranger knocking at the door. On the initial call, AR's parents stated that AR had calmed down whilst they were on the phone and that they no longer wanted police attendance (and which was confirmed in a subsequent call from LC to AR's mother).
18. LC dealt with the incident by telephone and did not attend in person. The LC officer completed a medium risk vulnerable child investigation and submitted it to the Police MASH. The Police MASH shared the referral with the Child and Family Wellbeing Service, Education and Health. An Op Encompass referral to LCC was also submitted.
19. LC considers that the decision to deal with the incident on the telephone was appropriate. LC recognises that attending the address in person would have had the benefits of being able to physically see AR and assess his home and surroundings. However, with the suggestion of the effect police attendance would have had on AR's behaviour in the context of his autism, combined with the fact that no criminal offences had been reported, the decision to deal with the incident over the phone was reasonable in the circumstances.
20. LC considers that the response to the call from AR's parents and the decision to submit a medium risk vulnerable child investigation was also appropriate in the circumstances, the latter permitting other more appropriate services to receive the information and offer appropriate support and intervention to AR and his family.

21. LC considers that the decision taken by the Police MASH to refer AR to the Child and Family Wellbeing Service, Education and Health was also appropriate. Those services were best placed to offer support to AR and his longer-term needs.

22. One point of learning for LC has been identified concerning the Op Encompass referral. The LC officer selected 'Out of Force' as an option when the Acorns School was actually within the LC area such that the officer could and should have specifically selected the Acorns School in the Op Encompass referral. That would have allowed for more timely information sharing with the school, though the school would still have received details of this incident when the information was shared through the MASH in any event.

LC Incident Four: 30 November 2021

23. On 30 November 2021 LC was contacted by Merseyside Police, who reported a call from AR's father stating that AR had become angry, thrown a plate of food at, and jumped on, a rental car. LC telephoned AR's father who stated that AR was no longer causing any issues but that they were having ongoing behavioural problems with AR and that AR had kicked his father that evening. Around 3 hours after the follow-up call to AR's parents, two LC officers attended AR's home, spoke to AR's father and created a crime report. The officers also completed a standard risk vulnerable child referral which was submitted to the Police MASH. The Police MASH upgraded the risk assessment to medium risk and shared the referral with the Child and Family Wellbeing Service. An Op Encompass referral was made to Acorns School and LCC.

24. LC considers that the response to the call from AR's father, the decision to submit a crime report for assault and criminal damage, the vulnerable child referral and the decision not to pursue a criminal investigation against AR were all reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.

25. LC recognises that an alternative option would have been to arrest AR and / or pursue a criminal justice outcome for the offences of assault and criminal damage. However, given that AR was a child with autism and taking into account the wishes of his father as the

notional victim, the decision instead to refer AR to other agencies was reasonable and proportionate. Given the lack of support for a criminal investigation by AR's father, it is unlikely that the investigation would have met either the evidential or public interest test of the Crown Prosecution Service Full Code Test.

26. The submission of a vulnerable child referral was necessary to allow for other agencies to receive the information and offer appropriate support to AR and his family.
27. LC has identified 2 points of learning from this incident. First, during a call with the LC FCR, a lot of information was shared by AR's father relating to how the family were struggling to cope with AR's behaviour and how the family feared him. Full information from this call was not typed onto the incident log. As a consequence, other members of staff and the officers attending the incident were not aware of that information. Second, a meaningful supervisor review of the investigation was not documented. Developmental feedback has been given to the sergeant concerned.

LC Incident Five: 17 March 2022

28. On 17 March 2022 at around 11:45 the LC Force Control Room received a missing from home report about AR. One LC student officer was deployed to AR's home and spoke to AR's mother. AR's mother reported that AR (still aged 15) might have taken a small knife from their kitchen. A missing from home report was created and an Op Encompass referral submitted. The Range School were contacted to warn them that AR was missing.
29. It was reported that AR was under the care of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services ("CAMHS") and had been due to attend Presfield High School, a school specialising in providing education for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder or Aspergers. She stated that AR had ADHD and Autism and was prescribed medication. It was explained that AR did not like change and was due to meet new teachers that day and was to start the new school imminently.
30. The officer conducted a search of AR's home to see if there were any signs of preparation for leaving home made by AR or anything else that would cause concern and affect the

risk grading. AR's bedroom, the living room and the kitchen were searched as part of the missing from home inquiries. LC officers deployed to search for AR.

31. At around 14:40 the LC FCR received a call from a bus company reporting what transpired to be AR on a bus and refusing to get off. The officer who had originally attended AR's home, together with another student officer, were deployed to the bus. Both these officers were in their probationary period. They found AR on the bus, calm, compliant and cooperative. When asked if he had anything on him that he should not have, AR handed the officers a small kitchen knife which he had in his pocket. No member of the public on the bus had been aware that AR had a knife. The officers spoke to the duty sergeant regarding how to proceed.
32. The two officers took AR home. On the journey, AR made concerning comments to the effect that he wanted his TikTok / Instagram account deleted as they contained embarrassing videos, but he could not do it himself as he did not know his login details. AR reported that when he asked his psychologist or psychiatrist how he could get the account deleted, he was told something about having to commit a criminal offence. AR reported to the LC officers that this had given him the idea to commit an offence so that he could get the police to delete the accounts. AR said he was going to use the knife to stab someone for this reason and had tried to make poison for the same reason.
33. The officers returned AR home and discussed the situation and what AR had said with AR's parents and gave advice about preventing AR from accessing knives in the kitchen. LC placed a vulnerable marker on AR's address. A high risk vulnerable child investigation was submitted by the officers to the Police MASH, who then sent the referral to Children's Social Care, Education and Health.
34. LC has carefully reflected on the decisions made by the two student officers, including to return AR home and not to arrest him for possession of a bladed article after he was found on the bus. LC considers that the officers' actions fell within the range of reasonable responses, having regarded, *inter alia* to the following factors: AR was a child; AR had mental health and neurodiverse issues; the effect a period of detention in custody could

have on a vulnerable child; AR had been cooperative and compliant; AR had not produced the knife in public; AR had not threatened anyone; there were other appropriate agencies to deal with AR.

35. However, LC recognises that the officers should have displayed a greater professional curiosity in respect of AR's comments about stabbing and poison. Furthermore, once in possession of the additional information, they should have recontacted the sergeant to discuss AR's comments and to determine whether arrest and taking AR to custody was appropriate. LC recognises that it would have been appropriate for the student officers to have arrested AR and to have sought further advice about steps to take and lines of inquiry.
36. The officers submitted a vulnerable child investigation which was sent to Health services. Contacting mental health services directly from the scene may have allowed for more timely intervention and immediate support.
37. A Prevent referral would have involved submission of an intelligence entry on the Connect system and LC recognises that submission of such an intelligence entry would have allowed CTPNW to identify the information and make an assessment as to whether it met their criteria for acceptance. However, the fact that AR had been referred to Prevent three times, and the outcome of those referrals, were not on LC systems. Communication has since been provided to all LC officers and staff to remind them of the Prevent referral process.
38. A Violence Reduction Network ("VRN") referral could also have been completed, if AR consented. No VRN referral was made because neither student officer knew about the VRN. LC has recently been engaged with a review of the structure and functions of the VRN, and briefings to all staff will be incorporated into the implementation plan.
39. LC encourages and supports officers to make arrests where it is necessary and reasonable to do so. However, LC also understands that the interests of children, and particularly children experiencing mental health difficulties, are not necessarily best served by taking them into custody. LC officers are required to use their discretion and professional

judgement when making decisions on whether a child should be arrested, considering the individual circumstances of each incident and the overarching context of public policy not to criminalise children.

40. That wider context includes but is not limited to the following:

- (1) An LC intranet article dated 3 February 2022 [**LC-174 / LANC000247**] recognised that police cells are not a suitable place for children. The article quoted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and said that custody should be “used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time”.
- (2) LC student officer training includes training on the welfare and treatment of detained persons [**LC-213**]. Slide 2 of the PowerPoint presentation, makes clear that the National Custody Strategy issued by the National Police Chiefs’ Council seeks to “ensure children are only held in custody as a last resort” and encourages “innovative but appropriate alternatives to custody”.
- (3) His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (“HMICFRS”) inspection of LC custody suites in March 2023. Part of the inspection reviewed the detention of children in custody and whether LC was detaining children in custody only when absolutely necessary [**LC /INQ NUMBER TO BE INSERTED**].

LC Incident Six: 14 May 2022

41. On 14 May 2022 LC received a transferred incident log from Merseyside Police after Merseyside Police received a 999 call in which someone was heard to ask for the police before the call ended. Merseyside Police identified the telephone number as belonging to AR’s parents and transferred the incident log to LC due to the incident being at AR’s home address, i.e. within LC’s area. Two LC officers deployed to AR’s home address and were told that AR (aged 15) had thrown food and water around the house but was now agreeing to sleep. AR’s family stated that they needed support in managing AR. The officers completed a high risk vulnerable child investigation and shared it with the Police MASH. The Police MASH subsequently downgraded the risk assessment to medium risk and shared it with the Early Help Hub, Education and Health. LC also made an Op Encompass referral to LCC. Following the sharing of information by the Police MASH, no further action was taken by LC in respect of this incident.

42. LC considers that the response to the abandoned 999 call, the decision to attend as an emergency and the decision to submit a vulnerable child investigation were all appropriate in the circumstances. There were no alternative options available to the officers since no criminal offences had been committed and the family stated they needed support in managing AR.

LC Incident Seven: 21 March 2023

43. On 21 March 2023, LC received a call from Presfield High School, asking for the police to conduct a welfare check because AR had not been to school since May 2022. The caller from the school told the FCR operator that CAMHS had seen AR in January 2023, and that AR's parents had reported that AR could not come to school due to his mental health. The caller reported that there was no immediate risk to life or serious harm to an identified person or the public, and no crime suspected or reported. Applying the "Right Care Right Person" policy, aided by a question set, no deployment by LC was made.

44. LC recognises that its personnel should always seek to obtain as much information as possible to determine how best to deal with any incident. LC has identified that the call operator should have obtained more information from the caller. Basic checks on the STORM computer system, including looking at previous calls to AR's address or any warning markers against the property were not performed and whilst the home address was documented, AR's full name and age were not ascertained. Any such information would inform a comprehensive THRIVE assessment.

45. Nonetheless, LC does not consider that police should have deployed to AR's home address on this occasion. AR was not missing from home and the caller had confirmed that there was no immediate risk. Right Care Right Person aims to ensure that vulnerable people get the right support from the right public services and the Police are not the appropriate agency to deal with educational issues where there is no identified imminent risk of harm.

Learning, reflection and improvement

46. Following AR's attacks on 29 July 2024, LC's Professional Standards Department undertook an internal review which identified areas of learning. LC was also involved in a multi-

agency rapid review in August 2024, where a decision was taken to progress to a local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (“CSPR”). This CSPR was paused in light of the Home Secretary’s announcement of the Southport Inquiry.

47. LC is engaging actively with this Inquiry and continues to approach the Inquiry, as it has from the outset, by providing any evidence sought from it; with candour; being reflective; and by constructively contributing to the identification of practical and timely improvements that can be made.

48. In preparing for the Inquiry, LC has carefully reflected on any issues that arise for the Force generally, as well as in respect of the specific 7 incidents. LC’s Corporate Statements include detailed consideration of improvements and learning which are not repeated here.

49. LC welcomes the opportunity to assist the Inquiry, particularly in respect of where matters could have been handled better. LC stands ready to offer all further assistance to the Inquiry that it can.

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