

**Witness Name: JENNIFER SCHOLES**

**Exhibits: JS/01- JS/10**

**Dated: 25 JULY 2025**

## **THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY**

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### **FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF JENNIFER SCHOLES**

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I, Jennifer Scholes, will say as follows: -

#### **Introduction**

1. My name is Jennifer Scholes. However, due to my sister-in-law also being a Jennifer Scholes, I sometimes insert my maiden name, which is Butler i.e. Jennifer Butler Scholes.
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated Monday 14 July 2025.

#### **Background**

3. Since 2024 I have worked for the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) as a Health and Inequalities Community Engagement Lead for the Women's Health and Maternity (WHaM) programme. I have done this same role since November 2022 but was TUPE transferred to the ICB last year. My job involves attending baby classes, toddler groups, other mother and child events in various settings throughout Cheshire and Merseyside as well as women's health events throughout the region. My role (which has recently been put at risk of redundancy) is to engage with members of the community to help

improve women's health and maternity services through co production to help ensure services are accessible to all who use them.

4. An example of what I do on a day-to-day basis would be attending baby and parent sessions in different settings to obtain feedback on services and the projects the programme works on. Workstreams include Perinatal Pelvic Health Service, Smoking in Pregnancy Pathways and the Infant Feeding Strategy. I attend children's centres, midwife led sessions, playgroups, stay and play sessions, youth centres, places of worship and other venues that facilitate clubs for preschool and school age children.
5. Prior to this I worked for the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) for over 9 years, initially as a dispatcher of ambulances, first responders and rapid response vehicles. Following this I worked on the Health Control Desk at NWAS, which liaised with NHS Trusts regarding their current bed status and ambulance delays.
6. Around the time I had my first child, the role moved to Manchester, and I found the commute too difficult to deal with as: DPA
7. In 2016, after the birth of my first child, I trained in Hypnobirthing and in 2017 underwent further training in baby massage, baby yoga and as a birth doula. Following this training I started running classes in numerous locations, where I hired studios on an hourly basis. I also worked as a birth doula supporting parents to be throughout pregnancy, birth and in the early weeks of having a newborn. This was all undertaken with my employer's knowledge.
8. After I left the ambulance service, I decided to set up a business on a full-time basis. My dream was a venue that offered a range of classes and support services for pregnancy, babies, children and adults where people could go to feel heard and supported.
9. I found a location for my business and leased a studio on Norwood Business Centre on Hart Street, Southport. When the venue was opened in 2019, I facilitated my own business's classes, but I also hired out the studio to other businesses with a similar ethos for support, kindness and community. These included support services such as breastfeeding support and linked in with the local Postnatal Depression and Anxiety support group.
10. The venue was given the name 'The Hart Space' due to it being on Hart Street but the business name for my own pregnancy and baby classes was 'Empowered Bumps'. Whilst I had The Hart Space in Southport, I was still hiring other venues in other local areas to facilitate my own classes, as I still do now. The venue continued to be rented out to other businesses and organisations for classes and sessions until The Hart Space was closed

following the attack on 29th July 2024. We have now moved to a new premises called 'The White House', Southport, with the help of Sefton Council.

### **Factual narrative of involvement**

11. The landlord of Norwood Business Centre was JGH Developments Ltd (JGH), the business of Jonathan Hayes (John). Another one of his businesses, Calculus Legal Costings Limited (Calculus), was also run out of the building.
12. Unit H (The Hart Space) is located on the first floor accessible only via a communal stairway at the building's main entrance/exit. The first floor also contained offices for Calculus and JGH in a self-contained unit. There was only one entrance/exit to the studio. Toilets for The Hart Space were located in the landing next door to the only entrance to the studio.
13. In October 2023, I also took on Units A & B. These are on the ground floor of the complex, located directly beneath Unit H but they are not connected to it. You cannot access Units A & B via Unit H, and vice versa. Units A & B are accessed directly from the car park via a separate entrance. Units A & B were not involved in the attack as it took place in the communal area and Unit H, the upstairs unit.
14. I took the additional unit on for two reasons, the first being to ensure I had control over the noise from downstairs, I didn't want something like a tap-dancing studio below when the unit above is used to run meditation and yoga classes which need to be quiet. The second reason was that the studio was popular, and I was running out of availability in the diary to facilitate additional classes and I was also receiving requests to let the space out to other businesses and organisations.
15. The Hart Space did not employ any individuals or contractors. I operated both as a sole trader and through a limited company, The Hart Space Limited. I didn't run any of my own classes under The Hart Space name; my classes were under Empowered Bumps, which is my pregnancy and baby class business.
16. I exhibit to this statement at JS/01 – **JSC000005** the tenancy agreement for Unit H and at JS/02 – **JSC000006** the tenancy agreement for Units A&B.
17. When I viewed Unit H for the first time, the whole complex was being redeveloped. It had been stripped out and was being completely transformed by the landlord. The landlord, John, fitted the doors, both internal and external, internal overhead lighting, air conditioning unit, windows, toilets, kitchenette, fire system, and a new staircase was fitted in the communal

entrance, which is how access was gained into the building. John even spent time polishing the floor and making it lovely in Unit H (though before opening laminate flooring was fitted as I was worried about damage from massage oil being spilt).

18. Prior to this work, the entrance to the upstairs of the complex was by an outside metal staircase, which I believe was the only entrance and exit at the time. Then the new 'main' staircase was fitted, which was wider than a standard staircase, with a turn in, which is the entrance and staircase that led to Unit H and Calculus' offices.
19. The common areas, which included the landing, and entrance/exit, were the landlord's responsibility. The Landlord had a cleaner who would clean the communal area, and I paid a service charge for shared costs and services relating to the communal areas in proportion to the unit size. I believe the other units also paid this towards maintenance costs of the complex. During the renovation work completed by the landlord, the car park was resurfaced, parking bays marked, including disabled/ accessible parking bays, CCTV was installed, and the exterior of the building was rendered.
20. John was aware from the outset of the tenancy that I intended to hire out the unit to other businesses and gave me permission to do so. I exhibit at JS/03 – JSC000002 email correspondence between John and my solicitor, who I instructed in relation to the tenancy, confirming this.
21. As John's business was also run out of the same building, with the offices on the same floor as The Hart Space Unit H, we would say hello to each other and had a good relationship as landlord and tenant, but no more than that. I also got to know the other people who worked at Calculus and some of the other people who also had units on site.
22. Other units were leased to other businesses. There was a Pole Fitness studio and a fishing tackle shop, 'Tackle Tarts'; a workshop and unit which I believe is utilised by a local restaurant as storage. The Pole Fitness studio appeared to be open most evenings and sometimes at the weekend, the fishing tackle shop was open Tuesday to Saturday 10am - 6pm, and the other units' tenants would come as go as they needed.
23. There was an additional fire exit on the first floor, but this was only accessible via Calculus' offices. In the event of a fire alarm being triggered the doors to Calculus' offices would unlock allowing access to the additional fire escape, if the main stairs could not be used. The whole complex is on the same system, so if a fire alarm goes off in one unit, it would go off in them all.

24. On the day of the incident, The Hart Space was being hired by Leanne Lucas. As was the case with most hirers, Leanne's business had an electronic booking system for people to book onto her classes. A link to her booking system was advertised on social media posts advertising her classes, and her website. The Hart Space did not have access to class attendee information; this was for the hirer to manage as it was their class/session. The Hart Space was simply the venue they hired by the hour to facilitate their business activities.
25. As the main entrance served different units in the building it was usually opened by the first person who arrived each day and then would be left unlocked until the last person left, who would lock it. You could tell if someone was in the other unit upstairs as the lights would be on, which you could see from the windows of The Hart Space and there would usually be a car in the car park. As most of the classes at The Hart Space started after 10am and most daytime midweek classes would finish by 4:30/5pm, it was common for me to find the main door unlocked if someone from Calculus or the cleaner was already in the building. If I was the first to arrive, I would not lock the main entrance door after entering. I believe most staff from Calculus arrived at approximately 8 to 8:30am Monday to Friday and left at approximately 5-6pm, however it was not unusual that Calculus staff would be in during the weekend or work into the evening.
26. The communal entrance had signs next to it on the wall with JGH Holdings and Calculus on it and The Hart Space had a 'A' Board which could be brought outside to the side of the entrance. There was no advertisement for The Hart Space on the road or entrance to the car park. There was a poster on the window for Unit A&B saying "The Hart Space".
27. Unit H has turn key locks on its double doors upstairs. I did not lock the upstairs doors once I'd entered, nor would I keep the doors locked during my own classes held in either Unit H or Units A & B. The classes I ran from The Hart Space were adult classes and baby massage and yoga, at which the parent was always with the baby. My baby classes are aimed at children under 1 years of age who are supervised by their own parent/carer.
28. Baby classes and support services often take place in public busy settings such as libraries in either a side room or in the main area but off to one side, and prior to the incident I almost never come across a locked door for these types of classes/sessions. I can only think of one venue in fact. It has a door with a buzzer that only sometimes needs to be pressed to gain access.
29. I would sublet the Unit to various businesses and organisations on an hourly basis for them to run their own classes during the day and evenings. The Hart Space was hired to businesses and organisations not for things like baby showers, though I did have many

requests. I only hired to businesses and organisations to provide classes and sessions, which included yoga, meditation, children's classes, baby classes, adult art classes, women's boxing classes, pregnancy classes, and first aid. The space was also used on occasion by the local Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership for engagement sessions with service users, which help improve local maternity services.

30. Hirers were asked to undertake their own risk assessments tailored to their own specific classes as I did with my classes. I asked the hirers to do this as while The Hart Space had a general risk assessment for things such as slips, trips and falls, blind cords being an entrapment problem, falling chairs from being stacked high, yoga mats being upturned, hot water spillage etc. It does not capture specific risks for individual classes. I would be unable to complete a risk assessment to capture this information as (1) I am not qualified in everything the Unit was hired for, (2) because they were not my classes and (3) hirers would sometimes bring in their own equipment. It is the responsibility of the person hiring the space and facilitating the class to ensure they have mitigated foreseeable risks, and that the Unit is suitable and appropriate for the reason of hire.
31. Hirers would rent the spaces on a flat rate basis taking care of all bookings themselves and obviously all moneys taken were the sole property of the hirer. The Hart Space only took money for hire, not bookings.
32. Hirers of the Unit would be invoiced electronically in advance, and they would make payment for the hire through the invoice system. This process was followed when invoicing Leanne Lucas (through her business called Enlighten) for the sessions she was running at The Hart Space, including the Taylor Swift Workshop on 29th July 2024.
33. As a small business I appreciate how hard it can be to fill classes, so while The Hart Space did not actually run any classes itself, the classes run by hirers could advertise their classes on The Hart Space platforms if they wanted to do so. However, in all media/communication it was made clear that it was the individual business who were running the class.
34. The Hart Space was sometimes contacted by people trying to book places on classes run by others. I never took bookings for hirers and would re-direct them to the business running the class. The Hart Space was just a venue to hire, like a church hall is hired for weight loss classes and painting sessions.
35. Leanne Lucas started hiring the space around a year before the incident but prior to this Leanne was a tutor to my daughter who has special educational needs (SEN). Leanne had been recommended to me as a tutor by mutual friends.

36. I hired Leanne as a tutor for my daughter around the end of the Covid pandemic and we got to know each other. At some point we discussed what I did for a living and when she expressed an interest in potentially running classes at The Hart Space, I agreed to show her around. Leanne was looking to book classes in the evening and in the school holidays which had capacity, so it was good for both of us.
37. I understand Leanne was already facilitating classes at other studios and local schools within the area when she started to hire The Hart Space and this continued during the same time frame as she was hiring The Hart Space.
38. I would say that on average Leanne was hiring a unit at The Hart Space at least once or twice a week. She regularly ran a children's yoga session on a Saturday daytime and bedtime yoga class in the evenings, where parents and children would attend in pyjamas. She also did other ad hoc sessions including SEN sessions, themed classes and holiday clubs during school holidays. She was also well known in the home-schooling community and for a while she ran some classes for home schooled children.
39. To book The Hart Space, Leanne would message me by WhatsApp to book the studio for her classes. I would check the calendar to make sure the dates and times were available and would then book it out for her if it was. I exhibit at JS/04 – **JSC000008** the WhatsApp exchanges on 4th and 7th July 2024 where we discussed and booked in the Taylor Swift dance and yoga class for 29th July 2024.
40. I did not have an electronic booking system for anyone to be able to book the Unit remotely, all venue bookings had to be made directly with me. Prior to the first time facilitating a class, I would go through all the Unit procedures etc with the hirer.
41. For the Taylor Swift Workshop on 29th July 2024, Leanne booked both studios (Unit H and Unit A&B). As this was not a busy time with it being the start of the summer holidays and most of the 'core' classes don't run over the school holidays, I charged her £27 for both rooms, when this was the going rate for just one unit. I understand that Unit A&B was not being used at the time of the attack, but I don't know why as I had no involvement in how the class was run.
42. Leanne told me she was running the class with her friend, Heidi (Liddle). I knew Heidi as she attended my own baby classes, and we also had some mutual friends. I knew that she was a trained dance instructor as she had taught some of my friends' children. I also knew that she was a teaching assistant, although I didn't have any working relationship with Heidi. This

was Leanne's class and she was responsible for all aspects of running it, as was the case with all classes run by individual hirers.

43. I do have a written hire agreement that I used for hirers, but I cannot find a copy of the agreement signed by Leanne. The agreement was in paper form as it seemed to be easier to do it that way. After the incident, I found returning to The Hart Space very difficult knowing what terrible things had happened there. When we moved, I had some help from friends and we cleared out the spaces as quickly as possible, putting things in boxes, bags and throwing a lot of things away so there was less to move. I will be honest, there wasn't much care taken during the process as we didn't want to be in the Units any longer than we needed to be, so it was very rushed, and a lot of things have unfortunately been lost throughout the move.
44. I assume the signed hire agreement was lost during our hasty move from The Hart Space. The laptop I was using was very old and very intermittent (if it would switch on/work at all) which is why it was on paper. I now have a new laptop. I have a copy of the standard agreement I used at the time, which I believe would have been the version signed by Leanne. I exhibit this at JS/05 – **JSC000009**. This was prepared by the solicitor I used when I took on The Hart Space in 2019. I asked for this because while I had only on two occasions been asked to sign something when hiring a unit for my own classes, I thought it was more 'official' that way. I understand after speaking to many people who hire studios and from my own experience that signing a hire agreement is not actually common practice in our line of work.
45. The agreement confirms that amongst other things the hirer was:
  - 45.1 responsible to ensure that all of the premises and other facilities and access to and exit from them are safe, suitable, and adequate for the purpose of hire; and
  - 45.2 responsible and liable for any lack of safety or unsuitability or inadequacy of, any of the premises or other facilities or access to or exit from any of them
46. Leanne was very familiar with the Unit as she had been using the space very frequently to run her classes. It is my understanding that many of the attendees at the Taylor Swift Workshop had a relationship already with Leanne or Heidi, either from a school or tutoring setting or they had previously attended their classes. I believe some of the children who attended the event had been to various classes at The Hart Space before.
47. I was not present at The Hart Space at the time of the attack. I was not intending be at The Hart Space at all that day.

### **My involvement in the aftermath of the attack**

48. On 29th July 2024, I remember that I was finishing up a Teams meeting in my employed job and was typing up the notes. My phone rang, I didn't realise I had a missed call already a few minutes earlier. I received another call from the same unknown number and picked up. There was a lady on the phone asking where her child was and that she was at The Hart Space, the call was a bit broken and I told her that I wasn't there as it wasn't my class, it was Leanne's class but I remember telling her that the door was in the car park (more giving her directions of location as I thought she was lost, as this happens a lot as there is no signage on the road). The call got disconnected. I have gone through the call logs on my mobile phone which confirmed this call lasted only lasted 22 seconds.
49. I didn't really think anything of it as it was not the first call I have had looking for the Unit, asking for directions and being disconnected when they have found it.
50. I called Leanne to let her know people were looking for the Unit but I didn't get through. I assumed she would be busy with parents picking kids up from her class which was finishing, and she would be ticking off the register handing children over to parents.
51. A few minutes later Joe from Calculus, one of the solicitors, called me at 12noon. It lasted 31 seconds. He sounded panicked and told me something was going on, someone was hurt. He mentioned John Hayes (the landlord). I remember him saying there was an incident in the car park and someone had maybe been stabbed and that I needed to come down. To be honest, I thought it was going to be an altercation in the car park over parking or something.
52. I called my mum and told her she needed to get down to The Hart Space right away. I lean on my mum a lot for support and I wasn't sure what I was driving into, but I knew I needed her there.
53. I called Joe back while I was driving on Bluetooth. The call lasted 41 seconds and he was more panicked and I could tell he was in shock. He told me John had been stabbed, there were kids bleeding. He said to me 'I don't know what's going on, John's been stabbed, there is someone stabbing kids, they're all bleeding'. I told him I was already in the car and he told me the police and ambulance had arrived. He told me to 'prepare myself'. I remember vividly that I was driving down Tithebarn Road when he told me this. I realised at this point that it was far more serious than I had originally thought.
54. At the time, my sister, Abigail Butler, was living with my mum, so they both came down to The Hart Space together. When I arrived, emergency services were already on scene and I

parked my car on Maple Street, as it was as close as I could get. There were people and emergency services everywhere.

55. I ran from my car and headed to the entrance of the business park. I saw Leanne slumped at the side of a van and I asked her what had happened and if she was okay. She told me she was worried about the kids. She told me she 'didn't know, someone came in and started stabbing kids', 'the kids were being stabbed'. I didn't realise at this point how seriously hurt she was. I asked her for the register of kids which she said was inside on the side. I ran to the main entrance of the car park, at this point the police tried to stop me. I told them The Hart Space was my Unit and I needed to get through; I needed to try and get the register of children. I ran through the forecourt of the car park to the glass communal door of the building which leads to The Hart Space (Unit H) and Calculus. I could see the glass was all smashed. There was a large police officer on the door telling me I could not go up. I told him who I was and he said no. From where I was positioned I couldn't see inside the building. I asked if I could use the other entrance to go into Calculus and he said yes. I ran to the fire exit on the far side of the premises and banged on the door. I was let in and I went upstairs.
56. I only got to the top of the fire escape near to John's desk, and I recall shouting asking what had happened and a member of Calculus shouting that John was dying and there was no one helping him. The office is in an 'L shape' and long, I could not see around the corner which led to The Hart Space. I could not see John. I couldn't see anything to do with the attack. I tried to call my husband who also works for the ambulance service to say we needed more resources and to send everything they had. There was no answer. This was at 12:12pm. I appreciate now they would have been sending everything given my previous job for NWAS. I ran outside to try and get some help for John.
57. I found my sister Abigail close to the entrance of the car park as I was running out to find someone. Abigail is a qualified nurse with lots of experience working in A&E, and my understanding is that after talking with one of the paramedics who I believe knew her, she was given a kit bag and gloves and asked to go into the Unit with the police to go to treat John. She gave me her phone as she left with the police. I now understand, AR was still in the Unit at the time. Abigail was escorted in to deliver emergency care to John which enabled the paramedics to concentrate on the children. I understand Abigail delivered lifesaving treatment to John and was the only medic working on him inside the building. It was only after John had been carried out by the Fire Service and Abigail to the road that other medics started to treat him with Abigail continuing to deliver medical aid.

58. I remember seeing Leanne again, still slumped at the side of the van, and I could now tell that she was more hurt than I initially thought she was. She had blood down her face and looked a bit lethargic, however I didn't know how badly she was hurt. Around her I could see paramedics and emergency services frantically working on children who had what looked to me like stab wounds. I couldn't see Heidi at all.
59. As I couldn't get the class register as it was inside the Unit, I got a piece of paper and a pen and ran around trying to find out the identities of the children so we could work out if anyone was missing and who was accounted for. I was running up and down the street to get this. I have a vague recollection of vomiting a little somewhere close to the top of Tithebarn Road. I remember seeing Jenni Stancombe, the mum of Elsie Dot, on the street, a couple of houses down (maybe outside number 30). Jenni had been in my classes, and I recognised her, and she told me Elsie was missing. I carried on and my mum supported Jenni as she waited for Elsie to be located. She waited with Jenni until one of her family members arrived so she wasn't on her own. I believe Elsie's dad was trying to help find Elsie which is why she was standing on her own.
60. In these moments, I just thought that I needed to find out who was there, who was missing and who was accounted for. I thought at the time that was the best way to help. From the list I made, speaking to the people on the street, Elsie and Bebe were not accounted for.
61. I know Leanne uses the same booking system for her classes as I do for my own classes (Acuity Scheduling). I know how to work the system to get the information on who was booked into the class and could log in from my phone. I didn't have her log in details as this was her class, not my own. When I couldn't find her again I sent Leanne a message asking if she would give me the log in details to get into the booking system so I could locate an electronic register. This was at 13:28. She didn't respond, and I now know she was very badly injured and was on her way to hospital.
62. There were so many people around and people on the street who looked like they were taking videos and pictures. I remember a child and John, who was now lying in the middle of the road, and the child from memory only had her underwear on and they were cutting all of John's clothes off. I used a sheet to try and shield them from the cameras by holding it up, trying to provide privacy for both them and the emergency services who were dealing with them.
63. I never went into The Hart Space that day or into the communal entrance, I only went up the fire escape into the office of Calculus which is on the other side of the building, stood at the top of the stairs. I didn't see John, AR, or where the attack took place.

64. I gave my details to the police when we were leaving the Hart Street cordon, which I believe was about 4pm. I contacted the police on a couple of occasions asking what I could do about reporters and asking for some advice and information. I was just told to direct all enquiries to Merseyside Police Comms and was given no information about what happened. I was not contacted by the police in respect of the investigation.

**Particular issues relevant to your involvement**

65. I did not hire the Unit to the public, only to businesses and organisations to provide different classes and services.
66. Hirers were required to undertake their own risk assessments tailored to their own specific classes as I did with mine for my own pregnancy and baby classes.
67. I completed a general risk assessment for the Units, which I went through with hirers along with a health and safety policy and fire evacuation procedure.
68. I also undertook a specific risk assessment for the classes that I personally ran under Empowered Bumps, as these class-specific things are not included in the general risk assessment.
69. I exhibit at JS/06 **JSC000010** a copy of my general risk assessment dated 1 September 2023. The general risk assessment covers what you would expect for a Unit like this. It includes things like slips, trips and falls; using the kettle and the risks of spilling hot water; cords for blinds from an entrapment perspective; falling equipment; lone working etc.
70. I exhibit at JS/07 **JSC000011** a copy of a class specific risk assessment I prepared for the classes I ran. In addition to the risks identified in the general risk assessment it covers the specific risks of running a baby massage class, for example, using massage oils used in baby massage. My class specific risk assessments covered things I thought were normal and foreseeable for the classes I provide, like checking yoga mats were flat so no one would trip over one, shoes on the shoe rack provided to prevent trips, no trailing wires, drinks could only be in travel mugs, verbal warning given to parents if having a hot drink, no real flamed candles, and verbal warning to parents wearing rings or who have long nails so they didn't scratch baby by accident.
71. My general risk assessment and class specific risk assessment do not cover an attack like what happened, I didn't foresee that this would happen. I did not consider the risk that someone would enter the Unit and attack people in broad daylight. It didn't even cross my

mind as a possibility that something like that could happen in a small studio tucked away in Southport.

72. The general risk assessment does consider the risk of "acts of violence" but only in relation to lone working. My thinking here was that a burglar could attempt to access the building at night which would put someone working alone at the premises in danger if confronted. Someone could be on the premises alone at night cleaning and locking up after an evening class or preparing the Unit for a class the following morning. In those circumstances I asked hirers to let me know if they were working alone and to message me once they had left, and to lock the entrance when in the building alone. However, I know a lot of the people who hired the space have someone else with them when they lock up at night, and on some evenings the pole fitness studio was often operating. Most evening classes finished between 8pm and 8:30pm. Most the classes held at The Hart Space happened in the day, when the other units of the complex were occupied.
73. I would not expect the main entrance to be locked when others were present given it was a communal entrance, but in an evening when the office of Calculus was closed and there were no staff in this would be up to the discretion of the person hiring the space. The car park had CCTV and exterior lighting fitted, and from the Unit you could see the entrance to the complex and the car park.
74. I was mindful of minimizing risks when fitting out the Unit. The Unit had child locks on the kitchen units, cabinets were secured to the wall, chairs had their own cabinet to be stored in so they did not need to be stacked, the only wall dressings/pictures were above cabinets to limit the risk of a frame falling, there was no high up storage for equipment, there was no notice board with pins just in case one fell on the floor and someone stepped on it, everything had a place. The Hart Space was functional; and in my eyes limited the foreseeable risk of injury and was a place where people felt supported. I did my best to make sure there was no way for people to hurt themselves.
75. I provided domestic grade cleaning equipment (which was in a child locked cabinet), wet floor signs, and a first aid box. There was no toaster or microwave to reduce the risk of a fire, no 'real' candles were allowed - only battery-operated ones, the air conditioning was serviced annually (and had been serviced not long before the 29th July).
76. The Hart Space provided basic equipment/facilities when renting the space and it was for hirers to provide any specific equipment they needed for their classes. This may include things like toys for baby and children's classes, 'singing bowls' used for meditation and sound baths.

77. The equipment that was available to use was to make it easier for people hiring the space so there was less to carry, reducing the need to carry heavy equipment up the stairs and so reducing the likelihood of injury. The equipment The Hart Space provided included tables and chairs, yoga mats, foam EVA flooring, cushions, blankets, Bluetooth speaker, fairy lights, battery operated candles/soft lighting, and refreshment making facilities in the small kitchenette located within the Unit. Travel mugs and plastic cups were available to use and there was some, albeit limited, cutlery in a drawer with a child lock fitted.
78. I really thought I did everything I could to limit the risk of someone getting injured by anything in the Unit. I didn't expect what happened to happen. I don't think anyone did.
79. At the same time as preparing the general risk assessment (JS/06 – **JSC000010**) I completed a checklist of questions/information which I exhibit at JS/08 **JSC000012**. The checklist has basic information which is easy to read at a glance and includes a lot of what the general risk assessments does, just in a different format and more streamlined. I only completed this to put information I thought was important in one place; I understand there is no requirement for this.
80. I exhibit at JS/09 – **JSC000013** The Hart Space's Health and Safety Policy which reiterates that all people hiring the space were responsible for ensuring they were compliant with health and safety, safeguarding, fire and evacuation policies when the studio was in their control. Anyone who is running classes should know about this to be confident they are not putting attendees or themselves at risk. The policy states that I was the overall person responsible for The Hart Space and that any concerns should be raised with me.
81. If any concerns were raised, they would be dealt with promptly and appropriately. If I required additional support, I would have sought it from the relevant place such as landlord (John Hayes), police or local authority.
82. During COVID I sought advice from our local Environmental Health team regarding reopening, what we could and couldn't do. While some of the things that are in the COVID section of the risk assessment, may seem irrelevant, but I really wanted to make sure I was doing everything I could to mitigate the risk of 'the spread' so we could open safely within the COVID guidelines set by the government.
83. I exhibit at JS/10- **JSC000014** the fire evacuation procedure which has a site map and details the fire escapes and fire assembly point.

84. Before hiring out the space to anyone for the first time, I would run through the general risk assessment (JS/06 – **JSC000010**), health and safety policy (JS/09 – **JSC000013**) and fire evacuation policy (JS/10 – **JSC000014**). The checklist (JS/08 – **JSC000012**) was a 'top up' of the other items listed above. Copies of these documents would also be present in the Units for hirers to refer to.
85. Hirers were asked to provide a copy of their insurance details and asked to have class specific risk assessments prior to running classes. Some hirers sent me copies of their own risk assessments for my records, although this was not to provide advice or consultation about them and I did not review them.
86. I don't believe The Hart Space is unusual in its set up. In Southport there are a lot of venues which are situated behind houses in residential areas with only one door used as an entrance/exit, there are also lots of multi-purpose venues, with communal entrances which can be hired for classes, while other activities are ongoing.
87. There was a key safe with a spare set of keys, located in one of the toilets for hirers to use, although regular hirers had their own set of keys that I would provide to them. Leanne had her own set of keys. One-off hirers would use the keys in the key safe or return a set I gave them after their hire. An additional spare set of keys was also in the office of Calculus. I also don't live far away from the venue and am available on my phone if there was a problem.
88. There was no intercom or videophone entry or electronic keypads. There was no CCTV within the Units. There was CCTV covering the car park, but this was arranged by the landlord and so I had no access to this. The car park was easy to see from the Unit, as was the entrance to the complex from the road. The car park had exterior lighting and the entrance to the complex had a gate and padlock on it: whoever was first in would unlock the gate, whoever was last out would close and lock it behind them.
89. The fishing tackle shop was not open as it was a Monday and the pole fitness studio was not normally open at this time of the day.
90. Whilst I produced the fire evacuation procedure for the Unit, the landlord managed the building fire assessments, alarms, smoke detectors and emergency lighting. There was emergency lighting in Unit H (where the attack happened) and an illuminated fire exit sign above the doors, which was installed and maintained by the landlord, and firefighting equipment with appropriate signage. There was also emergency lighting on the landing and stairs, overhead lighting, in addition to natural lighting provided by the glass door and two windows.

### Reflection on events

91. I am heartbroken for everyone involved in the tragedy, especially the families of Elsie Dot, Bebe, Alice, the other children who attended the event, their families, Leanne, Heidi, John, those living close by and all the people who came to help, including emergency services and those not on duty who rendered aid.
92. The events of that day will stay with us forever, however the horrific actions of the perpetrator do not, and should not define those lost or those affected.
93. I hope with time that the healing journey can begin. What happened will never be forgotten, and the children that were lost should be remembered for the joy they brought to the world, not by the acts of a monster.
94. I attend baby and toddler groups and other classes around the area as part of my employed job, as a mother of two, and as someone who has hired various venues over the years. I believe the procedures, systems and how The Hart Space operated were entirely standard.
95. I have hired many units over the years with a very similar set up to The Hart Space, but I have only twice been asked for anything relating to my insurance or to sign a hirer agreement. One was a golf club and the other a church hall. I have hired around 15 venues, and these were the only ones that ever asked for a hire agreement and insurance details.
96. I thought I was going 'above and beyond' what some other spaces do, from my own experience and from what the hirers had said to me about the processes we had in place.
97. The Hart Space was a small studio located off a residential street in Southport. You wouldn't even know it was there unless you were specifically looking for it, it didn't have signage on the road. I understand that the Taxi driver who drove AR didn't even know where it was and directed him to the wrong place.
98. During Covid I had a lot of contact with Environmental Health and even went into small details like if the 2m social distancing was 'nose to nose' or corner of the mat to the corner of the mat (which made an approx. 60cm difference). I even pestered them about biscuits and was told 'similar to those found at a hotel tea stand'. I just wanted to make sure it was all correct and thought I was doing everything I could. Environmental Health had no issues with my set up and advised me to put it in my risk assessment. I did and it's still in there, just in case we need it again in the future.

99. Whilst I was not running the class and I am not qualified in children's classes, I don't think I would have done anything differently from how I understand Leanne was running it.
100. In my NHS job and as a mother, I attend venues which host after school and holiday clubs. Some have a small gate system, similar to what you would find in a gym to prevent small children from running out, some have magnetic locks, some have nothing. Many places I visit are multipurpose venues, hosting different things at the same time, using the entrance as a communal area for all spaces within the venue. It would not be unusual to have a children's club running at the same time as other events/ classes/services in many venues which have a communal entrance.
101. As the main entrance was communal, it wasn't practical to lock it. The internal doors to Unit H were the only exit so locking these from the inside would be a fire hazard. The toilets were outside the unit on the landing so if someone had to use the facilities, it was not practical to let them out, lock the door, and then re-open it. This would disrupt the class and I imagine it would make it more difficult to supervise children.
102. My understanding is that the attack occurred at the end of the class and several parents were already waiting to pick up their children. In my experience, if you are expecting parents/carers to pick up children, I wouldn't expect the doors to be locked. I would expect there to be a hand over process of a child to a parent/carer, but the only way of handing a child to a parent would be to open a door.
103. From another perspective, the school my children go to bring the children onto the playground in class groups from year 3 to be picked up at the end of the day. They are not locked up behind a door waiting for the teachers to open the door when the parent is there on a one out at a time system. They stand on the school playground waiting to be collected at the same time; there are parents and children everywhere on the playground. There is no other way to do it, and I think this is a sensible system.
104. As part of my NHS employment, I have attended small classes with children and babies around the area and across Cheshire and Merseyside and access to these locations are very rarely locked and many don't have the provision to do so. Some have gates to keep children inside, but these wouldn't stop a determined intruder.
105. I can think of many other examples such as roller rinks, holiday clubs and more which are located in multi-use buildings, sometimes open to the general public for other facilities such as gyms. All these places have a much larger public footfall than Norwood Business Centre did. Children's classes and activities also take place on open public fields. The above

statements about other venues are not a criticism of them, it is simply to highlight that The Hart Space ran no differently to other places.

### Improvements

106. Due to the tragic events of 29th July 2024, The Hart Space did not reopen. With the assistance and support of Sefton Council I have moved to new premises, The White House. Nearly everyone who had hired The Hart Space has moved with me to the new venue, except for Leanne and those also not running classes anymore.
107. Sefton Council have been outstanding in supporting the relocation of The Hart Space. They have been thorough and understanding taking into consideration our thoughts, feelings, enabling us to move forward and continue the vision of creating a space where people feel heard and supported.
108. It means so much to me that some of the families who were so badly affected by this incident have returned to classes at The White House. I have received so many messages sending love and support since the attack happened, with many people sharing that they had made the best friends at my classes, and at classes ran at The Hart Space, and asking me to re-open another Unit as it was such a special place which really supported and cared about people.
109. I have streamlined my venue hirer 'onboarding' with a link for hirers to fill in, rather than a paper version of the hirer agreement so it cannot be lost (though again I highlight this does not appear to be standard practice, asking hirers to sign an agreement). I have also asked hirers to sign to say they have read and understood the risk assessments after reading them and taking them through the relevant policies. An unconditional term is that they send me a class specific risk assessment for their classes, ahead of time for my file, instead of just asking them to do one.
110. **I&S**  
but it operates in a similar way to The Hart Space with regards to hirers being responsible for their own classes, entrance and exit procedures and not being supervised by me during their sessions. There are no door staff or security at The White House.
111. The White House doors have glass panels so you can see through them from the inside to the outside and I have placed one way film over them to stop people looking in during the day and to create more privacy in classes as we are so close to the road and on ground level.

112. [REDACTED] I&S [REDACTED] I&S The White House is in a much busier location than The Hart Space was. It is next to a busy road and right by two golf courses. The building was, until recently, a bar and restaurant and we regularly get people walking up still thinking it is. You didn't get this level of thoroughfare at The Hart Space, which was hidden away in a much more secluded area. I have had A Boards made to inform people it is no longer a public space with no public toilets and there is also a sign on the window.
113. The police have given me and the other hirers of the new venue a personal alarm for use in the new building, [REDACTED] I&S [REDACTED] I&S [REDACTED] I&S
114. [REDACTED] I&S
115. When refitting The White House, Sefton Council offered the fitting of Magnetic locks. They did not insist on them, and I do not consider them beneficial for the reasons detailed below.
116. In this incident I don't think they would have helped as children panicking may not have immediately been able to find and press the release button, which could have delayed or stopped them exiting the building with even more tragic consequences. I don't think even my own children, who are very familiar with the Unit, would have remembered to press it given what was happening. I also think that children panicking, running toward the exit, and pushing into each other could have potentially re-locked the doors by accident. They could have potentially been trapped. I am not sure magnetic locks would have prevented AR from gaining access somehow.
117. AR is a disgusting human being, what he did was an act of pure evil.
118. What happened on 29th July 2024 was an absolute tragedy. I am devastated beyond words by what happened and will forever be heartbroken. I wish for a world filled with kindness, laughter and support. I don't think any parent or class provider could have foreseen this.
119. I don't want to live in a world where children are locked up and aren't allowed to go to forest schools or outdoor sports clubs because, for example, a football pitch or athletics track doesn't have a locked gate and fence high enough to keep someone like AR out. I understand this dreadful attack has changed everything, but I also want to live in a world

where children can be children, they have the freedom to go to clubs like Brownies, or parties with their friends, without the fear of an evil person destroying it.

**Other matters**

120. There is nothing in addition to that stated in the reflection and improvements sections above that I wish to add.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings many brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed: A DocuSign signature block consisting of a blue bracket on the left, the text "DocuSigned by:" above a dashed rectangular box containing the word "SIGNATURE" in bold, and a long alphanumeric string "246DEDF3D3CB45C..." below the box.

Dated: 26 July 2025 | 04:51 PDT