

Witness Name: Asleigh Williams

Exhibits:11

Dated: ...August 2025

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF ASHLEIGH WILLIAMS

I, Ashleigh Williams, will say as follows:

Introductory matters

1. I am a Family Support Worker (FSW) employed by Lancashire County Council ("LCC") since January 2022. I have a degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy. Prior to joining LCC as FSW, I worked at ASDA and volunteered at Home Start for a year.
2. I was employed as a FSW by LCC when I first became involved with AR and his family. I now work in the same role but for a team in a different geographic area in West Lancs.
3. I am one of 5/6 FSWs working in a team and at the time of my involvement with AR my line manager was Sharon Barrett.
4. A FSW is a role within the Family Intensive Support (FIS) team of the Children & Family Wellbeing Service (CFW) at LCC. We provide early help and targeted assistance to families within a specific geographic area with needs requiring support. Support is given to families which are assessed at level 3 on the LCC's Continuum of Need (CON). If the CON is assessed at Level 4 than it moves up to Children's Social Care, a statutory service.
5. Our service is not a statutory service, and it can only work with families by consent.
6. FSWs arrange the Team Around the Family (TAF) service. The FSW is the lead professional in multi-agency settings.
7. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 24 July 2025.

Factual narrative of involvement

Referral/Allocation

8. Referrals can come from different agencies; we will only work with a family if we have consent. If there are safeguarding concerns, then a referral can be made without consent but not to the FIS team, this goes straight to CSC.
9. I was first involved with AR's family in April 2023. In relation to AR, FIS was focused on addressing AR's anxiety and independence skills, building up AR's confidence to get out of the house to enable his education.
10. Presfield School had made a referral to the MASH (Multi Agency Support Hub) on 21 March 2023 as the school was concerned that they had not seen AR for some time. As we are a consensual service MASH needed the family to consent before the referral for support could be sent through to FIS. MASH wrote to dad, and he responded asking for support. The case was allocated to me on 4 April 2023.
11. I remember it, support had been requested due to AR's poor school attendance, as he did not like the noise at Presfield School, so had not attended. Dad was worried about him not getting an education.
12. The contact record states.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Progress to Early Help Episode	<input type="checkbox"/> Step down to LP (off system)
<input type="checkbox"/> Link to Existing Early Help Episode	<input type="checkbox"/> MASH Episode
<input type="checkbox"/> Threshold not met / No Consent	Progress to Other Local Authority
CFW - Commissioned Services	EHCP Transfer
Information and Advice / Signposted to Universal Services / Information	<input type="checkbox"/> Link to Existing MASH Episode
Sharing Only / Group Work	Start a Adult Workflow Episode

Case recommended to be stepped down to CFW. Father has contacted MASH after receiving a letter following the last referral. Axel is likely to continue to have poor mental health if left unaddressed, and not achieve academically, which will impact on his future choices. As a result the following support plan is proposed.

CON - 3.

Consent - yes.

Needs/intervention - Axel has significant mental health issues, impacting on him accessing education. He suffers with anxiety which has led to non school/college attendance/low

attainment/social isolation. Intervention could address this by one to one work with Axel, attempting to engage him in positive activities with others, and increase his college attendance.

Risks - none known.

13. A copy of the Contact Episode is attached as **AW/01 - LCC000187**. FIS were asked to work with AR to reduce his anxiety and enable him to return to education.
14. When FSWs are allocated cases, a referral comes through on The Early Help Management system (EHM). There was a change in the naming of the levels on the LCC's Continuum of Need at some point. Previously, CFW offered services to those deemed to be at level 2b on the CON, Early Help now sits at Level 3. In essence, the levels have been renamed but the need remained the same. FIS works at below a statutory need.
15. Early Help would not have intervened if AR remained at a level 2 on the current CON, as this can be delivered by other services. The need is assessed by MASH.
16. At the time of the referral AR and his family clearly required support, and his needs – anxiety, social isolation plus poor school attendance fitted exactly within Level 3.
17. The responsibility for allocation falls to one of the Senior FSWs. At the time, the Senior FSW responsible for allocation to me was Sharon Barrett. Sharon allocated AR to me as she thought I would be a good fit for AR based on my skills, the fact that Banks was in the area I covered and caseloads.
18. The FSW can see previous case notes, chronologies and contact records. I remember that it was the fourth or fifth referral for AR to FIS.

Home visits, TAF meetings and the Early Help Assessment

19. As the lead professional I would then contact all the agencies currently working with AR. I would also arrange to meet the family.
20. The agencies included school, health, CAMHS and the local authority education team. Initially I contacted CAMHS in Lancashire who explained that they were not the correct people and advised that I contact Sefton, as AR's school place was in Southport and covered by Sefton CAMHS. I then requested records from Sefton CAMHS.

21. I requested information from AR's school, Presfield. I asked for a school report and explained that my role would be to develop coping mechanisms for AR's anxiety, to improve independence and confidence. Which was the central reason why AR was referred to Early Help in the first place.
22. All this information is collated into the assessment document together with the RADAR charts. A RADAR is an assessment tool used to measure an individual's various needs, including safety; wellbeing; home and money; friends, relationships and support; work, education and learning; goals and ambitions; feelings, behaviours and choices; and boundaries and behaviours.
23. I remember that there were some concerns that AR may be at risk of exploitation due to his social isolation.
24. The initial meeting with AR and his family was on 11 April 2023. The initial visit invitation is sent around the time of allocation and based on my availability. All records of the meeting are stored on EHM system and would have been entered by either Sharon or me. The notes state that:

Axel and dad were both seen, Axel stated that there has been no violence between himself and his family recently. he stated he is not seeing CAMHs because he doesn't see the point in this. There was some damage seen in the property. Axel had reported that he started anti anxiety medication 2 weeks ago.

Agreed to the Early help assessment

25. Following on from the initial meeting, I contacted AR to arrange a face-to-face meeting. AR did not respond to my text, so I contacted his dad, who explained AR's phone was broken. I arranged to go and see him on 14 April 2023.
26. I commented at page 86 of the general notes that *"It is strange that AR's phone has broken already as it was observed by CFW to be working fine on Tuesday [11 April 2023] AR called Sharron Barrett in order for her to have his phone number"*.
27. I attended the family on 14 April 2023, and my notes are as follows:

Family RADAR- Axel presented as quiet, remained on the couch with headphones on. Axel expressed that he was going to try to go to school, his anxiety is not at its worst but it is limiting what he is able to do such as go outside but he is ok in the home and exists in the home alongside his family instead of being involved with them.

Axel agreed to the follow up visit

Considering that Axel does not know myself the session remained fairly positive and Axel remained engaged and agreed to a next session outside the home. It is likely that due to the complexity of Axel's needs progress may be slow overall, however for now it is going well.

It is unclear what has happened to Axel's phone and it is relatively concerning that it has broken within a short period of time. Consideration needs to be made that his phone may have been broken by Axel to avoid CFW contact, by a family member to maintain control on the situation or the phone is not broken and Axel is ignoring CFW. Either way contact with Axel will now need to be made through Dad.

28. I discussed my visit with Sharon and the notes comment as follows:

Introductions have been made between Axel and his new family support worker. Currently the same needs seem to be presenting in the family has historically been seen, it is positive that dad is reporting that Axel is less aggressive than he has been in the past. Axel is highlighting that his anxiety is very high again and that he is very isolated. He is reporting that his weight had increased but since the anxiety has returned he is losing weight again quickly

29. I attach a copy of the RADAR I completed at that visit **AW/02 – LCC000357**. I

specifically asked AR about feeling at risk in different environments including at school, at home and online. He said he did not feel at risk and only used YouTube. Online. I did not encounter anything during that visit that made me think that I could not handle the case.

30. The guidance and procedure that we work to in FIS is to visit the children at a minimum monthly, but I aim to see children weekly, to build up a proper relationship and make progress in supporting their needs.

31. In terms of engagement, AR did initially speak with me a bit, not in massive detail, but he would answer questions asked of him. This was mostly yes or no answers but sometimes he would give slightly longer answers.

32. Following my visits with AR and his family on 11 April 2023 and 14 April 2023 my next home visit was on 2 May 2023. I carried out direct work with AR as we went for a walk locally. AR engaged and asked for direct work to learn coping mechanisms for his anxiety. AR said that he did not want to be more social and did not want support from the youth team. Set out below is an extract from the general notes (**LCC000226**).

Axel presented as calm and relaxed. Axel came on a walk with me around the local area and spoke about what he wants from the service. Axel stated he would like direct work to learn coping mechanisms for his anxiety. Axel also stated he likes his sessions to be quick as he gets overwhelmed and bored otherwise. During the walk Axel was able to engage in general conversation about school (which he finds boring) and he also stated there is nothing in the local area. I asked Axel if he would like to engage with the youth team again. Axel stated he doesn't want this as he does not want to be more social. Axel did excellent by coming for a walk when he does not enjoy being out side, this is a very positive step for Axel. Although Axel does not want to have the youth team involved yet, it is important we get to that stage as this will ensure he is able to use the skills he will learn in a real environment.

33. My first failed home visit was on 9 May 2023. My notes in the chronology **AW/03 - LCC000865** (page 7) are as follows:

family RADAR complete with Dad predominantly- Mum was seen but there was limited engagement. This episode Dad is reporting that Axels behaviours have reduced and they are no longer violent.

34. Dad explained that AR had been to school and had a medical appointment that day and was tired due to this.

35. I visited again on 18 May 2023 and record another failed visit **LCC000865** (page 7).

Axel did not want to engage in the support, FSW offered to complete the session on the stairs, mum requested that this did not happen.
Telephone call session arranged

Telephone call failed to Axel and Alphonse.

36. CFW is a consent-based service, if I were to remain on the property once I had been asked to leave, then I would have been trespassing.
37. As can be seen from the chronology notes I called back as requested and no one answered. Dad then called back at 10pm but I was not at work at that time to pick up the call.
38. I was due to have completed my EH assessment by 5 May 2023 but was given an extension up to 22 May 2023 due to the fact I was awaiting on information from other agencies: school and CAMHS, and the lack of engagement from AR. AR was not attending school or CAMHS, so they were having difficulty in supplying me with their updating reports for input into the EH assessment.
39. I drafted the Early Help Assessment which is attached to my statement as **AW/04 - LCC000192**. I started drafting it on 4 April and finished it on 21 May 2023. It was signed off by my manager Sharon.
40. My analysis was that previous interventions had had a positive impact on the family. There was less conflict in the home. AR had been referred to us as his anxiety was increasing and preventing him going to school. AR was asking for support to help with his anxiety. The assessment also showed that AR was socially isolated. I was to complete anxiety work with AR.
41. Due to concerns about his isolation and risk of exploitation I completed an exploitation tool. The result was green meaning that AR was at low risk of exploitation.
42. His assessed needs were as set out below:

ASSESSED NEEDS	
Safeguarding	No Safeguarding Assessed Needs
Health	Child/Young Person emotional health and wellbeing needs Child/Young Person with mental health needs
Resilience	No 'Resilience' Needs in Family
Learning	Child/Young Person school attendance below 90% Disrupted Education
Work	No 'Work' Needs in Family
Community	No 'Community' Needs in Family

43. There was the first TAF meeting on 25 May 2023 where AR did not attend but his dad did. Dad asked for FIS to do an ADHD assessment as school had said they were unable to do so. I explained that that was not something that FIS could do either.
44. As the lead professional I was responsible for arranging and chairing the TAF meetings. During my involvement I attended TAF meetings on 25 May 2023, 22 June 2023, and 17 July 2023. There was also the last TAF meeting on 13 September 2023 where Sharon attended as I was off sick at the time.
45. AR was being supported by school, SEND, CAMHS, FIS and TYS. Not all those agencies would come under LCC, e.g. CAMHS and school were out of area.
46. Where FIS were involved, the FSW would act as the "lead professional" but FIS does not really have much authority. We can pull school, health etc in for a TAF meeting and at the meeting they will tell us what they intend to do, but we can't force them to do anything. It is about working together with the agencies, rather than compelling them to act.
47. The TAF meetings are to document what has happened and what progress has been made. The lead professional role is more administrative than managerial.
48. AR did not attend any of the TAF meetings. The TAF meetings took place via Microsoft Teams to try and make it easier for AR to attend. Both parents attended.
49. The TAF meeting outcomes for 25 May 2023 are at **AW/05 – LCC000359** AR's parents reported:

Child(ren)/Young Person's thoughts and feelings	Axel did not attend the meeting however expressed that he would like support to better manage his anxiety
Parent/Carer's thoughts and feelings	Parents state that Axel has been doing okay, and has been putting more effort into attending school than previous years. Parents state there is no conflict in the home, and Axel is making the decision to go to school on his own. Parents state that Axel is now on melatonin to help him sleep, however he is also taking his sertraline at night (CAHMS advised this may impact his sleep). Dad states there has been a significant improvement in his mood since taking Sertraline. Dad advised that it is difficult to get it right with Axel, and wants Axel to get the most out of the support being offered. Both Mum and Dad expressed that they want Axel to be able to leave school with his core GCSE's at a minimum.

50. The school reported that AR's attendance was inconsistent and mental health support reported that AR's engagement was patchy. CFW reported that AR was engaging well and wanted short sessions to explore coping mechanisms for his anxiety. CAMHS reported that the family were receiving family therapy.
51. I carried out another home visit on 26 May 2023. AR removed himself from the living room and went upstairs. I could not get him to engage in the session.

My general notes record the following:

On arrival Mum stated that Axel had gone upstairs and would not come down. CFW called up the stairs, however Axel did not respond. Mum stated that Axel has been spending more time with them watching TV and engaging in conversation. Mum states she has also been helping him learn languages, Mum states that as a whole Axel has been much better. When leaving CFW called up again to Axel and advised that I would email dad with resources for anxiety, Axel did not respond.

52. On 31 May 2023 I emailed dad as I was concerned, I had not seen AR for some time, since 2 May 2023. On 1 June 2023 I had to cancel an arranged home visit as I was unwell. Carl Coughlin the YTS worker went to see AR on 8 June 2023. He did not manage to see AR and AR's mum explained that AR had asked her how to say "I do not want this" in her own language.

53. The next TAF was on 22 June 2023 meeting outcome minutes are **AW/06 – LCC000361** again AR did not attend but his parents did and reported that AR was less aggressive. He makes his own decisions on what he does. Dad said that he wanted Sharon to complete a home visit as he thought AR would engage with her. AR's parents reported that AR was not taking his medication.

54. The summary and next steps are:

G: SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

School had not seen Axel for some time and due to this attended his home with police as per their policies. Axel presented as well during this visit. If Axel continues to miss school, school will need to complete another home visit as per their safeguarding policies.

CAMHS/Health have not had a meeting with Axel, however Axel has an appointment coming up with Anthony Molyneux on the 3rd July, however it is unclear if Axel will attend. - A review of his medication is important to ensure that Axel is receiving the correct dosage.

Axel has not made himself available for TYS sessions with Carl Coughlan and has asked Mum how to say "I don't want this" in her native language in reference to the support. - Carl to encourage engagement, however if this can not be achieved by the next TAF, it will be clear that Axel does not want the support and the case will likely close.

Axel would not make himself available to FIS either despite multiple attempts and an attempt via the phone. - Dad has requested that Senior family support worker Sharon Barrett complete a home visit in an attempt to engage Axel. Sharon does not case hold, so would not be able to take the case on.

55. One side effect from the medication was AR not eating. He had no appetite and was very thin.

56. It is stressed that there needs to be a review of his medication to ensure he has the correct dosage. However, CAMHS were not in attendance at that TAF meeting.

57. On 22 June 2023 dad asked me to post out the direct work I had tried to do with AR. I had emailed it, but dad told me they did not have a printer at home. I sent the work out in hard copy.

58. There was the second TAF meeting on 22 June 2023 where it was noted that AR was not engaging with CFW, he was not attending school nor CAMHS. The family were told that CFW would need to close until AR was ready for change. Dad asked for Sharon to visit.
59. On 7 July 2023 a joint visit with both Sharon and I was suggested.
60. The third TAF was on 17 July 2023 this was the last TAF meeting that I attended. The outcome minutes are **AW/07 – LCC000363**. It notes that AR didn't attend his CAMHS meeting in early July, but dad claims AR is fine and happy. AR is still not taking his medication. Dad states that he does encourage AR but thinks he has demand avoidance disorder, which limits what he can force AR to do. Dad was offered parenting lessons. A Triple P parenting programme had been delivered during previous period of involvement.
61. By 18 July 2023 school were reporting that a police visit would take place on 18 July 2023 to have eyes on AR as he had not been seen in school for a long period of time. At the TAF dad again asked for Sharon to become involved in the home visits. Sharon was off ill at the time and Della Heaton was overseeing Sharon's work in her absence. Della explained that it was not possible for Sharon to visit as she was off ill. I asked Della to advise as AR was refusing to see me or Carl, the YTS. It was decided that Carl would send a letter direct to AR to this if this would engage him **AW/08 – LCC000423**.
62. Although AR had barely attended school, the meeting notes state that AR had supposedly got dressed for school but could not attend due to there being a strike. Now with the benefit of hindsight, I think these were excuses.
63. Summary and next steps are:
- School update -
- Axel has not been in school for a significant amount of time. School have arranged for a police safeguarding visit at the family home for 18-07-23
 - School advised they can not provide Axel with more therapeutic support than what they already offer due to capacity
- CFW -
- TYS has not managed to engage Axel. TYS will sent a letter address to Axel to give him the opportunity to contact TYS on his own behalf.
 - Due to SFSW being on leave a joint visit has not been possible. Parents are happy to wait, however it is unclear when SFSW will return and so a joint visit may not be possible.
 - TYS encourages parents to challenge Axel and remove the choices they are giving him, taking back the power dynamic.
 - CFW offered to make referrals for therapeutic support, however Dad states that Axel does not want therapeutic support outside of school.
 - CFW will explore parenting support for parents in relation to demand avoidance.
- CAHMS -
- No update provided by CAHMS
- SENDIAS -
- No update provided by SENDIAS
64. By 20 July 2023 the case had been open for 15 weeks. I asked for supervision from Della the team manager and it was agreed that we would wait until Sharon returned to work and have a visit to try and engage AR.

65. I was on annual leave from 30 July 2023 until 14 August 2023.

66. On 30 August 2023 the case had been open for 20 weeks my notes are as follows

AW/09 – LCC000681:

Open: 20 weeks

This case has had supervision from team manager who has agreed that family can wait until SFSW Sharon is back in work to have a visit to encourage him to engage. Family know Sharon wont be picking it up as a case

Parents have agreed to complete parenting work aimed at supporting ODD as they feel that Axel may have this and this is why it is difficult to encourage him to do anything, Ashleigh is going to try and refer to the formby centre for this. – Offered to family however no response received

Carl to send a letter addressed to Axel to offer support. This will give Axel the choice and may encourage engagement. – Carl has complete this, unclear if Axel has responded

Barriers:

Lack of engagement from Axel

Voice of Child:

Unclear, he is not willing to talk to either FIS or TYS worker. He has parents at home who are ensuring his basic needs are met

Identified Risks of YP.

Axel has not been seen by professionals for some time.

Axel has poor mental health, doesn't leave house.

Axel has never wanted to engage with service he engaged at first as he felt dad wanted him to.

Child last seen? 02/05/23

Last TAF 17/07/23

Case summary up to date? Yes

Chronology up to date – to be updated to show none engagement

67. The last ever TAF meeting was held on 13 September 2023 and chaired by Sharon **AW/10 – LCC000365**, as I was off sick. It notes that AR's parents wanted the support to remain in place at level 3 as they felt AR needs to be made to go to school. However, the conclusion reached by all the TAF members was that there were no safeguarding risks to AR at this point, so the family was stepped across to level 2 to try and engage AR back to school and for CAMHS to continue with family therapy.
68. In total, I was only involved for five months. I can recall dad saying that AR would not engage and that as his parents, they were worried that if they kept pushing him, he would lash out at them.
69. Mum never really engaged in the process. Mum wasn't often around at the home. She would say "hi" and was polite but then would ignore me and walk away to do other things.
70. I tried texting AR to build our relationship when he started refusing to see me, but he would ignore texts. He didn't have a smart phone but a basic phone on which he could make and receive texts and calls. I tried to reassure AR when visiting him, telling him not to be scared, but to no avail. There were clear challenges with engagement and conducting visits, particularly towards the end of CFW's involvement (both FIS and TYS).
71. As I said there were a few weeks of engagement, but this dropped off not long after allocation. I do not know what caused the disengagement it may have been due to changes in his sertraline medication.
72. I don't think the SEND team attended any of the TAF meetings. As lead professional I cannot compel them to attend.

Episode Closure

73. I think that Sharon may have completed the Episode Closure at **AW/11 – LCC000203** as I was off sick at the time. I was still listed as episode coordinator because I was allocated the case at the start of the episode.
74. I went off sick in September 2023, so Sharon took over the case at around the time the case was being closed to CFW.
75. The decision to close a case is entirely contingent on the case in question. Sometimes the supervisor will advise closure but, in any case, they must approve the decision for closure to go ahead.
76. Whilst the parents didn't explicitly withdraw consent, AR was not engaging. Because of AR's age, both he and his parents must consent to the service. As the parents didn't want to do parenting work, there was no role for the service in that regard and AR wasn't

engaging, so it was stepped down to level 2. After episode closure, the school would take on responsibility as lead professional and carry on the TAF meetings.

77. Getting AR back into school was a separate thing entirely and more so the role of school, CFW was focused on independence and anxiety, which in turn would hopefully have enabled him to reengage with school.

78. I think AR's needs were being met by his parents and there were no concerns raised around violence, extremism and radicalisation.

Supervision

79. Sharon was my supervisor and would arrange monthly case load supervisions for my entire case load. I could always have conversations with Sharon in the office when I needed advice and support. When Sharon went off sick, I would go to Della Heaton for supervision. I feel that I was appropriately supervised and could go to my supervisors to ask any questions at any time. In addition, to Sharon and Della there are other seniors across the FIS team available to help.

Dealing with other agencies involved

80. In terms of the previous Prevent referral, which took place before I was involved with AR, I was aware that there were concerns around extremism but cannot recall whether I was specifically aware of the Prevent referrals. This might not necessarily have been on the EHM records. I know now that the referrals came from Acorns school, so the referral was stored only on Acorns' records. My understanding of Early Help's involvement was because AR had refused to attend school due to anxiety and that the referral to CFW was to provide support for this.

81. There were no Prevent referrals from Presfield school who were worried because they had not seen AR and he was not attending school. No concerns about violence or extremism were raised by AR's parents.

82. I didn't work with CYJS, Prevent or the police force. I am unsure of the difference between CAMHS and FCAMHS but one of the two did engage with TAF meetings. They communicated well and would attend the meetings where possible. Communication was mostly via emails due to busy schedules, but they were good at sharing information. School also engaged well but SEND involvement could have been better.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be 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:

Signature

Dated:

21/08/2025

Index to the Witness Statement of Ashleigh Williams

Exhibit No.	Inquiry reference no.	Document Description	LCC reference
AW/01	LCC000187	Contact Episode	LCC000187
AW/02	LCC000357	RADAR 14 April 2023	LCC000357
AW/03	LCC000865	Chronology Notes	LCC000865
AW/04	LCC000192	Early Help Assessment	LCC000192
AW/05	LCC000359	TAF Meeting Outcomes 25 May 2023	LCC000359
AW/06	LCC000361	TAF Meeting Outcomes 22 June 2023	LCC000361
AW/07	LCC000363	TAF Meeting Outcomes 17 July	LCC000363
AW/08	LCC000423	Letter from YTS to AR 17 July 2023	LCC000423
AW/09	LCC000681	AW Notes 30 August 2023	LCC000681
AW/10	LCC000365	TAF Meeting Outcomes 13 September 2023	LCC000365
AW/11	LCC000203	Episode Closure	LCC000203