

Witness Name: Amanda Chapman

Exhibits: AC/01 – AC06

Dated:

## THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

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### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF AMANDA CHAPMAN

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I, Amanda Chapman, will say as follows:

1. 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. I am providing this statement in my capacity as a former Missing from Home Support Worker in the Missing from Home ("MFH") team, Children's Social Care ("CSC"), Lancashire County Council ("LCC"), to explain my dealings with AR when I conducted a Return Home Interview ("RHI") on 22 March 2022.

#### **Personal Background**

2. I joined the MFH team in March 2021 as a Grade 6 Missing from Home Support Worker.
3. Prior to this, I had worked in children's homes for 18 years both within the local authority in Sefton and in the private sector. I worked my way up to the role of Deputy Manager before deciding to change role and apply to join the MFH team which meant that I no longer had to do shift work (as I had in children's homes), and I worked Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm.
4. I did not need any specific qualifications to join the MFH team however I do have a Level 3 National Vocational Qualification ("NVQ") in Children and Young People.
5. On joining the MFH team I received training specific to my role online and had access to the relevant guidance and policies. I felt that the training provided was excellent. I had a lot of experience working with children and young people from my previous roles in

children's homes and having been a Deputy Manager and so I felt well equipped to carry out my role.

6. I left LCC in or around August 2024; DPA I am no longer in employment.
  
7. It may be relevant to set out my personal circumstances during the period I met with AR. In December 2021, I experienced a relationship breakdown and moved out of the property I owned with my partner into a shared house in Preston. As the MFH team predominantly work from home, I was working and living in my bedroom in the shared house. In mid-December, I was signed off work by my GP due to stress. I returned to work in early 2022 however in early June 2022, I went back to my GP as I had been feeling unwell both mentally and physically for a number of months. I was feeling sick and not able to eat. At that stage I was put on the cancer pathway. Thankfully, I was not suffering from cancer, but I struggled massively throughout this period to cope with my personal circumstances, and my stress was compounded by the expectations in work. Looking back now, I was not in a good place mentally or physically at this time, and as I mention above, I am no longer working due to my ill health. I do not say this to excuse any inadequacies in my work during the relevant period, but to put the circumstances in which I was working into context.

### **MFH Team**

8. The MFH team is a standalone team which, during the time I worked there, formed part of CSC within LCC. I believe the team later became part of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub ("MASH").
  
9. LCC has a statutory duty to conduct RHIs with children and young persons ("YP") reported as missing to the police when they return home. The MFH team would receive notifications from the police regarding such YPs and would then have to:
  - a. Review the information received;
  - b. Contact the parents of the YP;
  - c. Arrange to carry out an RHI, this might be by phone or in person;
  - d. Complete a Missing from Home Return Interview Form ("the Form") and submit it to our team manager.

10. I would not have usually been involved with the YP prior to the RHI, nor afterward. My role was solely to conduct the RHI and complete the Form. I could provide recommendations, but I was not responsible for deciding on any necessary further action, whether a case should remain open or be closed, and / or any interventions required for the YP. Where I had concerns about a particular YP I could flag these in the Form and discuss them with my team manager.
11. We were required to conclude the contact within 72 hours which meant undertaking all the above actions within three days (excluding weekends).
12. The team was split by area, and I covered the central Lancashire area. This was a vast geographical area spanning across Preston, Chorley, and Wigan. It should have been me and two others covering the area, but it was not unusual for me to have to cover the area alone due to staff sickness or when members of staff left LCC.
13. My team manager was Jennifer Lacey, and I think there were around eight of us working in the team altogether.
14. We received a high number of allocations per day, and we were an extremely busy team working under significant pressure given the requirement to conclude contact within 72 hours.
15. I estimate on average I received around eight to ten allocations each day, and so it was a very heavy workload. When you bear in mind that we have to review the information, call the parents (often wait for them to return the call), travel to meet with the YP where a face to face meeting is deemed appropriate (which could be up to one hour travel time each way for the central Lancashire area), carry out the RHI, and write up the paperwork, I would say that each contact took around five hours to conclude. I think a reasonable / manageable case load would have been between two to three allocations a day.
16. The police referral forms were sent to the team manager who would review and allocate the case based on the location of the YP.
17. Allocations were in the form of open or unopen cases. Open cases were where the YP was currently open to services and, in some cases, had a social worker. Unopen cases were where the YP was not open to any services. The team also dealt with cases where

a YP had previously been open to services, but services were closed to them at the point at which they were reported missing to the police. This was the case with AR.

18. The team predominantly worked from home, but we would attend the office one day a week.
19. I would have regular supervision meetings with Jennifer Lacey where we would discuss things like case load and training needs. I was always given positive feedback about my work and how I dealt with allocations. No issues were ever raised about the standard of my work, RHI forms or anything else.

### **Dealing with a new allocation**

20. A new allocation would appear electronically in my "in-tray".
21. We would receive a summary of background information with the allocation ~~such as the~~ and any comments from the team manager. It would be evident from the allocation if the YP was open to CSC or not, and who else was involved. The police referral forms were not always sent to me, although on occasion I would contact the police to try and get some more information and then would receive the full form.
22. The allocations were given a "rag rating". Nearly every allocation I received was red rag rated, and so this rating itself didn't highlight to me that a YP was of particular or significant concern.
23. A red rag rating would trigger a face-to-face interview with the YP. The majority of the interviews I conducted were face-to-face although I did do some over the phone. Parents were required to consent to a face-to-face interview.
24. Records that were accessible to the MFH Team were held on Liquid Logic. It was not custom and practice for me to look back at all notes for the YP held on the system. As mentioned above, I was dealing with a heavy case load and was under time pressure to close each contact. In some cases, there may be months or years' worth of case notes for a particular YP where they had been known to local authority services for a significant period of time. It was not possible for me to look at all the notes, and I am not aware of anyone else within the team doing this before meeting with a YP either. I expected key information to be included within the allocation and would focus on that.

25. It was also not normal practice to contact any other team / worker within LCC to discuss a YP prior to conducting a RHI. If a YP had a social worker, I might notify them via email of an RHI, but it was more likely I would notify them post interview rather than discussing with them before.
26. RHI's could massively vary in length. Some were completed within 15 minutes and others could take up to an hour or more. I would usually take handwritten notes during an interview rather than take a laptop and type notes during the RHI because I found that this helped me to better build a rapport with the YP and their family and made them feel more relaxed and comfortable.
27. It was not a requirement of the RHI to speak with the YP's parent or carer, although such a discussion could form part of the RHI if either of us had matters to discuss.
28. Once I had finished the RHI I would complete a Form when I got back to my desk, which I would upload onto Liquid Logic to be viewed by management so that a decision could be made as to next steps.
29. At the top of the Form it says, "*to be used in conjunction with the CSE screening tool*". I believe that "CSE" stands for child sexual exploitation, but I don't recall a specific CSE screening tool or ever using one.

### **Factual narrative of involvement**

30. The case notes confirm that the police referral for AR was received on Thursday 17 March 2022 [Exhibit AC/01 – LCC000227].
31. My team manager, Jennifer Lacey, allocated the case to me because AR lived in Banks which is in the Central Lancashire area. Coincidentally, AR lived only a couple of minutes away from my house. I had no prior knowledge of, or contact with, AR.
32. I don't know when exactly the allocation was made to me or what my diary looked like during that time. However, it is likely that I would have already had a full diary planned out for Friday 18 March 2022. I can see from the notes that I did not progress AR's case until Monday 21 March 2022.
33. On Monday 21 March 2022, the case notes state that I made calls to the numbers provided and I have recorded "*not accepting calls*". I sent a text message and left a voicemail asking

for contact to be made. These calls / text messages would have been to AR's parents to arrange the RHI. Parents must agree before a RHI can be carried out.

34. At some stage I must have had contact with somebody because the RHI was booked for 22 March 2022 at 10am. I believe that this was following a discussion with AR's mum, but I am not able to recall any detail regarding a conversation with AR's mum now.
35. Given the weekend and not being able to contact anyone using the numbers provided for some time on 21 March 2022, this was the soonest that the RHI could take place. Had there been a request for an urgent RHI then I can move appointments in my diary to try to book it in sooner, provided the parents agree, and there was no suggestion that would be required in this case.
36. I attended AR's home on 22 March 2022. AR and his mum were both in the house at the time.
37. I can't be certain now about what information I was provided with at the time of allocation, or what I was aware of in advance of the RHI. It was marked with a "red rag rating" but as I have stated above, this did not notify me of anything specific because most cases I received were also red rag rated. It simply meant that I should try to meet with AR face to face.
38. Given it was not the usual practice within the MFH team to go into the system and review all the records relating to a YP, I did not review any case notes held on Liquid Logic for AR. It was also not normal practice to contact any other teams / workers within LCC to discuss a YP prior to a RHI and so I did not speak with anyone else within LCC.
39. I was not aware of AR being excluded from mainstream school in October 2019 for repeatedly taking knives to school; for assaulting another pupil in December 2019; or that he had been referred three times to Prevent prior to the case allocation to me.
40. I did know that AR had previously been open to CSC, but I can't recall now if I had been made aware that he had been closed to LCC's Children & Families Wellbeing Service ("CFWS") on 14 March 2022, three days before he went missing.
41. I also knew that he had been found a bus with a knife. I do not have any recollection of being told he had 'previously tried to make poison'. This is something that would have stood out to me because it is not something I have heard of before.

42. I attended AR's home on 22 March 2022. I remember that AR wouldn't speak, he was very awkward, putting his head down. This was not unusual bearing in mind the circumstances I was meeting the YP in. I think I suggested to AR that we speak alone which he agreed to and so his mum went upstairs.
43. After AR's mum had left the room, I conducted the interview. I asked AR questions, guided by the prompts on the Form, and made notes.
44. Other than meeting AR's mum on arrival, I did not have a discussion with her and did not speak with her alone.
45. As I was leaving, I asked AR to let his mum know that I was going which he did, and I think she shouted goodbye from upstairs, but she didn't come down or ask to speak with me.
46. I would estimate that the total length of the interview was around 15 minutes.
47. I remember specifically asking AR if he had anything on him that could be used as a weapon, and he replied "no" which is recorded on the form. We discussed his reason for going missing and how he felt on his return.

#### **Action taken following the RHI**

48. When I got home, I typed my notes onto the Form [Exhibit AC/06 – LCC000159]. The bold font represents AR's words to me. I can't recall exactly when I completed the Form, I thought it was on the same day, but I note the case notes confirming that I completed, uploaded and shared the Form are dated 28 March 2022.
49. There is a section on the Form inviting "*Analysis and recommendations from Missing Person Return Interview*". I am sure that this text was not entered by me. I do not know where this information has come from, or who has entered it onto the Form, but I did not know of the position with AR's education. I do not know who would have edited / added to the Form after I had completed it.
50. I can't now recall what I did put in this box, but I do not believe I suggested further action to be taken.
51. After I had completed the Form, I sent a copy to the police and also to "*health*" by which I mean AR's GP. I was not expecting either to take action in relation to it and the form was

sent purely for information, in line with our procedure. I did not send the Form to anyone else but uploaded it onto the system.

52. I am aware now that the case remained closed to CSC, but this was not my decision. I simply completed the Form and sent it to my team manager.

53. To assist in preparing my statement I have seen the contact record at [Exhibit AC/05 – LCC000157]. This indicates that others were taking action regarding AR at the same time that I was. I was not aware of this at the time.

54. The notes refer to the case being allocated to “GA”, an “EHW”, which is an Early Help Worker, on 21 March 2022. I don’t know who “GA” is. There are also comments in the “*Manager’s Section*” from a “KL” confirming the case closure on 22 March 2022. Again, I don’t know who “KL” is.

### **Reflections**

55. On reviewing the Form completed following my RHI with AR I am surprised by the lack of detail and can say that it is not to my usual standard. The Form is not good enough.

56. I have not interrogated AR enough or challenged him when he has said things I knew not to be true. I knew from the allocation information that AR was carrying a weapon, and my usual practice would be to discuss that in more detail with the YP.

57. The RHI was carried out in circumstances where I thought I was dealing with a YP who was reported as missing for a couple of hours, found and returned home, where he said he felt fine. Unfortunately, a YP carrying a knife was not an unusual occurrence in the MFH team. Therefore, these particular circumstances alone did not cause me concern. As AR was quite short with his answers, it led to a short RHI. All of that said, I should have questioned AR more thoroughly.

58. If I had been provided with the background information which I am now aware of then that would have certainly caused me to try and push for more information and / or caused me to discuss AR with my team manager. I should have had this information, but at the same time, I am not entirely sure who would be responsible for providing this. Unfortunately, I don’t think my professional curiosity was sufficient, even on the information I had.

59. I do accept that the RHI was poor, but I must say that if I had any concerns at all at the time, if I thought that AR was in any way capable of harming somebody, then I would definitely have flagged that concern on the Form and raised it with my team manager.

**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:

Printed: AMANDA CHAPMAN

Dated:

**Appendix 1: Index to the Witness Statement of Amanda Chapman**

<b>Exhibit No.</b>	<b>Inquiry reference no.</b>	<b>Document Description</b>
AC/01	LCC000227	Case Notes
AC/02	LCC000155	Episode Closure_2022-03-17-192223
AC/03	LCC000156	Police incident report - 18-03-2022_2022-03-18-112444
AC/04	LCC000344	2022-03-21 1543_ Contact Record by Susan Smith - CSSH MASH EHM (4008367).
AC/05	LCC000157	Contact Record_2022-03-22-121609
AC/06	LCC000159	4016658 - Successful RHI - 2311792