

Witness Name: Sakthi Karunanithi

Exhibits: 9

Dated: 11 August 2025

## **THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY**

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### **FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF SAKTHI KARUNANITHI, DIRECTOR FOR PUBLIC HEALTH LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

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I, Sakthi Karunanithi, c/o Lancashire County Council will say as follows:

#### **Introductory matters**

1. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request of 5 August 2025. I am providing this statement in my capacity as the Director for Public Health employed by Lancashire County Council ("LCC") to explain LCC's policies and procedures around Prevent and Channel.
2. I am the Director of Public Health, Wellbeing and Communities at LCC.
3. I am a General Medical Council fully registered medical practitioner with specialist registration with a license to practice. I am a Fellow of the Faculty of Public Health. I am the director corporately responsible for Prevent since October 2024.
4. I did not have any personal involvement with AR or his family. My understanding is that AR was referred to Prevent by Acorns school on three occasions: December 2019, February 2021 and April 2021. Each of these referrals was sent directly to the police. As I will explain below, this is the usual practice for Prevent Referrals. LCC were not involved in the assessment of the referrals, and none of them progressed to the Pan-Lancashire Channel Panel. As such, LCC has no direct evidence to provide in that regard. This statement is provided to assist the Inquiry with understanding the relevant background to Prevent, Channel and the Dovetail Pilot, and to offer learning and potential recommendations.

## **Statutory Framework and National Guidance**

5. In accordance with Section 36 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act (“CTSA”) 2015 (as amended by Section 20 of the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019), each local authority must ensure that a panel of persons is in place for its area with the function of assessing the extent to which identified individuals are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. In England and Wales this duty is met through “Channel panels”. Channel is a multi-agency approach to protect vulnerable children and adults from being drawn into terrorism and extremism and locally operates on a Pan-Lancashire footprint. An “identified individual” is anyone referred to the panel by the police or a local authority for assessment. By Section 35 of the CTSA 2015 “terrorism” is given the same meaning as the definition contained in Section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2000.
6. The functions of the panel are:
  - (a) to prepare a plan in respect of identified individuals who the panel considers should be offered support for the purpose of reducing their vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism;
  - (b) if the necessary consent is given, to make arrangements for support to be provided to those individuals in accordance with their support plan;
  - (c) to keep under review the giving of support to an identified individual under a support plan;
  - (d) to revise a support plan, or withdraw support under a plan, if at any time the panel considers it appropriate;
  - (e) to carry out further assessments, after such periods as the panel considers appropriate, of an individual's vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism in cases where—
    - (i) the necessary consent is refused or withdrawn to the giving of support under a support plan, or
    - (ii) the panel has determined that support under a plan should be withdrawn;

- (f) to prepare a further support plan in such cases if the panel considers it appropriate
7. If the panel ultimately determines that support should not be given to an individual under a support plan, the panel must consider whether the individual ought to be referred to any other agencies, such as the provider of any health or social care services and make necessary arrangements for the referral (Section 36(6)).
8. I attach the following Home Office Guidance which is currently in force:
- “Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales” [Exhibit SK1/[LCC001929]]
  - “Channel duty guidance: protecting people susceptible to radicalisation” [Exhibit SK2/[LCC001930]]

#### **Pathway for Prevent and Channel Referrals**

9. A recent review of Prevent undertaken by Lord Anderson KC sets out in full the current pathway of Prevent and Channel referrals at paragraphs 1.11 – 1.16 [Exhibit SK3/[CTPNW000114]]. Briefly, Prevent referrals are made to the police. Prevent referrals can be made by anyone. There is no mechanism that routinely informs a local authority about Prevent referrals. Prevent referrals usually only come to the attention of the local authority if the person making the referral makes the local authority aware, or the reviewing Counter Terrorism Policing (“CTP”) officer contacts the local authority. CTP triage the referral and ultimately determine the next steps. As part of that process, CTP consider whether the case meets the criteria for a referral to Channel panel under Section 36. Local authorities do not have any involvement in this part of the process. If CTP ultimately decide that the case does not meet the criteria, then the case is closed to Prevent and is not referred to panel. Local authorities do not receive notice or feedback regarding referrals which are considered but do not ultimately proceed to Channel Panel. As I will go on to explain, Prevent referrals operated slightly differently under the Dovetail Pilot. However, it remained the case that the Counter Terrorism Case Officer (CTCO) remained responsible for a Prevent referral until the conclusion of their initial assessment. Therefore, the local authority would not be aware of the referral unless contacted by the person making the referral or CTP.

10. Prevent referrals are asked to copy the LCC Counter Terrorism Manager into the referral. The date, directorate, service and the team from which the referral was made are logged. No personal information is retained for GDPR reasons. This information is presented quarterly at the internal LCC Prevent Ambassadors Group.
11. Between 2018 and 2024 the Pan-Lancashire the Lancashire Channel programme was part of a Home Office pilot, "Dovetail". This was a pilot scheme implemented by the Home Office which transferred the case management of Channel to the local authorities. The overall aim of this scheme was to de-securitise the Prevent process and encompass Prevent within local authorities' wider safeguarding responsibilities. The teams were made up of staff from diverse backgrounds and a variety of sectors including education, probation, youth justice services and social care with a range of experience in safeguarding. They were responsible for preparing cases, co-ordinating multi-agency holistic and ideological interventions and maintaining risk assessments.
12. A Pan-Lancashire Channel panel covering the Lancashire, Blackburn and Blackpool local authority footprints had already been well established. This panel had been in place since around 2009. At that time, the panel was administered by the Lancashire Police Special branch / Counter Terrorism Unit. From around 2012, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council was a Prevent Priority area with the local authority receiving funding from the Home Office for a Prevent Co-ordinator to support delivery of Prevent. Around 2018 – 2019, the priority area was expanded to include Lancashire and Blackpool but with the proviso Blackburn with Darwen would continue to lead on Prevent for the Pan-Lancashire area. Funding was allocated by the Home Office to establish a Pan-Lancashire Prevent Team to work across the footprint of the three authorities. In 2016 the Pan-Lancashire Channel Panel responded to a request from the Home Office to pilot transferring Channel responsibilities to local authorities. It was agreed that Dovetail would be piloted in the Pan-Lancashire area, co-ordinated by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to enable the pilot to be overseen by the Prevent Coordinator and Channel Panel chair who was at the time a Head of Service employed by them.
13. It was agreed the Dovetail Channel team would be managed by the Prevent Coordinator due to their nuanced understanding and experience of Prevent and Channel. Each Local Authority had a Chair / Vice Chair who was a senior member of staff who was responsible for the oversight of the cases on their local authority footprint. LCC's role in this panel was as a key partner, providing a Chair / Vice Chair

to the panel and staff from key departments to support panel meetings. The recruitment of staff within the Dovetail Channel team was undertaken across the partnership. Staff were employed by Blackburn with Darwen Council or seconded from Lancashire Constabulary.

14. During the Dovetail pilot, the initial Prevent referral would still only be received by Counter Terrorism Policing ("CTP") who would decide whether to progress the case to Channel. The Police CTCO remained responsible for a Prevent referral until the conclusion of the Gateway Assessment. If CTP considered that a case might be appropriate for Channel, it would be referred to the Dovetail Channel team to conduct initial information gathering across the multi-agency partnership including social care, education, criminal justice, health agencies who may be involved with the individual and their family.
15. When Dovetail moved to a Northwest model, the Home Office provided funding to recruit Channel Supervisors who line managed the Channel Coordinators and determined if the case should proceed to Channel under Section 36. Prior to this, the Prevent Coordinator as the line manager for the Channel Coordinators used to make the Section 36 decision. A Channel Supervisor would consider the information collated and decide whether the case should proceed to Channel (Section 36 decision). The Channel Supervisor would consult with the CTP Prevent Sergeant (CTCO Supervisor) when making the decision. It was agreed, that if there was a difference of opinion on whether a case should go into Channel, the Dovetail Channel team would send the referral into the Channel Panel. The local authority representative / Channel Vice Chair were informed of any referrals relating to individuals within their area which exited at the Section 36 stage to enable them to consider if other forms of safeguarding support were required. The Dovetail Channel Team had responsibility for assessing the level of risk, commissioning support for referred individuals, reviewing progress and risk over time, and administering the panel.
16. From a local authority perspective, benefits of the Dovetail Pilot included placing Channel into multi-agency safeguarding, quality assurance of the process and outcomes for referrals, improved staff awareness of Prevent referrals and issues, and a multi-agency approach to interventions.
17. A Home Office evaluation in 2022 identified the regional approach as being the best performing model but due to concerns about costs, a decision was made to end the

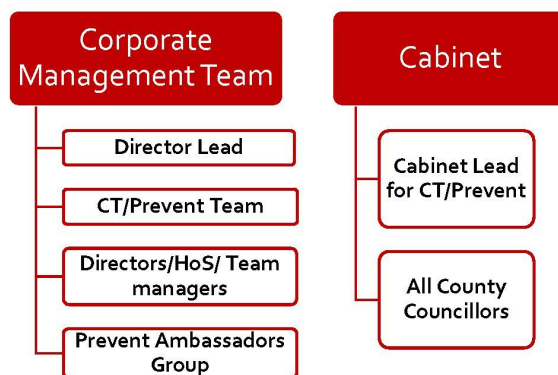
Dovetail pilot and move the case management back to Counter Terrorism Police Northwest, as of January 2024. From this date, police powers and functions which had been delegated to local authorities reverted back to Counter Terrorism Policing. This includes the information gathering stage and all Section 36 decisions. Since the conclusion of the Dovetail pilot, local authorities retain responsibility for chairing and administering panels. They will ensure there is appropriate representation from partners, support risk assessments and identify suitable interventions.

18. As set out above, the current statutory position is that both the police and local authorities can refer someone into a Channel panel under Section 36. However, in practice this responsibility passed back to the police following the conclusion of the Dovetail pilot. This is clarified by the Channel duty guidance which reads as follows: *"The Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019 extended provision for local authorities designated by the Home Office to make the section 36 decision. Within those designated local authorities, this decision is typically made by the supervisor of the Channel case officer. Steps are underway to end the local authority pilots and revert the case management function in these pilot locations to police, who will undertake all section 36 decisions following this transition"* [Exhibit SK2/ LCC001930 page 29, footnote 25]. This was also reflected within Lord Anderson KC's review.
19. LCC continues to be a partner of the monthly Pan-Lancashire Channel panel and provide a Chair. LCC do not hold any case specific Channel information on the system such as the initial referral, any information gathered as part of the assessment, or decision-making records. The only information available to LCC would be any departmental records for individuals known to them who have also been on Channel. Channel Case management information during the Dovetail pilot was stored by the Dovetail team within Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, recorded on the CMIS (Channel case management system) and retained by police. Today, this type of information is held solely by CTPNW.
20. Channel Panel meetings are attended by a wide range of multi-agency partners, including any considered to be specifically relevant to the referral(s) being discussed. The panel discuss and assess any referrals using the Prevent Assessment Framework (PAF) previously known as the Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF). This assessment is used to identify whether individuals need support to safeguard them from the risk of being drawn into terrorism. I attach the framework published by the Home Office in 2012 which was in force at the relevant time as Exhibit SK4/ LCC001931

21. It is worth noting that the Channel process is entirely voluntary for referred individuals; there is no legal duty for them to comply. Consent from the individual or in the case of a child, their parent or guardian must be sought prior to the implementation of a support plan.
22. LCC have no oversight or awareness of Prevent referrals which have not progressed to Channel following police assessment. This was the position in 2019 and remains the case now.

### Current LCC Structure and Governance

23. I attach the LCC Prevent Strategy and Action Plan for 2024-2026 as Exhibit SK5/ LCC001932. This document outlines LCC's procedures for promoting awareness of Prevent within the organisation. This has been approved by the Corporate Management Team and endorsed by the Cabinet lead for Communities to ensure we deliver against the requirements of the duty, which includes delivering training and making staff aware of how to make a Prevent referral.
24. The internal Prevent Duty Self-Assessment monitors and provides evidence that the whole organisation is compliant with the Prevent Duty requirements. This is an annual process submitted to the Home Office for assessment. The Self-Assessment is reviewed annually by the Corporate Management Team and monitored every six months by me.
25. Figure 1 demonstrates the robust internal governance structures in place to ensure the Prevent Duty is integrated across the organisation in relation to both Members and Staff:



## Training

26. I attach a copy of the current Prevent Training Plan for LCC as Exhibit SK6/ LCC001933. The Corporate Counter-Terrorism Manager and Corporate Counter-Terrorism Officer are corporately responsible for raising awareness of the Prevent Duty within the organisation through ensuring that all staff receive the appropriate training to support them to be competent in fulfilling their roles. I also attach the previous Prevent Strategy which sets out the approach to training at the relevant time as Exhibit SK7/ LCC001934.
27. Due to the size of the organisation, the Corporate Counter Terrorism Team have established a robust system that ensures all staff receive the appropriate training/awareness raising. This includes the co-ordination of the Prevent Ambassadors group. This is an internal group of Prevent leads from key services such as Children's Safeguarding, Early Help, CYJS and Adult's Safeguarding. The group aims to drive the Prevent agenda throughout the organisation by ensuring a coordinated approach and efficient communication. It meets to ensure Prevent is embedded across the organisation, discusses any national updates and local emerging issues, any internal data and training requirements.
28. The Counter Terrorism Team have also trained a cohort of Prevent Champions from a number of key services including Children's Safeguarding, Adult's Safeguarding, CYJS and Early Help. The Counter Terrorism Team trains the Prevent Awareness Raising Group (PARG) before they begin delivering Prevent awareness sessions to colleagues within their service. This group sits in the background and is available to support with Prevent delivery when required but most of the training is delivered by members of the Counter Terrorism Team.
29. All LCC employees are required to undertake some form of learning activity linked to the Prevent Duty so that they understand what concerns to look for and how to report their concerns. The standard learning methodology used is the national Prevent e-learning package. I attach a copy of the standard Prevent Awareness Package delivered to staff as Exhibit SK8/ LCC001935.
30. All staff are required to undertake Prevent Awareness every two years. This can be achieved in a number of ways, depending on the requirements of each service and reasonable adjustments can be made where appropriate:

- Prevent Duty e-learning.
- Classroom or Virtual sessions.
- One-to-one training.
- Updates in Team Meetings.
- Briefing Notes.
- Information alerts on TV screens within Depots and Buildings.

31. The Prevent Duty e-learning is a resource provided by the Home Office and has been integrated into LCC's organisation learning platform which is available to all computer-based staff. All staff that have access should complete the e-learning and completion of this is monitored by the Counter Terrorism Officer. A spreadsheet provided by Skills, Learning and Development details who has completed and also who has started but yet to finish the e-learning. Staff showing as incomplete are sent a reminder email. It is vital that the data is accurate as it is inspected by OFSTED, the Home Office and Corporate Management Team. The Counter Terrorism Prevent Officer analyses and filters the spreadsheet and this data is shared with the Prevent Ambassadors Group. Prevent Duty e-learning is included in the organisations induction programme and is a mandatory requirement for all front line and Adult's and Children's Safeguarding Services employees.

32. The Counter Terrorism Officer will also produce articles to be published on the Intranet and Staff Notices to promote the Prevent Duty training and e-learning. This will be done when deemed necessary in response to the ongoing Terrorist threat to both Lancashire and the United Kingdom. The Counter Terrorism Team distribute a quarterly newsletter to all Heads of Service that they can disseminate within their service, if they feel it is appropriate. The newsletter will provide all current Prevent information and advice, such as how to make a referral and emerging or existing extremist groups/trends.

33. The Corporate Counter Terrorism Team and the Prevent Champions provide classroom and Virtual Prevent Awareness sessions. The sessions can be tailored to meet the specific needs of a service and there are various tools available which have been created by the Corporate Counter Terrorism Team. The current resources provided by the Counter Terrorism Team are:

- Two hour Prevent Awareness session
- One hour Prevent Awareness session
- Prevent Quarterly Newsletter.
- Elected Member Briefings (provided by the Corporate Counter Terrorism Manager).

34. The resources are available for anyone within the organisation to access via the Counter Terrorism Team or Prevent Champions where appropriate. The Counter Terrorism Officer will be responsible for creating and promoting all of the resources available within the organisation.

35. Guidance on when to make a Prevent referral is also available on the staff intranet page. I attach screenshots of this guidance as Exhibit SK9/ LCC001936.

## **Data**

36. LCC has access to limited data regarding Prevent referrals in the pan-Lancashire area for the last four years. This is provided by Counter Terrorism Policing North-West ("CTPNW") under a common platform and is accessible to a select number of senior officers within relevant partnership agencies. We are provided with a high level breakdown of current Prevent cases within each district area on a monthly basis. We also receive an annual breakdown of Prevent cases for the previous financial year. Prevent data is also discussed verbally at governance boards.

37. The data provided is high level but includes, for example, the number of Prevent referrals made each year, how many of those referrals related to individuals under the age of 18, the main originators for referrals and the ideology referred to in those referrals. The data does not identify the referrer or the referee, nor does it provide more granular detail about the demographic, age or ideology for the referrals; it is just a total figure of each category.

38. Under the Dovetail pilot, there was a greater ability for local authorities to analyse themes of Channel cases including demographics, Adverse Child Experience ("ACE") factors and mental health issues. Each District Council Prevent lead also received an anonymized overview of the referrals to Channel from their areas to enable a targeted approach in any hot spot areas or with specific groups.

39. The percentage of Prevent referrals which proceed to Channel is not provided within the data but by way of example, LCC is aware from the data that 258 Prevent referrals were made in the pan-Lancashire area in the year 2024-2025. In the same year, it appears 25 children and adults were discussed at the Pan-Lancashire Channel panel.

## **AR**

40. The Pan-Lancashire Channel panel had no involvement in the case of AR. This was because none of the Prevent referrals made regarding AR were referred to the panel. Between 2019 and 2021 when these referrals were made, the Dovetail pilot was still in place and ultimate responsibility for any information gathering would have rested with the local authority led Dovetail Channel Team. As I have explained above, LCC was a partner agency to Channel and would have attended Channel meetings.

41. I have been asked whether LCC had any concerns that cases which were or appeared to be appropriate for Channel/Dovetail were not being referred, either because an initial referral to Prevent was closed prematurely or because cases were being retained for Police-Led Partnership working. For the avoidance of doubt, LCC and/or the Channel panel would have no awareness of any Prevent referrals which were made to police but were not ultimately referred on to Channel. This was the position at the time and remains the position today.

42. I have also been asked whether LCC considered that the Prevent referrals being received from CTP at that time were generally appropriate. As I have explained, LCC was not involved in the triage of any cases and would only have been aware of cases which progressed to Channel. This remains the case now.

## **Improvements**

43. In March 2025 the Home Office carried out their annual Prevent Duty benchmarking process. This is usually done on a Pan-Lancashire footprint but this year LCC was assessed separately. We received an official response from the Home Office on 19 May 2025 which stated LCC had either met or exceeded in all areas within the annual benchmarking assessment. Notwithstanding that outcome, LCC identified some areas internally where we could strengthen our Prevent delivery. These

changes have been implemented into the Prevent Action Plan for 2025-2026 [Exhibit SK5/ LCC001932].

44. Whilst LCC currently meet and/or exceed national requirements the Home Office has made three recommendations. These recommendations were: (1) to develop a specific LCC Prevent Risk Assessment, (2) to work with licensing teams within districts and (3) to work with the Home Office Funded Pa-Lancashire Prevent Team to develop a communications and engagement plan. These recommendations will be considered by the Compliance & Assurance Board and have been included in the Action Plan. The Action Plan 2025/26 aims to further improve our internal response to Prevent, under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, address the considerations raised in the assessment and strengthen our representation and processes. These actions will also be discussed at the next Lancashire Prevent Partnership Board meeting at the end of September.
45. Work is underway on the action plan including two key areas: Channel Panel and the referral pathway. We have held consultations with Adults, Education and Childrens Services and Growth Environment Transport and Health DLT's (Directorate Leadership Team's) and agreed that we will continue to operate the Channel panel on a Pan-Lancashire footprint, recognising the benefit of working with colleagues across the county footprint. Adults and Education Childrens Service (ECS) DLT's have also agreed to review their representation at Channel Panel.
46. We have also reviewed the referral pathway in Lancashire. I met with the CTPNW Head of Prevent and was informed that a new standard national approach to referrals where online referrals are simultaneously sent to the Police and MASH, is in development. In the meantime, LCC have sought to implement an interim solution to ensure LCC have sight of all referrals. To achieve this CTPNW have agreed to share referrals with MASH when they receive them, which should allow us to address any immediate safeguarding concerns. LCC are continuing to engage with the police and internally to continue to find ways to strengthen the referral pathway.
47. LCC is engaged in ongoing discussions regarding the possibility of implementing an official dual referral pathway. This would require the agreement and co-operation of police colleagues and would require further recruitment of staff. The dual pathway would serve as an interim measure to bolster the visibility of referrals before the Home Office introduce their IT solution.

## **Reflections and Recommendations**

48. LCC recently participated in a review of Prevent undertaken by Lord Anderson KC. In doing so LCC carefully reflected on its current role in Prevent and Channel and offers the following by way of reflections.
49. As I have set out above, AR's Prevent referrals were not referred to Channel panel. I am unable to comment on the reasons why as this is a matter for the police. Had the referrals been progressed to Channel at the information gathering stage then this function would have been carried out by the Pan-Lancashire Dovetail Channel Team as part of the pilot. The consideration of the referral would have had the benefit of a multi-agency approach, engaging with various LCC departments and multi-agency partners who had been involved with AR and his family to undertake a vulnerability assessment that detailed AR's vulnerability and risk factors. Had the referrals been sent to the Dovetail Channel team, it is my expectation, they would have passed the Section 36 consideration and progressed through to the Channel panel.
50. This case also highlights issues with the limited amount of information provided to local authorities regarding Prevent referrals which do not progress to Channel. Local authorities receive no feedback and have no oversight of individual referrals which do not progress to Channel. This was also the case at the time under consideration by the Inquiry. I understand this issue is not unique to CTPNW and is a national matter given the level of sensitivity attributable to Prevent referrals. However, this approach creates a risk that local authorities do not have awareness or oversight of cases which fall within their local area. This deprives the local authority and partners of implementing a whole family approach to manage the risk and support the referred individual through multi-agency discussions, risk management and identification of wraparound support to mitigate against and address vulnerability and risk factors.

### **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.

**Signature**

Signed:

Dated: 11/09/2025

**Index to the Witness Statement of Sakthi Karunanithi**

| <b>Exhibit Number</b> | <b>Inquiry reference</b> | <b>Document Description</b>                                                        |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SK1</b>            | <b>LCC001929</b>         | Home Office Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales                            |
| <b>SK2</b>            | <b>LCC001930</b>         | Home Office Channel duty guidance: protecting people susceptible to radicalisation |
| <b>SK3</b>            | <b>CTPNW00114</b>        | "Lessons for Prevent" Lord Anderson KC                                             |
| <b>SK4</b>            | <b>LCC001931</b>         | Home Office Vulnerability Assessment Framework                                     |
| <b>SK5</b>            | <b>LCC001932</b>         | LCC Prevent Strategy and Action Plan for 2024-2026                                 |
| <b>SK6</b>            | <b>LCC001933</b>         | Prevent Training Plan 2025                                                         |
| <b>SK7</b>            | <b>LCC001934</b>         | LCC Prevent Strategy and Action Plan for 2019-2021                                 |
| <b>SK8</b>            | <b>LCC001935</b>         | Prevent Awareness Training Package                                                 |
| <b>SK9</b>            | <b>LCC001936</b>         | Staff intranet guidance on Prevent referrals                                       |