

Southport Inquiry

Witness Name: Andrew Alan Hughes

Exhibits: AAH/1 – AAH/9

Dated:

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF ANDREW ALAN HUGHES

I, Andrew Alan Hughes, will say as follows:

Introductory Matters

1. I am Andrew Alan Hughes, known as Andy.
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 8 July 2025.
3. I am a Temporary Chief Inspector in Merseyside Police. I hold of the office of Constable and I am under the direction and control of the Chief Constable of Merseyside Police. I am currently deployed as a Force Incident Manager (FIM), a role that I have undertaken since March 2023.
4. Following a review of the FIM role in October 2023, the roles of FIM and FDO (Force Duty Officer) were merged and the role became a Chief Inspector's role. Following on from the learning in the Kerslake Report (into the Manchester Arena bombing) there are always two FIMs on duty at any one time in the force: FIM 1 and FIM 2.
5. The roles of the FIM is described by on the force intranet "I force" as follows:

"The Force Incident Manager (FIM) is a vital role within the force and is undertaken by an officer of the rank of not less than Chief Inspector who provides supervisory

oversight for ongoing incidents, risk and threat. The role is a 24/7 function that requires the FIM to be immediately available to respond to all incidents as they are reported into the control room. Every Force Incident Manager is trained as an Initial Tactical Firearms Commander (ITFC) and manages the initial response to firearms incidents until such time as a Tactical Firearms Commander is in a position to take command. The FIM act as Gate keepers for pre – planned decisions for referring incidents to a duty Tactical Firearms Commander.

The FIM is a trained Pursuit Commander and assumes the role of Silver Commander for the initial response to serious or significant incidents until additional and ground command structures can be put in place. FIMs receive specific training for the initial management of CBRN and Terrorism incidents as well as more general training surrounding the command of a wide variety of incidents aligned to the Force's emergency plans. The role is critical for the effective management of serious or significant incidents as well as the running of daily business across the Force.

Other responsibilities include:

- a. To consider any requests and authorise the deployment of the National Police Air Service (NPAS).
 - b. Manage a Force mobilisation of Public Order resources or specialist officers.
 - c. Manage Critical Incidents within the Force and chair initial Coordination meetings ensuring a coordinated response.
 - d. Deal with Gold command level escalations in Mental Health incidents with partners regarding persons in custody.
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- e. Management of strand and Force resources.
 - f. Review Occupational Disclosure Risk Assessment (ODRA) applications for common law police disclosure.

- g. Manage the initial response to major incidents, setting up Tactical Co Ordinating Group (TCG) meetings and briefing the Silver Commander.
 - h. Out of hours media enquiries – out of office hours we manage enquiries from the press.
 - i. Hold the details of the senior officers' rota and call out details for specialist functions such as accident investigators, negotiators, etc.
 - j. Senior officers who act a single point of contact for other forces and agencies.”
6. I was attested as a Police Constable in 2002. Prior to becoming a FIM in March 2023 I was a Police Sergeant serving as an Authorised Firearms Officer deployed in the Armed Response Vehicles. I was also a firearms tactical advisor (TacAd). In these roles, as well as the significant training required to qualify and maintain my competency as a firearms officer, I undertook an initial Tactical Firearms Commander course.
7. Since the incident on 29 July 2024 I have remained in the role of FIM.

Policy

8. Policing is a structured and disciplined service, and whilst each Force has its own nuances, where possible there are national standards that Forces adhere to. Where the College of Policing has issued national guidance in the form of Authorised Professional Practice (APP) the Force will follow it subject to identified derogations, although the APPs are often summarised in and or supplemented by local Force policies.
9. The College of Policing has issued guidance entitled National Call Handling that is now produced to me and marked AAH/1 **MERP007531**
10. In Merseyside Police the relevant local policy for calls handling is the Calls and Response Policy (AAH/2 **MERP007530**). The local policy references in particular the College of Policing's National Call Handling guidance and the College of Policing's National Decision Making model AAH/3 **MERP007534**

11. The Calls and Response Policy notes that in Merseyside all incidents fall within the following categories of response:
 - a. Emergency response – Attendance within 10 minutes.
 - b. Non – emergency – Priority response – Attendance within 1 hour.
 - c. Non – emergency – Scheduled response.
 - d. Incident log transferred or actioned at time of call.
 - i. The caller must be made fully aware of the circumstances and what action will take place next.
 - ii. Used where an agreed appointment is made for an officer to meet with the caller at an agreed location.
 - iii. Contact will be made with the caller at the earliest possible opportunity and in any case must occur within 48 hours of receiving the original call. The appointment time must be set at the convenience of the caller.
 - e. Non-emergency – Resolution without deployment
 - i. To be used in circumstances where the incident is deemed appropriate for a response over the telephone.
 - ii. To be finalised as early as possible in the contact chain.

 - iii. To be used also when the matter is an enquiry only but a record of the call is required by the caller.
 - f. Circulation – (CIRC)

- i. Used to pass incidents to Dispatch that do not necessarily require a deployment of a patrol, but would require a message or circulation over the radio. If a deployment is later required, then the grade should be changed to reflect the THRV (Threat, Harm, Risk, Vulnerability) at the time. There is no service level agreement time associated with this grade.
 - g. Police Generated – (POLGEN)
 - i. Used for all internal police generated incidents that does not involve the deployment of a resource to a public generated or call for service incident. There is no service level agreement time associated with this grade.
- 12. On 29 July 2024 the call handler who received the first call in respect of the incident at the Hart Space (as to which, see further below) determined that it required an **emergency response**. The policy (AAH/2 **MERP007530**) defines an emergency response and when matters need to be referred to the FIM. I have set these parts of the out below, in so far as they are relevant here, for ease of reference:

“3.16 Emergency Response

- 3.16 .1 This is where an incident is reported, by whatever route, into the Force and is taking place at that time and in which there is, or is likely to be, a risk of:
 - a) Danger to life.
 - b) Use of; or immediate threat of use, of violence.
 - c) Serious injury to a person; and/or,
 - d) Serious damage to property.
- 3.16.2 When the contact relates to an allegation of criminal conduct it should be dealt with as an emergency if:
 - a) The crime is or is likely to be serious, and in progress.

b) An offender has just been seen/disturbed at the scene.

c) An offender has been detained and poses, or is likely to pose, a risk to other people.

3.17 Incidents referred to the Force Incident Manager (FIM)

3.17.1 There are various incidents such as firearms related, which, by definition, should be assessed as an Emergency response. Certain incidents (e.g. one in which the caller has indicated that a firearm is involved, **or a bladed weapon**) are referred to the Force Incident Manager for consideration regarding the nature of the police response. Whilst such incidents require an emergency response, it may not be possible to achieve an emergency response time. This must be communicated to the caller so that they understand that we are working out how to get Police Officers to them in a way that ensures both the safety of the public and attending Officers.

3.17.2 The FIM will direct the policing response to such incidents, as appropriate, and will endorse the log with their assessment of the circumstances, decisions and instructions.

3.17.3 Where practicable in such circumstances, the caller should be notified of the estimated response time, and the reason for any delay, with the log endorsed accordingly."

13. Before I describe how Merseyside Police works with others or alone to respond to civil emergency situations, it is perhaps appropriate for me to set out the definition of a major incident and a critical incident:

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- a. A critical incident is defined in the College of Policing's APP Civil Emergencies (AAH/04 **MERP007529**) as "any incident where the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family and/or the community."

- b. A major incident is defined as: "An event or situation with a range of serious consequences which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agency."
14. The incident in Southport on 29 July 2024 fits the criteria for a both a **critical and a major incident** (I discuss the declarations of these incidents below).
15. In addition to the College of Policing APP for Civil Emergencies which is produced to me and marked **AAH/4** **MERP007529** the relevant local policy is the Force's Major Incident Policy, which is produced to me and marked **AAH/5** **MERP007528** (I have included the 2023 version and the updated 2025 version).
16. The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) is a recognised framework for multi-agency working that promotes interoperability. JESIP publishes guidance which is applied by the emergency services, at the core of which is the 'JESIP principles'. The JESIP principles are as follows: -
- a. To Co-locate: this requires multi agencies to co locate with other responders as soon as practically possible at a single, safe and easily identifiable location.
- b. To Communicate: this requires communication, using language which is clear and from technical jargon and abbreviations.
- c. To Co-ordinate, this is done by an agreeing the lead organisation, identifying priorities, resources, capabilities and limitations for an effective response including the timing of further meetings
- d. To Jointly understand risk, by sharing information about the likelihood and potential impact of threats and hazards and agreeing appropriate control measures
- e. To have shared situational awareness using the M/ETHANE and Joint decision model. **AAH/6** **MERP007533**

17. M/Ethane is a mnemonic used as the structure for a message given to all emergency services when one emergency service declares a major incident that requires a multi-agency response. It stands for:
 - i. Major incident declared
 - ii. Exact location
 - iii. Type of incident
 - iv. Hazards
 - v. Access
 - vi. Number and severity of casualties
 - vii. Emergency services present and required
18. When one emergency service declares is responding to an incident that requires a multi-agency response but has not yet declared a major incident, it may give an ETHANE message (i.e. the M/ETHANE message less the 'M' for major incident declared).
19. As a Force, we have contact details for the key contacts in our partner agencies, so that we can make contact with them and communicate with them as required. We also have a dedicated radio channel (the ESIC channel) on which we can communicate with the Ambulance Service, the Fire Service and the Coast Guard.

20. The civil contingencies section of the APP on Civil Emergencies (AAH/7 MERP007532) makes it clear that "In the event of an emergency or major incident, it is necessary to establish a dedicated command structure."
21. The civil contingencies command and control structure is based on strategic, tactical and operational commands. The principles of command and control are scalable and can be applied across different levels from national to local and in a multi-agency setting.

22. Response and recovery arrangements should follow a common set of underlying principles, but should also be flexible and able to be tailored to reflect individual circumstances. This common framework contributes to a cohesive multi-agency response and good shared situational awareness. The principles apply across tiers at all levels.

23. The civil contingencies section of the APP on Civil Emergencies addresses rendezvous points (RVP) and states as follows:

"The RVP is a location to which all police and emergency services personnel attending an incident should be directed. This ensures that the scene of the incident does not become inundated with resources, and that personnel can be deployed in an orderly fashion. A designated RVP should be a location suitable for marshalling, briefing and deploying resources. An RVP manager should be appointed to coordinate the RVP and these resources.

The type and number of emergency resources that are to be deployed and used during an incident depends on the nature of the event. It is likely to include a range of emergency resources, responders and other agencies. It is, therefore, important that partners are involved in identifying potential locations. This ensures that resources from the police and other agencies are not competing for limited space. It may be appropriate for the fire and rescue service and ambulance service to have different RVPs.

Where there is one RVP, the police are responsible for the logging and deployment of other specialist and voluntary services attending (with the exception of the fire and rescue service and the ambulance service). All personnel attending the scene should be directed to the RVP.

The location of an RVP should be secure and safe for emergency services personnel to use and it should be searched prior to use. If an RVP is being established in response to a suspected terrorist incident, it is preferable that it is not in an obvious, predetermined location.

When identifying an area and establishing an RVP, it is important to consider:

- safety and security of vehicles left there
- space needed to accommodate all responding organisations
- suitable hardstanding for vehicles
- adequate lighting
- access for large vehicles
- how easy the location is to find
- accommodation available for the personnel deployed there
- safety and security of vehicles left there
- location in relation to the marshalling area on the outer cordon"

24. I am aware that, following on from learning taken from the Manchester Arena Inquiry a former FIM, Chief Inspector Robinson, did a lot of training with officers and first line leaders in the Force about the need for unarmed officers to deploy to incidents, when so authorised by FIMs, and not to just make to a rendezvous point. As such, whilst rendezvous points are mentioned below and are necessary for inter-agency interoperability and for co-ordination of both the police and multi-agency response, the fact that a rendezvous point has been established does not necessarily mean that all resources will make to the rendezvous point whilst awaiting confirmation from Armed Response Vehicles that a location is safe for unarmed officers and other personnel to enter.

My role on 29 July 2024

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25. On 29 July 2024 I was on day duty, 07.00 - 19.00. However, as is the practice of the FIMs, I paraded for duty at 06.00 and took time to take a handover and prepare for the meetings that FIMs attend shortly after shift hand over at 07.00.
26. The FIMs are stationed at the Joint Command Centre in Bridle Road, Bootle. They are co-located within one of the Force's control rooms. The FIMs have an office that is separate from the control room.

27. On that day I was working with Chief Inspector ("CI") Arrowsmith. I was deployed as FIM1 and he was FIM2. The FIMs work in groups of three, so that we can cover absences for courses, annual leave etc. CI Arrowsmith was not in the group with whom I ordinarily work - as neither of my normal partners were available, he was covering a shift.
28. There is no set deployment as to who is FIM1 and who is FIM2, and the FIMs usually take it in turns. As I was FIM1, I would primarily address matters arising from the police call logs and take Initial Tactical Firearms Command (ITFC), should the need arise. As ITFC the FIM is the initial tactical firearms commander for any incident to which firearms officers may need to be deployed, and retains the role until it is appropriate to pass tactical firearms command to another of the Force's TFCs. FIM2 would address other matters as they arose, and/or assist FIM1 as appropriate.
29. My involvement in the incident at the Hart Space on 29 July 2024 can be seen from the incident log MP20240729-0350 (AAH/8 **MERP000469**) ("the log") which records contemporaneous notes of my key decisions, and the Body Worn Video footage of myself and CI Arrowsmith (AAH/9 **MERP008136**).
30. I can see that the log was opened at 11.47 hours on 29 July 2024. The first report was received via a 999 call and it was immediately graded as an emergency response. In accordance with both national and Force standards, this was the appropriate grading. The next 999 call appears on the log (log 350) at 11.49 hours having been cross referenced from log 353. A further call appears to have been received at 11.50 (see entries made by 48415), and a further call at 11.51.
31. The report was that there was a boy with a knife who had stabbed numerous persons and that there were numerous casualties. As I have said, this was graded as an emergency response and was passed to the control room supervisor, who determined that Southport Police Station should be the rendezvous point (RVP), in the event that one was required. I have set out at above the APP guidance on rendezvous points. This is that national policy that Merseyside Police follow. Until I had assessed the situation it was totally appropriate and in accordance with APP for a rendezvous point to be designated in. The distance between the location of the incidence and the rendezvous point is about 5 minutes by car, travelling at the prescribed speed limits.

32. The dispatchers (members of staff in the control room who deploy officers to incidents) began to send officers to the scene. A call was made over the Bravo Channel (the police radio channel for Sefton) for resources free to make to a grade 1 emergency as there were reports of a "boy with a knife stabbing numerous persons". The first call gave the RVP as Southport Police Station (this was before the log was flagged to me) so in the first instance, pending further instruction, it would have been for officers to make to the RVP. As can be seen later in my statement 2 patrols did in fact make there. This was wholly appropriate and in line with APP.
33. An officer with call sign 116 asked if there have been other calls and was told that there had been a second call with the same circumstances and possibly a child on the floor.
34. I can see that a number of patrols were identified as being deployable and that at 11.48 it was noted patrol BR102 (Sergeant Gillespie) was on route to the incident. I understand that Sgt Gillespie was making from some distance. Originally he would have been informed of the RVP but at 11.51 he would have been informed of my instruction for patrols to proceed to the scene with caution. Sergeant Gillespie made to the scene and I am told that arrived at 11.56. He was the first officer on scene.
35. I can also see that at 11.49 call signs BM116 and BM118 were dispatched to the incident. I have been told that BM116 was crewed by Constable 7157 Shakespeare and BM118 was crewed by Constable 8494 Carr. I now know that they made to Southport Police Station originally arriving about 2 minutes after they had been dispatched. This was in accordance with the directions from the control room as set out above. However, as a result of my direction about 1 minute after arrival at Southport Police, they were directed to 34A Hart Street as they were taser enabled. BM118 collected a defibrillator from Southport Police Station before making to the scene. I cannot see from the log when BM116 arrived at scene, but at noon there is an entry that BM116 is inside the location with a deceased child.
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36. LKB96 was the call sign for Temporary Sergeant 7485 Luke Holden who I now know was in company with PCSO Timothy Parry. They were second on scene after Sergeant Gillespie. They are referenced on the log as having been deployed at 11.52, and they are shown on the log as entering Hart Street from Sussex Road at 11.56.
37. I am also now aware that at 11.58 the Ambulance Service called Merseyside Police regarding the reports. The call handler gave the RVP as Southport Police Station but did

say that the FIM was still putting text on the log (i.e. I was still giving my instructions). The Ambulance call handler had understood that police were at the scene. The Merseyside Police call handler could not confirm this.

38. The dispatchers flagged the log for my attention on the STORM system, which is the standard way for an incident to be escalated to the FIM. This occurred at 11.49. I accepted the log at 11.49. The log having been opened at 11.47, this time frame was appropriate. The call handler had to assess the information that they were receiving and note it on the log before sending it to me. The original call handler was 49439. I can see from the log that that call remained open until the police arrived on the scene at 11.57 and a number of people were talking to that operator during the course of the call.
39. I immediately reviewed the log. I could see that there were reports as set out above, that the location was 34A Hart Street, and that it was reported that there were 25 casualties. I could also see that there were other reports about the same incident being received, those reports appeared consistent with the initial report and that the ambulance service (NWS) were being contacted by the radio room. I can also see from the log that at 11.53 details of the incident were being passed to NWS and likewise at the same time we had three calls from NWS advising us of the incident.
40. After accepting the log at 11.49, I needed to assess what we were dealing with as a Force. In light of the number of reports and the consistency of the information being provided from multiple sources I was satisfied that this was a genuine report. This was effectively an immediate decision on my part. I mention this because it is an early part of my assessment process as a FIM – sadly the police do receive a large number of false and hoax reports some of which appear credible at first. I also sought to clarify the number of casualties being reported.
41. In light of the circumstances, namely a male with a knife stabbing people, the criteria for an armed deployment was met. At this stage I was both ITFC and Strategic Firearms Commander (SFC). I authorised the deployment of firearms officers and requested that they deploy to the scene. However, I was aware that the firearms officers were a distance away. I knew from my FIM work that morning that there were no Armed Response Vehicles (ARV) in the Sefton area, as they were deployed to other areas in accordance with the Force operational control strategy for the day. I also knew that I had not deployed an ARV to the Southport area to do an enquiry that morning.

42. Based on all the information that I knew, I determined that unarmed patrols should be deployed to the incident as an initial response whilst the ARV's were on route. I noted that decision on the log. I also noted on the log that the ARV's were on route but were a significant distance away. I decided that, in light of the circumstances, there was an immediate need to protect life and therefore that the unarmed officers were to approach the incident with caution and if it was safe for them so to do, to deal with the situation.
43. I also made the point that, if the officers could not deal with the situation safely, then they should take appropriate action to minimise the risk to the public and maximise their own safety, and that, if necessary, they should consider a tactical withdrawal and a visual containment from where they could report observations with appropriate cover, pending the arrival of armed officers.
44. I asked that the control room be kept updated and that the control room update the FIM, as is standard. I also asked that, if the incident were resolved quickly, the ARVs could be stood down.
45. To make it clear, my direction was that the officers should proceed to the incident with caution and respond to the incident. I can see from the log that officers did indeed make to the scene and that the car with the call sign 102 that I knew had been deployed to the scene and I have been told was crewed by Sgt Gillespie, arrived in Hart Street at 11.56, having been waved down by members of the public so that he could be directed to the precise location. To be clear Sgt Gillespie had been deployed per the response policy, and then my direction, i.e. to proceed to scene with caution.
46. I can also see from the log that, by that time, NWAS were advising us that they were responding on a category 1 incident and provided us with the log number, 29439229 CAT1. I do not know what time the first ambulances were on scene. I believe that the NWAS log will provide that information.
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47. Having recorded my direction that officers should proceed to scene, I then verbally briefed the ARVs by Airwaves, the police radio system (I formally noted the briefing on the log retrospectively at 15.45 hours). I deployed the 5 ARV's that were available to me. The operational firearms commander (OFC) was Constable 2038 John Peter Lloyd. The OFC is the firearms commander 'on the ground' leading the officers at the scene. I noted that the firearms authority number FEX 146 and the need to deploy firearms officers because:-

- a. I had reason to believe that the officers may have to protect themselves or others from a person who was in possession of or may have immediate access to a firearm or other lethal weapon, and/or
 - b. Was otherwise so dangerous that the deployment of armed officers was considered appropriate.
48. I informed the officers that the authority was to arm themselves with the weaponry at their disposal, but to consider the use of less lethal options if appropriate, at their discretion and in accordance with their training. I told the officers that I believed that the firearms authority was necessary for a thorough search to be conducted for an armed subject, and that the authority was justified, proportionate, lawful, accountable, necessary and the least intrusive method to achieve the safety of the public and the police in the event of an armed offender being located. My overarching objective strategic aims were to protect and save life. The ARV's were instructed to locate victims, assess their immediate safety, protect and save life and to locate and contain the threat. The ARVs were also to neutralise the threat with the weaponry at their disposal, to include the option of using less lethal force.
49. I then outlined the threat assessment as I saw it at the time (shortly after 11.49 hours). I noted that the identity of the person causing the threat was unknown, that the person had a bladed weapon, that that the incident was a dynamic incident, and it was ongoing. As such, I considered the level of threat to the victims and persons targeted was high. I assessed the level of threat to the initial informant as medium and to unarmed officers as low (as I believed that they would be wearing body armour and carrying Personal Protective Equipment and they had only been directed to advance to the scene and deal with it if it was safe for them to do so, otherwise they had been directed to maintain a containment and visual observations. There was also the option of holding them at an RVP).
50. I briefed the ARVs that the working strategy was to save and protect life, that we needed to minimise the risk to the victims, the informant and the general public, and indeed to the subject. That we needed to locate and lawfully arrest the subject for the offences disclosed and that we needed to recover any weapons, develop our information and intelligence and secure and preserve evidence so that there could be an effective investigation, thereafter we needed to provide public reassurance and to return the scene to normality.

51. I went on to consider powers and policy and as such I also noted the offences that I considered may have occurred:-
- a. Possession of a bladed article in a public place
 - b. Murder
 - c. Attempted murder
 - d. Wounding with intent to cause GBH
 - e. Robbery and or assault with intent to commit robbery.
52. I have then reminded officers of their powers in relation to the use of force namely s.3 Criminal Law Act 1967 and/or s.117 Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and or at common law. I asked officers to consider the provisions of the Criminal Law Review Committee 1964 and the Human Rights Act 1988 specifically here Article 2 ECHR.
53. I also authorised an emergency search of the property by the AFOs. The firearms deployment and authority was ratified retrospectively (as is usually the case in situations where an armed response is required immediately) by the SFC, Superintendent Binks, at 13.09 hours.
54. Having given the briefing, I continued to monitor the log and speak via radio with the OFC PC Lloyd. The Force continued to receive information about the situation from a variety of callers, and indeed I could see that in, light of my direction unarmed police officers (and it would appear paramedics), had made to the scene. I am aware from the BWV of Sgt Gillespie that he alighted from his police vehicle at 11.56 and that Sgt Holden and PCSO Parry arrived very shortly afterward. I cannot see their time of arrival on the log, but I know from the documents that Sgt Holden and PCSO Parry were together, and Sgt Holden's BWV shows that he was entering the building with his Taser deployed at 11.57. Sgt Gillespie and T/Sgt Holden were both present at the arrest of AR that was confirmed on the log at 11.59 (see below).

55. I noted that the Dog Patrols were initially asked to make to the RVP so that they could be deployed as a contingency. This was appropriate. Thereafter there was a direction that the Dog Patrols deploy to the scene, again this was appropriate as it increased the tactical options available.
56. Whilst I was attending to my duties as ITFC, FIM2 CI Arrowsmith assisted. Due to the firearms deployment, at 11.58 hours he requested assistance from the National Police Air Service (NPAS).
57. At 11.59 hours I noted that one male had been detained in possession of a knife. This occurred some 12 minutes after the log had been opened, and 10 minutes after the log had been flagged to me as FIM.
58. I continued to monitor the log and liaise with the OFC. I noted that police were continuing to deploy to the scene, as was NWAS. I noted that a Heli Med were deploying at 12.02. By that I mean that the log noted that Heli Med would be making to the scene, but I do not know the precise time that Heli Med would take off. I was also aware from the log that, in addition to ambulances, two advanced paramedic cars were making to the scene.
59. I sought confirmation that the area Inspector was making to the scene to assume command on the ground. I can see that Inspector Cowin (BO01) was on the ground at 12.05 and declared the incident a critical incident.
60. At 12.06 hours FIM2 passed the ETHANE message on the ESIC channel. This can be heard on the body worn video footage. FIM2 made a broadcast to all on the ESIC channel – the dedicated radio channel that should be monitored by police, fire, ambulance and coast guard. The giving and content of a M/ETHANE (here ETHANE) message is part of the JESIP doctrine. The location of the incident and the address and postcode of the incident were broadcast. FIM2 stated that, whilst the circumstances were unclear, the information that we had was that there appeared to have been a large number of individuals stabbed at the location and that those individuals included children who were deceased. The hazards were described as blood victims, traffic made into the incident and broken glass at the scene access. Those on the channel were informed that the RVP was Southport Police Station, but they were also informed that police officers and ambulance crews had made straight to the scene due to the number of casualties. It was made clear over the channel that the incident may shortly be declared a major incident (as it has not

been declared a major incident, the message was an ETHANE message). Those on the channel were informed that two children were deceased and that the incident may be a declared a major incident shortly. When concluding the ETHANE message FIM2 said "**all agencies please go**". As such there was no request for any resources to be held back at this time - they were cleared to approach the scene. As such, the appropriate message was passed over the ESIC channel to the emergency services including NWS.

61. I have been shown the NWS Structured Debrief Report which says '*police at scene were telling staff it was safe to go forwards but not communicated it to ICC [Integrated Control Centre]*' [NWS000379/16]. However, I consider that the above ETHANE briefing made over the ESIC channel (which I assume is monitored by the "ICC", though I have not heard that term before), made it clear that ambulances could proceed to the Hart Street.
62. The clearance to other agencies to approach would have been re-enforced when, shortly afterward the ETHANE message, an update was passed over the ESIC channel that an offender has been detained with a knife and that we were awaiting confirmation as to whether or not there were any outstanding offenders.
63. I was considering whether to declare this a PLATO i.e. a marauding terrorist attack (MTA) incident. I was aware that, if I had done so, then there would automatically have been restrictions on who could enter the area. The information I had was that a lone male, described as a boy, possibly a teenager or in his early 20s, had committed a mass stabbing at a location where there were a number of children, that there were up to 25 reported casualties, and that this male had been detained. I did not rule out the possibility that there could be others involved or that this could be a terrorist incident however, based on the information I had it appeared to me that there was a real need to protect life and to provide medical assistance to multiple casualties and, on balance, I did not declare PLATO.
64. I continued to monitor the log and the reports. I note that an officer queried whether Lancashire Police could assist. Southport is very near to the border between Lancashire and Merseyside. At 12.08 the operator asked for Lancashire patrols to make to Hart Street.
65. The log continued to be updated as new information came to light. I can see that at 12.13 hours Inspector Cowin, the commander at the scene, had determined that the RVP should be moved to Meols Cop High School. However, it would appear that there was still some discussion about the RVP for a period after this was put on the log.

66. It was clear due to the level of response that was required that this matter should be declared a major incident. As such, at about 12.14 I declared a major incident and FIM2 passed this information over the ESIC channel to supplement the ETHANE message that had been broadcast at 12.06. In light of what was occurring, and the need to brief the ARVs, I do not consider that the ETHANE message could have been passed earlier or that a major incident could have been declared or communicated earlier. In light of the fact that multiple calls were being made to police and ambulance in any event do I consider that the passing of the ETHANE message or declaring a major incident earlier would have made any difference to the response to the incident.
67. Immediately prior to the major incident declaration, I note that FIM2 had been attempting to speak to NWS through the approved route of communication (the National Inter Agency Liaison Officer or NILO) but that he had been unable to speak with them. I had requested that, when possible, I be provided with a consolidated list of casualties.
68. Once a major incident has been declared, a police Silver Commander will be appointed, and the 'silver room' will be set up. At an appropriate juncture (see below) once the resources are in place, the FIM hands over command to Silver.
69. I can see that the Force Silver POPS (Public Order Public Safety) Commander for the day was Chief Inspector Riley and that at 12.17 FIM2 noted the CI Riley was making his way to the Joint Control Room (JCC). This is where the police service and fire service has a joint premises in the Bootle area of Merseyside. As such, any Silver discussion would take place with CI Riley.
70. Once the suspect had been arrested, the ARVs, who also have the highest qualification of first aid training in the Force, were seeking permission to assist with first aid. I was aware however that there were others with first aid training on the scene. As I have said, we still did not know the extent of what we were dealing with, and whilst I accept that all the reports that I had received were of a lone male, I still did not know if anyone else was involved. The ARV officers could carry out a search of the premises most safely in terms of public and officer safety. As such, I asked that the ARVs conduct a search of the premises at Hart Street to ensure that there were no other offenders and also to check for further casualties before they began administering first aid. At 12.20 there was an update on the log that the Hart Space had been cleared by ARVs and that there were no further offenders.

71. At 12.22 FIM2 updated the log with the detail of the ETHANE message that had been passed at 12.06 hours. This is recorded as a M/ETHANE message as by that time the incident had been declared a major incident.
72. During this period I was aware that the force duty NPCC (Gold) officer Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Wilson knew about the incident and was reading the log and I can see that at 12.23 FIM2 has made the press office aware of the log and has also briefed ACC Wilson with what was known at that time.
73. At 12.25 hours the log was updated to state that the senior officer at the scene, Inspector Cowin, had completed the initial JESIP meeting with the other emergency service commanders on the ground. The detail of that meeting and the interagency communication is set out in the statement of Inspector Cowin MERP000268. I am aware from the statement that, at the time of the JESIP meeting, it was determined that there were sufficient emergency responders on scene and that, following the detention of AR, steps were being taken to establish order at the scene so that the victims could be treated effectively and efficiently and the scene preserved for the investigation. I noted that there were commanders from each agency noted as being on scene who would be responsible for giving direction to their own staff.
74. I can see that at 12.36 FIM2 briefed Simon Waston, the NWAS NILO, over the phone. I also note that at 12.41 the Coast Guard spoke with FIM2 offering assistance from first aiders, advising that they could mobilise 10 – 15 first aiders within 15 minutes. I spoke with the OFC and relayed the message about the first aiders, but was advised that the NWAS commander on the ground felt that there were sufficient paramedics available to respond to the situation which they faced.
75. I continued to monitor the log. By 12.49 the Silver room was updating the log, however at this stage I had not handed over command. By 12.53 the new RVP had been confirmed as Meols Cop High School.
76. I noted an entry at 12.54, about a call from a taxi driver, who reported picking up a male from an address at 10 Old School Close, Banks, Lancashire and dropping him at 34 Hart Street. It was reported that the male had not spoken during the journey, that he had worn a face mask and that he had not paid the fare. The taxi driver had also reported that he had heard gunshots and screaming from the venue and had seen children running off.

77. I saw that this information was being researched. Whilst I continued to monitor the log, FIM2 was making arrangements for other calls for service in the Sefton area to receive the appropriate response. I also note that Inspector James was deployed to be the CIM (critical incident manager) for the Sefton area as Inspector Cowin was taking on the role at the scene. It further appears from the log that at 12.29 CI Ruane was making to the scene, to become the POPS Bronze Commander.
78. By 13.04, I noted that research had been conducted on the address at 10 Old School Close, Banks (given by the taxi driver) and that this address was linked to a male, AR, date of birth 07/08/2006, who had police warning markers for carrying knives. There was also a note to say that AR had been logging onto websites at school which involved school mass shootings and it was further noted that he talked about guns and beheadings. As the log states, the information was researched on the Niche system. NicheRMS (to give its full name) is an electronic operational policing database system that manages information in relation to people, locations, vehicles, organisations, incidents, and property. It also manages intelligence and is used as a criminal case management system. As part of the functionality of the system, you can enter an address and the system will tell you the incidents that Merseyside Police have that are connected to that address. It will not show information for Lancashire Police. In this case, it would appear that the Niche system referred to an incident in 2019 when AR had been arrested by Merseyside Police officers and that the operator has put on the log the information that from this incident that they considered to be pertinent to the circumstances of Hart Street incident. This was that AR had a warning marker for carrying knives, and that he had been logging onto websites at school which involved school mass shootings and beheadings.
79. I noted that Detective Superintendent Wilson and Detective Inspector Birchall had requested that there was a deployment to Old School Close in Banks, this being noted on the log at 13.06 hours. However, I still needed to know what we were dealing with, the possibilities in my mind at the time being:
- a. That AR was part of a group of offenders all of whom had deployed from 10 Old School Close, Banks, to carry out a series of similar attacks (possibly terrorist related).
 - b. That AR had harmed others at Old School Close, and then had made his way to Hart Street, as he had a connection with a person there.

- c. That the attack at Hart Street was carried out by AR acting alone.
80. As such, I directed that no (unarmed) patrols should be deployed to Old School Close, Banks, as this was likely to be a firearms deployment. FIM2 put this message on the log.
81. During this time I briefed the SFC, Superintendent Binks, who retrospectively ratified the authorisation of the firearms authority that I had put in place at 11.49. We discussed the possible scenarios for 10 Old School Close. We agreed the firearms authority should remain at this time and that there should be an armed deployment to Old School Close.
82. I remained as ITFC. There was a need to make to the Old School Close, there was an urgency to this situation, and therefore Merseyside Police ARVs were deployed, although the address is situated in the Lancashire Police force area. The deployment occurred at 13.28. The ARVs were able to secure the location and AR's family were inside the house safe and well.
83. The house was preserved as a scene. I am aware that, shortly after the deployment, Superintendent Binks spoke with the Lancashire SFC Superintendent Worswick. Lancashire Police agreed to hold Old School Close as a scene whilst the Merseyside ARVs returned to force.
84. I can see that, at 13.34, the log was formally transferred to Silver, however I remained as ITFC as there was still a live firearms authority.
85. There was a further request back from Silver to the FIM that Greater Manchester Police deploy an officer to the Manchester Hospital where one of the children was airlifted to. This was attended to by FIM2.
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86. At 13.44 I stood the incident down as a firearms incident and revoked the firearms authority. I reviewed the incident in line with the National Decision-making Model. I was satisfied that, in light of all that I knew, there was no longer a need for a deployment of armed officers. I formally handed command of the incident to Silver, CI Riley and I can be heard on the Body Worn Video saying this. I note that on the log I have typed that I have handed the incident to the CIM - this is a typographical error.
87. At 14.23 I noted the firearms authority number on the log for completeness as FEX 146.

88. My next involvement on the log is at 15.04 when I made Silver aware of the log number that detailed a possible protest in the city centre. Thereafter as stated above I updated the log with my firearms briefing.
89. At 15.08 I noted that the Silver Commander had deployed patrols to Southport Hospital to escort an ambulance from Southport to Alder Hey Children's hospital. I have read the statement of Constable Mark Griffiths and note that he was the escorting officer. Constable Griffiths states that the escort occurred without incident. Save reading the log and the statement, I have no knowledge of any matters relating to the treatment of Alice De Silva Aguiar.
90. For the rest of my shift I had limited involvement in the incident. I can see that I passed a message to Silver regarding the identity and contact details for the child that was in hospital in Manchester.
91. Any discussions between the respective 'on the ground' operational or Bronze Commanders would have taken place at the scene. Discussions between the respective tactical or Silver commanders would have taken place either in person at the Silver Control room at the JCC or via phone or teams call, likewise for the strategic or Gold Commanders. I can see from the log that ACC Goss chaired a multi-agency gold strategy meeting in relation to the incident at about 13.48.
92. I then carried on with my duties as FIM1 for the rest of my shift. I ended duty at about 19.00 that evening. I can see that C1 Foster became FIM1 on the evening of the 29 July 2024. He would have commenced duty at about 19.00 having paraded for a hand over at about 18.00.
93. I have been asked if I was overwhelmed in any way by this incident. I was not. I say that not to understate the horrific nature of the incident, the likes of which I have never been involved in before. However, I confirm that I was at all times able to exercise my duties as FIM without feeling that there were too many decisions to be made for me properly to attend to them. The two FIM model had been in operation since October 2023 and had been tested with previous incidents in the Force. It worked well, and worked well on this occasion.

- 94. Once the incident had been flagged to me, I was able to quickly assess the information and then determine that a firearms response was appropriate. I determined the immediate response which was to permit to unarmed officers to proceed with caution and attend so as to preserve life. I was aware that unarmed officers could proceed with confidence to the scene in a case such as this and take the appropriate steps depending on what they encountered.
- 95. I then attended to the firearms briefing and assumed command of the incident. As can be seen from the log and heard on the Body Worn video, CI Arrowsmith assisted with what he called 'ancillary issues". He delivered the ETHANE message over the ESIC channel and updated the other emergency services as to the fact that the suspect had been detained and that a major incident had been declared.
- 96. I believe that I had sufficient and appropriate training to take command of this incident and that the response was appropriate given all the circumstances. I note that, as stated above, at one point FIM2 were unable to contact NWS via the NILO, but that by 12.36 the Ambulance NILO had been spoken with. In any event, I knew from the log that, by this time, both police officers and NWS personnel were at scene.
- 97. I do not think from the perspective of the FIM and initial firearms commander that we could have done / directed more. There were certainly sufficient resources available very quickly.
- 98. I am not aware of any improvements that have been implemented by the Force post incident, but I know that the Force will be keen to identify, capture and implement any learning from this Inquiry.

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** OA / INS 4204 HUGHES

Dated: 01/08/25