

Witness Name: Stephen Baker

Exhibits:0

Dated: 13/09/25

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF
CONSTABLE 1075 STEPHEN PAUL BAKER

Introduction

1. I am Constable 1075 Baker of the Merseyside Police.
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 5 September 2025.
3. I was attested as a Constable in Merseyside in 2002.
4. I am currently posted to the Merseyside Police's Initial Training Department, and I am based at Mather Avenue training academy.
5. Between 23 March 2022 and 21 July 2024, I was posted to Local Policing in Southport. I was deployed as a safer schools' officer (SSPO).
6. Whilst deployed to the SSPO role I covered a cluster of schools within the Merseyside Police area: three mainstream schools, two specialist provision schools and a college. The mainstream schools were Christ the King Catholic High School & Sixth Form Centre, Meols Cop High School, and Stanley High School. The specialist provision schools were Peter House Alternative Education Autism Initiatives, and Presfield High School & Specialist College. I also covered Southport College, which provides mainstream education for 16- to 19-year-olds and adult education provision. I would estimate that there were 3000 pupils / students in total across these six schools.

SSPOs

7. The role of the SSPO is to: -
- a. Work alongside school staff and others to create and maintain a safe school environment and to address and promote safeguarding of vulnerable young people where they are identified.
 - b. Work with school staff and partners to reduce truancy, reduce exclusions, and increase attendance. Being involved with the school and Education Welfare service in instigating joint truancy patrols.
 - c. Work with schools towards improving young people's understanding of personal and social issues such as the consequences of crime and misuse of drugs, associated life skills / safe social media use / good citizenship. Work with staff to agree and prepare appropriate learning materials and delivering appropriate targeted classroom inputs, as agreed with school management.
 - d. Prevent offending by young people through working with individuals and through the joint development of programmes within the school community.
 - e. Ensure that the prevention work within the school is linked to the broader work in the local community undertaken by the Youth Intervention Unit and the Crime and disorder Reduction Partnership.
 - f. Arrange and supervise the delivery of intervention work such as leisure activities to develop and encourage young people, particularly those at risk of offending or re-offending.
 - g. Provide a visible and accessible policing presence within the school setting.
 - h. Collate detailed data to enable the school(s) effectively to conduct an audit of crime, anti-social behaviour, victimisation, and fear within its community.
 - i. Assist the school in developing whole school approaches to behaviour management and conflict resolution, such as through restorative justice, conferencing, and peer support / mentoring schemes.
 - j. Develop processes with school staff to ensure children are aware of the pressures they may face during periods of transition, notably from primary to secondary school but also changes of school, return to school from a period of exclusion to time spent in a young offender's unit.
 - k. Undertake all responsibilities relating to information management, data quality and information sharing, intelligence and information security to ensure accordance with the Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on Information Management, issued by the College of Policing.

8. There is no specific SSPO training. However, in the knowledge and experience section of the job description questionnaire for the role it says as follows: -
- a. Must possess a high level of motivation, enthusiasm, commitment, and flexibility. Must have the ability to work with the minimum supervision and display a professional and where necessary, caring approach.
 - b. Must have the ability to act as an 'ambassador' for policing utilising excellent interpersonal and communication skills, oral and written, to ensure effective communication with internal and external contacts.
 - c. Postholder must have a working knowledge of Crime & Disorder legislation and NPCC protocols.
 - d. The ability to recognise the diverse and cultural needs of the education community and professionally and positively interact with everyone is required.
 - e. Must be competent in the use of force systems with a particular awareness of the use of intelligence and briefing systems such as Niche: Operational User, Corvus, Webstorm: General User.
 - f. Must be trained and proficient in the use of PNC Module 1: Vehicles and PNC Module 2: Names or be willing to receive such training.
 - g. Must have the ability to investigate crime and deal with offences that have occurred in the school, environment. (This would be undertaken from a base in the school setting where possible)
 - h. Must have the ability to use and analyse crime and incident trends. Must have the ability to motivate and relate well with young people, those identified as at high risk.

Absenteeism

9. As set out above, one of the roles of the SSPO is to work with schools to reduce truancy / absenteeism. This would be at the request of the school – the school would have to tell me that they were having an issue with a particular pupil / student's absenteeism (I did not have access to this data) and ask for my help in trying to resolve it.
10. Whilst posted as an SSPO, I was frequently asked to assist the schools to deal with student absenteeism. This included a variety of tasks, which it fell to me to prioritise in line with Merseyside Police's threat, harm, and risk principles. The guidance from my supervision was to judge each case on its own merit and seek guidance if required.

Interactions with AR

11. I have been asked to set out my interactions with AR. I have limited recollection of my engagement with AR / with Presfield School about AR. I have therefore referred to emails and diary appointments to refresh my memory. These are exhibited to my statement [MERP000000].

Presfield High School & Specialist College

12. I was formally engaged with Presfield High School ("the school") from Friday 20th May 2022.
13. On that date, I was introduced to Cheryl Smith, who at that time was the Dedicated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Cheryl subsequently became Assistant Head whilst maintaining the role of DSL. We had an initial one-to-one meeting. I do not recall AR being mentioned at that meeting. I understand that AR joined Presfield School in the Spring of 2022.
14. Cheryl Smith and the safeguarding team at Presfield School would ask me to assist with a variety of pupils and issues, including absenteeism, as is apparent from Cheryl's emails to me.
15. My first knowledge of AR was when I received an email from Cheryl Smith about him at 09:15 hours on 27 March 2023. By that time, I had been working with Cheryl for about 10 months. The email read as follows: -

"Police meeting and I'm ringing up....

So, what it is: -

Axel Rudakubana DOB 07.08.2006 - last seen by us a year ago and became a non-attender. We have done many home visits, but Axel has mental health needs and Dad says 'they will pay the price' when we have gone and so they will not let us in or even bring him to the window (the blinds are always down). Parents are originally from Somalia, but both speak English, both work - Mother nights and sleeps in the day, Father taxi driver. Axel lives in Banks - so is a Lancashire child attending a Sefton School.

20/3/23 - DSL asked Sefton's attendance and welfare team to go to the home. Angela Maguire attended. Axel's mother made a complaint that she did not feel the welfare visit was warranted and refused for Axel to be seen.

21/3/23 - DSL emailed Lancashire's missing team - they replied that 'given that Axel is no longer of compulsory school age (within CME's remit) and is currently on school roll, there really isn't a role for us to play or advice we can give unfortunately. '

21/03/23 - DSL rang Lancashire police on '101' to request a police welfare call. Collar number 11097 concluded that 'Axel does not meet the threshold for a police welfare call and police will not be attending. '

21/3/23 - DSL referred into Lancashire social care for Axel. Ref number LCSS499473103. Social worker - Janet Fazakerley replied that 'I have tried to call parents twice but no answer, I will write to them and invite them to call us if support is needed. The case will close, we cannot override consent at this time.'

So now Tony has asked would you go out with me and see if we can see Axel together and if not, we will then have to escalate it within Lancashire council. I wasn't sure you could as he lives in Lancashire, and I rang Lancashire police, but he doesn't meet threshold. But I said I would ask you.

Thanks Steve,..."

16. At the time of this email, AR was 16 years old (year 11).
17. At 14:05 hours, later the same day, I received the following email from Cheryl:

"Steve,

You won't believe this!!! Axel has arrived in school - if I'd known you had magic powers, I'd have interrupted your important meeting months ago! ..."

18. I cannot recall whether I had been able to read Cheryl's first email by the time I received her second email, but due to the second email, I simply responded at 15.23 with a friendly acknowledgment. It was not necessary at that stage for me to have any involvement with AR.

First attendance at AR's Home

19. I do not recall AR being mentioned to me again until July 2023. I cannot recall exactly what was said but I was asked by Cheryl Smith (DLS) to attend AR's home address in company with a member of the Presfield safeguarding team due to his continued absenteeism.
20. In relation to this request and Cheryl's subsequent requests for me to join visits to AR's home address, the decision as to whether to assist the school was for me to take on a case-by-case basis. This involved prioritising demands on my time across six schools using threat, harm and risk principles. I trusted Cheryl's judgement as to the need for visits to AR's home. I knew that she was very concerned regarding the lengthy period of non-attendance of AR. I knew that she was concerned that the parents were not engaging, and I knew that it was her hope (and my experience in other cases) that the presence of a uniformed police officer on a home visit would reinforce to parents and pupils how serious their non-attendance was.
21. With respect to the request for my assistance with a home visit to AR in July 2023, I believe that Cheryl was keen for a home visit to take place notwithstanding the fact that the school was embarking on summer leave, because otherwise AR would not likely be seen by the school for a further six weeks, having not been seen for some time. Given the previous issues with AR's absenteeism, and the school's endeavour to get other services to assist (per

Cheryl's 27 March 2023 email), it was an easy decision to accept Cheryl's request for my assistance in attending AR's address to try and assist the school with pupil / family engagement. It was simply the right thing to do.

22. I do not recall Cheryl raising any concerns about AR's behaviour at school (which he had not been attending) or outside school – the issue was his persistent absenteeism. As there appeared to be nothing for the police to investigate, it was for the school to make any necessary referrals to social or mental health services in addition to or because of this visit and their ongoing plan to ensure that AR attended formal education.
23. Whilst I appreciate that AR lived in the Lancashire Police force area, he attended a Sefton school (Sefton is in the Merseyside Police area) for which I was the school's officer, and his address was just down the road from the School. Further, I was not investigating anything or taking action. It was therefore appropriate for me to be asked to attend, and to attend. The geographical difference between AR's home address and the School's address in terms of police force areas had no bearing on my attendance or involvement.
24. I have been asked whether geographic considerations (i.e. the fact that Presfield School was in the Merseyside Police area, but AR lived within the Lancashire Police area) created difficulties or issues in relation to the oversight of AR's welfare, the ability to access support for AR, or to otherwise assess and manage any risks presented by AR. I do not know if this was the case in respect of the School's role in relation to AR. It did not have any bearing on the role I was asked to have in terms of joining the School's home visits concerning absenteeism. If the purpose of the visit had been different (e.g. a pupil posing a risk of harm to other pupils in both Merseyside and Lancashire or committing offences in Lancashire) then I would have contacted Lancashire Police, but that was not the purpose of the visits.
25. At 10:30 hours, Tuesday 18th July 2023, I attended AR's home address in company with a member of the Presfield safeguarding team. Due to the passage of time, I cannot recall which staff member this was or indeed how we travelled to AR's home address. As set out above, the purpose of my involvement in the home visit was to provide a uniform presence to re-enforce to AR's parents / AR the serious concerns of the safeguarding team at Presfield that AR was not attending school.
26. While it is difficult to recall the specifics of this or the other visits to AR's home address, I recall that AR's father greeted us, and we were invited into the premises. AR was on the sofa in the living room covered by a blanket and with a half-eaten pizza nearby. The safeguarding staff member spoke with both AR and his father about the need for AR to attend school.
27. I do recall that I tried to engage with AR on each occasion, by talking to him, but the engagement was limited. I cannot recall precisely what I said but it would have been to reinforce what the school staff were saying about the importance of him coming into school.

28. To be clear I did not on this occasion – or at any time – check Merseyside Police's force systems in relation to AR. There was no policing need for me to do this. I was assisting the school with persistent absence.

Second attendance at AR's Home

29. At some point between 13:30 & 16:00 hours on Wednesday 13th September 2023, I returned to AR's home in company with a member of the Presfield safeguarding team.
30. I do not recall the precise conversation in which I was asked to join this home visit, but the safeguarding team were concerned that AR had not attended school after the summer holidays and that there had been no more interaction with partner services for eight weeks.
31. The visit was like the first visit although I cannot recall the specifics.

Third attendance at AR's Home

32. At 09:45 hours, Friday 17th November 2023 I received an email from Cheryl Smith, asking me to address several issues relating to a number of pupils and asking about a knife crime initiative. With respect to AR, the email (which was addressed to Janine Bannister of the Presfield safeguarding team and me, with me being the 'Steve' referred to) stated: *"[AR] - please can you and Steve go over to the house for a welfare check next week."*
33. At 12:30 hours on Thursday 23rd November 2023, I attended AR's home address in company with a member of the Presfield safeguarding team.
34. I do not recall the precise conversation in which I was asked to join this home visit, but the safeguarding team were concerned that AR was still not attending school.
35. The visit was similar to the previous visits although I cannot recall the specifics.

Fourth attendance at AR's Home

36. At 11:00 hours on Friday 8th December 2023, I attended AR's home address in company with a member of the Presfield safeguarding team for the final time.
37. I do not recall the precise conversation in which I was asked to join this home visit, but the safeguarding team were concerned that AR was still not attending school.
38. The visit was similar to the first visit although I cannot recall the specifics.
39. This was the final visit that I was involved in, as I had a period of absence due to a health condition at the beginning of the following year (2024).

Contact with Senior Staff members following the attack on 29 July 2024

40. On Monday 29th July 2024, I consulted with the Head and Assistant Head at Presfield School to offer to assist as a conduit between Presfield and Police. I did not in the end assist in this way as the School was speaking directly to police.

AR

41. I have been asked how AR presented on the occasions when interacted with him, and about any concerns I had in that regard (in relation to his mental health, the risk he presented to others or otherwise). I have set out my limited recollection of how he presented above. I do not recall having concerns about how he presented other than the fact that he was absent and out of school which the School was trying to address; in other words, I had no concern that required a police response. There was nothing said that suggested that AR was committing or intended to commit criminal offences.
42. I did not take any steps after the visits to AR's home address or have cause to do so. I do not know what steps the School took but they were clearly monitoring AR's attendance as they asked me to attend due to his absenteeism on a number of occasions.
43. I did not complete any risk assessment in relation to AR and did not have cause to do so.
44. I did not have any involvement in the escalation of concerns relating to AR to external agencies including in relation to safeguarding concerns. Escalating concerns to external agencies would have been a matter for the School. I do not recall any request for me (or Merseyside Police) to assist them with escalating safeguarding concerns to external agencies or to do anything other than attend the home visits with them as described above.
45. I do not recall having any interactions in relation to AR with Lancashire Police or having cause to do so.

Reflections

46. From my perspective, bearing in mind the information that I had, I believe that Merseyside Police acted appropriately and there was nothing more that we could do in this situation.
47. My observations as a former SSPO are that there is and remains a need to engage with pupils and their parents where there is an issue around persistent absence from education. Being present in a formal education setting allows for social engagement, which assists with integration and a sense of belonging to society. The pupil / student being visible to school staff will allow the school to make any appropriate referrals to other agencies.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed **Signature** _____

Dated: 13/09/25 _____