

Witness Name: Risthardh Hare

Exhibits: RH/01 to RH/29

Dated: 5th September 2025

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF RISTHARDH HARE

I, Risthardh Hare, will say as follows:-

INTRODUCTION

1. I am Risthardh Hare and I am employed by Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council '**the Council**'. My role at the Council is the Executive Director of Children Services which is a statutory position which involves being the strategic and operational lead for children services. My academic background includes gaining a master's in social work in 2005 from York University before gaining a master's in international social work and Community Development from University of East London in 2010. This led to me gaining a Doctorate in Social Work from Sussex University in 2018. Professionally I have been an accredited Social Worker since 2005 and have worked across various disciplines of the profession as a frontline Social Worker before becoming a senior leader in 2010. I have gained experience as an improvement consultant via the DFE working in the field of innovation creating new approaches to family problems. I have been employed in Sefton Council since March 2022 and became the Executive Director in March 2023. Since the event that took place on 29th of July 2024 my role has not changed.
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "**Inquiry**") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 29th of July 2025.

Role and Remit/Responsibilities of the Council

3. The Council's services for children and young people are made up of Children Social Care (CSC) and Education Excellence. The Council is also a partner of the Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP), together with the following other organisations including MerseyCare, Merseyside Police, partners from the third sector, Fire and Rescue, educational settings, housing and any other agencies which work with children and young people. Since the event that took place on 29th July 2024, I have been the chair of the SSCP.

Sefton Education Team

4. I have attached a structure of the Attendance Support Team for the academic years 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 which can be found at Exhibit RH/01-[**SEF000172**] and RH/02-[**SEF000173**]. Prior to this period attendance functions were organised under a locality - based model.
5. The education and attendance support team functions and responsibilities are dependent upon whether the child is of compulsory school age. The definition of this is contained under the Education Act 1996 as set out below:

Education Act 1996 c.56 s88.— Compulsory school age.

(1) Subsections (2) and (3) apply to determine for the purposes of any enactment whether a person is of compulsory school age.

(2) A person begins to be of compulsory school age—

(a) when he attains the age of five, if he attains that age on a prescribed day, and

(b) otherwise at the beginning of the prescribed day next following his attaining that age.

(3) A person ceases to be of compulsory school age at the end of the day which is the school leaving date for any calendar year—

(a) if he attains the age of 16 after that day but before the beginning of the school year next following,

(b) if he attains that age on that day, or

(c) (unless paragraph (a) applies) if that day is the school leaving date next following his attaining that age.

(4) The Secretary of State may by order—

(a) provide that such days in the year as are specified in the order shall be, for each calendar year, prescribed days for the purposes of subsection (2);

(b) determine the day in any calendar year which is to be the school leaving date for that year.

In summary, a child is of compulsory school age the 1st term after their 5th birthday, Therefore: children who turn 5 between 1st January and 31st March will be of compulsory school age at the beginning of the school term after 1st April; Children who turn 5 between 1st April and 31st August will be of compulsory school age at the beginning of the school term after 1st September; Children who turn 5 between 1st September and 31st December will be of compulsory school age at the beginning of the school term after 1st January. A child remains of compulsory school age until the last Friday in June in the school year that they turn 16.

6. While the child is of compulsory school age, the Council's policy is to perform functions related to school attendance, such as issuing fines for unauthorised absences, prosecuting parents of children, applying for Education Supervision Orders, obtaining School Attendance Orders under Section 437 (3) Education Act 1996 if the Council is not satisfied that the parents are providing a suitable education to a child of compulsory school age and it is appropriate for the child to attend school. Where there is a need for a child to attend special educational arrangements such as a Pupil Referral Unit, the Council will make arrangements for a child of compulsory school age who resides within their local authority to be provided with a suitable educational arrangement subject to their need. To be clear, this Legislation applies to any child of compulsory school age only. Upon the child ceasing to be compulsory school age, the Legislation and Council's procedures no longer apply.

7. If the child is not of compulsory school, age but resides in the Council's borough, the Council will continue to provide safeguarding support through Children and Social Care duties. However, in cases where the child resides in a home local authority different from

the borough where they attend education, this duty remains with the home local authority. Therefore, I would expect the home local authority to provide any educational support as part of safeguarding duties upon the child transitioning into post compulsory school age education.

8. The Council has developed policies and procedures in line with their legal requirements under the Education Act 1996. Incorporated into the guidance includes: -
- Parental Responsibility
 - The offence of failing to ensure regular attendance
 - Role of the school
 - School Attendance Orders
 - Referral to school attendance panel and associated procedures including parenting/Attendance contracts
 - A Framework for Education Supervision Orders - Practice Guidance
 - Parenting Orders
 - Penalty Notices for non-attendance at school
 - Prosecutions for non-school attendance
 - Voice of the child
 - Record and file keeping

I now exhibit these policy documents which can be found at Exhibits RH/03-SEF000111, RH/04 - SEF000080, RH05/SEF000108 and RH/06 - SEF000109.

7. In line with the current attendance guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) other universal core functions include: Attendance communication and advice; Targeting Support Meetings; Multi-disciplinary advice and support for families.
8. As part of our multidisciplinary approach, we have School Attendance Workers who, in addition to their core attendance duties, are allocated to support key areas. One of our workers attends the Channel Panel, contributing to discussions concerning school-age children who reside in Sefton. Another collaborates with the Youth Justice Team to support young people residing in Sefton who are at risk of offending. We also have dedicated Attendance Workers who focus specifically on children with a Sefton social worker, as well as those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) maintained by

Sefton. This targeted support service helps improve school attendance among these vulnerable groups.

9. Where a child of compulsory school age has a home local authority that differs from the Council's and attends a school located in the Council's borough, the Council's standard practice is that it will perform the educational duties as if the child resides in the Council's borough. However, in such circumstances, it is not the Council's duty or responsibility to take over the children social care or safeguarding functions for the child. This would be retained by the child's home local authority. While this has not previously been part of any guidance, it has been standard practice in the Council. However, 2024 statutory guidance exhibited in RH/06a - **SEF000190** now sets out these arrangements.
10. If the child is of compulsory school age and referred to the children social care department of their home local authority, we would provide attendance support for school attendance for children of compulsory school age who attend a school in Sefton, as outlined in the statutory guidance. If a concern is received into the Council's education team about the child's welfare from the school, they would be advised to contact Children's social care of the home local authority as any assessment or plan under sections 17 or 47 of the Children Act 1989 sits with the home local authority. If the concern is raised directly to Sefton team, they will contact children's social care of the home local authority or if a report requires more immediate intervention, contact the police to conduct a welfare check. If the concerns raised were not addressed, we would use the home local authority's published escalation process.
11. Any safeguarding concerns for children who reside in Sefton are reported through a process known as the integrated front door. This describes a service provided by two teams: Sefton Children's Help and Advice Team (CHAT) social care and Sefton Family Advice and Support Team (FAST) early help. For children who attend school within the Council's borough but reside in other local authorities the school will follow the home local authority procedures as it is the home local authority who provide the support services including Children's Social Care, Early Help and Youth Justice Services.
12. From 2017 onwards AR resided in the Banks area of Lancashire, which forms part of Lancashire County Council's jurisdiction. As a result, Lancashire County Council held the primary statutory responsibility for ensuring AR received a suitable education. In

2017 AR parents used parental preference to choose a school in Sefton: namely, Range High School in Formby.

13. As the Council was the local authority in which AR attended school, the Council had a number of responsibilities when it came to AR's education when he was a child of compulsory school age. This included monitoring educational standards, providing training to Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) within the borough, supporting schools in managing the exclusions process and ensuring attendance of children is tightly monitored. As the local authority in which AR attended school the Council has a statutory responsibility for addressing non-attendance at schools within our borough. This can include the issuance of educational penalty notices and prosecutions of parents under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, even if the child resides in another borough as was the case with AR.
14. Regulation for enforcement of attendance at compulsory school age lies with the local authority where the school is based. If an employee of the Council has any child protection concerns in dealing directly with a child or family, they would refer directly to the home local authority. If concerns arise in a school, the school will also refer directly to the home local authority. All safeguarding and support services are provided by the local authority where that child resides.
15. As the support services were provided and managed by AR's Lancashire County Council, they held responsibility for coordinating and delivering these services. The Council were not involved in delivering any support services so would not have undertaken any risk assessments. Any interventions in relation to PREVENT would be managed by the home local authority. AR's diagnosis of autism was made prior to him starting at Presfield, this may have involved school, health, and Lancashire County Council.

Sefton Children Social Care and SSCP

16. Since 2019 the structure of Children's Social Care and the structure of SSCP have both changed following the Working Together guidance 2018 being revised in 2023, which I exhibit as RH/07 – SEF000177 and RH/08 – SEF000178 respectively. The SSCP was previously known as Sefton Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

17. The LSCB role was to coordinate and ensure the effectiveness of what is done locally to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. The board was a statutory body established under the Children Act 2004. It was independently chaired as required by statute and consisted of senior representatives of all the main agencies who worked together to safeguard children and young people in Sefton. Underpinning all the work of the Board, was to drive the determination to safeguard children and young people. Following the updated Working Together Guidance 2023, the Multi Agency Safeguarding arrangements changed and the LSCB was replaced to what is now known as the Sefton Safeguarding Children partnership (SSCP), a key change was that The LSCB Board and Independent chair was deleted and instead A multi-agency Forum was introduced as was an Independent Scrutineer. The Forum is chaired by a Designated Safeguarding Partner (DSP).
18. The Role of Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership, in line with 'Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)', each area is required to have multi-agency arrangements in place that enable partners to work together to ensure that children are effectively safeguarded. The three safeguarding partners who are responsible for the local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) in Sefton Council, Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board and Merseyside Police. Further information about the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) in Sefton is outlined in our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements available on our website www.seftonscp.org.uk. The (MASA) arrangements were updated to include the changes in Working Together to safeguard Children (2023) and published in December 2024. They can be found on the Sefton SCP website.
19. The role of Sefton Children's Services has from 2019 and continues to date is to respond to children in need of support and protection. In 2019 children in need of support and protection were referred to Sefton MASH, and the threshold criteria that determined if the Threshold for CSC involvement was the Threshold of Need document 2017, which I now exhibit as RH/09 - [SEF000179] together with the revised guidance set out in the Threshold of Need Guidance 2020 exhibited as RH/10-[SEF000180]. Both those documents were revised in November 2024 following the MASH Model changing to a conversation model, which meant the MASH became known as CHAT and FAST, which meant in practice rather than children being referred electronically, professionals and families could ring and discuss if a child needed support or protection. I exhibit the updated guidance as RH/11 - [SEF000181]

Overview of the Council's Involvement

Sefton Education Team

20. The Council's awareness of AR prior to the incident related to his time attending schools within the Council's borough. The Council were aware of AR through school admissions as he attended primary schools in the Sefton area and he attended Range High School in Formby up until year 9. The Council were notified by Range High School when AR was permanently excluded over an incident which related to having a knife in his possession for a prolonged period whilst attending the school. AR was permanently excluded from Range High School on 9 October 2019. The letter was sent to Lancashire County Council, and a copy was sent to the Council.
21. The Council support all school and academies with the exclusion process and Headteachers can telephone or email for advice. Range High School is an academy, in relation to academy schools the statutory guidance on exclusion states parents may request that the local authority, where the school is based, and/or the home local authority attend a meeting of an academy's governing board as an observer; that representative may only make representations with the governing board's consent. AR's parents did not request the Council to attend the Governors meeting.
22. The Governors at Range High School upheld the Headteacher's decision to exclude based on a two- part test for exclusions with both parts being met. The test to be applied is: has there been a serious breach or persistent breach of the behaviour policy established on a balance of probabilities and does the Headteacher believe that allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of others? The Governors would have had to be satisfied there was a proper evidential basis for this assessment.
23. Following the Governors' meeting that upheld the Headteacher's decision, AR's parents would have been provided in writing with the outcome of the Governors' hearing and given the opportunity to apply for an Independent Review Panel, which in Sefton is set up by the Council even for Academy schools. AR's parents did not apply for an Independent Review Panel.

24. Tracy McKeating, Head of Service of Educational Excellence at the Council, is responsible for the exclusion process. Tracy writes the model letters that include advice on who parents can contact for further support.

25. As AR resided in Lancashire County Council, Lancashire County Council were responsible for arranging suitable education no later than the sixth school day after his permanent exclusion. Subsequently he attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) within the Lancashire area from 17 October 2019. On the 28 March 2022 AR was officially enrolled at Presfield School and Specialist College in Southport which also sits within the borough of Sefton. Children who attend Presfield all have Education, Health and Care Plans. (EHCP) The place applied for was a sixth form place from September 2022, however, it was agreed by the school and Lancashire County Council he could start earlier with an enhanced transition.

26. AR's attendance during his time at Presfield School was extremely poor. However, it must be noted AR was subject to EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) which was maintained by Lancashire County Council and was subject to an enhanced transition plan during his enrolment in year 11 on 28 March 2022, the below table relates to AR's attendance record during this period.

Ac Year	National Curriculum Year	School	Attendance	Authorised	Unauthorised	Lates (before reg closed)
21/22	11	Presfield Special School enhanced transition	6.25%	9.38%	84.38%	1

22/23	12	As Above	1.4%	0%	98.6%	0
23/24	13	As Above	0%	0%	100%	0

27. During his enhanced transition he was not known to the Council's school attendance team. However, given AR was subject to a EHCP at the time and there was involvement from Lancashire County Council's support services at no juncture did the Council pursue any legal proceedings or enforcement action for non-attendance against AR's parents. AR was compulsory school age for 13 weeks and three of those weeks were school holidays. The Easter break was the week beginning 4 April 2022 – and finished on Friday 15 April 2022. There was a bank holiday (Easter Monday) on Monday 18 April 2022. Children returned to school on Tuesday 19th April 2022. The week beginning 30 May 2022 was the summer half-term break. The children were not required to be in school for a week.
28. During this time, he was on a bespoke timetable as part of the enhanced transition to encourage him to attend school which is a specialist provision. He was being supported by health service due to his anxiety. The school during this period referred to Early help in Lancashire who provide support services as the home local authority where AR resided which is what should happen prior to requesting any formal support from Sefton Council. It would not have been appropriate during this period to initiate any legal proceedings against a parent for a child of compulsory school age who is being treated by a specialist health service (CAMHS) and who is receiving treatment at that time.
29. When a child's school attendance does not improve despite the school's interventions and the involvement of any relevant support services, in Sefton we follow a formal procedure through the school attendance panel to initiate any legal proceedings against parents. As part of this procedure, parents or guardians are issued a written invitation to attend an interview. The child is also invited if this is age appropriate. This letter is sent ten days in advance of the scheduled interview date to provide adequate notice.
30. The purpose of the interview is to discuss the ongoing attendance issues and to explore any additional support that may be required. Following the interview, the student's attendance is closely monitored over a period of 12 school weeks. In relation to AR it would not have been possible to complete this 12-week monitoring period such as when there are insufficient school weeks remaining in the academic year during which he was of compulsory school age. In such instances, prosecution for non-attendance cannot proceed, as the necessary evidence cannot be gathered within the required timeframe.

31. Once a child is above compulsory school age the legal duty, under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, no longer applies and the Council could not pursue any form of enforcement proceedings against AR's parents for non-attendance.
32. There is an entry from the chronology dated 24 June 2022 where the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) emailed the Head at the time and the Head of Sixth Form saying Michelle Woodward (SEN Attendance Officer) cannot take him on to be visited as he is a Lancashire child. The 24 June 2022 was the last day of compulsory school age as it was the last Friday in June of the school year in which AR turned 16.
33. The Council received two requests for assistance from the DSL Cheryl Smith and the deputy DSL Jeanette Bannister of Presfield school. Firstly, on the 2 February 2023 a request for support from the Council's school attendance team which was provided as there had been a discussion by email explaining AR was not attending school due to his anxiety and the school had put a bespoke timetable in place. There had been a referral to Lancashire CME who wouldn't accept this as it was an attendance issue and secondly a request on the 20 March 2023 that a welfare visit be undertaken.
34. On 20 March 2023 the DSL phoned Michelle Woodward, who works within the Council's attendance team, and requested a welfare visit stating they had concerns surrounding AR's attendance and the fact he had not been seen in person. The school emailed correspondence to the Council explaining he had not been in school. They provided information including the names and address of the parents and information about the history of his non-attendance.
35. Joe Farrell, who is the team manager of the attendance team, agreed for a member of the team to complete a welfare home visit. Angela Maguire from the attendance team visited AR's home. Upon Angela attending the property, AR's mother made a complaint that she did not feel the welfare visit was warranted and refused for AR to be seen. Following the visit, Joe Farrell contacted Presfield by email with feedback of the visit and suggested the school contact Lancashire police to complete a welfare check and inform Lancashire Missing Team and Lancashire SEN as this issue related to his EHCP for which they had conduct. The record of the email exchanges can be found at RH12/SEF000074 and RH13a/SEF000112.

36. I must stress that AR was no longer of compulsory school age at the time of both instances and the Council was under no duty to provide attendance support nor carry out a welfare visit at AR's address. In my opinion the conduct of the Council's school attendance team was appropriate and correct. The Council's school attendance team went beyond their statutory duties in order to try and provide assistance to both AR and the school. The reason the Council did this visit was due to the challenges the school were experiencing in being able to access the necessary support to address their concerns.

37. AR was only referred to the Council's attendance team on two occasions when he was above compulsory school age. Presfield were given advice by Joe Farrell, therefore Sefton Council would not have intervened beyond this point, given he was beyond compulsory school age. There were no further instances in which the Council directly interacted with AR's family from an educational excellence/school attendance standpoint prior to the incident following the visit on 20 March 2023.

Sefton Children Social Care and SSCP

38. Historically, the Council had early help involvement with the family briefly in 2016, [DPA] However, this intervention was subsequently closed as the family did not want the support. A record of this intervention are exhibited as [RH13b]/ SEF000151 [RH14a/b/c] [SEF000122]/SEF000121/ SEF000150 and RH15 SEF000118.

39. Sefton MASH received a referral in respect of AR on the 8 October 2019, the referral was made by the Range School Police officer, the officer was redirected by Sefton MASH to make a referral to Lancashire Childrens Services as AB resided in Lancashire, a record of this referral can be found at line [19] of the case chronology I exhibit as RH/16 - [SEF000182], no further record of this call is stored within the Councils system. No further action was taken by Sefton MASH. A further request for information was made to the Council on the 12th of December 2019 following the incident which took place at Range High School, again the Council confirmed that AR resides in Lancashire and therefore needs to refer this request to Lancashire Children Social Care. I exhibit the record for this request for information as RH17/ [SEF000119]. Outside of those referrals,

Sefton CSC had no further interaction with AR until the day of the events which took place.

40. To my knowledge the SSCP had no knowledge or referrals of AR between 2019 and up until the day of the incident.

41. I can confirm to my knowledge AR was not referred to Sefton Channel Panel between 2019 to date Sefton Council's public facing website does provide information for professionals and the public about Prevent. I am not aware what was available in 2019.

Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council's Policies, Procedures and Training

Sefton Education Team

42. As set out with paragraph 3 to paragraph 11, It is standard practice that during compulsory school age, schools will refer to the Council for support utilising a variety of interventions that would include an invite to the school attendance panel to put together an attendance contract or the issuing of a penalty notice. For children with an EHCP this would be the same if they are compulsory school age. At Post 16 the Children and Families Act 2014 gives rights directly to young people from the end of compulsory school age.

43. As outlined within the Act referred to above the involvement of parents is of particular importance, and local authorities should continue to involve them in the vast majority of decisions. Schools and colleges normally involve the parents or family members of students under 18 where they have concerns about a young person's attendance, behaviour or welfare. They should also continue to involve parents or family members in discussions about the young person's studies where that is their usual policy.

44. Child safeguarding law applies to children and young people up to the age of 18. The fact that the Children and Families Act 2014 gives rights directly to young people from the end of compulsory school age does not necessitate any change to a local authority's, school's or college's safeguarding or welfare policy. If there are any safeguarding concerns, they are referred to the home local authority which in the case of AR would have been Lancashire County Council.

45. The School Attendance Support Team are appropriately qualified, trained, experienced and well-suited for their roles. The staff possess a wide range of qualifications and experience including social work, youth work, family support workers, Early Help workers and teachers. They access training covering all aspects of school attendance processes and procedures, ensuring they are fully equipped to support the schools' efforts to improve attendance. children missing education, child safeguarding, as well as equality and diversity and some staff have accessed training around trauma informed practice and the PREVENT training.

46. In addition, Tracy McKeating delivers safeguarding training to the designated DSL for schools and the safeguarding Governors. I exhibit the most recent copy of the training that is provided to exhibit RH/18 - **SEF000174** and RH/19 - **SEF000175**

47. The team also possesses an understanding of emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), including its impact on children and young people with social and communication needs. This depth of knowledge enables them to respond effectively and sensitively to a wide range of attendance-related challenges. The guidance provided to the team can be found at exhibits RH/20 - **SEF000183** and RH/21 - **SEF000184**).

Sefton Children Social Care and SSCP

48. The Polices for Working Together are exhibited at RH/07 and RH/08 and the Council provides Working Together training, which has been delivered consistently by Sefton LSCB and now the SSCP since 2019. This was previously delivered a 2-day course every other month, it was aimed at all staff who worked with Children and Families across Sefton. During 2020 and the Covid Pandemic, this changed to a 1-day course and was delivered monthly and continues to be delivered monthly.

49. In terms Childrens Social Care there is currently a 1-hour digital training session on Prevent Duty and there is Action Counter Terrorism 1 hour learning sessions on offer, I exhibit this training as RH/22 - **SEF000185**). More recently, PREVENT Duty briefing was delivered on 17 January 2024 by the SSCP. I am unable to confirm if such offers of training were available between 2019 to 2024

Involvement with other agencies

49. I understand from the chronology submitted to this Inquiry that there have been a number of meetings involving different core participant agencies who have discussed AR's welfare. I wish to clarify that due to AR attending Presfield as a child of compulsory education age for only a short period of time, the Council did not receive an invite to attend those meetings. I anticipate that if AR was in compulsory school age education in the Council's borough for longer, then my team may have been involved.
50. Cross border arrangements should never have a negative impact on children receiving support for having both their educational and other needs met. However, looking at the information referenced in the email from the DSL at Presfield exhibited at RH/12, there seems to be some confusion as to which local authority is responsible for Children Missing Education. On 23 March 2023 AR was post 16, Children Missing Education refers to compulsory school age. The responsibility for maintaining and reviewing the EHCP if the non-attendance is significant and providing support services lies solely with the home local authority.

Reflection on events

51. The Council's advice to the school to contact Lancashire County Council was correct as AR's Education, Health and Care Plan is maintained by Lancashire County Council and the support services are provided by the home local authority in which AR resided. Where there is some confusion is about the role of "Children Missing Education", as this refers to children missing education who are of compulsory school age. AR was absent from the post 16 provision at of Presfield School.
52. In my opinion the Council could not have done more or done things differently as AR was only of compulsory school age for 13 weeks, during which he was being supported by Health and Support Services. The majority of the time AR was enrolled at the School; he was above the compulsory school age. As a result, the Council did not have the legal power to enforce his attendance.
53. The Council's guidance is clear, procedures are robust, and comprehensive training has ensured staff are well- informed.

Improvements

54. Tracy McKeating met with Lucy McLoughlin who is the Headteacher of Presfield School to analyse the details of key events. Examples of effective practice were identified together with opportunities for learning. Tracy McKeating also attended and participated in the rapid review meeting held in Lancashire and presented the findings from the chronology, as the date had been changed so this meant the Headteacher was out of the country. Tracy would have attended the rapid review in her role. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, a former colleague Joe Banham, and current colleague Tracy Overs, the Business Manager of the Safeguarding Unit at that time, were also in attendance at the review.
55. The Council in 2023 and 2024 incorporated cross border working into our local procedures. In 2023 the Council included information in relation to the local authority in which the child attends school has the responsibility to take forward any required statutory intervention for poor school attendance. If a child lives in a different local authority to where they attend school, then support services may be required to be provided by the authority in which the child lives. For example, a prosecution would normally be taken forward in the area where the offence was committed, whilst an Education Supervision Order cannot be taken forward without consultation with the local authority where the child lives. Sefton Council support the school attendance functions including enforcement of children of compulsory school age who attend schools within its area. During this academic year of 2021/2022, the guidance did not reference cross border working. The Council would have used our Guidance for improving School Attendance in Sefton (incorporating Legal Measures) in relation to children who attend our schools but live in neighbouring Local Authority.
56. As of 19 August 2024, the Department of Education statutory guidance was introduced "Working together to improve school attendance", which I have exhibited as RH/6a [**SEF000190**]. The Guidance provides that where a child has Education, health and care plan, the school's local authority should alert the home local authority which maintains the EHCP about any significant issues emerging over attendance of which it becomes aware, so that the home local authority can consider whether needs

continue to be adequately supported through the existing plan. This information was incorporated into the Council's local procedures in 2024.

57. We have undertaken and produced new flowcharts addressing cross border working. This is in response to the change into the updated regulations, this can be found at exhibits RH/23- **SEF000186**, RH/24- **SEF000187** and RH/25 - **SEF000188** .
58. There has been change implemented within the Council, we have made changes about parents' refusal to let their children be seen by our professionals. The children missing education and elective home education referral pathway has been developed by children's social care and education services that addresses when children are not seen. The pathways can be found at exhibits referred to in paragraph 57. The Council has reviewed its processes in relation to obtaining school attendance orders for those children who are not receiving a suitable education, this was not a direct result of the case of AR but will address children not being seen. Again, this is for children of compulsory school age so would not be addressing issues with post 16 education.
59. On some occasions parents of children who are not attending school refuse to allow School Attendance Workers to see their child. If attempts have been made to see a child without success, the Council's school attendance workers and the Children Missing Education Coordinator will escalate to the appropriate services such as children's services and in more serious cases the police. We have now incorporated this practice titled Safeguarding Procedure for Unseen Children into our local authority school attendance procedures for the academic year 2025/26, I exhibit this guidance as Exhibit RH/26 - **SEF000176** }.
60. Steps have been taken to address the quality of information in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) from other local authorities who send consultations to the Council's schools' following examination of the information section relating to social care advice in AR's plan. Tracy McKeating has spoken with Headteachers of the Borough's Special Schools and explained when receiving an initial EHCP consultation from another local authority, schools must ensure Section D of the EHCP includes a summary of social care needs related to the child's disability and a summary of social care needs not related to SEND and disability including information about risk and risk taking behaviours

to enable the potential receiving school to put in place risk assessments to mitigate these. If they feel information is lacking, the consulting Local Authority must be contacted for further details.

61. On 5 June 2025 the Council wrote to the local authorities who share borders in relation to the school attendance of children, including those with EHCP's who are placed in independent schools within our neighbouring local authorities. There was a request to the neighbouring local authorities to share their protocols that they have adopted in response to the updated statutory guidance for attendance (August 2024) with regard to cross border placements and information sharing.
62. It should be made sure that children not attending education are seen by the appropriate professionals. Parents should not be able to refuse to let professionals see their children. It also should not matter what age the child is, schools should be part of any meetings relating to a child especially those who are not attending, in this instance the parents refused to let the school be in the meeting with health professionals
63. Furthermore, to assist the inquiry, I exhibit the following documents which are not expressly referred to in the contents of this statement, but may assist the inquiry with understanding;
 - a. RH/27 - SEF000107 – Identifying and maintaining contact with children missing in education
 - b. RH/28 – SEF000106 - Penalty Notice Code of Conduct August 2024
 - c. RH/29 - SEF000189 – SSCP presentation on working together to safeguard children

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: 05/09/2025

Index to the Witness Statement of Risthardh Hare

Exhibit No.	Inquiry reference No.	Document description
1	RH/01- SEF000172	Attendance Support Team for the academic years 2022/2023
2	RH/02- SEF000173	Attendance Support Team for the academic 2023/2024
3	RH/03-SEF000111	Guidance to Improve School Attendance dated 01.09.2018
4	RH/04- SEF000080	Guidance to Improve School Attendance September 2023
5	RH/05 - SEF000108	Guidance to improve school attendance updated 29.8.2024
6	RH/06 SEF000109	Guidance to improve school attendance updated october2024
7	RH/6a- SEF000190	DFE Working together to improve school attendance 2024
8	RH/07 SEF000177	Working Together 2018
9	RH/08- SEF000178	Working together to safeguard children 2023_ - statutory guidance
10	RH/09 SEF000179	Threshold of Need Guidance Oct 2017
11	RH/10- SEF000180	INQ000000000 Sefton Threshold of Need Guidance (July 2020)
12	RH/11- SEF000181	Threshold of need 2024
13	RH/12 SEF000074	Email Record of Visit from Education Between 02-02-23 and 20-03-23
14	RH/13a SEF000112	Email Record of Visit from Education Between 02-02-23 and 20-03-23
15	RH/13b SEF000151	Children Social Care Referral 7 October 2016 and Screenshot
16	RH/14 SEF000122 RH/14a SEF000121 RH/14b SEF000150 RH/14c	Children Social Care Documents 15 June 2016 - 23 July 2016
17	RH/15 SEF000118	Children Social Care Record For AR 30 September 2016
18	RH/16 SEF000182	Combined Chronology Document
19	RH/17 SEF000119	Children Social Care Case Note 12.12.2019
20	RH/18 SEF000174	Safeguarding Training July 2024
21	RH/19 SEF000175	DSL TRAINING SEPTEMBER 2024
22	RH/20 SEF000183	Emotionally Based School Avoidance Guidance 2024
23	RH/21 SEF000184	Sefton Emotional Based School Avoidance Toolkit 1
24	RH/22 SEF000185	Prevent Training Slides
25	RH/23 SEF000186	Independent Schools Attendance Pathway
26	RH/24 SEF000187	Maintained and Academy Schools Attendance Pathway
27	RH/25 SEF000188	CMEEHE REF PATHWAY

28	RH/26	SEF000176	Guidance to Improve School Attendance 2025
29	RH 27	SEF000107	Identifying and Maintaining Contact with Children Missing in Education Guidance September 2024
30	RH/28	SEF000106	PENALTY NOTICE CODE OF CONDUCT August 2024.
31	RH/29	SEF000189	Working Together Presentation Slides

