

Witness Name: Louise Anderson

Exhibits:

Dated: 12/9/2025

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF LOUISE ANDERSON DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN SOCIAL CARE LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

I, Louise Anderson, Director of the Children's Social Care of Lancashire County Council will say as follows:

Introductory matters

1. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 5 August. I am providing this statement in my capacity as the Director of Children Social Care ("CSC") Lancashire County Council ("LCC") to explain LCC's dealings with AR via CSC.
2. I started my role as Director of CSC at LCC in November 2022.
3. I have worked in the social care system for over 25 years. I became a practicing social worker in September 2007 working for Solihull Metropolitan Council and the City of Wolverhampton Council. I became Adoption Service Manager at the City of Wolverhampton Council in January 2014 moving to become a principal social worker for the same council in 2016 and Head of Strengthening Families in March 2020. I took my current post in November 2022.
4. I have the following qualifications: MA, Social Work, Warwick University 2006, Post Graduate Qualification, Practice Educator Stage two, City of Wolverhampton University, Post Graduate Diploma, Specialist Social Work Practice with C&F, Staffordshire

University and BA (Hons) Leisure Management, Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies.

5. As Director of CSC, I have overall responsibility for the following services: The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Duty and assessment, CiN/CP and Court Teams (Family Safeguarding), Contextual Safeguarding (EmPower), Youth Justice Service, Fostering, Adoption (Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool) and Residential children's home. For each main area of the directorate there is a Head of Service and senior managers who run the CSC services on a day-to-day basis. As Director of CSC, I have oversight of the direction and policy, however, day to day practice within CSC teams is managed by the relevant Heads of Service.
6. I report to Jacqui Old CBE, who is the Executive Director of Education & Children's Services.
7. This statement is divided into four sections, addressing the following:
 - **Section One: "Corporate Structure, Role, Responsibilities, Personalities and Tools"** – in this section I provide a background to the CSC department, the practitioners and their responsibilities intended to assist the Inquiry.
 - **Section Two: "Engagement with AR"** – in this section I provide a detailed factual chronology of CSC's involvement with AR.
 - **Section Three: "Reflections and Recommendations"** – in this section I provide reflections on the case generally including any points of learning and potential recommendations which may be helpful for the Inquiry to consider.
 - **Section Four: "Improvements"** – in this section I provide the improvements that CSC at LCC have made since our engagement with AR generally including reference to an anonymised case of Child A. This case provides an overview of multi-agency support around Child A which may be helpful for the Inquiry to consider.

Section One: Corporate Structure, Role, Responsibilities, Personalities and Tools

8. The CSC is underpinned by several key pieces of legislation, including:
 - **Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (as amended by the Children Act 2004)**

- The Act is the principal legislation that established key structures within local authority social services such as the appointment of a director of adult social services, mandated reporting relationships and the obligation for local authorities to act under guidance from the Secretary of State.

- **Children Act 1989**
 - The Act sets out the foundations of children in social care law in England and Wales.
 - The Act establishes the duty of local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need within their area.
 - The Act establishes legal frameworks for:
 - Child protection section 47 duty to investigate if a child is at risk of significant harm (section 47).
 - Looked after children, care orders and accommodation (section 20).
 - Parental responsibility and care proceedings (section 31 and section 38).
 - Supervision orders (sections 31, 35 and schedule 3)
 - Special guardianship orders (14A-14F inserted by the Adoption and Children Act 2002).

- **Children leaving Care Act 2000** (which amended by The Children Act 1989)
 - The Act was introduced to improve support for young people leaving the care system
 - The Act aims to promote better life choices and reduce poor outcomes for care leavers.

- **Children Act 2004** (as amended by The Children and Social Work Act 2017)
 - The Act strengthened multi agency working following the Victoria Climbié inquiry.
 - The Act created the duty to cooperate between agencies (section 10).
 - Introduced the role of the local authority safeguarding children (now replaced by the safeguarding partnerships).
 - Established the Children's Commissioner.

- **Children and Young Persons Act 2008**
 - The Act amended the Children Act 1989 to strengthen the care and protection of children especially those in or leaving care.
 - The Act strengthened the responsibilities of local authorities and partners.
 - The Act ensures better placement stability and care planning.
 - The Act enhanced the support provided to care leavers.

- **Children and Families Act 2014**
 - The Act strengthened duties for care leavers (personal advisers up to the age of 25 years old).
 - The Act required local authorities to publish a “local offer” for care leavers.
 - The Act reformed safeguarding arrangements (replacing LSCB's with safeguarding partnerships).

- **Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006**
 - The Act prevents unsuitable individuals from working with children and vulnerable adults.
 - The Act strengthens the vetting and barring system following the Bichard inquiry into the Soham murders.

- **Domestic Abuse Act 2021**
 - The Act provides a clear statutory definition of domestic abuse
 - The Act strengthens protection and support for victims including children.
 - The Act improved the justice system's response to perpetrators.
 - The Act places new duties on public authorities especially the local authorities.

- **Adoption and Children Act 2002**
 - The Act modernised adoption and extended the concept of harm in child protection.

 - The Act is designed to provide children with a permanent secure family placement when they cannot live with their birth parents but where adoption is not appropriate.

- **Care Standards Act 2000 and Children's Home Regulations 2015**
 - The Act and Regulations regulate children's homes fostering and residential care.
- **Education Act 1996 and Academies Act 2010**
 - The Act includes provisions relating to safeguarding in schools and education welfare.
- **Equality Act 2010**
 - The Act protects children from discrimination.
- **Human Rights Act 1998 and UN Convention on the rights of child (UNCRC)**
 - This act underpins principles of welfare and rights.

9. **The Children and Social Work Act 2017** outlines the principles of corporate parenting for children and young people, the duties and responsibilities of safeguarding partners in children's social care.

10. **The Children Social Care National Framework ("CSCNF")** [Exhibit LA/01/ LCC001898] provides statutory guidance on the principles behind children's social care detailing what practitioners must do to comply with the law. The CSCNF applies to all children who come into contact with children's social care up to the age of 18 years old. The CSCNF applies to children in the care of the Local Authority ("LA"), children residing with their families and children living independently. Children that have left the care of the LA are considered care leavers. The CSCNF applies to care leavers up to the age of 25.

11. **Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance 2018, 2019 and most recently 2023** is guidance issued under the Children Act 1989/2004. [Exhibit LA/02/ LCC001899] The purpose of the guidance is:

- To provide a national framework for safeguarding practice.
- To clarify the roles and responsibilities of local authorities, health, education, Police, voluntary organisation and others.
- To ensure children are protected from harm and that their welfare is promoted.

- This guidance sets out how agencies must work together to safeguard children.

12. The statutory scheme and governmental guidance should be complied with and state that CSC should:

- **Safeguarding:** - safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who, without the provision of services, are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly or further impaired, or is disabled (*section 17, Children Act 1989*).
- **Assessment of needs:** - assess the needs of young carers, and whether they require support (*section 17ZA, Children Act 1989*)
- **Enquiries:** - undertake enquiries when there are concerns a child may suffer significant harm and take action to keep them safe, including taking the child into care (*section 47, section 31, Children Act 1989*)
- **Welfare:** promote welfare and safeguard children and to ascertain wishes and feelings of children, parents and carers and give them due consideration in decision making (*section 22, Children Act 1989*)
- **Accommodation:** - provide accommodation in accordance with section 20, Children Act 1989.
- **Leaving care:** - provide a range of support to a child who has left care (*section 23A, 23B, 23C, Children Act 1989*)
- **Looked after children and care leavers:** - deliver services and support to looked-after children and care leavers, local authorities must have regard to the corporate parenting principles (*section 1, Children and Social Work Act 2017*).
- **Professional Leadership:** - Provide leadership for children's social care staff, including workforce planning and development.
- **Implement Standards:** - Ensure services comply with legal and regulatory standards and promote best practice and continuous improvement.
- **Manage Cultural Change:** - Promote child and family centred care, equality, diversity, and inclusion in service delivery.
- **Promote Social Inclusion and Wellbeing:** - Champion the rights and needs of children, including carers, and work to reduce inequalities.

- **Partner agencies and collaborative working:** - working collaboratively with partner agencies who have related duties to CSC at LCC as they commission and deliver services that support children and young people to thrive:

13. Where there are concerns about a child's welfare the intervention of the local authority is governed by statute, in particular the Children Act 1989. Working Together offers guidance about the intervention of the State in a child's life generally."

14. The Children Act 1989 provides as follows:

- **"Section 17 - child in need ("CIN")**

a child is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without services or their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or they are disabled

the local authority has a duty to assess and provide services to support the child and the family".

- **"Section 25 - use of accommodation for restricting liberty**

(1) Subject to the following provisions of this section, a child who is being looked after by a local authority may not be placed, and, if placed, may not be kept, in accommodation provided for the purpose of restricting liberty ("secure accommodation") unless it appears—

(a) that—

(i) he has a history of absconding and is likely to abscond from any other description of accommodation; and

(ii) if he absconds, he is likely to suffer significant harm; or

(b) that if he is kept in any other description of accommodation, he is likely to injure himself or other persons.

- **"Section 31 – Care and Supervision**

(1) On the application of any local authority or authorised person, the court may make an order—

(a) placing the child with respect to whom the application is made in the care of a designated local authority; or
(b) putting him under the supervision of a designated local authority

(2) A court may only make a care order or supervision order if it is satisfied—

(a) that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm; and

(b) that the harm, or likelihood of harm, is attributable to—

(i) the care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give to him; or

(ii) the child's being beyond parental control.

(3) No care order or supervision order may be made with respect to a child who has reached the age of seventeen (or sixteen, in the case of a child who is married).

- **“Section 47 - child protection (“CP”)**

the local authority must make enquiries if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm”.

15. Section 47 enquiries can lead to different types of intervention in the child's life. The nature and degree of intervention will depend on the risk identified and the extent to which the child requires protection.

16. A Child protection plan (“CPP”) is a formal plan under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 which is prepared by CSC following a child protection conference. A child protection conference is arranged between CSC and the parent or care giver when it is considered that a child is at risk of significant harm actual or likely ~~harm~~ due to the care that is being afforded by their parent or caregiver.

17. The Public law outline (“PLO”) is engaged when there is evidence of reasonable grounds to believe that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer from significant harm. The PLO process is pre-proceedings before court. The purpose of the pre-proceedings process is

to work with the parents to prevent the need to apply to the Court for a care or supervision order.

18. The local authority will make an application for a Care Order or Supervision Order.

o Care Order ("CO")

- Parental responsibility is defined in Section 3 (1) of the Children Act 1989 as follows:

"in this act parental responsibility means all the rights duties powers responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property".

- The court may make a care or supervision order if the local authority can prove that threshold criteria have been established for a care or supervision order are defined, as set out earlier in this statement, in section 31 of the Children Act 1989.
- Under a Care Order the local authority shares parental responsibility for the child together with the parents.
- The local authority will produce a care plan which falls to be approved by the Court setting out the child's proposed long term care arrangements. The duration of the Care Order is until the child turns 18 or until a further order is made by the court discharging the care order. If the child is adopted the care order will end and an adoption order will be made.
- During the course of care proceedings, the court can grant an Interim Care Order ("ICO") under section 38 of the Children Act 1989. An interim care plan is in place whilst the interim care order is in force.
- Case law and the ethos of the Children Act 1989 places the emphasis on the benefits to children generally of being brought up by their parents. Accordingly, the local authority must establish that nothing less than removal from home will do to meet the welfare of the child. This is a high hurdle for a local authority as the legal test requires a

holistic analysis as to why no form of professional or other support would assist to keep the child at home in a way that is conducive to their welfare.

○ Supervision Order (“SO”)

- A supervision order can be made when it's found that the threshold criteria have been established but it is not necessary for the local authority to share parental responsibility. There is no power under a supervision order for the local authority to remove the child from home.
- The effect of the supervision order is set out at section 35 of the Children Act 1989 and states as follows;

“supervision orders and supervised child

- *where a supervision order is enforced it shall be the duty of the supervisor;*
 - *to advise, assist and befriend the supervised child;*
 - *to make such steps that are reasonably necessary to give effect to the order; and*
 - *when the order is not wholly complied with or the supervisor considers that the order may no longer be necessary to consider whether or not to apply to the court for its variation or discharge.*
- *A supervision order may require the supervised child to comply with any directions given by the supervisor which –*
 - *require him to live at a place specified by the supervisor*
 - *regulate his contact with the named person or*
 - *require him to participate in specified activities”.*
- A Supervision Order can be made for up to one year initially. The local authority can make an application to extend the supervision order. The maximum length of a supervision order is 3 years from the date of the original order.

19. In emergency situations the local authority may apply for an emergency protection order (“EPO”) under section 44 the Children Act 1989. This is the most urgent form of order under the Children Act 1989.
20. The duration of an EPO is 8 days.
21. The Police are also given Protection Powers (“PPO”) by section 46 of Children Act 1989 to protect children in emergency circumstances where it is believed that a child is at risk of significant harm.
22. In cases where a child is in imminent danger of actual harm, the police may invoke powers of protection pursuant to section 46 Children Act 1989 to remove them from their home. Such power only endures for a maximum of 72 hours. If the child’s continued removal from home is justified an application to the Family Court by the local authority is required.
23. Secure Accommodation Orders can be applied for by the local authority where a child is a looked after child under a Care Order or accommodated pursuant to Section 20. A Secure Accommodation Order can only be made where the local authority has satisfied the court that the conditions under Section 25 apply to the subject child. This is a stringent test.
24. The Secure Accommodation Order authorising a secure accommodation placement can last up to three months after the first application.
25. A local authority can apply to the High Court for leave to invoke its inherent jurisdiction to authorise the deprivation of a child’s liberty. Such an application can only be made where the proposed deprivations are imputable to the State i.e. the local authority and they must be necessary and proportionate to the risks posed to the child and posed by the child to others. It is not possible for the Court to authorise deprivations of liberty in favour of a local authority where the child is still at home. The child’s rights under Art 5 of the European Convention are engaged in such an application due to the draconian nature of the remedy being applied for.
26. Orders authorising the deprivation of a child’s liberty are made for short periods of time and are reviewed regularly by the Court due to the significant interference in the child’s

human rights. The Court will expect the local authority to formulate a clear “exit plan” for the child within its care planning processes whilst the child is not at liberty.

27. Working Together 2018 mandated a “child centred approach” as fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. It reminded all practitioners to follow the principles of the Children Act 1989 and 2004. It recognised the need for “early help” provision and distinguished between an early help assessment and statutory assessments required under the Children Act 1989.
28. It set out the services it anticipated would be available at different levels of need and required safeguarding partners (the local authority, a clinical commissioning group for the area and the police) to have in place a published threshold document that set out local criteria for intervention. In Lancashire this was known as the “Continuum of Need”.
29. Below is an overview of the continuum of need (“CON”) at LCC policies are [Exhibit LA/03] **LCC001900**

CSC Structure

30. During the period under consideration by the Inquiry, CSC was made up of several sub-teams including front door, assessment and adolescent service (which include Youth Justice and contextual safeguarding), child protection, children in need and court work (family safeguarding), looked after children and leaving care, fostering and adoption, residential services.

Internal Policies, Procedures and Training

31. I attach at LA/04- **LCC001901** internal good practice policies and protocols – including Good Practice Aide Memoire 2018, A weekly briefing note from 2019, Good practice transfer between workers guide, CSC Service Practice Statement 2019, CSC’s Vision Poster from 2019, CSC Multi-Agency & Care Planning Responsibilities 2019, CSC’s Complex Safeguarding Protocol 2020-2022 and Practice Principals from November 2021.
32. At LA/05 – **LCC001902** I attach the Missing from Home Policy for 2018.
33. At LA/06 – **LCC001903** I attach relevant COVID-19 policies for CSC, the EHWP Partnership update for COVID April 2020, CYP Placement Providers COVID policy for 15 April 2020, COVID-19 visits guidance March 2020, ICPC and RCPC process during

COVID-19, Visits Guidance updated COVID-19 2 June 2020, Updated visits guidance, March 2020, Visit – Risk Assessment RAG COVID-19, The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020.

Training

34. All social work staff are required to read the LCC CSC Practice Handbook.

Supervision

35. Social workers within the CSC should receive monthly reflective supervision, and the supervision records recorded on the LCS within Liquid Logic. I attach at LA/07 –

LCC001904 copies of the Supervision policy for CSC and a problem resolution flowchart

36. There have been improvements in information sharing within LCC which I will deal with later in section four “Improvements” of my statement.

Information Sharing within LCC

37. Information sharing within in CSC with the NHS (CAMHS and F-CAMHS), at LA/08 –

LCC001905 I attach a pre-health joint funding application, and Aide Memoire for a Health Assessment, Therapy Pathway and information sharing with The Cove form 2023.

38. In relation to working with Prevent and sharing information with them, at LA/09 –

LCC001906 I attach Channel Good Practice Guide 2019, Channel Referral process for 2019, Prevent Information for 2019, Channel 7-minute briefing from 2019, a standard Prevent referral form and CSC’s Prevent Duty Self-Assessment 2020.

39. There have been improvements in information sharing within LCC. I will state these improvements in the “Improvements” section four of my statement.

Multi-agency Information Sharing

40. The Statutory Guidance **'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018/19'**, sets out expectations about how CSC, and other agencies should work in partnership.

41. The National Framework Statutory Guidance highlights the importance of multi-agency working within the assessment stage. Paragraph 16.4 states:

“Professionals from different agencies, families, friends and the wider community should work together in a coordinated manner around each young

person or carer to help raise their aspirations and achieve the outcomes that matter to them. The purpose of carrying out transition assessments is to provide young people and their families with information so that they know what to expect in the future and can prepare for adulthood".

Practitioners seek, share, and analyse information proactively and discuss with partner agencies to build a full picture of a child or young person's experiences. They share information in a way that takes into account ethical considerations and any disproportionality in its use, which may affect minority groups.

42. Multi agency safeguarding and information sharing policies are managed and developed by the Lancs Child Safeguarding Assurance Partnership Exhibit LA10: **LCC001907**

Overview of the CSC Departments' involvement with AR

43. I refer to the attached CSC chronology setting out further details of the CSC involvement with AR and his family at Annex A to this statement. **LCC001854**

44. CSC involvement with AR within the relevant periods include:

- Assessing risk of harm via C&F assessment via section 47 Children Act 1989.
- Assessing needs and carer's support via section 17ZD Children Act 1989 assessment following request for support from the parents.
- Conducting a Return to Home Interview ("RHI") following a missing episode.
- Attending AR and the family directly through home visits and indirect telephone contact.
- Attending multi-agency meetings.
- Liaising with Police, CAHMS, Prevent, Range High school, Criminal Youth Justice Service, Acorns School, AR's family and colleagues from other LCC departments including the Youth Offending Team ("YOT"), Early help ("EH") and the Education department.

45. Therefore, throughout the relevant periods, CSC worked with other professional agencies in line with the multi-agency and collaborative Working Together Practice Guidelines 2018/19. The agencies engaged were:

- **Early Help / Child and Wellbeing Service: -**

- regular communication and working relationship were maintained during the relevant periods. There are interactions, assessments, plans and TAF considered whilst CSC were engaged.
- **School: –**
 - **Designated Safeguarding Lead, Range High School** - regular liaison, interaction and information shared with CSC throughout the relevant periods AR was on Range High school roll. There are interactions recorded and considered whilst CSC were engaged.
 - **Designated Safeguarding Lead, Acorns** - regular liaison, interaction and information shared with CSC throughout the relevant periods AR was on Acorn's roll. There are interactions recorded and considered whilst CSC were engaged.
- **CAMHS and FCAMHS**
- **Parenting 2000** – Information considered as part of CFW engagement with AR and his family to be kept aware of the agencies previously and currently linked to the family.
- **Police** – liaison and interaction around incidents and post assessment work at points. Police involvement included Police Safeguarding referrals (“PSR”) to the MASH, attendance at multiagency strategy meetings and rapid review meetings.
- **Prevent**
- **CYJS** – liaison, interaction and information shared with CSC at strategy meetings and during section 47 enquiries during their period of intervention.
- **Youth offending teams (“YOT”)** - regular liaison, interaction and information shared with CSC including attendance at multi agency strategic meetings.
- **NHS** - interaction and information shared with CSC information shared with CSC including attendance at multi agency strategic meetings.

46. By way of overview, the key periods of involvement were as follows.

Period 1 October 2019 – 11 December 2019

47. AR first came to the attention of the CSC in October 2019. AR and his family were not previously known to CSC due to abuse or neglect. On 8 October 2019 a Police Safeguarding Referral (“PSR”) marked “High Risk” from Lancashire Constabulary was received by the Children Social Services Hub (“CSSH”). A referral had been made by ChildLine to Lancashire Police. It was recorded in the PSR that AR telephoned Childline and explained that he was being bullied. He said that he had taken a knife from his

kitchen to school on multiple occasions and was going to kill the child who was bullying him. The referral was recorded by CSSH MASH.

48. I understand the police rationale for a high-risk assessment was based on AR's bullying at school and his repeated actions of taking a knife to school. Although AR hadn't used the knife or taken it out of his bag, this showed potential for significant escalation. While AR appeared to understand in theory the severity of the offence and potential repercussions, the risk was high that he could again take a knife to school. AR's actions placed both himself and others at risk of harm. CSC were informed that AR was subsequently warned about the dangers of carrying a knife by Lancashire Police.
49. The fact that AR told ChildLine and the police that he believed he might use the knife in a bullying situation was obviously cause for serious concern. The social worker within CSC identified that concerns were around alleged bullying in school and AR taking a knife into school. It was considered that the Police had dealt with this incident in that AR was spoken to by the police about the dangers of taking a knife but were of the view that he may benefit from some emotional support. In response to the incident CSC were aware that parents had taken immediate action to store knives safely.
50. The Range high school (RHS) was made aware of the incident. AR was permanently excluded from the RHS in October 2019. It was considered by the RHS that AR posed a risk to the safety of the children attending the RHS and, that AR had not been able to demonstrate any regret for his actions.
51. It was therefore agreed within CSC that AR may benefit from emotional support and work around the consequences of behaviours such as taking a knife into school. The concerns identified at this first contact stage met level 2 of CON 2019.
52. Consequently, the case decision was to step down to LCC Child and Family Wellbeing Service ("CFW") that sat in Early Help ("EH"). EH does not sit in CSC but in the Education, Culture and Skills Directorate. Kathy Ashworth is the Early Help Head of Service. The plan was that CFW were to follow up with mother and offer appropriate support/signposting.
53. This was an outcome that could be deemed to be in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 and the local continuum of need.

54. The MASH report was shared with Parenting 2000. Parenting 2000 had been providing therapeutic support through private therapy since January 2019. Support was coming to an end when they received the MASH report regarding the school incident. A decision was made by Parenting 2000 to extend the support onto the Sunshine and Shower program, which is for young people at risk of criminality. The worker at Parenting 2000 had concerns regarding AR having ADHD and/ or ASD and had made a referral to CAMHS regarding this. The worker also had concerns about AR's mental health. This information was shared with AR's school.
55. On 3 December 2019, Acorns the PRU AR was now attending shared with the Family Support Worker (FSW) from CFW that teachers had had concerning conversations with him in art class about guns, decapitation, and his understanding of what is appropriate and not. The school was advised to share this information with the MASH.
56. On 5 December 2019, a meeting was held at Acorns, including AR, his father, the FSW, and the Designated Safeguarding Lead to discuss the issues above. It was clear that at this time, AR's father was convinced that his son would never harm another person and would not actually use a knife. AR's father felt that his son's neurodiversity needs meant that he did not understand what he was saying. The FSW advised the school to make a Prevent referral.
57. On 6 December 2019 the MASH responded to the information as follows.

" The concerns regarding AR searching on the internet for violent images, can be managed with level 2 support such as Police Community Safety Officer and Emotional Wellbeing Services / CANW. Children with Autism (which AR may have) often develop obsessions around death, violence and crime. This is due to their neurodevelopment".

Period 2 – 12 December 2019 – 9 March 2020

58. On 12 December 2019 a PSR was received from Merseyside police via the MASH to advise that AR had attended the Range high school in Formby the previous day with a hockey stick with the intention of attacking a pupil. A telephone call from SGT Smith took place advising of AR's arrest. It was reported that AR had in fact attacked a pupil with a hockey stick, striking the victim on his arm.

59. AR was subsequently cautioned and arrested for section 47 assault and possession of a bladed article. At the point of arrest, it is recorded that AR told the police that he also had a knife in his backpack. The police also reported that intelligence from Prevent suggested that AR had been actively searching for beheadings and other extremist material on his computer. The police made Prevent aware of the arrest. AR made no reply to the caution. AR's home address was searched by the police, but nothing was seized. AR was referred to CSC by Stephanie Hallaron, Merseycare.

60. On the afternoon of 12 December 2019, a statutory MASH assessment was completed by Adrienne Fox at the MASH central which stated that AR was at risk of suffering significant harm due to unmet needs and that a multi-agency response would be required. No further information was gathered as part of this assessment. The case was passed to CSC at level 4 for support on CON 2019. The team was concerned about the late referral, partly due to there being another child in the house.

61. A decision was made to progress for a child and family assessment ("C&F assessment"). The practitioner and manager acknowledged that this was the second incident involving AR and violence in a short period of time. It was identified that a C&F assessment would be of benefit to consider AR's needs and explore whether there were any safeguarding concerns. Reflections as to the practitioners' actions are set out in the section three reflections of this statement. On 13 December 2019 AR is stepped up by CFW to CSC. The assessing social worker suggested a strategy discussion was required. This decision is in line with Working Together Statutory Guidance 2018.

62. On 17 December 2019 a strategy meeting was held due to the concerns about AR attending the Range school with a knife and his arrest for a section 47 Assault.

63. Attendees at this meeting were as follows;

- Anna Jameson (Allocated Case Worker, Children's Social Care),
- DC Paula Murray (Merseyside Police),
- Skott Morgan (CAMHS Practitioner, Alder Hey NHS Foundation Trust),
- Carmen Thompson (Police Early Action Team),
- Laura Davidson (Team Leader, Early Help),
- David Cregeen (Designated Safeguarding Lead, Range High School),
- Andrew Bramhall (Community Safety Sgt, Merseyside Police),

- Jan Lewis (Designated Safeguarding Lead, Acorns School),
- Karen Wigan (role not specified),
- Stephanie Hallaron (Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Practitioner, Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust),
- Matt Rowe (Practice Manager, Children's Social Care),
- Paul Harrison (Community Safety Officer, West

64. Some key discussions included:

- **Police:** - The police advised that AR had been arrested and bailed for possession of a knife. AR provided a prepared statement which stated he had no intention to use the knife. AR was later interviewed and gave a no comment interview apart from responding to the suggestion he had researched violent acts on the internet which he denied.
- **Education:-** AR was initially a very quiet child with no issues being raised. It was noted that more recently there had been an escalation in his behaviours specifically AR has been challenging and inappropriate in some things he has said to teachers and children alike and when challenged. AR doesn't accept any responsibility. It was noted that AR had since moved to the Acorns where initially he was very quiet. AR's behaviour is said to have escalated with AR beginning to display strange behaviours such as creating issues with other children and occasionally fixating on staff members. It was discussed that there have also been issues within Acorns where he used the school computers to "research" school shootings etc. It was agreed that AR would not attend the provision until assessments had been completed by professionals working with AR.
- **CAMHS:-** CAMHS advised that it was suspected that AR was autistic and confirmed that he was awaiting an Autism Spectrum Disorder ("ASD") assessment. It was discussed that AR presented as having no rational responses. AR had also been referred to Sefton CAHMS and was due to be seen in the next week. AR will also be referred to forensic CAMHS who specialise in assessing risk.
- **CFW:** - CFW advised that they initially had difficulty contacting the family and when they started working with the family the father's concerns were specific to supporting AR back into education. It was discussed that they have a significant amount of support from "Parenting 2000" in Southport who had advised they are supporting AR with counselling on a 2-weekly basis.

- **CSC** - The social worker had visited AR and the family prior to the strategy meeting. It was shared that it was evident that AR had additional needs and that he struggled not to dominate conversation and he had difficulty with differing opinions. It was also stated that parents struggled to understand how to respond to a child with his needs.

65. The actions recorded were:

- CSC to continue their assessment, including seeing AR's brother, DR, and parents by themselves.
- Prevent team to commence initial assessment.
- Skott Morgan to complete the initial CAMHS appointment.
- | |
|------------|
| DPA |
|------------|
- AR not to return to school at this time; work requested to be sent home from Acorns.
- Update to be sought from Parenting 2000.
- Follow-up strategy meeting to be held on 6th January following updates from the above inquiries.

66. The strategy meeting held on 17 December 2019 was the first of two multi-agency strategy meetings held during period one to consider AR's section 47 assault and arrest and caution for carrying a bladed article. It is consistent with Working together 2018 to undertake a strategy discussion in such circumstances. One of the reasons for doing this is to ascertain if the child is a victim of child exploitation.

67. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018-19 statutory guidance does not contain information relating children who are violent generally.

68. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018-19 makes reference to the serious violence strategy set out in April 2018 which included children social services in the duty to prevent serious violence. Primarily this made reference to working with professional agencies to disrupt grooming and exploitation activity and diverting young people at risk.

69. Online abuse was also considered. At the time online abuse was defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 as; *“sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Whatever the form of abuse or neglect, practitioners should put the needs of children first when determining what action to take”*.

70. The guidance was, therefore, focused primarily on the abuser.
71. At the time there was no reference to children fixated on violence within the Serious Violence Strategy 2018, there was a focus on children being radicalised by people.
72. At the time, it was known by CSC that AR had been arrested and bailed with conditions, and whilst his behaviour raised concerns, including a lack of remorse and fixation on violent content, there were also signs of insight and self-awareness. AR had independently researched neurodevelopmental conditions like ASD and ADD which was felt to suggest a desire to understand himself better. Referrals to CAMHS and forensic CAMHS were initiated to explore these needs further. It was also considered by CSC that the family had already accessed support through Parenting 2000 that included counselling and parenting courses were required. This engagement with Parenting 2000 demonstrated a commitment to improving outcomes for AR and the family. Although AR appeared to dominate family dynamics, his parents were open to professional involvement and acknowledged their struggles with implementing boundaries for AR.
73. It was also understood by CSC that Acorns staff noted AR's initial engagement and positive interactions, particularly during a trip to Chester Zoo, where he was relaxed and sociable. These glimpses of positive behaviour highlighted his capacity to connect and thrive in the right environment. Professionals engaged also recognised the family's willingness to engage, and the proactive steps already taken to seek support.
74. It was acknowledged that there is a possibility that through the highlighted actions and assessments, AR's risks may escalate. It was agreed that the plan was to proceed with assessment work and reconvene when more professional knowledge of the family had been gathered by the agencies involved.
75. On 6 January 2020 a follow-up multi-agency strategy meeting was held. The attendees were as follows.
- A multi-agency strategy meeting takes place attended by Anna Jameson (Allocated Case Worker, Children's Social Care)
 - Matt Rowe (Practice Manager, Children's Social Care)
 - Carmen Thompson (Police Early Action Team)
 - Skott Morgan (CAMHS Practitioner, Alder Hey NHS Foundation Trust)
 - Pita Oates (Pupil Attendance Supervisory Support Worker, LCC)

- Sharon Anderson (Area Pupil Access Officer, LCC)
- Stephanie Hallaron (Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Practitioner)
- Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust)
- Jan Lewis (Designated Safeguarding Lead, Acorns School)

76. The meeting reviewed updates from multiple agencies following the initial strategy discussion. Some key discussions included: -

- **CSC:** - CSC were completing a Child & Family assessment regarding AR [DPA] [DPA] which would comment on the risk he posed and the risks he was subject to. This would need to include information from partner agencies and specifically the appointment with FCAMHS, which would comment on the risk he might pose. Home visits took place to see AR [DPA] engaged well, and discussions with parents were positive. There was no evidence from a safeguarding point of view of continued risk of harm to the children; however, there were clearly some outstanding support needs that needed to be addressed following assessment and actions from all agencies.
- **Prevent:** AR had been seen by the team. It was felt that he did not have any issues regarding the Channel/Prevent programme. They felt that there were no concerns that he was being led into criminality or radicalised. It was noted that he showed no remorse for the incident. The assessment was to be shared.
- **CAMHS:** - AR had been seen and his presentation was described as “very autistic” however a diagnosis remained outstanding. CAHMs confirmed that it was clear from the appointment that AR feels his actions were in retaliation and that he has a sense of injustice about what has happened. AR was not found to be experiencing psychosis or acute mental health issues. Advice was given to parents about having one-on-one time with AR, and discussions took place regarding his feelings towards his brother. From the appointment it was felt by CAHMS that AR presented as having no mental health issues and was not experiencing psychosis.
- **Police:** - The case remained with the CPS regarding a decision on whether to charge AR. AR’s medical records had been requested as part of this decision-

making process, and a request had been made to fast-track this. Police advised the case was still with CPS, pending a decision on charges.

- **Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Team:** - AR was on the cancellation list for his autism assessment. AR did have a further appointment on 21 Jan 2020 with forensic child and adolescent mental health service ("FCAMHS) which would focus on his potential risks.
- **Education:** An update was provided that the LA was looking at alternative provision for AR, including a possible one-on-one tutor. A risk assessment was required regarding the potential risk to other pupils. A request needed to be made for an EHCP, with parents being identified as best placed to complete this; however, it was also possible for the school to do this. There was a discussion about a risk assessment needing to be completed before AR's re-introduction to school. There also needed to be a request for statutory assessment and referral to SENDO. CAMHS would provide information to support this request. The school would send a letter to parents advising of the steps they would take to provide AR with education during this process.
- **Parenting 2000** was continuing to offer support to AR via the Sunshine and Shower program, which is for young people at risk of criminality.

77. While there were concerns about AR's potential for further criminal behaviour and unmet needs, particularly around education and neurodevelopmental support, professionals agreed there was no ongoing evidence that AR was at risk of significant harm. As such the outstanding concerns did not meet the threshold for Section 47 enquiries.

78. Instead, it was agreed that the social worker would continue with the C&F assessment, supported by ongoing multi-agency involvement. The decision reflected the family's engagement and the absence of immediate safeguarding risks, while acknowledging the need for coordinated support to address AR's vulnerabilities.

79. On 19 February 2020 AR was convicted of assault occasioning ABH, possession of an offensive weapon in a public place and possession of a bladed article in a public place. AR was referred to the LCC YOT within Child and Youth Justice Services (CYJS) on a 10-month Referral Order and allocated a social worker, Anna Croll, within YOT.

80. On 20 February 2020 a C&F Assessment was completed by the assessment and Safeguarding Team (West Lancashire Duty Team) for AR. The assessment was completed within 45 days of the strategy discussion but just over 45 days from referral. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018-19 says.

“The maximum timeframe for the assessment to conclude, such that it is possible to reach decision on next steps should be no longer than 45 working days from the point of referral”.

81. The strengths and concerns were identified as follows.

Concerns: AR clearly demonstrated traits of ASD during the assessment, including:

- Lack of contact.
- Lack of empathy.
- Lack of remorse.
- Being literal in his manner.
- Feeling anxious and nervous in crowds or big groups.
- Disliking touch or having people in his space (which may explain why he felt bullied).
- Low self-esteem.
- Feeling that the school did not care.
- Irrational/disproportionate responses to perceived injustice.

Strengths/Safety Factors:

- Loving parents who listened to him and advocated for him with health and school.
- Parents could manage his behaviour at home.
- Participation in extra-curricular activities.
- Positive family time.
- Increased supervision.
- Knives put away.
- No access to the internet.

82. Concerns were raised about his emotional regulation, social isolation, and exposure to violent content online. AR had expressed intent to harm another pupil, alleging bullying as a trigger. Professionals across agencies including CAMHS, Prevent, FCAMHS, and

CSC, identified traits consistent with ASD. AR presented with limited emotional awareness and regulation skills, limited empathy, and literal thinking. He also struggled with anxiety, low self-esteem, and sensory sensitivities. Despite the seriousness of the incident, AR had no prior history of violence or criminal behaviour. He engaged well with professionals during the assessment period and showed signs of remorse and insight into his actions. His parents were also cooperative, proactive in seeking support, and maintained a stable, nurturing home environment.

83. It was reported within the C&F assessment that AR was open to CAHMS for an assessment to be completed. Two previous referrals had been made to CAHMS but these had not been accepted. Information shared by CAHMS during this assessment period was that there is no evidence of AR experiencing any mental health difficulties.
84. It was also reported that AR attended the Acorns school in Ormskirk having been permanently excluded from RHS school in Formby. It is also reported within the C&F assessment that AR struggled to recognise, understand and respond to his own emotions and others. It was noted that AR is only able to identify a few emotions such as happy, sad and angry. It is noted AR is unable to identify the appropriate feeling for the situation/context. It was also highlighted that parents had responded appropriately to the concerns and ensured that AR was supervised in the community to manage risk.
85. The C&F assessment concluded that AR was not at risk of significant harm. However, his ongoing needs, particularly around education, emotional development, and neurodevelopmental support, were significant and required multi-agency intervention. The assessment concluded that the family would benefit from support under Level 3 on Lancashire's CON, which at the time was indicating the need for a Child in Need Plan.
86. It was agreed that a multi-agency meeting would be arranged. It was also identified that as a multi-agency team, they needed to work towards a return back into school for AR. Reflections as to the practitioner's actions are set out in the section three reflections of this statement.
87. On 4 March 2020 a Child in Need ("CIN") meeting was held. The attendees were as follows.
- Anna Jameson (Social Worker, Children's Social Care),
 - Julie Hamill (Family Support Worker, Children's Social Care),

- Laura Davidson (Early Help Manager),
- Anna Croll (Social Worker, Youth Offending Team, Pita Oates,
- attendees from Acorns and The Range (not named).
- Mr. Hicklin from FCAMHS was present but Mr. Morgan from CAMHS was not present

88. During the CIN meeting it was agreed that the multi-agency plan was that AR would be stepped down from CSC to CFW with EH becoming the lead professional. The agreed plan was:

- Family to be supported by EH (Level 2 CON)
- AR to be supported by CYJS for the period of his referral order
- AR to be supported to attend school.
- AR has no formal diagnosis for ASD and is awaiting an assessment. CAMHS
- CAMHS to work with AR around his psychological needs as advised by FCAMHS.
- Family is socially isolated with limited support in the local community. Work to be completed by CFW.

89. I believe the decision was made as there was an absence of concern that AR was at risk of significant harm by his parents or by others outside of the family. There was evidence of continued positive parental engagement and capacity for change. AR was willing to engage with professionals and reflect on his behaviour.

90. Further the closure record identified that offending behaviour was being addressed by YOT. AR had been enrolled at Acorns school which CSC were told met his educational needs. AR's ASD needs were being assessed together with CAMHS supporting AR around his emotions. The main outstanding social care needs was deemed to be social isolation; this was assigned to CFW.

91. On 24 March 2020 AR's case is stepped down from CSC to CFW.

Period 3 – late spring/summer 2020

92. Lockdown happened in March 2020. It disrupted the delivery of services and attendance at education settings. TAF meetings were initially unable to take place.

93. AR was initially not attending Acorns because of concerns about the risk he posed to students and teachers, but work was being sent home to him.
94. He was subject to a RO under CYJS and open to CFW. The RO set the terms for CYJS involvement: focused on carrying a knife. It did not refer to a general fascination with violence or online behaviour.
95. AR engaged poorly during lockdown with Education and CFW. He was open to CFW for 14 weeks and many attempts were made at contact with intermittent success. He engaged better with CYJS but contact was initially by telephone.
96. In March 2020 CYJS assessed AR's likely risk of re-offending and serious harm as "medium". In April CYJS carried out an initial risk assessment using the Youth Justice Board ("YJB") tools. Under "risks and concerns" AR scored "medium" for ROSH judgment, 48% on the Youth Offender Group Reconviction Scale and "medium" for likelihood of reoffending.
97. In May 2020 an EH Plan was prepared and on 19 May 2020 a TAF meeting took place. CAMHS did not attend.
98. At the meeting CYJS shared their assessment of risk as medium but reduced because of lack of imminence due to lockdown (AR was at home). CFW proposed to close AR to their service because face to face meetings were prohibited, AR was not engaging remotely, and the service was consensual.
99. There was an understanding that there was no role for Prevent because AR was deemed not to be a risk.
100. After the meeting Acorns emailed the TAF about the concern that bringing AR back to school would reintroduce imminence and increase risk. The email provided comments about the father's attitude being a barrier to progress with AR.
101. CFW answered Acorns saying there was supportive parenting. CYJS explained and stood by their risk assessment as consistent with the YJB tool used to assess risk, but said Education must do their own. I refer to my reflections set out later in the statement.

Period 4 – summer 2020 – January 2021

102. This was a more settled period.

103. AR was invited to return to school in June 2020, but his parents declined.

104. AR's father asked that EH support be closed to AR until he returned to school. Acorns were concerned about this and wrote to FSW. On reflection there was substance to Acorns' concerns, but CFW options were limited due to the consensual nature of the service. AR re-opened to CFWS on 14 September 2020 as planned when he returned to school.

105. CYJS continued to work with AR and its risk assessment was medium during the summer. His CYJS worker changed, and the new worker was able to deliver some interventions in person with the easing of lockdown rules. CYJS interventions gradually reduced in line with national guidance.

106. AR returned to school in September 2020. As part of the CYJS process Acorns views were sought and in October 2020 AR's teacher reported that AR was doing well and they considered the risk was steadily reducing.

107. On 28 October 2020 a CAF Assessment was completed by CFW. AR was struggling with anxiety but had decided not to continue with CAMHS. There had been no violent incidents, no safeguarding concerns and AR was attending school.

108. TAF on 4 November 2020 was positive. The plan was to reintegrate AR to the year 10 class. An EH Plan was prepared focusing on managing anxiety.

109. CYJS AssetPlus risk assessment was updated in December 2020⁴⁷. AR scored "low" for ROSH judgment under "Risks and Concerns", 36% for YOGRS and "low" for likelihood of reoffending. This was in line with national guidance.

110. On 5 January 2021 the second national lockdown began.

111. The Referral Order Final Panel Report was dated 18 January 2021. A Referral Order Contract Exit Plan was created at a final meeting on 19 January 2021.

112. On 19 January 2021 a TAF meeting took place. AR had declined a referral to CAMHS. All the actions on the CFW plan had been completed; therefore, there was a plan to close AR to the service. School reintegration was to continue once Covid19 restrictions eased. An EH Plan was prepared.

113. On 19 January 2021 during his last supervision with CYJS AR disclosed that his father had hit him. The CYJS worker considered a referral to CSC. He discussed the incident with the father who said that AR had assaulted him. He shared the information with CFW and Acorns. Following investigation, the agencies decided that no further action would be taken. AR closed to CYJS on 24 January 2021.

Period 5 - Early 2021 to September 2021

114. On 23 June 2021, AR's father requested Parent Carers' Needs assessment. This was not a safeguarding referral in respect of AR, but of the parents' needs as carers, that looked at whether the family was entitled to further funding for AR [DPA]. AR's father stated there were no safeguarding concerns, however, he and his wife were struggling to look after the children and require financial assistance from children's social care.

115. This was not re-engagement with CSC for the reasons of safeguarding concerns relating to abuse or neglect as the previous referral had been. It should be understood that the purpose of the carers' assessment was to determine what support parents needed to meet the needs [DPA].

116. A MASH Assessment was completed by Chrstine Bridge and AR was transferred to CSC. CSC accepted the request and allocated the assessment to the Duty and Assessment service, in line with guidance.

117. On 7 September 2021 the C&F Assessment was completed by Stacey Haydock, Duty & Assessment Team. Key information was provided from the multi-agencies working with AR:

- **Health:** AR was open to CAMHS and had received a diagnosis of ASD. AR presented with Anxiety. AR was prescribed Propranolol medication to treat the symptoms of anxiety. Parents reported that AR was generally well, however they had concerns around his eating as he rarely ate food at home and would only eat the same foods.

- **Education:** AR was attending Acorns short stay school. The school reported that he was high functioning and had little trust in professionals. He had an EHCP in place. Parents had requested a review of his EHCP as they were of the view he would benefit from attending a specialist school for children with ASD.
- **Emotional and behavioural development:** It was reported that AR does not make eye contact and that he would rather stand with his head down looking at the floor and would not interact with anyone. AR can become shy and nervous in groups of people. AR is unable to let go of any real or perceived injustice. Parents report that AR refuses to go out of the house except to go to school.

118. AR was described in the assessment as academically able, with high verbal reasoning skills, but emotionally reactive and socially isolated. His relationship with his father was notably strained, with reports of verbal aggression, refusal to engage, and incidents of throwing objects. AR expressed distrust toward professionals and was reluctant to engage with the social worker, only participating in one visit. His educational provision was limited to one hour a day at the PRU, which professionals agreed was unsuitable for his needs. A review of his EHCP had taken place, and efforts were underway to secure a specialist SEN placement. AR's teacher and CAMHS practitioner both highlighted the need for a tailored approach to support his emotional regulation, social development, and trust-building.

119. The assessment included valuable information from the school and parents regarding AR's needs. Parents reported that they had requested a review of AR's EHC plan and requested that AR be educated within a special educational school with autism specialism. They believed that mainstream schools and the current PRU were not the correct environment for AR and that a specialist school with autism knowledge would be able to support AR's social, communication, and autistic needs appropriately.

120. Parents originally enrolled AR in the same high school as his brother; however, they now wished they had tried AR at the same school all his primary school friends were going to, as he struggled to make social relationships and they reported that he was bullied. The SEN teacher knew AR well and had a good relationship with him. She talked about how best to engage AR and the time felt it would take 12 months to support him to access social activities.

121. Good information was provided by CAMHS regarding AR's needs and how they would support graded exposure work, although the relationship with his father made this difficult.
122. The family was asked about knives; they only kept one small knife, which they kept safe and used for cutting onions, etc. The house was described as clean and tidy. AR's father clearly loved his children, was protective of them, and blamed himself for their extra needs. It appears that parents are beginning to use strategies that do not upset or provoke AR, making many adjustments to manage his behaviours and rightly picking their fights.
123. However, I observe that during the assessment, AR had made allegations against his father, including claims of physical harm and threats. The allegations had been made during an online session with CAMHS. These allegations were investigated by a separate social worker and were not substantiated by other family members, including DR, who denied any such incidents. The social worker noted the tension between AR and his father and was curious but found no evidence of current risk of significant harm.
124. The social worker proposed a referral to senior management for funding a carer to support AR's community access, though the team manager suggested this could be met through education and Early Help services.
125. The C&F assessment considered funding for a carer for AR but concluded that he did not meet the criteria for direct payments. The needs identified were around AR's education, eating, relationship with his father and social isolation. The social worker concluded that needs identified were in line with level 3 (FIS) of the CON 2021 specifically;
- Have multiple or complex needs.
 - Require coordinated multi-agency support.
 - Have poor engagement with key services (e.g. school, health).
 - Exhibit anti-social or challenging behaviour.
 - Experience neglect or poor family relationships.
 - Are not in education or work long-term.
 - Are involved in crime or substance misuse at a significant level.
 - Have significant disability or mental health needs that impair development.
 - Require targeted intervention to prevent escalation into safeguarding concerns.

126. The assessment identified that there had been further Prevent involvement with AR.
127. The assessment identified that work to reintegrate AR into both school and the community would meet the parents' needs as carers. This would enable them to experience more free time and participate in other activities. The assessment also considered AR's wider needs.
128. AR's needs were identified and deemed to be best met through a Family Intensive Support (FIS) Plan, with recommendations for direct work to rebuild the father-son relationship, support for social engagement, and further exploration of his eating and sensory needs.
129. Consequently, on 27 September CSC stepped down AR and his family to FIS. There is a request for EH to provide support around social isolation and access to Lancashire Breaktime. Support requested was to improve social skills, access activities in the local community, support to re-build the relationship between AR and his father, emotional support, community support and parenting skills for parents.
130. On 27th September 2021, there was a telephone call between Stacey Haydock's Team manager, SFSW and case holder in FIS, Louise Lewis. The TM informed CFW that the allocated worker had left, which meant a step-down meeting could not be arranged or attended. She highlighted that AR was not in full-time education and was currently on roll at PRU, however, was refusing to attend. As a result, AR was receiving only one hour of home-based education per day, which he was also refusing to engage with.
131. The TM expressed concern that this lack of educational engagement was having a detrimental impact on AR's social development and emotional wellbeing. It was also exacerbating tensions within the home, particularly with his father, as AR had made allegations against his father, allegations that had been investigated and found to be unsubstantiated.
132. The TM noted that AR has an active EHCP which clearly identified the need for a place in a specialist educational setting due to his diagnosis of ASD. However, at present, these needs were not being met, and the absence of appropriate provision was contributing to his isolation and emotional distress.

133. Attached to the contact record that the CFW worker had access to was the Child and Family Assessment and the Step-Down Request, which outlined the following support needs at Family Intensive Support (FIS) level:

- **Education:** A specialist SEN school placement to be sourced. In the interim, joint working with the PRU to support AR's social development and community access.
- **Community Engagement:** Direct support for AR to access structured activities outside the home.
- **Parental Support:** Exploration of peer support groups for parents of children with additional needs; consideration of the Stepping Stones parenting course.
- **Family Relationships:** Direct work with AR and his father to rebuild their relationship, with mediation as a contingency.
- **Emotional Support:** Individual sessions with AR to explore his wishes, feelings, and emotional needs.
- **Health and Nutrition:** Parents to consult the GP regarding AR's restrictive eating, with potential referral to an eating disorder clinic.
- **Sensory Needs:** CAMHS to assess whether AR's eating difficulties are linked to sensory processing issues.
- **Mental Health:** Continued CAMHS involvement to support AR's anxiety and emotional regulation.
- **Transitions:** Referral to the Transitions Team for DPA AR DPA to support future planning.

Period 6 – October 2021 – February 2022

134. From October 2021 EH become involved. On 5 October 2021 an FSW, from CFW/EH carried out an EH assessment and on 2 November 2021 she completed an EH plan. CFW were alive to the issues of the Prevent referrals and some of AR's extreme thoughts. They were aware though that two of the Prevent referrals had been closed with no further action and recognised the need to learn the outcome of the third.

135. AR was discussed in FSW's supervision. The senior FSW had been involved with AR previously supervising another FSW. It was recognised that there were issues with the family's capacity for change and that they had received support in the past for the same concerns. It was recognised that key workers needed to build a positive relationship with AR to challenge his views. It was also understood that AR was refusing school and spending 24 hours a day at home and he had no specialist placement.

136. CFW proposed to bring in a worker from TYS. AR was introduced to the worker, Mr Coughlan, on 3 November 2021. On 5 November 2021 a police incident occurred when AR reacted extremely causing damage when someone knocked on the door. The EH Plan was updated, and more detail was recorded on 19 November 2021.
137. On 30 November 2021 a second police incident occurred. AR kicked his father in the leg causing no injury and threw a plate at a car parked on the driveway cracking the windscreen. On 6 December 2021 the police made a safeguarding referral. A TAF meeting took place on 7 December 2021. Following updates from the relevant agencies it was felt that the plan enabled the family to take small steps in the right direction and there were positives for the family.
138. On 15 December 2021 the final EHCP was approved. On 5 January 2022 it is reported to CFW that AR was not attending school. A decision was made on 7 January 2022 that AR would be stepped down from CFW once the TYS sessions are completed.
139. On 11 January the EH Plan was updated again. TYS had seen AR. CAMHS reported that AR had been seen by the psychiatrist and his medication was being reviewed. AR's sensory issues around food were being addressed and the parents had completed the Triple P parenting course and were waiting for Rising Rapids.
140. Two safeguarding concerns were noted at Acorns on 21 and 26 January 2022 when AR was talking about the holocaust. As a result of Acorns' previous experience of Prevent they did not make referrals for them. AR was referred to the transitions team of ASC.
141. A TAF meeting took place on 10 February 2022, and all the professionals present agreed AR could be stepped down from EH.
142. There was a CFW supervision to consider AR. It was felt he had made good progress and that the parents needed to take ownership going forwards, with minimum reliance on agencies. No safeguarding risks were identified. The main issue was the father relying on professionals to take on the parenting role.
143. On 21 February 2022 the final TYS meeting took place. On 4 March 2022 AR was offered a place at Presfield Special School in Southport. On 7 March 2022 the case was proposed to close to CFW: all actions complete.

144. On 11 March 2022 a TAF meeting was attended by education, CAMHS and CFW. They agreed AR no longer required level 3 support. Ongoing support was to be managed through the EHCP. The father expressed concern about the case closing to CFW before AR had transferred to Presfield. Attendance issues at school were to be addressed by Presfield's attendance officer. The father was given the CFW contact number. The Episode was closed on 14 March 2022.

Period 7 - 17 March 2022 to 23 March 2022

145. On 17 March 2022 LCC CSC receive a missing from home report from Lancashire Police.

146. CFW was contacted by CAMHS on 17 March 2022²⁷¹ who informed them AR had gone missing. CFW were made aware of the referral even though the case was closed by CFW on 11 March 2022. CFW knew AR was meant to be attending Presfield School for a taster day. The FSW was also contacted by the father who reported AR was missing. CAMHS later contacted the FSW to say the police had found AR.

147. No information was provided to the FSW that day beyond this. Based on what she knew she did not consider there was a reason to reopen the case to CFW.

148. On 18 March 2022 the police report was received by MASH. It contained key information: AR had admitted he had a knife, he said he was planning to stab someone with the knife on the way home. He also said he had tried to make poison in the past. AR explained that he wanted embarrassing videos removed from his social media and his psychologist had explained if he committed a crime, he could get his account deleted. The police formed the view that he was having a bad mental health episode. It was recognised that AR did not seem to appreciate the seriousness of the incident and did not think he was doing anything wrong.

149. On 21 March 2022, a PSR was received by the MASH advising that AR had been reported missing by his mother on 17 March 2022. The report states AR's father had reported that a small knife had gone missing from the kitchen. AR was recorded missing for 2 hours and 45 minutes. The referral states that AR was later found by police carrying a kitchen knife. AR disclosed plans to harm someone. It is understood that AR was motivated by a belief that committing a crime would lead to deletion of his social media

accounts. AR is recorded as appearing emotionally detached and did not grasp the seriousness of his actions. Police advised the family to secure knives in the home due to ongoing safety concerns.

150. Attempts were made to contact AR's mother and school by the CSSH. A letter was sent by the CSSH to AR's mother on 21 March 2022 leaving contact number to CSSH to discuss further support.

151. A missing from home ("MFH") episode was created on the 17 March 2022 following receipt of the missing episode. This was passed to the missing from home team.

152. MASH received an information share from the police the MASH manager asked the early help coordinator to liaise with Early Help, share information and ascertain whether the family required any further support. It appears the full details of the incident were not shared, and positive feedback was given to the MASH social worker that indicated there were not any safeguarding concerns, and the matter could be dealt with at level 2 of the CON.

153. The return home conversation form ("RHC") was allocated to Amanda Chapman within CSC for completion.

154. Contact was made with AR's mother on 21 March 2022. Arrangements were made to complete a return home interview with AR ("RHI") on the 22 March 2022. The RHI was completed with AR by Amanda Chapman in CSC. The interview was completed face to face with AR in the family home. AR reported that he left the house following an argument with his mother over his social media accounts and whether people could look at them. He stated that he then left the house to calm down. He said that he did not have a knife with him.

155. It is recorded within the notes of the RHI that AR was attending school although not consistently due to his severe anxiety. The family were awaiting his EHCP to be updated and he was due to start Presfield special school after the Easter holidays. It was also noted that CAHMs remained involved and engaged with AR. It was recorded that neither AR nor parents felt that they required additional support. No further concerns were noted, and further support was not recommended.

156. I refer to my reflections about this period later in this statement.

Period 8 – April 2022 to March 2024

157. On 17 May 2022 AR is registered to Presfield High School. On 23 May 2022 contact was made by Presfield contacted the MASH with the following;

My name is Mark Rigby, and I am the Deputy DSL student at Presfield High School in Southport. I am emailing regarding the above student who is currently attending our school. Today, we discovered that he previously had a social worker (Matthew Embly?) and an early help worker (Sharon?). However, when I contacted Lancashire Social Care, I was informed that his plan has been closed.

Could you please provide the date when his plan was closed and the reasons for its closure? We have some concerns as he has begun refusing to attend school, and his father reports challenging behaviours at home, such as pouring milk into his bed to prevent himself from sleeping, tipping his father's dinner over his head, and pouring water over his father's laptop, causing it to break.

158. MASH undertook enquiries including speaking to AR's dad. The outcome of these enquiries was that Presfield would undertake an assessment to identify what support was required and make a referral to CFW if this was appropriate.

159. There was then a protracted period when AR was not attending school and Presfield and CAMHS sought to work with the family in relation to attendance. On 14 July 2022 Presfield wrote saying they were unable to meet AR's needs and revoking LCC's sixth form place.

160. On 8 August 2022 Suzanne Walmsley, a social worker in ASC, was allocated to assess AR's needs in relation to his transition to adult services.

161. AR was reinstated to Presfield but did not attend.

162. In January 2023 AR's parents completed parental input for an annual review, saying that they did not think Presfield was suitable and that LCC should identify another placement. No alternative provisions were explored because Presfield had places and were thought to be legally able to meet his needs. It was felt that Presfield had not provided good enough evidence that they were unable to do so. As a result, he was given a more therapeutic offer and tutoring from March 2023.

163. On 22 March 2023 Presfield made a request for support because AR had not been seen by the school since 25 May 2022, reporting he was too anxious to engage. CSC attempted to reach the family and could not. Consideration was given to whether consent could be overridden under s. 47 and the conclusion was that it could not. The recommendation was to close the case.
164. On 3 April 2023 the father contacted MASH for support, reporting that things were better when CFW was involved. On the 4 April 2023 CFW became involved again. No risks posed by AR were identified at this point.
165. On 4 April 2023 a CAF assessment was started and a new FSW became involved. A decision was made to involve TYS too. The newly allocated FSW met AR on 14 April 2023 and discussed the situation with the family. The father reported that AR was less aggressive. AR reported high anxiety and that he was very isolated. He said that he was safe online and only used Youtube.
166. On 2 May 2023 the FSW had a direct work session with AR walking in the local area. AR presented as calm and relaxed and engaged in a conversation about what he wanted from direct work and school. He did not want to engage with TYS or become more social. This was the last successful visit between LCC and AR.
167. On 21 May 2023 CWF completed a CAF. The FSW had tried to visit AR twice since 2 May and on both occasions he had given excuses not to see her. LCC's understanding was that previous interventions had helped and conflict in the home had reduced. AR was engaging to an extent with school and CFW. AR was assessed at level 3 on the Continuum of Need 2021. He was to be referred to TYS for support for social isolation and have direct support for anxiety to teach coping skills.
168. On 25 May 2023 a TAF meeting took place. The father reported AR's mood had improved with medication. AR's attendance at school had been patchy, varying week to week and patchy engagement with mental health services. He had initially engaged well with CFW but there had then been failed visits. The family was receiving family therapy from CAMHS. CFW drew up an EH Plan reflecting what had been agreed. The record is wide ranging but includes a note that there were no concerns about AR's online behaviour according to the father.
169. In late May / June the FSW continued to try regularly to see AR but he did not engage. From 8 June 2023 the TYS worker tried to engage AR too.

170. On 22 June 2023 another TAF meeting was held. CAMHS could not attend. The father was worried about lack of engagement and wanted the senior FSW to become involved. It was reported that the case was likely to close if there was continued non-engagement. An EH plan of 22 June 2023 recorded the situation.
171. On 27 June 2023 TYS wrote to AR to encourage engagement.
172. A home visit could not be arranged because the senior FSW was off work. A TAF meeting was held on 17 July 2023. TYS encouraged the parents to challenge AR and remove choices from him, regaining the power dynamic. CFW offered to make referrals for therapeutic support, but the father said AR did not want support outside of school. The parents declined repeating the Triple P course and a one-to-one tailored version of the course was considered.
173. On 14 August 2023 the ASC Transitions Team contacted the family to initiate a transitions assessment to ASC under the Care Act 2014, to assess services required by AR when he turned 18.
174. On 6 September 2023 a meeting took place between the father, CFW and ASC. It was explained that as AR was refusing support the only role CFW could offer was support to the parents. The father did not want this and it was explained that without consent CFW could not work with the family.
175. On 13 September 2023 a TAF meeting took place and it was noted that there was no progress by CFW because AR was not engaging and the parents had declined support. AR had been seen by a police safeguarding officer and education options were discussed.
176. On 22 September 2023 a decision was made to close AR to CFW, but he would remain on a Continuum of Need 2021 - level 2.- a child who has additional unmet needs and is just coping thus may be in need of early support from services.
177. On 25 September 2023 an AH Psychiatrist visited AR but he would not engage.
178. On 29 September 2023 the case was closed to CFW. There were no safeguarding concerns relating to AR and the father had reported no concern about his online behaviour. The school were going to continue to encourage AR to attend.

179. On 9 November 2023 ASC attended the family home for a Care Act 2014 assessment. She wrote a retrospective note of the visit into the case notes on 30 July 2024. Contemporaneous supervision notes suggest she concluded AR was eligible for post 18 support to help with prompting and accessing the community, but he would not engage with the assessment.

180. In November 2023 Presfield again reiterated they could not meet AR's need because he was not attending. AR's father wanted him to remain on the roll.

Section Three: Reflections on CSC involvement with AR

181. The primary purpose and role of CSC is to identify, safeguard, protect and promote the welfare of children. CSC's responsibilities come primarily from the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004, the Children and Social Work act 2017 and statutory guidance such as the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (and later Working Together to Safeguard Children 2024).

182. Following the tragic events of 29 July 2024 CSC participated in the Rapid Review [LA11-LCC000786] with all other associated professional agencies. As the Director of CSC, I have also considered all relevant information and records disclosed as part of this Inquiry. I set out my reflections upon specific periods of CSC involvement with AR including learning to assist the Inquiry.

Reflections for:

Period 2 (12 December 2019 to 9 March 2020)

183. On 12 December 2019 a referral was received from Merseyside Police Safeguarding following the incident whereby AR attended RHS school with a knife and assaulted a pupil with a hockey stick.

184. It is accepted that there were issues with record keeping; in particular there is no CSC record of the meeting of 4 March 2020.

185. CSC followed procedures and undertook two strategy discussions and a C&F Assessment. The initial outcome was for a CIN plan to be implemented by CSC. However, at the first CIN meeting the partnership agreed a step down to EH with a multi-

agency plan in place was appropriate. This was in line with both Working Together 2018 and the local threshold arrangements outlined in the CON.

186. The assessment undertaken rightly included information from Prevent, the police, CYJS and FCAMHS. These agencies provided information pertaining to the level of risk AR could pose to others and what work should be done with him as a result of this.

187. The multi-agency plan reflected the needs identified within the assessment.

188. With hindsight it is recognised that a more robust multi-agency plan, with clear monitoring arrangements, should have been developed to address the risks. This plan needed to identify who would work with AR around his interest in violence, support internet safety, and help him engage in more constructive interests. In time, Acorns did begin to work with AR on several of these areas, but earlier intervention and clearer roles would have made a difference.

189. It remains unclear to LCC what actions were taken by CAMHS, FCAMHS and paediatrics following the March 2020 meeting, particularly as it occurred just days before the first Covid-19 lockdown. Greater transparency and follow-up would have supported a more joined-up approach.

Period 5 - early 2021 to September 2021

190. A Carers Assessment was initiated in June 2021, following a request from AR's father. A C&F assessment was completed on 7 September 2021. I do note that the assessment was completed on an incorrect form and should have been completed on a carers' assessment form. It was delayed and should have taken 45 days in line with guidance 2018-19. Despite the delay, the assessment contained much useful information. The strengths I have observed are, useful multiagency information particularly from CAMHS and Acorns, a good relationship with AR and his SEN teacher, and it appeared there were some positives within the family.

191. LCC were aware that three Prevent referrals had been made at time and therefore understood them to have been sufficiently processed. Prevent had not signposted AR to any LCC services.

192. The social worker initially requested funding for a carer to support AR to access the community and attend social activities. The manager was however of the view that this

work could be undertaken by TYS. This appears to be a rational decision. CFW had the resources to meet the identified needs, which were primarily around social isolation, diet and parenting.

193. Safeguarding concerns had been considered by another social worker and had not been substantiated. Neither S17 CIN nor S47 processes were initiated.

194. S. 47 requires the SW to act if they consider that there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm. CSC had investigated the disclosure reported by CAMHS and the wider carer's assessment did not reveal other concerns of this nature. The support needs identified were around family support, not child protection.

195. With hindsight, the provision outlined could have been more precise. The social worker had identified the need for a support worker to engage regularly with AR to address his social isolation. When it was agreed that this could be met through Early Help via the Targeted Youth Support (TYS) service, the plan needed more detail particularly around the duration of the intervention. Additionally, CAMHS input would have been beneficial to guide the TYS worker, especially in supporting AR's socialisation and graded exposure to community settings.

Period 6 – October 2021 – February 2022

196. An assessment was undertaken and completed on 5th October 2021 by a FSW in EH/CFW.

197. The plan, dated 2 November 2021, allocated a youth worker from Targeted Youth Support (YTS) to help AR reintegrate into the community in line with the C&F assessment, which is available to the EHM. FIS was also doing direct work with AR and his family, and AR's father agreed to Triple P parenting course to help with parenting.

198. Targeted Youth Support ("TYS") did not start happening properly until January 2022, with six sessions agreed to take place. The rationale for this is not clear, as the SEND officer at school had suggested it would take at least six months to achieve sustainable change in AR's ability to access the community.

199. On 11 January 2022, there was a good update in the plan, showing how partners were trying to support AR and his family. After Triple P, family therapy to be provided by CAMHS was advised as there continued to be difficulties in the relationship with AR.

200. Following information from the school, TYS engaged AR around politics and world affairs. On 19th November 2021, a much better plan was detailed around interventions and purpose. *Exhibit LAX/LCC000327*].
201. Given AR's ASD needs, I consider it was highly likely that he would need more than a 12-week intervention to achieve sustained change. He needed consistent support, routine, and a long-term relationship with someone he trusted. If AR had received consistency, the youth worker might have been able to achieve some level of reintegration into his mainstream community and helped him and his family advocate for education that met his needs- a small and calm classroom with a consistent teacher.
202. On 14 March 2022, a plan led to the decision to close the case to EH following a TAF on 11 March 2022. The TAF notes record, AR was now refusing to attend the community group, and his father felt no progress had been made, stating "nothing has changed." His father wanted CFW to stay open until AR had transitioned to Presfield.
203. I acknowledge that AR was still not attending school on a full-time timetable at this point. AR could achieve a grade 4-5 in Maths and a grade 2-4 in English; however, if he continued to not attend and refuse to complete work, he was at risk of getting low grades in both subjects. Therefore, I consider this could indicate that AR's educational needs were not being met at the time.
204. CFW considered AR's needs had been met. However, it is noted that AR was not yet in a permanent education provision full time, he had only attended a community provision a few times. It is important to allow sufficient time for new patterns to consolidate, particularly where emotional regulation or social engagement is concerned. Therefore a longer period of support would have been beneficial.
205. I have carefully considered whether CFW was the right support offer following the C&F assessment by CSC in September 2021, I understand that Early Help could have continued their TYS work for 6 months, therefore I think this was an appropriate approach.
206. Looking at this case now I expect the plan to have been more specific and explicit about the minimum length of intervention required. I would also expect the plan to have consciously considered the information provided by CAMHS regarding AR's needs and

how CFW would support graded exposure work. It is possible that through TAFs it would have been possible for CAMHs to provide support and guidance to the TYS instead of the father. To my knowledge there are not any trained specialists who would do this work.

Period 7 (17 March 2022 to 23 May 2022)

207. On 20 March 2022 a RHI was conducted by Amanda Chapman following the incident whereby AR was reported missing from home. With the benefit of hindsight, this reflection involves considering what information was available to CSC and what (if any) action could have been taken.

208. It would have been expected for the RHI to be informed by all historic children's care information including previous Prevent referrals and Early Help interventions. This may have led to greater curiosity with regards to the carrying knives and internet usage.

209. The quality of the interview would have been improved had the information above been explored and if AR had been challenged about the untrue assertion that he did not have a knife on him when found on a bus by police.

210. Exploration of these issues should have led to a safeguarding referral from the MFH worker.

211. Within the MASH episode AR's historic involvement with CSC and EH should have been more thoroughly considered. It would also be expected that the MASH would have initiated a conversation with EH and MFH, including consideration of the detail supplied about this incident.

212. The police referral contained information about the incident which if combined with the information set out above would have led to a strategy discussion. Within this, the partnership would have been able to gain an updated assessment of risk informed by agencies with specialist knowledge.

Section Four: Improvements

213. Information sharing within the LCC

- Currently, all new account requests—effective from the date being verified—are configured to ensure cross-system visibility. Specifically, a CFW

practitioner receives a primary account in EHM and a read-only secondary account in LCS. A social worker is granted a primary account in LCS and a read-only secondary account in EHM. This approach ensures that professionals can access relevant information across systems, aligned with their role and responsibilities.

214. Prevent referrals

- A clearer understanding that AR posed a risk of committing a serious offence even though Prevent referrals had not been accepted could have focused the multi-agency approach. There are more interventions available now for children who are not accepted by Prevent, the local authority is strengthening pathways to access these services.
- We are currently exploring what a dual referral pathway could look like to ensure that children and adults that don't progress to a police led partnership discussion or to channel panel receive the support that they need.
- Prevent now accept referrals for children who do not have a clear ideology but have an intense interest in violence. This enables the partnership to more effectively manage risk through the Channel process.

215. Early intervention

- During Channel Panel discussions, we routinely explore support options for children who are not currently open to statutory services. Very few children fall outside the scope of support at Level 3 or Level 4.
- Referrals are typically made by the professional with the most direct involvement with the child. Where no clear lead professional is identified, the Child Trafficking and Criminal Exploitation Officer (CTCO) is asked to submit the referral, with a note that the case has been discussed at Channel Panel.

216. Neurodiversity

- During times of CSC involvement, the partnership did not always display a good enough understanding of neurodiversity. The partnership was not fully aware that AR remained to have an intense interest in violence. A greater understanding of AR's neurodiversity needs and vulnerabilities may have led

to a greater focus around how AR was spending his time in his room and what his internet usage entailed.

- Following the pandemic we now know more about the difficulties of integrating children with neurodiversity needs back into school after a break. If this had been better understood there could have been a greater focus on keeping AR in school both prior to and during the pandemic. Although it was parent's choice to keep AR off school, the long-term impact of not attending was not explained to them explicitly within the context of his diagnosis of ASD.
- Since this time the Autism Intensive Support Service (AISS) was established to provide specialist input for children and young people with complex autism-related needs. Their role is to work collaboratively with social workers and the wider multi-disciplinary team (MDT) to enhance understanding of the child's presentation and tailor support accordingly.
- Feedback from frontline staff highlights the pivotal role AISS played in supporting a young person with significant needs that they were supporting. Their involvement enabled professionals to better understand the child's behaviours and triggers, leading to more empathetic, child-centred interventions and a reduction in harmful behaviours. Key contributions included:
 - **Training and Awareness:**
 - **Support for Care Providers:**
 - **Information Sharing/formulation report:**
 - **Creative Communication**

217. LCC has since provided an enhanced training package to support practitioners work with children with neurodiversity needs.

218. **Missing From Home**

- More recently The Department of Education addressed guidance on children who run away or go missing from care issued in January 2014, is a key document for local authorities in England. It outlines the responsibilities of local authorities and safeguarding children who run away or go missing from home or care. The guidance emphasises the importance of effective joint working between agencies and professionals to ensure the

welfare of children. It also includes a flow chart detailing the roles and responsibilities when a child goes missing from care. The guidance is issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which requires local authorities to act under a general guidance of the Secretary of State. [Exhibit LA12/[LCC001908]] Department for Education (2014a) Statutory guidance on children and adults who runaway or go missing from home or care. London: Department for Education.

- The missing from home procedure has been developed since 2022. A plan to re-design our contextual safeguarding was agreed in 2022 and implemented in 2023. LCC have made significant improvements in how we respond to children who go missing from home. One of the most impactful changes has been the integration of Missing From Home (MFH) workers into a wider multi-disciplinary team, moving away from the previous model where they operated as a separate, specialist service.
- This shift has brought about several important benefits. By embedding MFH workers within a broader team we've strengthened collaboration and improved the flow of information between professionals. This has enabled timelier and more coordinated responses, ensuring that risks are identified earlier and that interventions are better informed.
- This model supports the workforce itself. MFH workers now have greater access to peer support, shared learning, and professional development opportunities within the team, which contributes to a more resilient and confident workforce.
- We have also strengthened the return home conversation ("RHC") form. The revised form gives improvement in structure, safeguarding focus, and practitioner accountability compared to earlier formats. It has been designed to ensure that the voice of the child is central to the process, while also embedding clear pathways for risk identification and follow-up.
- Improved Safeguarding and Practitioner Insight Improved Safeguarding and Practitioner Insight: The updated RHC form introduces mandatory safeguarding checks with tick-box indicators for known risks (e.g. exploitation, substance misuse), alongside a dedicated section for practitioner analysis to explore reasons for missing episodes, patterns, and required interventions—ensuring the conversation leads to meaningful action.

- Strengthened Multi-Agency Coordination and Oversight Strengthened Multi-Agency Coordination and Oversight: Practitioners are prompted to record consent for follow-up work, referrals, and agreed actions, while oversight from the lead practitioner or team manager reinforces accountability and ensures each conversation is reviewed within the wider safeguarding framework.
- The policy / procedure for the education attendance for vulnerable children has developed. LA/13 – LCC001909.

Closing reflections

1. With the benefit of hindsight, I believe that our early intervention strategy should have been much stronger from the outset. We should have utilised a partnership approach that was evidence-based and tailored to the identified needs of AR as outlined in the C&F assessment. It was evident from the professional opinions that AR was exhibiting behaviours consistent with autism, necessitating an autism-informed intervention.
2. Social workers, early help workers, youth justice workers, and education workers need to have a coherent and evidence-informed approach, for example, positive behaviour support. Moreover, the workforce could have been more purposeful in redirecting AR's interest in serious violence and collaborated with parents to limit or stop AR's access to violent material.
3. It is also important to note that our social workers have been trained to work with parents around parental controls, monitoring internet usage, and removing phones if necessary. This is often done with the parents' consent, allowing professionals to assist them in implementing these measures.
4. We understand the critical importance of children remaining in school and socially engaged. Preventing social exclusion and isolation is a far more manageable task than reintegrating children with complex needs back into their communities and schools. Therefore, we are working much harder with schools to prevent the exclusion of children with needs similar to AR, who would become more vulnerable when not in education.
5. In 2018 Lancashire children's services received an Ofsted rating of *requires improvement to be good*. Since 2018, LCC have been on a significant developing trajectory achieving an overall Ofsted judgement of *Good* in November 2022. Since those times the improvement of services has remained the focus of the whole system from social workers to senior leaders with both performance data and outcomes of QA being improved.

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: 19th September 2025

Index to the Witness Statement of Louise Anderson

To follow

Annex A

CSC Chronology for all relevant periods – to follow.