

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

WRITTEN CLOSING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT FOR PHASE 1 OF THE INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

1. Whilst this Closing Statement will inevitably focus on the issues that arise in connection with the identification and management of the risk of serious violence posed by AR, the Secretary of State makes clear from the outset, as her predecessor did when the Inquiry was first established, that the families of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar, and all those children and adults who were harmed physically and psychologically by this horrendous, barbaric and cowardly attack are, and will remain, at the forefront of our minds as the work of this Inquiry progresses. She pays tribute to their courage in giving evidence and supporting the Inquiry in its work. She reiterates the Home Office's commitment to assist the Inquiry in understanding what happened in the lead up to the attack. She is also committed to helping the Inquiry in addressing the wider and growing problem around serious violence in young people – which is sometimes but not always driven by extremist and radical ideology – and understanding why this has been happening and what needs to change.
2. The Secretary of State has sought, through the witness statements and oral evidence of Cathryn Ellsmore and Nicholas Hunt, to explain the systems that were in place, what has already been done by way of change, and to provide the Inquiry with an understanding of the work that is being done to assess what more fundamental changes might need to be made. As in the Opening Statement, this Closing Statement is structured to assist the Inquiry with matters that arise in connection with the Home Office's four policy areas relevant to the issues for consideration: Prevent, Knives and Offensive Weapons, Biological Toxins and Online Harms. The Closing Statement does not rehearse content in the Opening Statement or witness evidence as to structures or legislative framework, but focuses on the key issues to assist the Chair in reaching his conclusions, making recommendations on substantive changes and identifying matters that will require further consideration in Phase 2 of this Inquiry.

PREVENT / VIOLENCE FIXATED INDIVIDUALS

3. The Secretary of State does not address the actions of and decision making by individuals in connection with AR's three Prevent referrals in December 2019, January 2021 and April 2021. The sufficiency of those actions or reasonableness of their decisions are factual issues for the Inquiry regarding the operation of the system. Similarly, the Secretary of State does not consider what would have occurred had AR been referred to Channel at the point of any of his referrals, or at any other time when the Inquiry may conclude a referral ought to have been made, as that question is also a factual issue for the Inquiry that will draw on the statistical evidence about consent, and the wider evidence that has been given about AR and his family's engagement with support services.
4. It is, however, helpful to review the evidence now available to the Inquiry about the extent to which the Prevent system was capable of identifying and managing AR's risk at the time of his referrals, how well embedded the system was, and how the system has changed and improved.

System to identify and manage the risk posed by individuals referred to Prevent without a clear ideological driver at time of AR's referrals

5. In 2017 the Mixed, Unstable or Unclear (MUU) ideology category was first introduced to the Prevent Case Management Tracker (PCMT) because of the marked increase in referrals with no clear ideology present (witness statement (WS) of Cathryn Ellsmore at §102 [HOM000078_0032]).
6. By 2018 Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) had added the sub-category of "school massacre" to the PCMT (see table 6 row 195 of the Prevent Referral Data December 2024, which shows the first Prevent Referrals categorised as 'school massacre' in 2018 [HOM000170]).
7. Data from 2017/2018 showed that although over 25% of referrals from that reporting period (1,982 out of 7,318) were classified as MUU, only 12 individuals over that same reporting period received Channel support [HOM000078_0032 and HOM000167 D_03]. As Ms Ellsmore explained in her oral evidence, this low proportion of MUU cases being referred for Channel management was a cause of concern and was one of the reasons

that the Home Office and CTP decided to issue a joint letter to the Prevent Network on 25 June 2019 to provide guidance on dealing with MUU referrals (“the Joint Letter”)(see [13 October 2025 DAY 22/19/3-18] and [13 October 2025 DAY 22/35/11- 36/8]).

8. The Joint Letter [HOM000048] did not change policy, but was issued to reaffirm existing policy (see Cathryn Ellsmore [13 October 2025 DAY 22/36/22-25]). The Joint Letter expressly identified, amongst other examples, that of individuals who were “*obsessed with massacre, or extreme or mass violence, without specifically targeting a particular group (e.g. ‘high school shootings’)*” as relevant for consideration, and reiterated that preventative work should not be restricted “*only to individuals associated with the ideologies of formally proscribed organisations*”, and practitioners should “*consider those individuals who appear to have an interest in multiple, concurrent, and even contradictory extremist ideologies or causes...*”.
9. In addition to the Joint Letter, a range of measures were taken at that time to ensure practitioners were reminded that individuals whose ideological drivers were Mixed, Unstable or Unclear were Prevent relevant, which included training, guidance and consultation. Ms Ellsmore herself, newly appointed to the role of Deputy Director of Prevent, hosted all Channel Panel Chairs in November 2019 to talk about the risks presented by individuals presenting under the MUU category [13 October 2025 DAY 22/36/1-37/7].
10. Version 3.3 of the Dynamic Investigation Framework (DIF) (the assessment tool in use from c. August 2019 to assist Counter Terrorism Case Officers (CTCOs) in the conduct of the Police Gateway Assessments (PGA)) identifies, under the section of the form entitled ‘Ideology’ that subjects did not need to be true or fanatical believers of an ideology to be vulnerable to it, and practitioners were directed to consider a concerning fascination in the tactics of terrorism, mass-killings or school massacres, which, in the absence of a unifying ideology or narrative reason for this interest, may be indicative of a subject who requires support through Prevent [CTPHQ000040_0005-CTPHQ000040_0006]. CTPHQ updated its policy documents following the Joint Letter to reflect its contents (see CTPHQ’s Case Officer Guide published in August 2020 – section headed ‘Ideology (Relevant to PREVENT)’ [CTPHQ000034_0152- CTPHQ000034_0155]). See also CTPHQ’s Guidance on the Dynamic Investigation Framework (undated, but appears to

pre-date the August 2020 Case Officer Guide) – section headed ‘Ideology (Relevant to PREVENT)’ [CTPHQ000015_0024-CTPHQ000015_0026].

11. Whilst the breadth of expertise of the Intervention Providers (IPs) now recruited to assist Channel has significantly increased since 2019 (see DCS Kenwright [13 October 2025 DAY 22/172/16-173/6]), in 2019 IP support was available for an individual adopted onto Channel with MUU ideology. Although at that time most IPs were recruited because they were experts in Islamist extremism or extreme right-wing radicalisation, some would have had adaptable and flexible skillsets to enable them to support individuals categorised with MUU ideology (see first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore at §§59-60 [HOM000078_0022] and oral evidence [13 October 2025 DAY 22/23/19-24/23]).

Practitioner understanding of the Joint Letter at the time of AR’s referrals

12. One of the issues the Inquiry will need to consider is whether the message of the Joint Letter – that individuals whose behaviour was concerning in the context of Prevent but did not have a clear ideological driver should still be considered for Prevent support – was sufficiently clear to the Prevent practitioners involved in AR’s referrals. This question arises on the facts of this case because (i) AR’s first referral was (appropriately) categorised under MUU, and on the PCMT under the ‘school massacre’ sub-type category, but he was not referred under s.36 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA) to Channel for support; and (ii) the decisions on AR’s referrals were taken at a time when referrals for Channel support generally for cases categorised as MUU ideology were low (which is addressed further below).
13. When Ms Ellsmore was challenged as to whether she accepted that, at the time of AR’s first referral, there was a problem in that the message of the Joint Letter was insufficiently clear, her consistent response was that in 2019 the system was adapting to increased numbers of MUU referrals and that the Joint Letter was an important thing to do. However, she agreed that – as the Home Office better understands the risks, vulnerabilities and needs in that cohort – the policy and guidance is clearer now than it had been at the time ([13 October 2025 DAY 22/33/1-16 and 37/12 – 38/21], and first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore at §§59-60 [HOM000078_0022]). To similar effect, the Senior National Coordinator for Prevent and Pursue DAC Victoria Evans said that the message of the Joint Letter had been clearly delivered previously in policy and training, but

following the Southport attack there was a need to reaffirm the previous messages, noting that there were new practitioners who would not have been in Prevent roles when the earlier updates were given and that the threat picture presented by violence fixated individuals had been changing [14 October 2025 DAY 23/102/15 – 103/21].

14. The Secretary of State does not, by the observations that follow, seek to suggest that practitioners were, at the time of AR's referrals, uniformly clear on how to approach cases where the subject of the referral did not have an obvious ideology but did have other vulnerabilities/evidence of susceptibility to radicalisation. It is apparent from the research project undertaken jointly by Homeland Security Analysis & Insights (HSAI)/Home Office Analysis and Insight (HOAI) (see first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore §105 [HOM000078_0033] and HSAI/HOAI Joint Report June 2023 'Research into 'Mixed, Unstable or Unclear' (MUU) referrals into Prevent' [HOM000097] and summary [HOM000091]) that by 2023 there was still inconsistency of practice and approach in how Prevent practitioners dealt with MUU cases (and this report warrants review in full). However, policy and guidance on emerging threats will inevitably evolve and improve over time, drawing on continual learning and analysis. In considering the adequacy of the Joint Letter and the work that was being undertaken alongside it to address the under-adoption of MUU referrals indicated by the 2018/2019 Prevent data, the Inquiry is invited to reflect carefully on the sufficiency of the measures taken in light of the knowledge and understanding at that time of issues in connection with MUU cases.
15. The Secretary of State invites the Inquiry to consider two aspects of the evidence which together support the nuanced position expressed by Ms Ellsmore i.e., that the system in 2019 did permit sufficient flexibility for those with AR's presentation to be referred and considered for Prevent support. In reviewing the following two matters, the Inquiry will note that all the Prevent practitioners involved in AR's referrals state that they had considered cases with school massacre type ideology concerns as suitable for Prevent support by the time of AR's referrals, however, continual analysis of the data, learning from practitioners and specific cases, and increased understanding of the cohort, has led to changes that make the position clearer for practitioners now than it was in 2019-2021.
16. **First**, the data on the MUU referrals for the years following the Joint Letter is instructive. It is not linear, and consistently suggests that MUU referrals were more likely to leave

Prevent prior to Channel Panel compared to other types of concern (see summary of HSAI/HOAI Joint Report 2023 ‘Research into ‘Mixed, Unstable or Unclear’ (MUU) referrals into Prevent’ [HOM000091]), but it does show (as addressed in the detail which follows) that after the June 2019 letter, the proportion of referrals adopted to Channel for MUU and school massacre concerns increased.

17. There was an increase in the proportion of referrals adopted to Channel where the type of concern was categorised as MUU. In 2019/20, c.4% (125 of 3,203) of referrals for MUU concerns were adopted to Channel [HOM000169].¹ This increased to c.8% (205 of 2,522) in 2020/21 [HOM000169].² In 2020/21 (the year after the Joint Letter) c.30% of all cases adopted onto Channel were for individuals whose ideology was categorised as MUU (205 out of 688) [HOM000169].³
18. There was also an increase in the proportion of referrals adopted to Channel where the type of concern was categorised as ‘school massacre’.⁴ In 2019/20, the period of AR’s first referral, referrals for ‘school massacre’ concerns were adopted to Channel at a lower rate compared with all referrals (8% compared to 11% of all referrals) [HOM000170].⁵ In 2020/21, the period of AR’s second referral, referrals for ‘school massacre’ concerns were adopted to Channel at a higher rate compared to all referrals (24% compared to 13% for all referrals) [HOM000170].⁶ This higher rate of adoption continued in 2021/22 with 25% of referrals for ‘school massacre’ concerns adopted to Channel compared to 13% of all referrals [HOM000170].⁷ The difference in 2022/23, the period of AR’s third referral, was

¹ Table 6, rows 67 and 77, column H

² Table 6, rows 82 and 92, column H

³ Table 6, rows 88 and 92, column H

⁴ See §94 of the first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore which explains the changes to the presentation of data from 2020/2021 (including capturing historical, more granular, data) [HOM000078_30]

⁵ Table 6, rows 159 and 183, column H (school massacre referrals), rows 150 and 174, column H (all referrals)

⁶ Table 6 rows 123 and 147, column H (school massacre referrals), rows 114 and 138, column H (all referrals)

⁷ Table 6, rows 87 and 111, column H (school massacre referrals), rows 78 and 102, column H (all referrals)

smaller but still the rate of adoption for ‘school massacre’ concerns was higher (11% compared to 9% for all referrals) [HOM000170].⁸

19. **Second**, the evidence of the Counter Terrorism Policing North West (CTPNW) Prevent practitioners involved in assessing AR’s referrals has consistently been that they were aware of, and understood, the message of the Joint Letter for each of the referrals; had themselves referred cases for Channel support where the subject had no clear ideological driver, but made a judgment call that the threshold was not met in AR’s case:

- a. PS Carmen Thompson (CTCO) [CTPNW000180] and oral evidence Day 21.
 - i. Witness statement. PS Thompson states at §78 that whilst she does not recall seeing the Joint Letter she “*considered the guidance referred to in it in any event throughout [her] decision making*” and she was aware of school massacre ideology in particular due to having dealt with an individual presenting with this ideology that she had determined required support from Channel. She did not consider AR had an obsession with school massacres. At §88 she states she did not consider AR met the threshold set out in the Joint Letter for MUU ideology. Although she does not recall seeing the Joint Letter itself, she considers it is likely it was discussed during team briefings.
 - ii. Oral evidence:
 1. [9 October 2025 DAY 21/24/4-17] PS Thompson confirms that she has no recollection of seeing the Joint Letter but was aware of it and believes it would have been discussed in the daily team meetings, so whilst she had not seen it she was aware of and trained on the actual substance of it.
 2. [DAY 21/27/4-10] PS Thompson confirms she was familiar with the concept of individuals being obsessed with massacre or extreme or mass violence without specifically targeting a particular group.

⁸ Table 6 rows 51 and 72, column H (school massacre referrals), rows 42 and 66, column H (all referrals)

3. [DAY 21/29/20-30/10] PS Thompson confirms she was familiar with and agreed with the contents of the Joint Letter that explained focussing only on those with very clear or embedded ideology risked missed opportunities to support those with less obvious vulnerabilities.
 4. [DAY 21/31/1-11] PS Thompson states she considers the Joint Letter could have been explained in more detail and in more formal training but again confirms she was aware of it and had dealt with cases that would fit with unclear ideology.
 5. [DAY 21/94/3-4] PS Thompson reiterates that in making her assessment that she was “*taking into account the school massacre and the things mentioned in the joint letter*”.
- b. T/CI James Neale (PS Thompson’s supervisor, first referral) [CTPNW000166].
- i. At §§66-67 T/CI Neale confirms he recalled the message of the Joint Letter being communicated to the team and that this was something very much on the team’s radar. He was “*very aware of the Joint Letter and its contents*” which “*not only helped us [the team] with decision making, but made clear that mixed or conflicting ideology could form the basis of a referral to Channel – that issue arose a lot*”. He states: “*the guidance was helpful for my decision making and for the team’s assessments*”.
 - ii. At §67 T/CI Neale confirms that the assessment was that AR did not appear to have an obsession with mass killings or display other factors such as to constitute ideology to justify a referral, presumably to Channel.
- c. DS Rachael Treharne (PS Thompson’s supervisor, second and third referrals) [CTPNW000177] and oral evidence Day 21.
- i. Witness statement. DS Treharne states at §58 that although she cannot recall whether she specifically received or viewed a copy of the Joint Letter she was aware of the substance of it and specifically about MUU/school shooting/mass casualty ideology which could in principle form the basis of referrals to Channel, that this was “*definitely*” brought to the CTCOs’ attention, and she herself had relied on it multiple times in making referrals to Channel. At §59 she states that whilst the concept of MUU ideology as

set out in the Joint Letter was less well understood in that it was an emerging and new area, it was progressing at the time and “*was a focus of the team*” and when the team met with the Detective Inspector “*key themes such as these were discussed*”.

ii. Oral evidence:

1. [9 October 2025 DAY 21/141/10 - 142/6] DS Treharne confirms she was “*absolutely*” aware of the substance of the Joint Letter about MUU ideologies and that these could form the basis of a referral to Channel.
2. [DAY 21/145/3-14] DS Treharne confirms she was aware of the DIF guidance on cases without unifying ideology.

Changes, improvements and ongoing work in connection with individuals referred to Prevent who do not present with a clear ideological driver

20. As set out in the Summary of Findings of the 2023 Report ‘Research into ‘Mixed, Unstable or Unclear (MUU)’ referrals into Prevent’ [HOM000091], there were four changes that were designed to enable better understanding and management of MUU cases.
21. **First**, the published Prevent data now contained a more detailed breakdown of the data within the MUU category to provide greater transparency around the cases in Prevent [HOM000091_0005]. The data for Prevent referrals in the year 2024/2025 has recently been published [HOM000203] together with the Official Statistics Release ‘Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2024 to March 2025’ [HOM000205].
22. When examining referrals by month, a notable increase occurred in August 2024, immediately following the Southport attack, and a further sharp increase was observed between January and March 2025 (3,287 out of 8,778 referrals, making up 37% of all referrals),⁹ coinciding with AR’s trial and sentencing. The ‘fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks’ category also recorded a large increase in referrals in this period (January to March 2025), rising by 240% compared with the previous quarter (from

⁹ [HOM000203] Table 6, row 6, columns G and H

82 to 279),¹⁰ with 59% (279 out of 469) of all referrals for this type of concern being recorded between January and March 2025 (see also Ms Ellsmore’s oral evidence [13 October 2025 DAY 22/79/2-80/16]). While individuals referred for concerns related to ‘Fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks’ made up 5% of all referrals in the year, they represented 9% of all adopted cases.¹¹

23. Ms Ellsmore’s second witness statement, which is due to be provided to the Inquiry by the end of November 2025, will provide further analysis of the 2024/2025 data to assist the Inquiry with the ‘journey’ of referrals made where no ideology is identified, or the ideology is unclear, both generally (across all age ranges) and for children specifically.
24. **Second**, new Prevent ideology categories were developed which better characterised referrals into Prevent. These were implemented in May 2024, along with advice to record referrals according to the dominant concern to help improve recording practices, and MUU ceased to be used as a category (see first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore at §105 [HOM000078_0033]). The ‘school massacre’ category was replaced with ‘fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks (where no other ideology)’ which more accurately represents the cases being referred to Prevent of this nature.
25. **Third**, the 2023 iteration of the Prevent Duty Guidance makes it clear that referrals can be made whether there is a clear ideological driver or not:

44 There may be times when the precise ideological driver is not clear. Yet, like any safeguarding mechanism, it is far better to receive referrals which turn out not to be of concern than for someone who genuinely needs support to be missed.

[CTPHQ000012_0013]

26. **Fourth**, training for Prevent and frontline practitioners was updated to include cases without clear ideological drivers (see first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore at §130 [HOM000078_0040]).

¹⁰ [HOM000203] Table 6, row 13, columns F and G

¹¹ [HOM000203] Table 6: Referrals - row 13, column H (469 referrals out of 8,778); Discussed – suitable for adoption – row 26, column H compared with rows 20-31, column H (126 out of 1472)

27. As Ms Ellsmore said, there remains more to do (see first witness statement at §174 [HOM000078_0051] and in her oral evidence, in particular “*I think that what we have now is an inconsistency, so in some areas I think this is being adopted and an effective approach. I think in some other areas, we have inconsistency in decision-making as those referrals come through into the system. We must do more to drive out that inconsistency and we must do more in guidance, training, and keeping on building awareness.*” [13 October 2025 DAY 22/75/2 - 76/18]). The 2025 Thresholds Review identified that the presence of ideology or no ideology was often considered inconsistently and some CTCOs expressed uncertainty around the relevance and importance of ideology. The evidence suggested that there may still be over-emphasis on a clear identifying ideology at certain points in the passage of a Prevent referral (Prevent Thresholds Review May 2025 at §§21, 112, 175-177 [HOM000090]). Similar conclusions arise from the Dignate 2 Review and the Prevent Learning Review conducted into this attack (Dignate 2 Review – CTPHQ Interventions Org Learning Review - Learning Observation 5 [CTPHQ000028_0012] and Prevent Learning Review - Conclusion 2 [CTPHQ000055_0034]).

28. The Inquiry will have in mind, when considering the conclusions of the Thresholds Review, the Prevent Learning Review and the Dignate Review, that following Sir William Shawcross’ Independent Review of Prevent (IRP) in February 2023 [HOM000071], conducted in the wake of a series of Islamist terrorist attacks (see [HOM000071_0006]), the Prevent Duty Guidance was updated to record that “*the presence or possible presence of any terrorist or terrorism-linked ideology will be an important consideration*” (PDG §34 [CTPHQ000012_0012]). Whilst this is undoubtedly correct, it is recognised by the Home Office that the renewed emphasis, following the IRP, on the presence of an extremist ideology needs to be balanced by very clear guidance and training on how to deal with cases where the ideological driver is not, or not obviously, present but the radicalisation risk remains.

29. Recommendation 4.1 of the Thresholds Review is that Prevent should ‘Clarify the policy and guidance on ideology, including unclear/no ideology’. Ms Ellsmore’s second witness statement will provide an update on the steps that have been taken to address this recommendation. In particular, the Home Office has produced and distributed to partners the Key Principles of Prevent which state:

While ideology is an important consideration, a clear identifiable ideology is not mandatory to make or adopt a Prevent referral. As the Independent Prevent Commissioner noted, ‘adherence to an extreme ideology is in law neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for entry into Prevent or Channel’. As an early intervention programme, Prevent must consider susceptibility to terrorist ideology or involvement, rather than limiting Prevent to cases where a terrorist ideology has already taken hold. For some people, it might take spending time and building trust with a professional before an ideology becomes clear. It is important to consider that emerging movements could evolve to meet the definition of terrorism, and to remain alert to new potential threats.

30. In March 2025, CTPHQ introduced the ‘Fascination with Extreme Violence and Mass Casualty Attacks: Interim Referrals Policy’ which was devised to drive consistency in the assessment and progression of Prevent referrals that fell within the category ‘Fascination with Extreme Violence and Mass Casualty Attacks’ [CTPNW000016]. The foreword to this policy reflects the ongoing concern of inconsistent awareness of risks for Prevent subjects where a CT ideology is not present or not clear, and states, “*An interest in mass-casualty attacks or acts of extreme or graphic violence can indicate a heightened risk of escalation to committing similar violence themselves, despite the absence of a CT ideology*”, and that Prevent officers “*must treat these referrals with the same level of diligence and risk management as referrals where there are clear concerns with terrorist ideologies*” [CTPNW000016_0005]. The policy records that for individuals in this cohort, “*The absence of an obvious terrorist ideology does not appear to lessen the potential risk, and a fascination with mass casualty attacks or extreme graphic violence may indicate a significant step along the radicalisation trajectory*” [CTPNW000016_0006].

Wider cross-government work in connection with Violence Fixated Individuals

31. Violence fixated individuals (VFIs) (who are not driven primarily by an ideology) have long been considered by Prevent if there are concerns that the person is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. The changes that have already been made to Prevent as outlined above increase the likelihood of these individuals progressing through the Prevent system where appropriate (see DAC Evans’ oral evidence [14 October 2025 DAY 23/114/8-13]). However, the Southport attack brought clarity to, and focus on, the need to consider further measures to address the risks posed by VFIs, especially those who are not considered at risk of being drawn into terrorism and thus are not eligible for Channel support.

32. This work began earlier this year, requires cross-government effort and remains ongoing. It includes improving awareness of and guidance for the early identification and intervention for VFIs, considering measures to strengthen disruptions of activity by VFIs (including online) and considering longer-term reform options for the management of VFI risk (including the role of broader violence prevention strategies, as recommended by Lord Anderson). Some of the measures under consideration will be long term projects. The Secretary of State anticipates that these themes will be the subject of detailed evidence and analysis in Phase 2 of this Inquiry, but welcomes any initial consideration or guidance the Chair may wish to give arising from the evidence in Phase 1. Ms Ellsmore's second witness statement will provide an overview of the work that has already been done and that which is in progress.

33. Ms Ellsmore's second witness statement will also provide the Inquiry with further information about an ongoing review of civil orders that may have some relevance for managing the risk posed by VFIs. These are relevant because certain types of civil order may include conditions that would afford authorities greater insight into and control over a person's online activity – provided that a court considers those conditions necessary and proportionate and that compliance with those conditions can be effectively monitored and enforced. The Home Office expects, by Phase 2 of the Inquiry, to be able to address the question of whether a specific type of civil order for this cohort of individuals would be valuable, and will consider carefully any recommendations the Inquiry makes in Phase 1 as part of its ongoing work.

Managing ongoing risk for persons who are not referred to Channel

34. The Inquiry has explored with many witnesses the question of who should have been responsible for mitigating the risk AR posed when he was closed to Prevent. At the time of AR's referrals guidance was (and remains) that individuals who have vulnerabilities but are not assessed as suitable for Prevent should be referred for support from other services (see: Contest 2018, Figure 2.5 [HOM000064_0042], Channel Duty Guidance 2015 at §§20 and 39 [HOM000039] and PDG 2023 at §§49 and 55 [CTPHQ000012]). Under s.36(6) of the CTSA 2015, Channel Panels who determine an individual will not be adopted onto Channel are under a duty to consider whether the individual ought to be referred to a provider of any health or social care services and if so, make appropriate arrangements for making the referral.

35. AR's case illustrates that more robust mechanisms are required to ensure that risks that are identified but do not meet the threshold for Channel support are managed and mitigated. This has been recognised by the Home Office (see: announcement of the former Home Secretary on 17 December 2024 [HOM000083_0011] and recommendation 5 of the Prevent Thresholds Review 'Strengthen how Prevent works with safeguarding and other support services' [HOM000090_0015]) and is part of the wider VFI work described above.
36. As Ms Ellsmore explained in her oral evidence, the Home Office is currently running what is referred to as the "Prevent Below Thresholds" pilot, which commenced in March 2025 and is operating in nine local authority areas at the moment [13 October 2025 DAY 22/70/21 - 71/11]. The pilot is testing different approaches for formalising the handover of individuals from Prevent to a wide range of statutory partners, including local police and will conclude at the end of this financial year. Further information on the objectives, operation and progress of the Prevent Below Thresholds pilot will be provided in Ms Ellsmore's second witness statement and the Secretary of State anticipates this important topic will be given close scrutiny in Phase 2 of the Inquiry.

Information sharing

37. This issue of managing ongoing risk engages the question of information sharing about persons referred to Prevent. A number of the professionals involved with AR, including the response police officers, but also the community mental health team and social services, were not aware of AR's Prevent referrals or the detail of them, and consider their actions or assessments may have been different if they had known AR was referred to Prevent.
38. Information sharing, and deficiencies in information sharing, is a theme that runs through almost every aspect of AR's risk management. In some cases, the issues are operational: individuals failed to make sufficient records, review the records available to them or convey the information they had to the professionals who needed it. However, consideration must also be given to how information sharing systems can be improved so that operational error or oversight is less likely. Many witnesses have given evidence about improvements

to their own local systems and practices, but wider questions remain about ensuring multi-agency access to risk information. The Inquiry may feel that this wide issue is best addressed in Phase 2, when information sharing can be considered alongside the risk management systems generally. However, the Secretary of State addresses one matter that has been raised in evidence at this stage, which is the question of ‘markers’ for those referred to Prevent.

39. As DAC Evans said, it would not be appropriate to require that a marker, visible to all officers, is placed on police systems for every person referred to Prevent **[14 October 2025 DAY 23/37/15-39/20]**. There are two primary reasons for this. First, the efficacy of Prevent relies on receiving a broad range of referrals which requires referrers to have confidence in the process. If a referral led to an automatic marker showing that the individual had been referred to Prevent this may disincentivise referrals, particularly referrals for children. Second, a significant proportion of those referred to Prevent are identified as posing no concern and there are no ongoing identified risks. It would be inappropriate for Prevent markers to be placed on those individuals. DAC Evans explained that before any process was put in place that might increase the visibility of the fact of a Prevent referral to frontline officers it would be necessary to explore carefully the cause and effect of any such process, to ensure that it does actually contribute to the safeguarding of the public, and results in information getting to where it needs to without unintended consequences or risks arising **[DAY 23/42/22-43/3]**. The Secretary of State endorses DAC Evans’ view that this question warrants close attention, and the implications of any changes would need to be scrutinised carefully before any amendments to the existing system of markers is put in place.

System to support practitioners assess the risk posed by individuals referred to Prevent at the time of AR’s referrals who were or were suspected to be autistic

40. At the time of AR’s three referrals to Prevent, the Vulnerability Support Hubs (VSHs) were operational and able to provide advice to practitioners about the management of individuals referred to CTP who had known or suspected mental health difficulties or disorders or neurodivergence, including autism (first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore at §48 **[HOM000078_0019]**). The role of VSHs was embedded in Prevent policy (see e.g. DIF version 3.3 August 2019 **[CTPHQ000040_0001]** and Policy for Northern Prevent Vulnerability Support Hub **[CTPNW000021]**). The CTCO Guide issued in

August 2020 provided guidance on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the Complex Needs & Vulnerabilities section, advising practitioners that ASD traits could be either a risk or protective factor depending on the individual's circumstances and characteristics, and that there was therefore a need for expert input from the VSH and mental health practitioners [CTPHQ000034_0087].

41. PS Thompson gave evidence that she understood the role of the VSH and had good relationships with the team. She said she had the intention of referring AR's case to the VSH and the fact that she did not was probably an error and an oversight (PS Thompson witness statement at §31 [CTPNW000180_008] and oral evidence [9 October 2025 DAY 21/84/20-/86/10]).

Changes, improvements and ongoing work to support practitioners manage individuals referred to Prevent where neurodiversity is or may be present

42. Since 2021 training from the National Autistic Society has been available to all Channel Panel members and Intervention Providers (first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore at §144 [HOM000078_0043/4]). CTP is responsible for training its staff and the update provided in response to the Prevent Learning Review explains the updates to the training and guidance that are relevant to the question of managing individuals with mental health or neurodiversity needs (see Lord Anderson's Report 'Lessons for Prevent' (July 2025) Annex 6: Southport Recommendations Update, recommendation 11 [HOM000079_163]).
43. In April 2024 the Joint CTP and NHS Clinical Consultancy Service (CCS) replaced the VSH pilots. As Ms Ellsmore's first witness statement explains, the CCS comprises multi-disciplinary mental health and social work specialties and operates to support CTP officers in their understanding of the mental health and/or neurodiverse conditions indicated on a referral and offer tactical advice on information sharing and interventions within health (§142 [HOM000078_43]). Ms Ellsmore's second statement will provide an update on a service currently being developed to afford IPs with access to advice to assist their engagement with and support of individuals with mental health or neurodiversity conditions.

44. Through 2025, the Home Office has undertaken a strategic policy review to identify and deliver improvements in how individuals referred to Prevent who are neurodivergent or suffer from mental ill health are supported and managed. This was announced by the former Secretary of State in the wake of the Southport attack [HOM000083_0011]. Ms Ellsmore's second statement will provide further detail about what this review entailed, what its conclusions and recommendations were, and what has been done or is in train to (i) strengthen practitioners' approach to and confidence in assessing and supporting people who have mental health conditions or are neurodivergent, and (ii) improve the understanding of the complex relationships between mental health and neurodiversity and radicalisation.
45. The recently published 2024/2025 Prevent data now contains (at Tables 8 – 12) data on referrals where mental health and neurodiversity conditions are recorded [HOM000203].
- a. 1,226 referrals were for individuals with confirmed or suspected ASD (Table 8, rows 8 and 9). This is 14% of the total number of referrals for the year (8,778).
 - b. 862 (70%) of the 1,226 total referrals for individuals with confirmed or suspected ASD were categorised under one of the 'no ideology' types of concern categorised as fascination with violence with no clear ideology, multiple ideologies with no dominant ideology, or no ideology is identified (Table 11, rows 8 and 9, columns J-M).
46. The published data contained official statistics in development, and so the Home Office will seek to work with CTPHQ to improve the quality of data captured, explore the options to refine categorisation and build understanding of how this data can provide further insight into those who are referred to and supported by Prevent and Channel.

KNIVES AND OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

47. At the outset of this section, the Secretary of State acknowledges the very significant concerns that arise from the evidence the Inquiry has obtained regarding the online retail, packaging and delivery of knives and the effectiveness of the systems in place designed to prevent (i) children from being able to purchase online and take delivery of knives, and (ii) knife sellers from marketing knives online in a way that glamourises violence. The evidence is troubling and demonstrates the importance of the stronger enforcement and legislative measures that are outlined in Ms Ellsmore's first witness statement at §§252-270

[HOM000078_72-HOM000078_78] and that will be addressed further in the second witness statement of Mr Hunt.

48. This Government has pledged to halve knife crime in a decade, by 2034. The evidence already before the Inquiry provides a high-level overview of the operational and strategic changes and programmes that seek to deliver on this commitment. This Closing Statement does not rehearse the totality of that evidence, but does address four topics of particular relevance to the issues raised in this Inquiry: (i) online age verification, (ii) marketing of knives, (iii) bulk and suspicious transactions and (iv) machetes.

Age verification

49. Part 3 of the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 (OWA 2019) introduced offences for the delivery of bladed products to persons under 18, and also for delivering bladed products to residential premises, following a remote sale. An offence would be committed unless the seller could prove that it had procedures in place which were likely to ensure the bladed product was handed over to a person 18 or over, and it had taken all reasonable precautions and exercised due diligence to ensure that was the case (see summary of provisions in Ms Ellsmore's first witness statement (§§225 – 226, [HOM000078_0065]). As Mr Hunt accepted in his oral evidence, and as the evidence heard by this Inquiry illustrates, the regime under the OWA 2019 was not watertight [14 October 2025 DAY 23/137/18-24] and the Government is in the process of introducing new measures through the Crime and Policing Bill that are intended to close the key gaps.

50. As Mr Hunt explained, when the OWA 2019 was first placed before Parliament, it banned the delivery of bladed products to residential addresses, but as the bill progressed through Parliament defences were introduced as outlined above – effectively it would be a defence if reasonable precautions were taken by the seller to ensure the bladed product was not delivered to a child under 18 [14 October 2025 DAY 23/140/7-24]. The OWA 2019 did not prescribe the nature of the online age verification checks to be undertaken: the onus was on the retailers to establish a reasonable system of checks that worked with their business model. The Government was concerned about prescribing an age verification process that might rapidly have become outdated [DAY 23/140/25 - 141/13]. The OWA 2019 also did not require that the purchaser of the bladed product was the same person

who accepted delivery. The measures on delivery of bladed products came into force in April 2022.

51. Prior to the Southport attack, and relatively shortly after the OWA 2019 came into force, the Home Office reviewed the provisions, listened to new concerns from policing about making the sales offences indictable to increase penalties and provide the police with greater powers to investigate potential offences, and also identified there was a need to tighten the law on online sales of knives in respect of age verification and delivery. The Government had committed in its manifesto for the 2024 general election to instigate a Review of the Online Sale of Knives (first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore at §258 [HOM000078_0074]). Commander Clayman was commissioned to lead that review on 30 September 2024, and reported in February 2025 [HOM000160]. The Review (“the Clayman Review”) made recommendations to strengthen the regime in respect of the online sale and delivery of knives, and the Government brought forward amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill – the details of which are summarised in Ms Ellsmore’s witness statement (§§261-265 [HOM000078_0075-HOM000078_0076]) and in the Crime and Policing Bill: Knife Crime and Crossbows Factsheet [HOM000123]. The Government is also supporting the pilot of a new national police coordination unit (described in the first witness statement of Cathryn Ellsmore at §266 [HOM000078_0074]), which is dedicated to investigations into all aspects of online unlawful knife and offensive weapons sales – including the marketing of knives – and improving data collection.

Marketing of knives

52. Pursuant to s.1 of the Knives Act 1997 (“the Knives Act”), it is an offence to market knives in a way which indicates or suggests that it is suitable for combat or is otherwise likely to stimulate or encourage violent behaviour involving the use of the knife as a weapon. S.1(3) provides that an indication or suggestion that a knife is suitable for combat may in particular be given by the name or description applied to the knife, on the knife/packaging, or included in any advertisement which expressly or impliedly relates to the knife. By s.2, it is an offence to publish written or pictorial or other material in connection with the marketing of a knife that would indicate or suggests that it is suitable for combat or is otherwise likely to stimulate or encourage violent behaviour involving the use of the knife as a weapon. On summary conviction, the penalty is imprisonment for a term of up to 6 months or a fine, and on indictment, up to 2 years imprisonment, a fine or both. “Suitable

for combat” means suitable for use as a weapon for inflicting injury on a person or causing a person to fear injury (s.10).

53. The offences under ss.1 and 2 of the Knives Act are broadly drawn. In *R v STC Limited* [2021] EWCA Crim 1237, the only reported decision concerning these offences, the Court of Appeal observed that the thresholds for making out the offences were low: the marketing of a knife must not contain any suggestion that the knife is suitable for hurting anyone to any extent. Edis LJ held at §23:

It may be very difficult to market some types of knife at all without making this suggestion. This does not mean that such marketing ceases to be criminal. It would be a rational aim of an Act of Parliament to restrict substantially the ability of sellers to market weapons of the kind with which this case is concerned and the choice of wide words and low thresholds appears to be intended to do just that.

54. The Court did not need to resolve the question of whether the knives in question could be lawfully offered for sale, but noted (at §33) that they were combat knives and it would probably be difficult to offer them for sale in any way which conceals this fact.

55. In this context, and given the evidence before the Inquiry about the names and descriptions of some of the knives that are available on the websites of some of the retailers who have given evidence, which Mr Hunt agreed were “very concerning”, suggesting there was an issue about what was being advertised for sale [14 October 2025 DAY 23/149/3-5], the Inquiry will undoubtedly be considering recommendations around the enforcement of ss.1 and 2 of the Knives Act.

56. It should be noted that although the Clayman Review observed that the Knives Act was “a challenging piece of legislation” and the lack of reported case law contributed to the difficulties in understanding how to use it correctly, it actually concluded that it was “rare to find any listings” that contravened the Knives Act legislation. That conclusion does not, the Secretary of State accepts, reflect the evidence adduced in this Inquiry. The Inquiry has brought renewed focus to this issue, albeit that it was intended in any event to be addressed by the work of the new police coordination unit.

Bulk transactions and suspicious transactions

57. The totality of AR’s online purchasing or attempted purchasing activity would cause anyone who was looking at the collective picture to have significant concerns about his

actions and intent, particularly (but not exclusively) because of his age. The Inquiry has explored with witnesses the possibility of some form of requirement to report suspicious transactions arising from multiple transactions.

58. Clause 36 of the Crime and Policing Bill, if enacted, will introduce a duty on sellers to report remote sales of knives in bulk. Breach of the duty will be a summary criminal offence punishable by a fine. This reflects one aspect of Ronan's Law, in that the perpetrators in that case had purchased numerous knives prior to the attack on Ronan Kanda.
59. The Home Office is also intending to consult, following the recommendations of the Clayman Review, on a licensing scheme for sellers of knives and Mr Hunt's second witness statement will provide further information about this. The Clayman Review suggested that a condition of a license to sell knives could include mandatory reporting of suspicious or bulk purchases. As Mr Hunt said, and subject to consultation and legislation, a licensing regime for sellers of knives would make a reporting system on suspicious transactions much easier to enforce, since it is the Home Office's view from discussions with stakeholders that prosecuting agencies may be reluctant to bring prosecutions against retailers which require proving that a transaction was suspicious to the criminal standard of proof [14 October 2025 DAY 23/155/1-10].

Machetes

60. The Home Office has listened carefully to the evidence relating to the use of machetes in crime – particularly the impactful evidence of ACC Winstanley [8 October 2025 DAY 20/100/22 to 101/3]. The Home Office has also heard the Inquiry question witnesses about the extent of any legitimate use of machetes, when weighed against their illegitimate use.
61. The Home Office has, over a number of years, looked at how best to lessen the threat posed by machetes and other potentially dangerous bladed articles. As Mr Hunt's second statement will note, however, the responses to the Home Office's consultation in 2023 suggested that many members of the public do use machetes for legitimate purposes (albeit that, by its very nature, the Inquiry has not heard evidence from such groups). The respondents to that consultation further contended, for example, that there was an increased cost and danger associated with alternative tools, such as chainsaws and

billhooks. The Home Office has therefore sought to take a targeted approach to this issue, informed by what research there is. The 2023 consultation regarding a ban on machetes of a menacing description (“zombie machetes”) was influenced by the College of Policing’s research, as set out in “Knife Crime – a Problem Solving Guide”. As the first statement of Cathryn Ellsmore observed (§216, [HOM000078_0061]), this emphasised that the principal factor driving which machetes were in fact used in crime was their ‘attractiveness’ (i.e. machetes which had a particularly menacing appearance were more likely to be used in crime than machetes which were more available but less menacing). Even so, almost two thirds of the respondents to the consultation (which respondents included businesses, charities, organisations working with children at risk, outdoor enthusiasts, collectors, gardening associations, museums and enforcement agencies) opposed even the limited ban, on machetes of that description.

62. Despite that opposition, the Government proceeded with the ban on zombie style machetes and zombie style knives. It has also worked since to give powers to the police to target illegitimate use – for example allowing them, by way of Clause 29 of the Crime and Policing Bill, to seize machetes even in a private place, and even when the machete would otherwise be lawful, where an officer has reasonable grounds for suspecting that the machete would be likely to be used in connection with unlawful violence. Such ‘reasonable grounds’ are more likely to be made out when possession is (for example) by a young male with gang affiliations in an urban environment than if the machete is possessed by a known outdoor enthusiast in a rural setting (there are also related powers of prosecution under Clause 27 of the Bill).

63. A number of the above measures have not yet come into legislation and are still being considered in Parliament (or in the case of the co-ordination unit are just starting work) and their impact is unknown. The Home Office is not therefore intending to reconsult on these issues at present. It will however be considering the evidence heard at the Inquiry in this area and any Phase 1 recommendations with the utmost care.

BIOLOGICAL TOXINS

64. The Home Office is undertaking a piece of work, as part of ongoing efforts to keep dangerous materials under review, to consider the feasibility (and potential impacts and proportionality) of regulating the sale of castor beans. An update on the progress of this

review will be provided to the Inquiry in Ms Ellsmore's second witness statement, but the review itself will not conclude before Phase 1 of the Inquiry reports.

65. More broadly, to support the work the Home Office delivers and oversees under the Poisons Act 1972 (regulation and reporting of specified explosive precursors and poisons), it is engaging with retailers to look at voluntary measures which could involve exploring the use of detection algorithms. The Home Office will consider findings of this work alongside the outputs from the castor beans activity.

ONLINE HARMS

66. The evidence the Inquiry has considered about AR's online activity lays bare the importance of the measures now in force through the Online Safety Act 2023 to require platforms to have systems and processes in place to identify and remove illegal content, to protect their users from illegal content, and to prevent children from accessing various categories of harmful content including, of particular relevance in AR's case, violent content. Those provisions have only recently come into force and it is, as Sarah Connolly of the Department for Science, Innovation and Trade (DSIT) implied, too early to assess whether the measures are sufficient [3 November 2025 DAY 31/228/15-20]. The Online Safety Act 2023 was designed to be a foundation for online regulation and not a limit; there are, as the Inquiry has heard, potential issues that will require close scrutiny as the new framework beds in, in particular around the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs).

67. The Home Secretary will consider carefully any recommendations the Chair makes at the conclusion of Phase 1 and anticipates this will be the subject of detailed exploration as part of Phase 2. The Home Office will work closely with other government departments (including DSIT) to assist the Inquiry further at that stage.

CONCLUSION

68. The former Secretary of State established this Inquiry, and separated its work into two parts, because AR's pathway to the horrendous attack committed on 29 July 2024 demands all those involved in the management of his risk explain what was done and what was not done, and because it is recognised at the heart of government that the evolving and increasing threat posed by violence fixated individuals must be met – and reduced – with improved systems. At every level the Home Office's engagement with this Inquiry is

motivated by the desire to (i) ensure the victims of the attack and their families and everyone affected have full and candid answers to the many questions that are raised, and (ii) assist and work with the Inquiry to deliver a system that will make the public safer.

24 November 2025

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