

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

PHASE 1 CLOSING SUBMISSIONS OF THE CHIEF CONSTABLE OF MERSEYSIDE POLICE

References to the hearing transcripts are formatted [T: date P: number L: number]

1. The Chief Constable of Merseyside Police makes these closing submissions pursuant to the Chair's directions dated 9 October 2025. They are made under the following headings:
 - a. AR's 11 December 2019 Range High School attack.
 - b. Safer Schools Officer's attendances at AR's address in 2023.
 - c. AR's 29 July 2024 Hart Space attack.
 - d. Recommendations.
2. These submissions take account of documents disclosed by the Inquiry up to 14 November 2025.

AR'S 11 DECEMBER 2019 RANGE HIGH SCHOOL ATTACK

3. In headline terms it is submitted that:
 - a. Merseyside Police's investigation of the attack was appropriate.
 - b. The evidence before the Inquiry emphasises the need for close liaison between local investigators and Prevent / Counter Terrorism Policing ("CTP") where the former have seized electronic devices the contents of which may be useful to the latter's open processes.
 - c. There is a need for certainty as to which is the lead agency responsible for managing the risk to others posed by an individual such as AR.

Background

4. This is not a complete chronology of the incident but rather a summary of what Merseyside Police did and the matters understood to be of relevance to the Inquiry.

5. On 3 December 2019 AR's school, the Acorns School in Lancashire, had reported concerns about searches AR was conducting on the internet at school to Lancashire Police.¹ Lancashire Police considered that this ought to be referred to the MASH and advised the School to do so on 4 December 2019,² however the School had already tried to do this unsuccessfully. The School made a Prevent referral on 5 December 2019³ (resubmitted on 10 December 2019⁴). Prevent was in the process of considering that referral. Merseyside Police was not aware of any of this prior to 11 December 2019, nor was there any reason why it should have been.
6. Acorns School obtained a download of AR's school internet browser history for 15 November 2019.⁵ It is unclear whether the School ever provided this download to Prevent, but the balance of the evidence suggests that they did not.⁶ Merseyside Police was not provided with the download by Prevent. Merseyside Police has no record of having been provided with the download by anyone, including by Acorns School. Sharon Hodson's evidence that she recalled providing a printed copy of the download at a strategy meeting [T:23/10/25 P179 L:22]. This is not consistent with the records of the strategy meetings,⁷ any other witness' recollection, or any documentation that Merseyside Police has seen.
7. On 11 December 2019 AR was arrested after two Merseyside Police officers (PCs Dodd⁸ and Clarke⁹) attended a report of an assault at the Range High School, Formby, which is in the Merseyside Police area. AR had been a pupil there but had been permanently excluded for bringing a knife to school. AR was arrested for assault contrary to section 47 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, possession of a bladed article (a knife) on school premises and

¹ LCC001348 page 71 – email from Ms Hodson to PC McNamee

² LCC001346 page 69 – email from PC Harrison to Ms Lewis

³ LANC000175 – page 21, email referral to Prevent

⁴ CTPNW000154 – Prevent Referral on referral form

⁵ LCC001401 – AR's school internet browsing history for 15 November 2019

⁶ Note in particular the detailed review of the emails sent on 5 December 2019 [T:23/10/2025 P:51 L17 – P:53 L:12] and Officer B's evidence [T:8/10/25 P:143 L:17]

⁷ Contrary to Ms Hodson's evidence at LCC001773 at [134]

⁸ MERP007527 – Inquiry witness statement of PC Dodd

⁹ MERP008138 – Inquiry witness statement of PC Clarke

possession of an offensive weapon (a hockey stick) in a public place. A vulnerable person's referral form ("VPRF1") was completed by PC Dodd in relation to AR.¹⁰ Further VPRF1s were completed by PC Clarke in respect of the intended victim and the actual victim of AR's assault.

8. AR was brought to St Anne Street Police Station, where DC Murphy processed him. During his time in custody. He was seen by the Criminal Justice Mental Health Team ("CJMHT"), and there was engagement with the Youth Offender Team, Children and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Sefton Council's Emergency Duty Team.¹¹ Following liaison various organisations AR was bailed¹² (with conditions) to his home address overnight, to return for interview the following day.

9. PC Paul Harrison from Lancashire Police emailed Merseyside Police on 11 December 2019 explaining that AR was already known to them,¹³ and that:
 - a. AR had previously lived in Southport and had previously attended Range High School, Formby.
 - b. AR had been expelled, having been found in possession of a knife.
 - c. Due to his behaviour, AR was placed at the Acorns School in Ormskirk, Lancashire. It was noted that this school was a special school.
 - d. In the two weeks prior to the 11 December 2019, AR had been referred by Acorns School to Social Services. It was understood that this was due to him accessing websites at Acorns School and researching mass shootings. It was also noted that he had a fixation with beheadings and guns, and a dislike for teachers.
 - e. Following the referral to Children's Social Services, the Child Early Action Team became involved, and the information had been sent to the Prevent Team in Burnley.

¹⁰ MERP002938 – VPRN1

¹¹ MERP002937 – Custody Record

¹² MERP002879 – Application for pre-charge bail

¹³ MERP002558 – email from PC Harrison 11 December 2019 at 14:48

- f. A meeting had been due to take place at Acorns School on Friday. (The incident at Range High School happened on Wednesday 11 December 2019, so it is assumed the Friday referred to would have been Friday 13 December 2019).
 - g. AR's parents were British Rwandan nationals who had previously fled from Rwanda.
 - h. AR's father was in denial, and he was of the opinion that Acorns School were exaggerating things.
10. Following receipt of this email, AR's home address was searched by Merseyside Police officers as part of their criminal investigation into AR's actions on 11 December 2019 ("the assault investigation") and electronic items were seized.¹⁴ AR's black iPhone was seized from him in custody.¹⁵ The investigation into the electronic devices was for consideration of any threats or other matters relating to the assault investigation.¹⁶ In other words, DC Murphy sought to seize and interrogate AR's electronic devices because their contents were potentially relevant to AR's motive for the hockey stick attack.¹⁷
11. AR was interviewed under caution by DC Murphy.¹⁸ All relevant agencies were updated as to the situation by email.¹⁹ The case was referred to the CPS. During the course of the investigation DC Murphy received information about a 'hit list' which AR was said to have had.²⁰ No evidence was ever found that such a list existed [T:06/10/25 P:81 L:7], but DC Murphy nevertheless made a VPRF1 on 27 December 2019²¹ regarding the possibility of a hit list.

¹⁴ MERP002906 – witness statement of PC Lynch; MERP002905 witness statement of PC Sims; see also [T:06/10/25 P:69 L:7]

¹⁵ MERP002897 – witness statement of PC O'Callaghan who seized AR's iPhone and exhibited it as EO/01

¹⁶ DC Murphy witness statement at [31] MERP007786

¹⁷ Agreed by CTP in their Officer's Report dated 13/03/2025 – CTPNW000034

¹⁸ MERP002989 – witness statement of DC Murphy confirming interview took place and circumstances; MERP000186, page 17, AR's prepared statement

¹⁹ MERP002566 page 18 – email from DS Smith 12 December 2019

²⁰ MERP002919 – (Occurrence Log) page 6, entry 25

²¹ MERP000186 – VPRF1 27 December 2019

12. On 17 December 2019 DC Murphy attended a strategy meeting arranged by Lancashire Social Services. DC Murphy provided an update of the criminal investigation. None of the agreed actions flowing from that meeting required any steps to be taken by Merseyside Police, although it was understood by all at the meeting that the criminal investigation was continuing.²²
13. Ultimately, AR was charged and appeared at the Merseyside Youth Court on 19 February 2020 where he pleaded guilty to the three charges and given a 10-month Youth Referral Order.²³ It is understood that this is the typical sentence where a 13 year-old defendant pleads guilty to a first offence of the kind AR was charged with.
14. No statement was obtained during Merseyside Police's investigation from Acorns School regarding AR's school internet searches because DC Murphy was informed by the person from the School who she spoke to that AR's search history was no longer available [T:16/10/25 P67 L23].²⁴ In the circumstances, no statement was required. AR's seized devices were provided to the Digital Forensics Unit ("DFU"), along with details of the hockey stick attack, and information about his internet searches for mass school shootings and beheadings [T:06/10/25 P:70 L:18]. That information was based on PC Harrison's report (see [9(d)] above). Key word searches were carried out on the data from AR's devices, including the name of the school, the names of the victim, the intended victim and various teachers, and the words "beheading" and "shooting".²⁵
15. The CPS did not consider it necessary to wait for the results of the digital investigation before AR was charged and appeared in Court. There was plainly

²² LANC000004 – record of strategy discussion

²³ LCC000026 – Youth Offending Services court record

²⁴ It is not understood how this confusion arose. There is no evidence from the person who DC Murphy spoke with (who Ms Hodson believes was Ms Heaton: LCCO01773, paragraph 133). It may be that this person (wrongly) assumed that the download from 15 November 2019 had already been provided to law enforcement and that the downloads from subsequent days on which AR's internet browsing had been of concern *were* no longer available.

²⁵ MERP008359 – DFU report

enough evidence to achieve a conviction. The DFU analysis of AR's seized electronic items continued after AR was sentenced. DFU confirmed on 4 March 2020 that the electronic items they had been able to access were negative for data related to the investigation, meaning that no relevant data was found. The mobile phone belonging to AR was never downloaded as it could not be decrypted, and the PIN was not provided by AR. DC Murphy accepted in her evidence [T:06/10/25 P:96 L:15] that she should have issued AR with an advisory notice and considered using section 49 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, to compel AR to provide his PIN. Although this case may not have met the threshold for a section 49 notice, an advisory notice (and therefore the threat of a section 49 notice) may have pushed AR a little harder to provide his PIN. Following conclusion of the criminal proceedings and the nil-return from DFU, there was no proper policing purpose for retaining the electronic devices seized from AR's home and AR, and they were returned to AR's father.

Liaison with CTP

16. Merseyside Police had seized electronic devices the contents of which may have been relevant to Prevent's parallel assessment which had commenced before Merseyside Police's involvement. Merseyside Police's analysis of those devices revealed nothing of relevance to its investigation (or Prevent's processes). DC Murphy did not provide this 'nil return' to Prevent. Prevent do not appear to have been expecting a 'nil return'. Prevent's understanding was that they had advised Merseyside Police to make a referral to Prevent if any relevant information was found on AR's devices.²⁶

17. DC Murphy acknowledged it would nonetheless have been good practice to update Prevent with a nil-return.²⁷ Prevent²⁸ acknowledged that it would have been good practice to check on the progress of the digital searches before closing AR's referral. Merseyside Police works very closely with CTP and will

²⁶ CTPNW000122 – Prevent Case Management Tracker of AR, First Referral, page 29

²⁷ DC Murphy evidence [T:06/10/25 P:97 L:21]

²⁸ [T:13/10/25 P:139 L:21] – evidence of DCS Kenwright [T:09/10/25 P:78 L:13] evidence of PS Thompson

give careful consideration with CTP as to how best to work together where Merseyside Police has seized electronic devices that may contain information relevant to an open Prevent referral, including as to search terms (where appropriate) and dialogue as to the progress of searches.

Responsibility for risk

18. Following AR's arrest and during the course of the criminal investigation, Merseyside Police's understanding was that ownership of AR's risk (beyond the criminal investigation) lay with Social Services. Steph Halloran of CJMHT, who assessed AR in custody, had made the referral to Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service ("FCAMHS"),²⁹ and confirmation was received from Lucy Parkinson (of Lancashire Family and Wellbeing Service) by email dated 13 December 2019 that "this case is now sitting with Lancashire's CSC."³⁰
19. As to Merseyside Police's responsibility for the risk posed by AR:
 - a. During the criminal investigation Merseyside Police's responsibility for the risk posed by AR was (i) progressing the criminal investigation; (ii) obtaining bail conditions; and (ii) policing those bail conditions to the extent that they were breached in the Merseyside Police area.
 - b. After the criminal investigation concluded with AR's conviction, Merseyside Police had no responsibility for the risk posed by AR. AR's bail conditions fell away upon his conviction. AR's referral order was delivered by the Lancashire Youth Offender Team. He lived in Lancashire and attended a Lancashire school. Merseyside Police may have become involved again if there was any suggestion that he posed an ongoing risk to people living in the Merseyside Police area, or if he committed offences there. Merseyside Police did not assume responsibility for any investigations / assessments of AR's behaviour that were underway prior to 11 December 2019 in response to the reports made by Acorns School to the MASH, Lancashire Police and Prevent.

²⁹ Custody Suite mental health assessment form MERP002881

³⁰ Email from Lucy Parkinson (LCC) to DS Chris Smith MERP002570

20. Wherever primary responsibility for the ongoing risk posed by AR lay, Merseyside Police strongly endorses the need for clarity as to who the lead agency responsible for the risk posed by an individual such as AR is. It is suggested that there should be a requirement for a lead responsible agency to be formally identified, and also a nominated lead responsible person within that lead agency. The lead responsible agency would be the one responsible for leading the multi-agency approach.

SAFER SCHOOLS OFFICER'S ATTENDANCES AT AR'S ADDRESS IN 2023

21. The headline submission is that Presfield School appropriately sought the support of PC Baker, the Safer Schools' officer ("SSPO"), for checks on AR at his home address due to his persistent absence. These checks were not being undertaken by the School because AR was thought to pose a risk to others and there was no reason for PC Baker to suspect that he did.
22. Staff at Presfield School were concerned that they had not seen AR for a number of months. They were concerned for his welfare.³¹ PC Baker was the SSPO for six schools including Presfield School between March 2022 and July 2024. He was approached by Cheryl Smith of Presfield School by email on 27 March 2023 and asked if he could assist the school by attending AR's address with Ms Smith, in circumstances where Lancashire Police had declined to conduct a welfare check.³²
23. PC Baker agreed to assist by attending AR's home address with a teacher. He did so on a handful of occasions at the School's request between July and December 2023.³³
24. PC Baker explained the reason for the visits in his witness statement as follows "the safeguarding team were concerned that AR was still not attending school".³⁴

³¹ PRE001806 – Inquiry statement Cheryl Smith [48]; PRE000511 – email from Cheryl Smith 21 March 2023 stating concern AR not seen since 25 May 2022

³² 27 March 2023 email from Cheryl Smith to PC Baker PRE001451

³³ PC Baker witness statement MERP008318 [19] – [39]

³⁴ PC Baker witness statement MERP008318 [37]

The staff at Presfield School were not conducting home visits because of a concern that AR posed a risk to others. They did not tell PC Baker that they thought AR posed such a risk. This is consistent with the evidence that Presfield School had not appreciated the nature / extent of AR's risk to others due to their own error in not opening the email containing that information.³⁵

25. There is no evidence to suggest that AR behaved (or that AR's family revealed that he had behaved) in a way that suggested he posed a risk to others during the home visits that PC Baker assisted with.

AR's 29 JULY 2024 HART SPACE ATTACK

26. In headline terms it is submitted that:
 - a. Merseyside Police's response of the attack was appropriate.
 - b. The initial designation of and direction of officers to an RVP until the FIM could assess the situation was appropriate.
 - c. Merseyside Police will work with NWS (and MFRS) to ensure common understanding of terminology given the differences that were apparent in the evidence about use and understanding of the terms "RVP" and "stand off".

Background

27. The detailed chronology of what happened on the day of the attack is not rehearsed; it is set out in the written statements of DCI Pye and CI Hughes and in their evidence. The summary below begins at the point of the first 999 call by Leanne Lucas, which connected to police at 11:47.08.³⁶
28. PS Gillespie was the first police officer to arrive on scene. He arrived in a police car at 11:56:53. He saw a child on the pavement and told members of the public to flag down a paramedic car which he had seen driving behind him. He was ushered to Hart Space by Joel Verite. He arrived at the smashed door leading to

³⁵ [T:23/10/25 P:222 L:23 – P:222 L:2] and [23/10/25 P:227 L:24 – P:228 L:23] evidence of Cheryl Smith

³⁶ Transcript of 999 call by Leanne Lucas MERP000481

the Hart Space at 11:57:04.³⁷ As he stood at the smashed door PS Gillespie provided updates over his radio and then said words to the effect of “we’re going in to try to detain him” whilst appearing to remove his baton from his belt. Mr Verite said in response “watch out....don’t go, don’t go, don’t go yet, you need a fucking gun mate that’s doing nothing”, apparently referring to PS Gillespie’s baton. PS Gillespie asked “What has he got?”. Mr Verite replied “He’s got a fucking knife”.³⁸ PC Holden, who is Taser trained, and PCSO Parry joined them at the door 11:57:50, 46 seconds after PS Gillespie first arrived at the door.

29. The NWS fast response vehicle of Paramedic Paul Smith, which PS Gillespie had seen, arrived at 11:57:20. Two ambulances arrived at 11:58:00.
30. PS Gillespie arrested AR for attempted murder at 11:58:39. PC Shakespeare and PC Carr arrived at the scene on Hart Street at about 11:58:23³⁹ and arrived on the first-floor landing at 12:00:02 where they assisted with restraining AR.
31. During his evidence CI Hughes was questioned about PS Gillespie’s actions on arriving at the scene. In summary, on arriving at the smashed door PS Gillespie was urged by Mr Verite not to go in without a gun as AR had a knife. PS Gillespie gave an update over his radio (crucial for the wider police and emergency service response) and then entered the building with PC Holden 52 seconds after arriving at the door. Merseyside Police endorses CI Hughes’ evidence that [T: 24.9.25 P44 L2]:
 - a. It was appropriate and in line with the National Decision Model for PS Gillespie to gather information before entering the building.
 - b. He did this “very quickly”.
 - c. He formulated a plan very quickly to await a Taser officer and then enter to try and detain AR, and this was “highly commendable”.
 - d. PS Gillespie “absolutely” got the balance right between assessment of risk and his duty to protect life and protect the public.

³⁷ BWV PS Gillespie MERP008136

³⁸ BWV PS Gillespie MERP008136

³⁹ BWV PC Shakespeare MERP008136

32. DCI Pye was asked about the scene not being secured (i.e. members of the public prevented from accessing it) in the first few minutes after officers arrived. When PCSO Parry and PC Holden arrived, PS Gillespie asked PCSO Holden to remain at the door. However, when PCSO Holden heard the shout of “knife” he left his post to go upstairs to assist his colleagues. The protection and preservation of life (whether of colleagues or members of the public) takes priority over preservation of a crime scene. This was put to DCI Pye in evidence and agreed by him [T:22.9.25 page:94 L:20].⁴⁰ It is clear from the BWV footage, and was explained by DCI Pye, that PS Gillespie took control of the scene and asked people to leave the building very quickly, in extremely difficult circumstances [T: 22.9.25 P:95 L:11].

(M)ETHANE message and major incident declaration

33. An ETHANE message was given over the EISIC channel by CI Neal Arrowsmith (FIM2) at 12.06.⁴¹ It was explained at the end of the message:⁴²

“Message entered this time at 12:06, with the caveat that this may well be declared a major incident in a short period once about further updates from scene.”

34. A major incident declaration was given over the EISIC channel by CI Arrowsmith at 12.14:35 as follows:⁴³

“Merseyside FIM to all agencies monitoring this channel in relation to the ETHANE message earlier described at 12:06 on this channel.
The revision now is now declared as a major incident, Major Incident Declaration 1214.”

35. Merseyside Police is clear that the ETHANE message and major incident declaration were broadcast over the EISIC channel. It is understood that NWS does not take issue with this, notwithstanding the accounts of some NWS staff in their debriefs: [T:24/09/2025 P:154 L:7 – P:155 L:21].

⁴⁰ This was also put to CI Hughes who stated “preservation of life is always a priority overriding any crime scene contamination” [T:24/09/25 P:52 L:18]

⁴¹ MERP000469 – Merseyside Police Log page 10

⁴² BWV CI Hughes clip 1 of 3

⁴³ BWV CI Hughes clip 1 of 3 recorded on the Merseyside Police Log page 11 – MERP000469

36. Looking at matters with the benefit of hindsight, a major incident could have been declared at 12.06, the same time as the ETHANE message was given. CI Hughes accepted as much: [T:24/09/25 P:56 L14 – 22]. But it is understandable that, in the immediacy of what for him was an unprecedented incident, CI Hughes wished to catch up with the log having completed his briefing to firearms officers and to have confirmation from the officers on the ground about the number of casualties before making that declaration [T:24/09/25 P:56, L:3-13; P:57 L:2-10], against the backdrop of diverse initial reports.
37. In the event, any delay in declaring a major incident did not damage the emergency response: see CI Hughes' evidence [T:24/09/2025 P:57 L16 – P:58 L:16]. Merseyside Police had already sent multiple units to the incident and promptly located and arrested AR. Within 15 minutes of the first call, NWS had sent in excess of the units required for its predetermined attendance in a major incident on standby [T:24/09/25 P:146 L:18-21]; within 28 minutes of the first call NWS had met the pre-determined attendance for a major incident: [T:24/09/2025 P:146, L:9-13]. Moreover, various NWS staff considered that they had declared a major incident or a major incident on standby internally (see the questioning at [T:24/09/25 P:138 L:23 – P:143 L:16]). Once police officers and NWS staff were on scene, they worked together to provide an effective multi-agency response in line with the outcome intended by the JESIP principles.

Should officers have been sent to an RVP in the first instance?

38. Given the nature of the 999 call (i) it was passed by the operator to the control room supervisor who assigned an RVP pending the FIM's review; (ii) it was passed by the control room supervisor to the FIM for review; (iii) dispatchers dispatched unarmed units to the RVP; and (iv) the FIM declared a firearms incident, but gave guidance that unarmed units could approach the scene (*viz* "Deploy unarmed patrols to approach with caution / Assess the situation / If safe deal").⁴⁴

⁴⁴ MERP000469 – Merseyside Police Log page 3

39. Merseyside Police considers that dispatching officers to an RVP in the immediate response to an incident pending the FIM's decision is the correct practical tactical approach in incidents involving firearms or knife attacks that (i) are likely to be declared a firearms incident; and then (ii) are declared as a firearms incident. Sending officers to an RVP in the immediate response is a holding position. It ensures that officers are already making their way to a safe location near to the locus of the incident while the FIM is in the process of assessing the situation and deciding whether or not it is safe for unarmed officers to approach the locus of the incident before firearms officers. That is what happened on 29 July 2024. In the immediate response officers were sent to the RVP; CI Hughes promptly decided that it was safe for unarmed officers to approach the Hart Space with caution.
40. An RVP is described in the JESIP doctrine⁴⁵ as "Point to which all resources arriving at the outer cordon are directed for logging, briefing, equipment issue and deployment."
41. The "A" in METHANE is "Access"⁴⁶ and is described as follows: "What are the best routes for access and egress? Include information on inaccessible routes and rendezvous points {RVPs}. Remember that services need to be able to leave the scene as well as access it."
42. In the Manchester Area Inquiry Report, Volume 2-1 Sir John Saunders considered the JESIP doctrine and described the RVP and the Forward Command Post as "...two key locations that are central to a successful multi-agency response" [10.19]. With respect to RVPs Sir John continued at [10.20]: "The RVP is a single place to which all responding agencies should travel and co-locate. The RVP needs to be identified and then communicated as early as possible. The RVP brings all the responders together in a single place. It reduces the risk that each responder agency will operate on its own, rather than together."

⁴⁵ JESIP Joint Doctrine: The Interoperability Framework version 3.1 2024 p.49

⁴⁶ As covered in JESIP under [M/METHANE](#) and the APP Civil Emergencies under [METHANE](#)

43. The section on civil contingencies in the College of Policing’s APP on Civil Emergencies⁴⁷ is to similar effect, as covered by CI Hughes in his statement to the Inquiry.⁴⁸
44. While the concept of an RVP described in the JESIP doctrine and the APP undoubtedly applies once a major incident has been declared (or in a multi-agency response pending declaration of a major incident), an RVP used in the initial stages of the police response to an incident as described at [39] is no different: it a safe location away from the locus of the incident to which resources should be directed to await further deployment.
45. If, contrary to these submissions, it is the Inquiry’s view that unarmed officers and other first responders should be dispatched *immediately* to the locus of the incident involving knives or firearms (rather than to an RVP) then it is suggested that amendment will be required to the JESIP principles and to the APP on Civil Emergencies.

Commonality of language

46. The evidence suggested that Merseyside Police use the term RVP to encapsulate (i) the concept set out in the major incident guidance set out above; and (ii) a safe location away from the locus of the incident to which officers should be directed to await further deployment [T:24/09/2025 P:20 L:2-7]. NWAS use the term RVP in the same way as (i), but apparently not (ii), and use the term “stand off” to describe attending the scene but proceeding with caution: [T24/09/2025 P:102 L:25 – P:103 L5].⁴⁹ CI Hughes, one of Merseyside Police’s cadre of FIMs, was not aware of the NWAS concept of “stand off”: [T:24/09/2025 P:20 L:11-13]. Mr Ainsworth of NWAS was not aware of whether Merseyside Police had an equivalent procedure to NWAS’ “standing off”: [T:24/09/2025 P:104 L:10 – 11].

⁴⁷ MERP007529 – APP Civil Emergencies

⁴⁸ MERP007548 paragraph 23 – CI Hughes statement to the Inquiry

⁴⁹ The NWAS EOC Standard Operating Procedure (NWAS001084) referred to in Mr Ainsworth’s statement at [48] (NWAS001083) as covering the process of “stand-off” appears to be describing an RVP (see page 2 paragraph 2 and page 5 paragraph 4)

47. While Merseyside Police gave NWAS the location of the RVP (i) no NWAS resources were deployed to that RVP in the initial response: [T:24/09/2025 P:134 L:24]; and (ii) the first (and subsequent) NWAS resources deployed directly to the locus of the incident: [T:24/09/2025 P:128 L:6 – P:129 L:23]. It does not appear that NWAS made any relevant communication to Merseyside Police that its resources had “stood off” / would be “standing off”.
48. Nonetheless, the use of different terminology / lack of police understanding of NWAS’s term “stand off” / lack of NWAS understanding of the police use (or range of use) of the term RVP is plainly undesirable.
49. Merseyside Police has contacted NWAS with a view to jointly reviewing policies and training to ensure common understanding of terminology, given the number of incidents that both organisations respond to (most of which are not declared major incidents).

Safety information / advice from police to the ambulance service

50. It was first communicated (at control room level) that it was safe for first responders to approach the Hart Space at 12.06 in the ETHANE message by the words “All agencies please go”.⁵⁰ In the event, this made no difference because ambulance crews had already made directly to the locus of the incident and were treating the victims as AR was being detained.
51. CI Hughes was aware that NWAS staff has proceeded directly to the Hart Space where police officers were present, and as such he did not consider it necessary to provide NWAS with any safety information: [T24/09/2025 P.40 L12]. CI Hughes nonetheless agreed that an indication that there would be a benefit in giving an indication (at control room level) that the scene was safe to approach: [T24/09/2025 P:40 L:22 – P:41 L:1].

⁵⁰ BWV CI Hughes clip 1 of 3

52. The Chief Constable agrees, but observes that:
- a. Ultimately, it remains for the ambulance service to make its own risk assessment as to whether and to what extent it is safe to proceed to the locus of an incident. In many cases NWAS arrive on scene before police.
 - b. The practicalities of when, how and in what terms safety information / advice should be given at control room level would need to be worked through carefully (e.g. avoiding any cut across / confusion with the guidance for CBRN(e) and Operation Plato incidents).
 - c. Agreed language for police safety information / advice given at control room level would need to be formulated (what CTI referred to as “standardised communication and terms between emergency services”: [T:24/09/2025 P:41 L:15) e.g. unsafe to proceed; unsafe to proceed without police attendance; seek guidance from police officers at the scene.
 - d. A formal police declaration that a scene is safe will often not be possible for some time (relative to the urgent needs of critically injured victims). In this case, the firearms officers confirmed that they had cleared the scene following a firearms emergency search at 12:20.⁵¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

53. The Chief Constable suggests consideration of the following recommendations, a number of which the Inquiry may already be considering, or wish to consider, subject to the terms of reference, in Phase 2. This list is not exhaustive or in any particular order. It is not intended to diminish any of the proposals tested by the Chair or CTI in their opening statement / submissions or in questioning witnesses.
54. In respect of those suggested recommendations directed at children, it is acknowledged that AR would have been 18 very shortly after the 29 July 2024.

⁵¹ MERP000469 – Merseyside Police Log page 13. The firearms officers arrived at 12:16.

- (1) **Crossbows; imposing licensing.** The introduction of licences for crossbows, similar to those which apply to firearms⁵² and shotguns⁵³, whereby applications have to be made to the police, including references and proof of a "good reason" for ownership. If consideration is given to amending the Firearms Act 1968 to include crossbow licences, the following might be considered:
- (i) At present firearm / shotgun licences are managed by paper certificates. It would be an opportunity to amend the legislation to have an electronic register.
 - (ii) The application fee for a licence currently has to be refunded by the police in the event of a refusal. Merseyside Police would support an amendment to end the fee being repaid.
 - (iii) Conditions (as with firearms licences) could be added to the holder of a crossbow licence, or there could be no conditions (as with shotgun licences).
- (2) **Bows and arrows; imposing age restrictions.** The introduction of age restrictions with respect to the sale of bows and arrows (c.f. crossbows) and other projectiles (such as the smoke grenades AR purchased).
- (3) **Sale of knives to persons under 18; either way offence.** The amendment of s.141A the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to make the offence of 'sale of knives and certain articles with blade or point to persons under' eighteen an either way offence to increase the deterrent.
- (4) **Distance selling of age-restricted items; permitted only if age verification processes are adequate.** The starting point of online retailers such as Amazon⁵⁴ appears to be that they should be permitted to sell age-restricted items such as knives in the same way that physical retailers do. This ignores the relative anonymity and ease with which age verification

⁵² Firearms Act 1968, section 1

⁵³ Firearms Act 1968, section 2

⁵⁴ See for example [T:02/10/25 P:50 L:18] and the analogy with a child not being prevented from entering a physical shop

measures can be defeated in online / distance sales as opposed to in-person sales. A safer starting point would be that the distance selling of age restricted items is not permitted unless the vendor's age verification measures are adequate. The adequacy of age verification measures could be quality assured by a national equivalent for distance sales of Trading Standards bodies, which are focused on geographical areas [T:14/10/25 P:180 L:6]. The standard of age verification should be equivalent to the identity verification software employed by the financial services industry. Merely asking the putative account holder / customer to enter a date of birth is woefully insufficient (aptly described by CTI as "quite literally, child's play to pass" [T:17/10/2025 P:83 L:5]).

- (5) **Visibility of age-restricted items online; age verification.** Age-restricted items such as knives should not be visible online to persons below the minimum age for purchasing the item in question. This restriction would require age verification in order to access websites (or parts of websites) on which age-verified items can be marketed. The point made above about the standard of age verification measures is repeated.
- (6) **Social media; age verification.** The answer of some social media companies to complaints about violent and offensive material being visible on their platforms is that their platforms are age restricted. The Chief Constable does not enter the debate (at least at this stage) about what should be permitted to be published on social media. Rather, if social media companies do not propose to restrict content (as would appear to be the position of X Corp⁵⁵), then age restrictions should be imposed by law. The point made above about the standard of age verification above is repeated.
- (7) **Parents who fail to take appropriate steps to prevent risk of harm from their children; criminal liability.** In light of AR's father's evidence,

⁵⁵ [T: 04/11/2025 P:79 L:14] detailing that graphically violent material is permitted to remain on X if it is labelled accordingly

consideration should be given to criminal liability where parents fail to take appropriate steps to prevent risk of serious harm from their children that eventuates. This would require careful consideration in Phase 2 drawing on international comparisons including from the USA where parents of children responsible for school shootings have been prosecuted for a variety of offences in recent years.

- (8) **Preventative orders with respect to persons who pose a risk of serious harm to others.** In light of some of the evidence about the difficulties in engaging with AR in circumstances where he was neither arrestable nor detainable under the Mental Health Act 1983, consideration should be given to a 'risk of serious harm' civil preventative order (whether as a new type of order, or by varying the tests for Serious Violence Reduction Orders⁵⁶ or Knife Crime Prevention Orders⁵⁷). While defining the threshold condition presents challenges, the conditions imposed by such an order such as restrictions on attending certain locations and the requirements to provide access to internet browser histories and to submit to searches would present law enforcement with valuable preventative opportunities.
- (9) **Multi-agency work with respect to persons who pose a risk of serious harm to others.** As set out above, where there is multi-agency work in respect of a person who poses a risk of serious harm to others, there should be a requirement for formal clarity as to who is the lead agency responsible for managing the risk, and who in that lead agency is responsible for managing the risk. This would not affect the statutory responsibilities of the individual agencies involved in the multi-agency response (e.g. the responsibility of the police to investigate criminal offences), but it would ensure that one agency had overall 'ownership' of the risk posed by an

⁵⁶ Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 Chapter 1A – currently only a pilot scheme which concluded in April 2025

⁵⁷ Offensive Weapons Act 2019 Part 2 – currently only a pilot scheme which concluded in March 2023

individual, and responsibility for leadership of the multi-agency response to that risk.

(10) The ‘Voice of the child’ should be considered with care, and balanced against the risk to others that the child may pose. It was apparent during the evidence that the concept of ‘voice of the child’⁵⁸ being at the centre of individuals’ approaches meant that AR was able to manipulate those seeking to make assessments of him.⁵⁹ This can also be true in criminal investigations. Consideration should be given to rebalancing this approach so that any relevant guidance makes it clear that where that the ‘voice of the child’ is taken into account, this is not at the expense of professional curiosity and mature scrutiny of the risk that may be posed *by* the child.

55. In their opening submissions the families of Elsie, Alice and Bebe and proposed adjustments to the **common law of tort** in relation to the obligations on the State and private citizens [T:17/09/2025 P:5 L:10]. If that is a matter for the Inquiry’s consideration, it is submitted that it should be considered in Phase 2. Any recommendation should be made following a proper assessment of, and submissions on, the state of the common law and the benefits and disbenefits of changing that position, not least given the careful and incremental way that the law has developed over multiple decisions of the House of Lords and the Supreme Court.
56. Finally, the Chief Constable submits that it would be appropriate for the Inquiry to make a finding regarding the decision of the taxi driver Gary Poland **not to call 999** until 12:36:56 despite calling his friend very shortly after leaving the scene at 11:46. That failure was not causative given Leanne Lucas’ impressively prompt and detailed 999 call, but Mr Poland had information that would have been useful to Merseyside Police at the outset *viz* who he had dropped off, where he had picked them up, and the fact that his passenger was alone. The Chief

⁵⁸ A phrase which is found in e.g. *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023*

⁵⁹ [T:29/10/25 P:59 L:19 – P:60 L:4] and [T28/10/25 P:104 L:1 – L:25]

Constable endorses DCI Pye's evidence on this point.⁶⁰ It is hoped that the Inquiry might acknowledge that there is at least a moral duty on members of the public to promptly call 999 when they become aware that one of their fellow citizens is being attacked.

CONCLUSION

57. Merseyside Police concludes where it began in its opening submissions by repeating the Chief Constable's deep condolences to the families and friends of the children murdered by AR, to those who he injured, to their families and friends, and to all those affected in different ways by AR's offending.
58. Merseyside Police remains committed to assisting the Inquiry in any way it can in the balance of Phase 1 and in Phase 2 and will give the Inquiry's recommendations the most careful consideration. If the Inquiry identifies shortcomings in Merseyside Police's policies or processes (or in national guidance and processes that apply to the police service) Merseyside Police is keen to understand and to implement that learning.

JAMES BERRY KC

CHLOE HILL

Serjeants' Inn Chambers

24 November 2025

⁶⁰ [T: 22/09/2025 P:78 L:21-22]