

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

CLOSING SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD

PHASE 1

Introduction

1. The YJB wishes to start the closing submissions by repeating the words of Stephanie Roberts-Bibby at the outset of her evidence on 4 November 2025: “All those who make up the YJB and those working as part of it offer their heartfelt condolences to the families of Alice, Bebe and Elsie and the others that were harmed by the actions of AR and impacted by the events on 29 July 2024. The victim impact evidence heard during the first week of the Inquiry has clearly shown the wide-ranging effects of what took place”.
2. These submissions are intended to assist the Inquiry, and other Core Participants, in determining the lessons that can be learned from this tragic incident and to make recommendations which will allow real change to take place.
3. The YJB stated at the outset of this Inquiry that “the terrible actions of AR reinforce the need for there to be an interconnected system” which “must be developed whilst ensuring that local agencies operate with understanding and trust, and with the ability to take action to support children’s needs”. It is submitted that the evidence heard by the Inquiry has demonstrated that there is a need for far better multi-agency working and vast improvements in respect of information sharing and accurate recording to inform a dynamic assessment of a child’s needs and risk to others, critically to assist effective planning and management of the risks to the child, potential victims and others.

4. The structure of these Closing Submissions falls into three sections:
 - i. A critical analysis of the chronology of AR and those touchpoints, relevant to the youth justice system, where the YJB feel that opportunities were missed;
 - ii. A consideration of the recommendations set out at Paragraph 7 of the YJB's corporate statement;
 - iii. Recommendations arising out of the evidence heard by the Inquiry relating to:
 - a. The approach to be taken to Youth Sentencing;
 - b. Multi-agency engagement including information sharing, risk assessment and planning, including planning for transition into adult services;
 - c. Knife Crime Prevention including access to online material.
5. The YJB has sought to make meaningful recommendations, it will be a matter for the Inquiry whether to adopt these recommendations immediately or to consider them as part of the next Phase of the Inquiry. The YJB's view is that these recommendations are vital to ensure an effective youth justice system which prevents children offending, reduces victims and creates safe communities.

Critical Analysis of AR's Engagement with Youth Justice

6. AR's first engagement with the criminal justice system, specifically the police, took place as a result of AR contacting Childline on 4 October 2019 asking, "what should I do if I want to kill someone?" [MERP000030].
7. AR contacted Childline again on 7 October 2019 stating that he wanted to kill someone and had taken a knife with him to school [MERP000030].
8. Lancashire Police attended AR's address and PC McNamee discovered that AR had taken a knife to school on a total of ten occasions [LANC000020]. Whilst this matter was based solely on AR's admission to Childline and the Police, this could still have been pursued evidentially and indeed given the admission, would have been appropriate

to deal with by way of early intervention and diversion by working with the youth justice service or alternatively with a conditional caution.

9. The steps taken at this stage were insufficient, consideration ought to have been given to a robust offer of early intervention and diversion by seeking the involvement of the Youth Justice Service, especially as it was a self-referred concern from AR himself. Instead, the matters were minimised and limited efforts were made to refer the matter to Merseyside Police. PC McNamee stated that AR was not arrested because police felt that “because of his age and his vulnerabilities with potential learning difficulties and the fact that we could put other preventative measures in place, that we could deal with it in other ways.” [02 October 2025 – p134 – PC McNamee]. This is an early example of where even within the same public service, information was lost because of a lack of interoperability and information sharing between regions. It also gives an example of where options other than formal intervention were considered, yet this did not happen as a result of PC McNamee’s request of Merseyside Police being ignored. [LANC000020]
10. If there was not an offer of early intervention and diversion that the next appropriate response would have been a conditional caution with targeted work with AR by the youth justice service. Instead, it appears that the matter was passed between police forces before ultimately being closed despite it being known that Merseyside Police had not opened a crime report. As a final observation on the practicalities, the YJB would observe that as soon as AR left his home he was in a public place, and the offence had been committed. It is not entirely evidentially justifiable that this was a Merseyside Police matter simply because AR attended school in Merseyside, the offence was committed within Lancashire and Merseyside. [LCC000003], and critically self-disclosed by AR who was seeking help from Childline.
11. On 27 November 2019, PC McNamee contacted Merseyside Police to confirm whether a crime report had been created. Merseyside Police responded on the same day to confirm that a report had not been logged with them. It is unclear why at this point a report was not created by Merseyside or why further enquiries were not made by PC McNamee. [LANC000070]
12. The evidence called by the Inquiry has demonstrated that information regarding the 7 October 2019 police attendance was diluted as time progressed. The effect of this was

that by February 2020, the information had reduced to simply carrying a knife rather than the potential threat to kill another student and at a later stage, that the information held by various agencies was inconsistent and inaccurate.

13. As the Inquiry has heard, AR was then excluded from The Range due to his admission to carrying a knife to school on multiple occasions; there was no Youth Justice Service involvement and therefore no intervention from them.
14. When the PREVENT referrals were not progressed, there was a lack of appropriate handover. The YJB would expect at a minimum that if the PREVENT referral was not accepted, that the case be handed back to the referring agency with advice on any actions that need to be taken in relation to the child. In this instance there should have at least been a discussion about the material AR was accessing, understanding why, exploring his perception of victim and grievances against others, who they are and any mitigations that should be taken to ensure their safety. Where any risk is present there must be a considered handover to another agency to meet needs and address any unresolved issues. In this instance we would have expected those who made the PREVENT referral, the school, to be told what support would be offered to the child and by which agency. Additionally, the YJB would have expected that Children's Social Care to have been informed of the referral. The YJB believe that there is a lack of clarity of who would be responsible for this when there is no youth justice intervention in place.
15. On 11 December 2019, AR attended the Range School in possession of a hockey stick and a bladed article. When AR was challenged, he struck a student who he had previously been friends with using the hockey stick, an injury was caused to the other student. AR was initially arrested but was released with his mother and returned to be interviewed the following day.
16. When interviewed, AR provided a prepared statement admitting the offences of assault, possession of an offensive weapon and possession of a bladed article. AR stated in the prepared statement that he did not have the intention to use the knife. There is no evidence of any exploration by professionals to understand why AR was carrying the knife or linking of this to the call to Childline.
17. A referral for AR was received on 13 December 2019 by Stephanie Hallaron, Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Practitioner at the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion

Team (CJLDT) provided by Mersey Care NHS Trust. There is limited information available as to what steps were taken following this referral.

18. AR appeared on 19 February 2020 at Merseyside Magistrates and Juvenile Court and pleaded guilty to the following offences:

- i. Possess article with blade/sharp point on school premises (sentenced to a referral order 10 months, victim surcharge £21.00 and forfeiture and destruction).
- ii. Assault occasioning actual bodily harm (sentenced to a referral order 10 months and compensation £100.00).
- iii. Possessing offensive weapon in public place (sentenced to referral order 10 months and forfeiture and destruction).

19. There was no pre-sentence report as the Magistrates Court considered the matter would be dealt with by way of a mandatory referral order. The Initial Details of Prosecution Case "IDPC", which is a PDF bundle prepared before a first appearance, which was available was extremely limited. The charge being drafted incorrectly demonstrates the lack of attention that was given to the case, given it appears to have been thought AR had a baseball bat rather than a hockey stick. The IDPC did not, and nor would the YJB expect it to, provide any information as to AR's background, the call to Childline, threats to kill nor that AR carried a knife on ten occasions whilst attending school in October 2019. The statements disclosed were limited to a statement from the arresting officer [LCC000021]. However, notwithstanding the limitations of the current approach to IDPC, the information available was clearly incomplete and did not give a full enough picture of AR's background or his risk profile at the point of sentence.

20. It appears that the only additional information given was from Ms Jameson, who attended sentence, who stated that AR's care plan was ongoing and that the ASD assessment needed expediting. The Inquiry heard significant evidence regarding the assessment of risk in respect of AR from Ms Callon. Even on the information available, AR should have been assessed as high risk.

21. If there had been proper information sharing with Ms Croll (who completed the assessment) it is likely that high risk would have been the outcome. This should have included but not limited to the following:

- Information relating to AR's call to Childline, in particular the suggestion that AR felt like he was going to kill someone, as well as the identity of the potential victim;
- The record of the visit from Lancashire police as a result of his two calls;
- Correct details of the offence for which he was due to be sentenced;
- Details of AR's previous PREVENT referral;
- AR's current health information;
- Any information relating to AR's potential ASD diagnosis; and
- Any information from children's social care relating to AR and his family.

22. The AssetPlus assessment of AR, completed by Ms Croll, indicates that information regarding previous safeguarding incidents was available to her. However, the observations do not accurately reflect what had been documented by other agencies as it states, "in October 2019 AR rang Childline and took a knife into school, it is not thought AR had the intention of being proactive in harming anyone and he had taken this in to defend against one particular pupil". Initially, AR was assessed as "low risk" [LCC000450], but this was later changed to "medium risk" [LCC000447]. It appears this assessment was made without the knowledge that AR had indicated that he would use the knife, wished to harm another student and had thoughts of killing, nor was it made with the benefit of information regarding AR's behaviour at school such as his search history which led to the first PREVENT referral.

23. Even in the absence of the information at the initial point of contact between the Youth Justice Service and AR, it is clear that by March 2020, Ms Croll had sufficient information available to her as the Acorns school provided her with a detailed chronology outlining all previous safeguarding incidents and CPOMs records. [LCC001346]

24. Stephanie Roberts-Bibby advised on the importance of seeing risk to self and others as dynamic, something that should be reviewed with new information and events. Risk is never static and should always be subject to ongoing reviews, she advised that based

on the information available to the Youth Justice Service, AR should have been assessed as high-risk of harm to others [4 November 2025 – p31].

25. The following is a brief chronology of AR’s involvement with the Youth Justice Service taken from [MERP000165]. Where engagement was with AR directly, this has been highlighted in green (where he engaged), orange (where it is unclear) and red (where AR failed to attend):

<u>March 2020</u>	
4 March 2020	Multi-agency meeting between Anna Croll, Acorns, Range, CLJT and CSC
5 March 2020	Anna Croll was provided with a chronology detailing the October 2019 incidents and CPOMs record [LCC001346]
9 March 2020	Education update provided by email
11 March 2020	Email chain provided between school and AR’s parents
13 March 2020	Telephone call from Anna Croll to Alphonse R
17 March 2020	Referral order panel letter was sent Initial meeting was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic and stay at home guidance
24 March 2020	Initial panel meeting was completed by phone 1. AR advised to keep in contact with YOT by phone 2. Initial discussions around potential work
25 March 2020	Initial Panel Meeting took place
31 March 2020	Further meeting took place and AR informed his objective was to keep in touch with YOT
<u>April 2020</u>	
7 April 2020	Attempted contact with AR by phone – AR did not answer the phone
8 April 2020	Telephone contact with AR – general discussion around lockdown and AR’s hobbies

14 April 2020	Comprehensive Health Assessment Tool (“CHAT”) completed
17 April 2020	ASD assessment chased but there was an 18-month waiting list
24 April 2020	Telephone contact attempted – AR did not answer No breach as this was not a scheduled appointment
28 April 2020	Two attempts to contact AR – not successful
29 April 2020	Telephone appointment took place – no detail provided
<u>MAY 2020</u>	
04 May 2020	Telephone appointment took place – no detail provided
11 May 2020	AR was spoken to by telephone and stated that he found the work provided by school too easy
19 May 2020	TAF meeting held – AR did not attend but had not been told to attend
28 May 2020	Telephone appointment with Alphonse R – this is marked as a session with “counts” but it is not clear that AR in fact attended
<u>JUNE 2020</u>	
5 June 2020	Telephone appointment with Alphonse R – this is marked as a session with “counts” but it is not clear that AR in fact attended Anna Croll indicated she was now leaving YOT
16 June 2020	Telephone appointment with AR – It was explained to AR that he would have a new YOT worker called John
17 June 2020	Referral order risk review occurred by phone
23 June 2020	It was remarked that AR should be commended on his engagement and that further work re risk could now take place

<u>JULY 2020</u>	
1 July 2020	Telephone appointment with John Fitzpatrick – now indicated that JF will try to see AR in person
8 July 2020	In person meeting with AR and general discussion
16 July 2020	Failed telephone appointment with AR
21 July 2020	In person appointment with AR - Session completed on Knife Crime using the No Knives, Better Lives worksheets
31 July 2020	Telephone appointment with AR
<u>AUGUST 2020</u>	
7 August 2020	In person appointment with AR - AIM victim awareness discussion and victim impact worksheet
13 August 2020	Telephone appointment with AR
20 August 2020	In person appointment with AR - Method - Anger management worksheets and Discussion
<u>SEPTEMBER 2020</u>	
2 September 2020	Telephone appointment with AR
9 September 2020	In person appointment with AR – AR stated that he would not attend as he was angry at his dad for cutting the grass over the grave of a pet hamster of Axel's and Axel had asked his dad not to cut the grass in that area No breach as AR suffers with ASD Contact reduced to once per fortnight at this stage
10 September 2020	Acorns informed Mr Fitzpatrick that AR was attending and engaging, as such it was decided that attendance at education was to count towards AR's referral order

15 September 2020	In person appointment with AR – AR refused to attend as he was still angry about the grass being mowed over As AR was attending school this was marked as an agency attendance
21 September 2020	In person appointment with AR – review self-assessment completed contact reduced to once per month [MERP000165_48] The risk assessment at this stage was reduced to low on the basis that there were no areas of concern reported and work had been completed
<u>OCTOBER 2020</u>	
15 October 2020	In person appointment with AR – AR was not aware of the visit so was unhappy and not very ‘chatty’
<u>NOVEMBER 2020</u>	
19 November 2020	In person appointment and confirmation given that order would end in on 21 January 2021
<u>DECEMBER 2020</u>	
9 December 2020	In person appointment with AR
14 December 2020	Review meeting where it was confirmed that AR was attending school and continued to receive YOT support
<u>JANUARY 2021</u>	
19 January 2021	In person appointment – AR stated that he had threatened to break his dad’s laptop and kicked his dad in the balls, his dad had slapped him in response
21 January 2021	End of referral order

26. The work done with the referral order was insufficient and refers the Inquiry to the evidence of Stephanie Roberts-Bibby [4 November 2025 – p28]:

So I would have expected the caseworker to be forming a relationship with him; understanding why he had done what he had done; working that through with him; trying to give him insight; working on victim empathy; thinking about consequences; thinking about how his, at that point undiagnosed, ASD was playing out in his world; what was that meaning for him; why did he have a perception of victim and now -- that making him perpetrator.

27. Opportunities were missed in terms of understanding the way that AR viewed the world and to help him understand his offending behaviour. The preventative work that was done was entirely insufficient and there was an absence of work focusing on victims, who the intended victims/s were and how to keep them safe. The child-first evidence-based approach means that the Youth Justice Service should have looked to work with AR to understand how he could use his time more positively and to encourage him to take advantage of the opportunities that were available to him to address his needs and reduce the risk of harm to others.
28. The options available to the Youth Justice Service at the end of the referral order were extremely limited, there had been no enforcement action and no further offences committed which were capable of being charged. As such, the referral order and the formal involvement of the service was required to come to an end in February 2021. The only way in which it could have continued is on a voluntary basis with AR if he and his parents agreed.
29. The YJB are particularly concerned that there were a total of 6 failed engagements and yet there is no evidence that any action was taken in respect of this non-engagement. In fact, there was the opposite, there was a minimisation of harm and vulnerability and a positive reinforcement of non-engagement by reducing the frequency of contact.
30. On 30 November 2021, Merseyside Police were contacted, and it was reported that AR had thrown a plate of food at a car and jumped on the car. The matter was transferred to Lancashire Police [LANC000079] and no further action was taken. We are also aware that in January 2021 AR assaulted his father by kicking him the groin, which was known to the Youth Justice Service and raised with Children's Social Care, but no formal action taken [LCC000488]. From the evidence presented by AR's family there were other incidents of assault which were not reported to the Police.

31. On 17 March 2022, AR was reported missing and Officers subsequently found AR on a bus, it was reported to them that he suffered with autism and ASD. [MERP000528]. AR had a two-inch knife in his possession but the determination was made that he did not have capacity and so prosecution was not appropriate. AR said he was going to use the knife to stab someone for this reason and had previously tried to make poison for the same reason.
32. The YJB would have expected Police records to show the previous engagements with AR to help inform next steps. The YJB position is that there should have been a further charge, or at the least a referral back into the youth justice service alongside a safeguarding referral to children's social care. The YJB understand from the evidence that the Officer did submit a MASH referral for AR and was surprised when advised by the inquiry that it did not result in Tier 4 support and that the Early Help Coordinator concluded 'No identified safeguarding or support needs that would require CSC / CFW intervention'. The YJB disagrees with this assessment and believes that a child found carrying a knife, in addition to how AR presented, would warrant a CSC and CFW intervention.
33. Stephanie Roberts-Bibby stated in her evidence on this matter [4 November 2025 – p37] that “we would have expected an arrest and charge”. Whilst it would not have resulted in a mandatory minimum sentence due to AR's age (on the assumption he would have been charged promptly) it would have resulted in a Youth Rehabilitation Order and proper supervision being put in place for AR. This could have included a curfew as part of the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (“ISS”) system. It is striking that AR had indicated that he had considered creating poison, at this point a search of his bedroom under Section 32 PACE (although we accept Code B says that less intrusive options should be preferred) would have been reasonable and proportionate and may have discovered items that could cause harm to others. From what we have learned from the inquiry we understand that AR had received a delivery of ricin seeds on the 19th January 2022, pestle and mortar and flasks ordered on the 25th January 2022, and crossbow ordered on the 4th March 2022. It is likely that there would have been items of concern in his room had a search taken place.
34. Where a child has previously received or completed a referral order relating to possession of a knife, the Child Gravity Matrix states:

“Where the suspect has any history of offences of violence, has previously been dealt with for a knife/weapon offence or the offence under investigation is an offence other than simple possession, then they should be charged.”

35. The 17 March 2022 stop was a significant missed opportunity in AR’s chronology, and this date also represents the beginning of his decline into becoming reclusive, very rarely leaving the home.
36. On 14 May 2022, there was a further call to police by AR’s parents as AR's behaviour had escalated inside the family home, he had been denied access to a laptop in the middle of the night, AR agreed to go to sleep and a safeguarding referral was made once again [LANC000093].
37. The YJB remains concerned by the approach taken by Lancashire Police in March 2023 when a request was made by Presfield School for a welfare check to be carried out. By this stage, AR had been in contact with police on multiple occasions and his parents had called 999 at least twice due to his behaviour at home. This should have led to further alarm bells given the level of police engagement that had occurred, regrettably, the police did not undertake a welfare check.
38. Finally, on 22 July 2024, it was clear that offences were likely being committed. AR’s family did nothing to act on their concerns. These concerns should have been exacerbated when upon searching AR’s room, AR’s father found ricin and a bow and arrow. Once again, no action was taken. It is unclear whether, in fact, all of the 999 call outs have been disclosed – Dion R’s evidence was that there had been various callouts, indeed that the police had been called “multiple times” [4 November 2025 – p172].
39. It is the role of Children's Social Care to act as needed to protect children from being the perpetrator or the victim of harm. We recognise that section 11 of the Children Act 2004 does not currently place emphasis on public protection and the risk children pose to others and speak to legislative changes that need to take place later in this statement. We are concerned that the nature of the support offered to the family when they were requesting it did not fully meet their needs. This could have had a negative impact on their trust and confidence of services. There should also be considerations around cultural competence: we have seen little evidence that services sought to explore AR's parents’ views on family life, understanding of ASD, and the breadth of different services involved. There should have been greater professional curiosity from Social

Care, and other services, as to the level of risk posed to all members of the household and how this would shape what they might be willing to disclose. The above does not negate the critical role of parents in safeguarding their children and protecting them from both incurring and causing harm both within and outside the home.

The Recommendations of the YJB

40. At Paragraph 7 of the corporate statement provided on behalf of the Youth Justice Board, recommendations were made. It is submitted that these recommendations, through the evidence heard by the Inquiry, have been shown to be well thought out and essential to ensure a properly functioning Youth Justice System.

41. The YJB has undertaken to provide more detail in respect of the recommendations and the measures required to introduce them in an addendum to the corporate statement. Within these submissions, the YJB has sought to set out the basis for the recommendations and initial observations to assist the Inquiry in making its own recommendations (in addition to determining the scope of Phase 2).

i. Development of an effective risk assessment tool, based on the most contemporary evidence, designed to assess the risk and needs of children who have evidence of adopting extreme ideologies or a fixation on violence and serious criminal offending;

- a. There is a strong consensus and evidence base, indeed as shown in this Inquiry, that current tools are insufficient and that there is a need for shared, multi-agency, multi-disciplinary assessments (Youth Justice, social care, health) rather than isolated tools.
- b. The YJB would support the introduction of a holistic assessment framework that sequences specialist tools and ensures collective agreement and planning with an emphasis on dynamic risk assessment and regular review—current practice can sometime be static and outdated.
- c. The YJB would recommend that there be a MAPPA style model focused on prevention of harm with multi-agency shared assessments of risk and need with shared information and collective sign-off on any assessment.

ii. Regulation of social media;

- a. The YJB feels that social media platforms do not appreciate or understand the risks that their platforms create, nor do they recognise the role that they ought to play in managing this risk;
- b. The YJB would support greater use of restrictions alongside cross-agency working, such as with the assistance of seconded police officers within youth justice services, in order to properly manage use, risk, and exposure.

iii. Targeted research to better understand what works to prevent children causing serious harm;

- a. The Youth Endowment Fund has provided research which can be built upon, but there is a need for research into what works for high-risk cohorts, including those radicalised or those being labelled as violence-fixated including inciting others to cause harm;
- b. The YJB recommends that research goes further than simply considering “violence” and instead looks at understanding identity, context and trauma (e.g., belonging, victimhood, shame, family history, cultural factors) behind violent ideation.

iv. Improved access to, quality of and use of data;

- a. The current data systems are fragmented and outdated, there is a need for better linkage between youth justice, health, and education data; (for example, when the YJB has have attempted to look at the quality of PNC ID provided to the YJB, the match rates have come back as low as 60%.)
- b. The YJB would recommend greater adoption of the BOLD project (Better Outcomes through Linked Data to maximise the use of integrated systems to track children;
- c. In future the same information must be available for all decision makers who deal with a child and must be included within, for example, IDRC packs and documents used for making determinations as to bail;
- d. The above will ultimately require resourcing and investment.

v. Improved IT infrastructure;

- a. There is a vital need for a single case management system or interoperability of sharing information across youth justice and children’s services. There was a previous attempt (“Wiring Up Youth Justice”) which failed due to funding cuts;

- b. This is once again depending upon spending and investment.

vi. Strengthening oversight of children who are not in school;

- a. The YJB would recommend that any child in England who is permanently excluded or is classified as missing from education (as defined by the DfE children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools) is placed on a Child in Need (“CiN”) plan. An equivalent policy should be implemented in Wales whereby children outlined above are classified as children who need care and support (as defined by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014);
- b. There should be greater tracking and accountability of school exclusions and absence data, including the introduction of national performance indicators on exclusions, managed moves, off-rolling [children removed from the school register without an exclusion or a reason], and local tracking systems.
- c. The implementation of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill creates an opportunity to further specify governments expectations to address the concern relating to children missing from education.

vii. Clarity on what constitutes the youth justice system, redefining the standards of that system and strengthening strategic governance;

- a. There is a need to update Standards for Children in the Justice System to reflect safeguarding, victim considerations, and prevention, as well as the role of each statutory partner;
- b. The YJB would invite the Inquiry to recommend that the Government commission the YJB to update Standards for Children in the Justice System to reflect safeguarding, victim considerations, and prevention and outline each statutory partners role.
- c. This would allow for greater work to understand the extent to which the Government seeks a national, or locally devolved, youth justice system.

viii. Clarification of ways of working between the YJB, officials and ministers, as well as local, regional and national levels across the system;

- a. The YJB’s view is that there is a need for clearer expectations on shared ownership of meeting needs, managing and mitigating risk and resourcing, be it financial or otherwise, contributions from all statutory partners.

- b. The YJB has undertaken to review all guidance to consider which need to be revised in the light of the short comings in AR's case, this will include Case Management and AssetPlus guidance, and Management of children at risk of engaging with or involvement in terrorist-related activity guidance and our Oversight Framework.

ix. Effective sharing of information; and

- a. There are, as set out in these closing submissions, a number of occasions where information was not shared effectively;
- b. The YJB would emphasise the need for real-time notifications and cross-agency visibility that is not hampered by thresholds or labels applied (as referred to in the Corporate Witness Statement).
- c. The YJB would seek engagement from the Department for Education to share best practice models with Directors of Children's Services or Social Services for Wales, as statutory partners, and encourage them to implement and evaluate effectiveness of different models.

x. Better multi agency systems across statutory partners to ensure a shared understanding of what contributes to the prevention of offending.

- a. There is no genuine integration at present, the system would benefit from multi-agency co-produced plans with clear governance, review points, and escalation routes that are supported by robust quality assurance by all agencies.

42. The YJB invites the Inquiry to monitor the progress of Phase 1 recommendations and the actions which will be contained in the addendum corporate statement during phase two and not hesitate to call evidence as to progress or to explain inaction.

Thematic Recommendations

43. The YJB would suggest to the Inquiry that the following key themes have developed in respect of AR during the Inquiry. The YJB invites the Inquiry to consider the observations of the YJB in respect of the following:

- i. The Approach to be taken to Youth Sentencing;
- ii. Multi-agency engagement including information sharing, risk assessment and planning, including planning for transition into adult services;

- iii. Knife Crime Prevention including access to online material.

Youth Sentencing

- 44. There are clear benefits to the imposition of referral orders and youth rehabilitation orders, it demonstrates that the system can work to assist children and young people and meet their need and in turn reduce risk to others. DR's evidence stated that whilst AR was subject to youth offending supervision, there was an improvement in his behaviour. Stephanie Roberts-Bibby is right to say that the sentencing principles ought to be revisited in the case of those who are found in possession of a bladed article with the intent to cause harm to another [4 November 2025 – Stephanie Roberts Bibby – p11].
- 45. AR's case demonstrates that there are instances where there is a lack of information available at the point of sentence. The IDPC provided simply contained a brief summary and the witness statement of an arresting officer, it provided no factual background to the offences at all. Furthermore, the result was that at the point the sentence was imposed the fact that AR had previously taken knives to school was not known. The YJB agrees with Ms Sarah Callon that it would have been helpful for further information to have been available [Hearing Transcript – Monday 27 October – p182].
- 46. The YJB recommends that there be an improved minimum standard of IDPC pack for anticipated guilty plea (GAP) cases in the Youth Court to ensure the correct sentence is imposed. There is insufficient guidance in place to demonstrate what information should be made available to the prosecuting advocate, sentencing tribunal and youth justice service. This is particularly pertinent in circumstances where the Court proceeds to simply impose a referral order, rather than obtaining a pre-sentence report which may include third party material (e.g. previous education / social care concerns).
- 47. Notwithstanding this recommendation, the YJB believes that the correct sentence to be imposed was a referral order. AR had no previous convictions and had pleaded guilty; custody was not a realistic possibility. At this stage, the decision had not been taken to charge him with carrying knives to school in October 2019. Had AR been subject to an order at the time the December 2019 offences were committed, he would not have been eligible for a referral order.

48. The YJB takes the view that referral orders remain an effective sentencing tool to address a child's needs and risks to others, but only if they are used effectively. For the year ending March 2023 cohort, the reoffending rate for those with a Referral Order was 28.0% against the overall reoffending rate for children of 32.5%. The frequency rate for reoffending was also the lowest in the year ending March 2023 cohort. Referral orders had the lowest frequency rate of reoffending at 3.71 reoffences per reoffender, compared with an overall frequency rate of 4.34 reoffences per reoffender.
49. The approach taken to AR's referral order was not appropriate. Whilst there were challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, this should not have led to a situation whereby AR's aim for the first 4 months of his order was to maintain effective contact with the Youth Justice Service. The YJB would not support such an approach. The YJB agrees with the observation of Counsel to the Inquiry that this was a "very low" expectation [Transcript of Inquiry – 28 October 2025 – p12]. The work was summarised in the September 2020 review [MERP000165_48] which states that "Axel has completed interventions on knife crime, anger management, victim awareness and consequential thinking". There is no doubt that more could have been done than the three 30-minute work-book sessions, these were superficial and not robust enough to address his needs and risks.
50. Furthermore, the YJB disagrees with the approach taken to enforcement of AR's referral order. There are multiple examples in the chronology contained in these submissions where AR does not attend telephone appointments and after his father mowed the grass over his hamster's grave, refused to attend in-person appointments. A lack of compliance can often indicate an increase in risk, there ought to have been action taken, there is no evidence of any discussion with AR in relation to his engagement, setting expectations, boundaries and compliance with the order. These were missed opportunities to work with AR and his parents to provide an adequate protective factor.
51. It was inappropriate that no action was taken not to count attendance at school nor to continue to reduce contact. The approach to enforcement does not reflect the YJB's expectations or the approach that should be taken, Stephanie Roberts Bibby stated that "it is absolutely incumbent on the worker, the lead worker, to seek to engage with the child, find out why they are not engaging, and then do everything they can do to inspire them to engage" [4 November 2025 – p12]. In simple terms, not enough was done in

the light of AR's non-compliance. AR was given a referral order, and therefore the Referral Order guidance should have been followed. Youth Justice Services will benefit from the guidance for referral orders being reviewed and re-written in light of the learning from the inquiry. The YJB's current case management guidance covers engagement with children and what do in the event of the need to breach a child (or take action to address non-engagement). The YJB commits to reviewing the content of these sections to further strengthen understanding and practice. The YJB commits to work with the Ministry of Justice, who currently author the Referral Order Guidance, to consider how that guidance could be incorporated in the case management guidance and remove any confusion for practitioners.

52. The YJB has indicated that it plans to revisit the content of the case management guidance, AssetPlus guidance and other guidance where there can be any learning for the sector in how services are delivered to children to prevent them offending and causing harm to others.
53. The YJB maintains its view that the focus should be on diversion, where possible and safe to do so, rather than charging children with offences, criminalising them and increasing likelihood of offending. The rationale for this is that a failure to focus on diversion often leads to criminalisation of children. Furthermore, the statistical research as set out in the Knife Crimes Insight Pack [YJB000112] demonstrates that dealing with matters without charge and conviction is an effective way of reducing knife crime, prevent victims and create safer communities.
54. The YJB would recommend that as part of Phase Two, the Inquiry should consider the arrangements for referral orders for children found carrying a knife where there is intent to cause harm. The YJB is conscious that there may be a wish to consider removing mandatory referral orders, the importance of a referral order is that it is spent upon completion and is recorded differently to other youth sentences. The YJB would suggest that the Inquiry be mindful of this as ensuring a first offence is not recorded permanently avoids criminalising children.

Multi-Agency Engagement

55. The issue of multi-agency engagement arose at the outset of the Inquiry during a number of opening statements. The evidence in respect of AR has made clear that there

are missed opportunities and incorrect judgments made as a result of agencies failing to share information with one another.

56. The YJB invites the Inquiry to consider the observations of the YJB in respect of the following, noting that the safeguarding and prevention of harm to themselves and others should be the primary responsibility of all agencies working with children and families.
57. The YJB repeats the recommendation made at the outset of the Inquiry that there needs to be a lead agency and improved partnership working at both a national and local level.
58. The difficulties with engagement extend to communication and sharing of information between the same agency but in different geographic areas, as well as information sharing within the same agencies and with partners. The failure to properly share information between Merseyside Police and Lancashire Police in October 2019 meant that no proper review ever took place of AR's possession of bladed articles whilst at the Range school and the case was eventually closed. [2 October 2025 – PC McNamee – p165-169].
59. The YJB does not support the proposition that AR ought to have been charged given his age and presentation, however, there were various options available, the evidence shows that diversion provides the greatest chance of preventing future offending and should, subject to risk of harm to others be considered before a caution, which should be considered before a youth caution and a youth caution before a youth conditional caution, none of which were considered. The YJB does not agree with the evidence of PS Bramhall that the offences did not occur in Lancashire [6 October 2025 – PS Bramhall – p26] as previously set out.
60. Knife Possession Guidance is being developed by the Home Office (with the Ministry of Justice) which is aimed at Police, Youth Justice Services, and partner agencies to ensure a consistent, swift, and robust response when a child is found in possession of a knife. Its purpose is to reduce knife crime by mandating interventions that are evidence-based and applied uniformly, moving away from informal resolutions and ensuring mandatory engagement with youth justice services. The YJB's view is broadly supportive of the ambition for stronger, more meaningful interventions, but we have raised concerns about alignment with existing CPS/NPCC guidance, inclusion of Wales, equality duties, and clarity on scrutiny panels. The YJB are also concerned because the new guidance creates an expectation that most Out of Court Resolutions

for knife possession will default to Youth Conditional Cautions, which risks reducing professional discretion and may lead to disproportionate criminalisation of children, particularly from minoritised communities, rather than allowing tailored, needs-based interventions. Next steps include finalising the guidance, awaiting ministerial sign-off, and preparing for implementation from April 2026, alongside a communications and operationalisation plan for YJS and police forces.

61. The YJB recommends that a joint piece of work be undertaken to bring all the relevant agencies, including the YJB, to create one shared guidance document agreed by all. This should include an emphasis on professional discretion, accountability and combine a drive to avoid over-criminalisation for simple possession offences with an appropriately robust approach to threats or use of knives. In preparation for this closing statement the YJB has considered the Home Office guidance for frontline staff and consider merit in the review of these to ensure alignment across guidance and with Standards for Children in the Justice System.
62. The YJB views conditional cautions as a useful tool when given alongside diversion activity, this can include conditions, such as attending education, and the consequences of failure to comply can be that an individual is charged with the offence [4 November 2025 – Stephanie Roberts-Bibby – p7-8].
63. The lack of multi-agency meetings ultimately fed into the incorrect assessment of risk that took place in respect of AR. As was put to ACC Winstanley [8 October 2025] that the lack of multi-agency meeting “speaks volumes”. The YJB would adopt the recommendation given by ACC Winstanley that there ought to be a multi-agency risk assessment that takes place. Stephanie Roberts Bibby supported the introduction of such an approach [4 November 2025 p17-19], clearly there is a need for a lead body in terms of determining risk and mitigating the risks that exist.
64. The YJB supports the recommendation that there is “a single system that talks across social care, mental health, education, policing, so that it is there and available to everybody to help them”. The shortfall of such a lack of approach is shown by the evidence of Ms Callon, by the time of the meetings on 17 December 2019 and 6 January 2020, AR had carried knives on at least eleven occasions and assaulted a school child with a hockey stick. Despite this, no efforts were made to involve the Youth Justice Service in any multi-agency meetings.

65. Lessons can be learned from existing best practice from across the sector, one example of this is the work of SHiFT which has provided a single point of contact a “guide” for both the child and their family. With this model the guide single point of contact is embedded in the local authority team and has access to both children’s social care and youth justice IT systems, this gives them access to all the relevant local authority information and an opportunity to escalate when they believe that there is an increase in the child’s needs and or risk to others. When there are concerns these are escalated through the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements which draws on all professionals' skills and knowledge to develop and agree a plan including the escalation route if needed.
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67. This way of working does not require any change in legislation but does require a change in practice where multi agency coordination sits are the heart of the work with a child and their family. The YJB firmly believes that this approach should be adopted at a local level, with a national cross-government Ministerial group offering leadership and shared accountability, to which systemic failures can be escalated. These would be risks and issues which undermine local services ability to address children's needs and management of risk and have a role of agreeing how they will be managed between government departments. [4 November 2024 – Stephanie Roberts-Bibby – pages 22-24].
68. In addition to a marked lack of curiosity it was as a result of a failure multi-agency engagement that Anna Croll’s assessment was made on information which was inadequate and incomplete. LCC000447 demonstrates that the information had been highly diluted and even the material, which was available, was incomplete and inaccurate.

69. Stephanie Roberts-Bibby stated correctly that the assessment of risk, even on the information initially available, should have been high. If Ms Croll had the benefit of all available and relevant information, the assessment of risk as high should have been inevitable.
70. The YJB supports the proposition that record keeping in respect of the Youth Justice Service was insufficient in respect of AR. The YJB agrees with the evidence of Ms Callon who stated that her view of the record keeping in AR's case, particularly concerning the initial assessment meeting, was of "poor quality" [27 October 2025 – p184-185]. The absence of the original panel report and the insufficient grading of risk is a cause for concern, as was set out by Stephanie Roberts Bibby.
71. Ultimately, the YJB agrees with the evidence of Ms Barrett which indicated that "a more robust multi-agency plan with clear monitoring arrangements should have been developed" [3 November 2025 – p141].
72. A robust multi-agency plan would have also helped to better inform planning arrangements for AR's transition to adult services, creating more clarity on what his needs were, the risks he posed to himself, known others and unknown others.

Knife Crime Prevention and Online Harms

73. The YJB submits that the available evidence demonstrates that more needs to be done in respect of knife crime prevention and reducing online harms. The YJB would ask that the Inquiry focus on the recommendations and observations made in the Knife Crime Insights Pack which provides vital insight into the approach that is effective when reducing knife crime. These are set out at Paragraph 148 of the corporate statement of the YJB.
74. The YJB urges the Inquiry to be cautious before adopting an approach of encouraging the imposition of civil orders. These orders tend to criminalise children and young people as breach of such an order is a separate criminal offence.
75. AR did not benefit from a proper use of pre-charge diversion, this ought to have taken place after the reports to Childline in October 2019. There is strong evidence that Pre-Court Diversion has a moderate impact on violent crime. It is estimated to reduce re-offending by 13% and in the instance of another offence, this is likely to be less serious (YEF Toolkit). The aims of the youth justice system must not become punitive, it should

remain solely to prevent a child offending, causing harm to others and preventing victims [4 November 2025 – Stephanie Roberts Bibby – p6].

76. Recognising that children are accountable for their actions is a fundamental part of effectivity applying the current evidence base. As a result, the YJB does not agree that too much pressure is placed on not arresting children, as was suggested by PC Fairclough. [7 October 2021 – p30-31]. However, in the context of this case, there was too much emphasis placed on AR’s suspected diagnosis of ASD (which was confirmed in February 2021) and a lack of accountability for his actions, including exploring this with AR. There are a number of examples of this including the decision of the Youth Justice Service not to breach AR for his lack of engagement with his referral order. This can be viewed alongside the failure by the police to take enforcement action on the 17 March 2022 or liaise with partner services like FCAMHS to gain specialist advice on whether his ASD made him less culpable for his actions. The YJB refers the Inquiry to the evidence of Sarah Callon [28 October 2025 – p46] which set out some of the referrals which could have been made on 17 March 2022. Notwithstanding this, the YJB maintains the view expressed by Stephanie Roberts-Bibby that it would have been appropriate to charge AR at this juncture.
77. The YJB refers the Inquiry to the evidence of ACC Mark Winstanley [08 October 2025 – p11] which sets out the eligibility criteria for referral to the Lancashire Violence Reduction Network (VRN). An opportunity was missed when a referral was not made for AR to receive supportive interventions funded by the VRN on 07 October 2019 when he contacted Childline. We recognise that prior to 2021 the age range for eligibility was 18 to 25, which excluded AR from referral, and that this policy has now changed.
78. It should be noted by the Inquiry that if AR had contacted Childline on 4 October 2019 threatening to kill or harm himself rather than saying that he had an intention/thought towards harming others, it is likely that the response and approach to intervention taken towards him would have been very different as there are clear frameworks in respect of protecting a child from harm.
79. There needs to be better understanding that children who are indicating they want to harm others also, inevitably, represent a danger to themselves also. The response to a

child who indicates they want to harm another must be given the same attention as an indication of self-harm.

80. At present, Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 confers a statutory duty on various organisations, agencies and individuals “who must ensure their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children”. Guidance “Working Together to Safeguard Children” published in 2023, makes clear that Section 11 places a duty on; local authorities and district councils (including children’s and adult social care, housing and youth services), NHS organisations, the police, Youth Justice Service as well as others.
81. The 2023 guidance places a sharp focus on child protection practice and outlines the expectations for a multi-agency approach amongst organisations as well as information sharing. There is, however, little consideration when a child poses a risk to others and how this should be approached, with no guidance on what steps should be taken and by whom, there is an opportunity to address this as part of the ongoing review.
82. This then brings us to the question of ‘duty’ in cases where a child presents a risk of harm to others (and themselves), particularly in the context of possessing knives, but also generally.
83. The police are well placed to identify at an early stage when a child is at risk or poses a risk to others. In the case of AR, the police were contacted as a result of AR’s call to Childline in October 2019. It was PC McNamee who gathered information, contacted The Range School and later referred AR to MASH, as clearly, some form of risk had been identified. Drawing from what we know at the first point of contact with the police in 2019, there was a need for clear framework or guidance on how to properly manage the risk AR posed to others at this stage.
84. There already exists a framework, provided through the Criminal Justice Act 2003, to assess and manage the risks posed by sexual and violent offenders through multi-agency public protection arrangements (“MAPPA”). MAPPA is a mechanism which requires a lead agency to take responsibility of managing a MAPPA offender and sets out clear guidance on the management of risk.
85. In respect of children, the Youth Justice Service is generally the lead agency for any MAPPA child, and they are expected to manage information sharing to properly identify

risk. The Youth Justice Service is responsible for identifying cases which are subject to MAPPA and are directed to use the YJB's AssetPlus tool to conduct risk assessments. Children's Services are also expected to attend all MAPP meetings. However, this occurs only after sentence. Unless a child is identified as a MAPPA offender, the present Section 11 duty lacks the requirement for organisations to equally consider that of public protection and the risk the child poses to others. If the 2023 guidance were to be used by agencies going forward, the duty would need expanding or to mirror a MAPPA style model to include this critical element.

86. The YJB wishes to support the Inquiry to consider how any recommendations can be implemented in the devolved context of Wales.

Closing Remarks

87. That there must be change so that children are diverted from offending and the question of risk to others from children is addressed has never been clearer.

88. Over the past 10 years, the YJB's work has led to and overseen a reduction of 62% in children entering the justice system for the first time. During the same period, the number of children in custody has reduced by 60%. Reoffending rates have reduced by 10.6% in the last 10 years, with the number of children in the reoffending cohort reducing by 74%. Whilst this is a significant achievement, the corollary has been that the children who remain in the statutory cohort have multiple complex needs. The YJB facilitate Developing Practice Forums and online support forums which provide Youth Justice Services with the opportunity to seek advice and share effective practice regarding engagement with children who have complex needs. Examples of practice are gathered on an ongoing basis and disseminated through the YJB Resource Hub and actively promoted through our communication channels.

89. The YJB's regional oversight teams highlight effective practice examples which are relevant to local challenges, which would include engaging with those children who due to their needs, experiences and circumstances find it more difficult to trust adults and professional services and facilitate peer support between Youth Justice Services. Youth Justice Services have become exceptionally skilled in engaging children with speech, language and communication difficulties, neurodiversity, social, emotional and mental health needs, often because of their experience of trauma, abuse and

exploitation; particularly where work is undertaken collaboratively with other vulnerable adolescent services.

90. The YJB recognises that there is much more work to be done. The YJB has the experience of pushing for and succeeding in effective change in the past and stands ready to assist the Inquiry during the next phase to assist in making meaningful and helpful recommendations to ensure that the horrific and tragic events of 29 July 2024 are never repeated. Nothing the Inquiry can do can undo the damage AR caused, but it can seek to remedy those issues identified through the evidence it has heard.

91. Finally, the YJB once again offers its deepest sympathies to all those affected by the tragic events of 29 July 2024.