Witness Name: PAUL COURT

Exhibits: [PAC/01 – PAC/16]

Dated: 6th August 2026

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF

DEPUTY CHIEF CONSTABLE PAUL COURT

I, PAUL COURT, will say as follows: -

INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

My background

1. I am the Deputy Chief Constable of Sussex Police. I have responsibility for the day-to-day operational running of the force, leading 5,700 officers and staff in the delivery of policing services to the communities of Sussex.

2. I have 21 years' experience in policing across three different police forces: Merseyside Police, the Metropolitan Police Service and Sussex Police. I have worked within a variety a disciplines during my career with a strong local policing background. My previous role was as the Assistant Chief Constable for Local Policing in Sussex. I have also held senior leadership positions within the fields of Professional Standards and Digital Transformation.

3. I would like to clarify that I transferred from Merseyside Police in January 2024. I have not had any previous involvement in the local policing response to the events of 29th July 2024. The incident post-dates my employment with Merseyside Police.

4. In a national capacity, I lead on Violence Fascinated Individuals (VFI) on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). I assumed this responsibility in July 2025. I am also a national policing lead for drugs having assumed that role in the same month.

5. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "**Inquiry**") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 25th June 2026. The request was made of the National Police Chiefs' Council and I respond on behalf of the organisation. In my statement I will to the best of my ability reflect the expertise of myself and my peers who have portfolio responsibilities that intersect with the topic of VFIs.

6. I would like to add at this point that within the evidence contained within my witness statement, on occasion I will refer to the practice within my own force, Sussex Police. I do so to assist the Inquiry by providing a 'case study' of how local practice currently operates rather than necessarily as an exemplar. I would stress that where I do so, I do not infer that this is common practice across all forces. Where I know it to be so, I will state it within my evidence.

7. I will also state that in the production of my witness statement and to ensure thorough responses to the Rule 9 request, I have sought the policy positions of other NPCC portfolio leads to ensure that my response reflects the views of the organisation. In the interests of candidness, I will exhibit those written responses within my statement. The response from the Child Protection and Abuse Investigation lead is exhibited as NPCC000016 PAC/14. The response of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub lead is exhibited as NPCC000017 PAC/15. The response of the Children and Young Persons lead is exhibited as NPCC000018 PAC/16.

Function of the NPCC and local Chief Constables

8. The NPCC is a coordinating body that brings UK police leaders together to set direction in policing. This is achieved through coordinating the operational response to critical national policing issues, collaborating with the whole policing system to improve public safety and communicating the collective expertise and views of policing leaders.

9. The NPCC is also a non-statutory body, established through a collaboration agreement formed under Section 22A of the Police Act 1996. In that respect, it is not a single legal entity but rather may be considered as a coordinating body which exists

through the agreement of the Chief Constables of England and Wales, Police Scotland, Police Service for Northern Ireland, and other key policing partners.

10. The national response to many specific policing issues is developed and managed by NPCC portfolio leads for example burglary, uniform, roads policing. Each of these portfolio leads report into one of the thirteen coordination committees chaired by a Chief Constable. The portfolio leads undertake these roles on a voluntary basis to support the work of the NPCC rather than on behalf of their own force.

11. Following the Southport incident, a national portfolio role was created for a Chief Officer to lead on VFI. I was invited to undertake this role by the previous Chief Constable of Merseyside Police, Dame Serena Kennedy. As the VFI lead, I report into the Prevention Committee chaired by the Chief Constable of North Wales Police, Amanda Blakeman.

12. The role of a NPCC lead is not explicitly defined however it involves policy and practice development, the co-ordination of implementation activity and the continued performance monitoring of the business area.

13. Whilst I lead on VFI on behalf of the NPCC, there are several cross-cutting portfolios which I believe will bring significant expertise in the development of future policy in this area. These NPCC portfolios are:

    a. Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders (MoSOVO)
    b. Child Protection and Abuse Investigation
    c. Children and Young People
    d. Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Early Intervention
    e. Serious Violence
    f. Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Undercover Online

14. The Chief Constable of each force is established in law as corporations sole and under The Policing Protocol Order 2023 they remain operationally independent. NPCC portfolio leads cannot compel a Chief Constable to adopt any practice, guidance or similar that may be produced. Each Chief Constable is the decision maker as to whether they adopt the policy position of the NPCC within their force. Consequently, the Chief Constable holds responsibility for the policing response to VFIs within their force area.

15. Legislation places statutory duties upon individual Chief Constables in a range of areas. The Serious Violence Duty, enacted through Section 8 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 requires specified authorities of a local government area, of which a police force is one such authority, to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence. Whilst not directly intended to address the VFI cohort, the Duty has relevance to VFIs.

16. The Chief Constable is also the Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP) within the *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023* statutory guidance (referred to hereafter as *Working Together*). That places a responsibility upon all Chief Constables to lead and oversee the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for children in their local area.

Correspondence from NPCC to Home Secretary

17. On 28th January 2025, a joint letter was sent to the Home Secretary of the day, Yvette **HOM000254** Cooper MP, which I exhibit as PAC/01. The joint signatories were the Heads of the NPCC, the National Crime Agency (NCA) and Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP). This letter pre-dates my appointment as the VFI lead and I had no input into the content or development of the proposals. Within that letter, the NPCC made numerous proposals grouped under four key areas: wider intervention and change, online environment, multi-agency and adoption outside Prevent, and Prevent system efficacy.

18. I am not able to provide an update on each of the proposals at the time of preparing this witness statement.

Stakeholder engagement as VFI lead

19. Since assuming the role as VFI lead, I have undertaken wide engagement. Those include the following policing bodies: CTP, NCA and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). I have engaged with the following Government departments: Home Office and Ministry of Justice. My engagement with other government bodies includes: Prevent Commissioner, Children's Commissioner, Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) and the Office of Communications (OFCOM). I have also been engaging with local partnerships

through the following forums: London VFI Roundtable (consisting of local authorities, health trusts and policing) and the Violence Reduction Unit leads board.

20. In February 2026, I presented at a COM Network conference hosted by the NCA and South-West Regional Organised Crime Unit (SWROCU). This conference was intended to provide Continuous Professional Development to ROCU Threat Leads and practitioners and raise awareness of the threat amongst wider stakeholders.

21. The purpose of my engagement with stakeholders is threefold: to understand on-going work in relation to VFIs, to influence policy and practice development and to implement actions required of policing.

22. In my role I attend the bi-monthly Non-Ideological Extreme Violence (NIEV) Strategic Delivery Board chaired by the Counter Terrorism Director in the Home Office. I also attend the bi-monthly Operational Response Working Group which is chaired by the NIEV team within the Homeland Security Group of the Home Office. This governance structure has been established to provide direction and oversight of the system response to NIEV related risks.

23. On 19th January 2026, following the Home Office VFI unit disbanding, I held a workshop with key NPCC portfolio leads and other law enforcement bodies. The purpose of the workshop was to determine a VFI policy position which would allow the formation of a unified approach across policing. The key discussion points and outcomes from that workshop were:

    a. There are existing referral structures capable of assessing risk and whilst demand needs to be managed, 'front doors' for initial risk assessment do exist albeit they are imperfect.
    b. There is an absence of agreement on how to manage the risk post referral including intervention pathways.
    c. There is an absence of legislative controls to manage those who have not committed a criminal offence but whom pose a risk.
    d. To avoid duplication or confusion, VFI communications or training opportunities can be aligned to those related to COM networks.
    e. Legislative changes may be required to encourage buy-in from agencies for example a stronger emphasis within the Serious Violence Duty or Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) development.

24. Following the workshop, I developed a policy position which I articulated in a VFI position paper which I exhibit as PAC/02. This was considered by Chief Constables' Council in July 2026 and accepted. NPCC000004

25. The workshop generated a number of key actions to develop the response to VFIs. These actions from the workshop were: to design a management system using existing mechanisms, to agree a definition for the term and to develop a VFI assessment method to assist with the referral process. These actions will now be addressed within the work of the NIEV taskforce within the Home Office in which I will have involvement.

IDENTIFICATION OF VFIs

26. As NPCC lead, I recognise the term Violence Fixated Individuals is now common parlance within policing and across other sectors. However, as identified within Lord Anderson's review published in July 2025, titled *Lessons for Prevent*, the preferred terminology is '*fascinated*' rather than '*fixated'*. Both words are used interchangeably.

27. In current Government work, VFIs are defined as "*individuals presenting a fascination with extreme violence and the intent to inflict extreme violence, where ideology is not the primary driver".*

28. The term Non-Ideological Extreme Violence (NIEV) is also frequently used, as is the term Fascination with committing an Extreme Violence or Mass Casualty Attack (FCEVMCA) with CT Prevent.

29. Through a recent survey undertaken by the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection (NCVPP) and the NPCC MASH lead, I sought to answer the following two questions:

    a. Do your MASH(s) have any involvement in sharing information for VFI?
    b. Describe how the force manages a person identified as VFI who is not subject to any criminal investigation or convictions.

30. Based on the findings of the survey, of the 41 forces who responded, only 13 forces indicated that they had any specific involvement of MASH. Several forces did note increased focus on VFIs following emerging national concerns.

31. The survey showed that across forces, VFIs are generally managed through existing safeguarding, public protection and Prevent frameworks rather than a single bespoke process. The survey identified that Prevent was the primary route by which a VFI was identified. There is escalation into specialist public protection arrangements such as Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, Potentially Dangerous Person (PDP) or Prevent where the level of risk warrants it.

32. The survey found that where the subject is a child, cases are commonly managed through child at risk processes, significant harm assessments, strategy discussions or children's social care referrals. Where the subject is an adult, cases are often managed through Multi-Agency Risk Management (MARM), MAPPA, PDP or Adult at Risk pathways.

33. The survey identified examples of emerging practice within forces those being:
    a. South Wales Police have implemented a specific VFI process within its Harm Reduction Unit.
    b. Sussex Police have introduced a VFI category within the referral form, with daily searches and Detective Inspector oversight.
    c. Thames Valley Police has developed a dedicated multi-agency forum based on MAPPA principles to manage individuals posing harm to others.

34. Other than this Survey, no other statistical analysis relevant to VFIS has been undertaken.

35. Prior to my appointment to role, the Government Office of Science facilitated several VFI roundtables chaired by the Police Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Paul Taylor. Professor Taylor is employed by the NPCC on behalf of policing. These roundtables took place on 5th March 2025 (meeting notes exhibited as PAC/03), 6th March 2025 **NPCC000005** **NPCC000006** (meeting notes exhibited as PAC/04) and 27th May 2025 (meeting notes exhibited as PAC/05). **NPCC000007**

36. I have been asked to summarise the key findings of these roundtables which I shall outline:
    a. VFIs are unique and complex with risk factors varying on a case-by-case basis which affects the ability of systems to identify cases.

b. Risk factors include early trauma, dysfunctional family backgrounds personal grievances, mental illness, neurodevelopment disorders and online activities.
c. Grievances are a significant risk factor which authorities should pay particular attention to.
d. There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of interventions for VFIs.
e. General approaches to violence reduction may offer insights but have limitations.
f. Improved identification of VFIs could be achieved through better data sharing and multi-agency collaborations that are adequately funded. The definition of VFIs should be tailored to its intended use. This is also essential for effective identification and management of VFIs.
g. The definition of VFIs should not be predicated on the AR case given the limited evidence available and the unique circumstances of perpetrators of violence and at-risk individuals.
h. Actuarial tools may not reliably identify at-risk individuals due to the prevalence of common VFI risk factors in the general population.
i. Adolescence is a key period of potential vulnerability: bullied adolescents with neurodiversity and complex needs can benefit from support provided by schools and other services.
j. Touch points and pathways vary by individual such that a single intervention or triage process will unlikely succeed.
k. Data and information sharing only work when timely and unobstructed.
l. There is limited evidence on the efficacy of interventions. A mixture of anecdotal, clinical and emerging empirical insights suggest that existing interventions can be effective but this could be tested more formally.
m. Evidence suggests the detrimental effects of poorly resourced interventions not delivering effectively and confirms a VFIs view on society.
n. Interventions must be based on thorough assessments to understand their motivations, needs and context.
o. Robust evaluations of interventions are critical to target finite resource effectively.
p. Most risk predicting tools consider variables in isolation and have proven ineffective especially for adolescents.
q. Where interventions are not available, sustained engagement with individuals remains important.

r. Those working with VFIs need training around pertinent issues, including neurodivergence and digital cultures.

37. I am also aware of other non-NPCC analytical assessments which have been undertaken:

a. Counter Terrorism Policing Headquarters undertook quantitative and qualitative benchmarking exercises to assess the scale, characteristics and trajectory of the VFI cohorts in August 2025.

b. **T1D - Cabinet Office Body** in the Cabinet Office undertook an analytical assessment of VFIs on 27th March 2025.

38. Whilst I do not have empirical evidence as to the consistency of the use of the term VFI across police forces, it would be my professional judgement that there will be varying levels of knowledge and understanding amongst professionals.

39. The lack of an agreed definition is unhelpful. I consider it important that there is agreed terminology and definitions across agencies for the following reasons:

a. It allows for better threat management as it assists in cohort identification.
b. More precise classification allows for accurate demand and resource management.
c. It provides a framework for the evaluation of proposed and implemented change to be assessed against.
d. Improves clarity of understanding amongst staff on the concept.

40. Whilst it is important to develop a definition, the implementation may need to consider the risk of it leading to the binary 'labelling' of individuals which may result in a less flexible approach to risk management where classifications are applied too rigidly. It is important that there remains an element of profession discretion and flexibility in the application of the definition, particularly when considering the individual complexity of VFIs.

41. At this point I would like to offer a view on the use of the term non-ideological. In current classifications and within forums I attend, it is often commented that VFIs do not have an ideology (meaning a *terrorist* ideology). Whilst this may be the case, VFIs may often have a harmful ideology whether that is a nihilistic and misogynistic

one. Therefore, in the development of definitions it may be beneficial to consider VFI ideology.

42. To date, the NPCC has not prepared or published guidance specifically relating to the identification of a VFIs. To the best of my knowledge, the College of Policing have not done so either. Due to the size of the workforce for whom this would need to be communicated to, it is important that there is clear agreed terms and definition. Individual forces may have prepared local communications to assist in the identification of VFIs however I am unable to comment on the approach of each individual force.

43. By way of example, in my own force, in April 2025, communications were published about how to identify and report a VFI within our existing systems. I exhibit this communication as PAC/06. A further communication was published in July 2026 due to changes to the vulnerability form. I exhibit that communication as PAC/07. Furthermore, within my own force the local vulnerability assessment form has a specific VFI question contained within it which if answered in the affirmative will trigger a Detective Inspector review and consideration of referral to Prevent. The referral will also be considered by the MASH.

NPCC000008

NPCC000009

44. In the absence of national guidance, police forces will rely on existing local policies and process to identify individuals who are vulnerable or at risk of engaging in extreme violence. I would expect that once an officer has identified risks related to fascination with violence that this would be referred into a decision maker through a vulnerability form and an intelligence report. In doing so, it would cause an assessment of the information and instigate further action.

45. Whilst each force will have its own process, I am able to share an example of a local process chart from within my own force which explains how an individual identified as having a fixation with violence will be handled between Counter Terrorism Police South-East (CTPSE) and Sussex and Surrey Police (collaborated forces). I exhibit this process chart as PAC/08.

NPCC000010

46. I am unable to comment on the confidence levels of staff or officers across forces in identifying the lead person or agency for the management of VFIs or when to make referrals. Based on my professional judgement, I believe those who have experience of working in a neighbourhood policing, public protection, specialist investigations (for

example CSAE teams or cybercrime teams) or Prevent setting will likely have more knowledge of the process due to their involvement within it and exposure to wider multi-agency working.

ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT OF VFIs

47. The expectations of a member of staff or police officer who has identified a VFI is not currently set out in NPCC policy or guidance. Instead the expectations of a force will be set out in its own operational policies and practices.

48. I would expect that following the identification of a VFI, the following would be undertaken:

    a. Further intelligence assessment - I would expect the prompt submission of an intelligence report and that information shared with other law enforcement agencies through existing processes for example CTPSE. I would also expect an assessment by Prevent.
    b. Investigation - as part of the management of the VFI I would expect a thorough examination of the existing information and evidence to identify any criminal offences which would allow the person to be pursued through the criminal justice system.
    c. Risk assessment – The process of assessing the risk posed by a VFI is a continual one which commences at the initial identification of a VFI and continues through any subsequent management. I would expect a referral via an existing vulnerability referral form to allow an assessment of the needs of that individual by statutory partners. The sharing of information would occur through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) within each force.

49. With the recent introduction of the Mult-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPT), these would best place to coordinate the child's plan, record interventions, manage risk and ensure suitable oversight. However, implementation across the country is at an early stage and local models continue to vary in terms of governance, operational delivery review processes, and the role of individual agencies. As a result, the consistency and maturity of joint decision-making arrangements are likely to differ between local areas.

50. In my own force, every referral is reviewed by the MASH. If an officer or staff member has ticked the 'fixated with violence' box it will require a review by the Detective Inspector within MASH. Additionally, any officer working within the MASH who reviews the vulnerability form and has a concern around indicators of a fascination with violence, it will be escalated to a Detective Inspector. As part of that review, consideration will be given to a Prevent referral. The exact process in each force will likely be different.

51. More broadly, there is no specific agreement amongst agencies as to who has lead responsibility for managing a VFI.

52. I will now offer my opinion on the necessity of a single shared muti agency risk assessment tool. I am drawn to the evidence contained within the Government Office for Science roundtable held on 6th March 2025 (exhibit PAC/04 refers). Point 12 **NPCC000006** within that document states that "*there was broad agreement that risk assessment tools will not reliably capture at-risk individuals. VFI risk factors are too prevalent in the general, non-dangerous population. The vast majority of people with mental ill health, for example, will not commit violent acts*". It continues at point 13 where it states "*risk assessment tools do not always work well across different domains such as mental health services and forensic policing. HCR20* [violence risk assessment] *was cited as illustrative of this flaw*".

53. There is work underway through the NPCC MASH working group towards the development of a single risk assessment tool for policing and that working group is seeking involvement from multi-agency partners. This single tool would form the primary risk assessment tool for frontline professionals. The intention is that there would be a series of secondary risk assessment tools which are tailored to specific threats and would be completed by specialists. As a primary risk assessment tool, it will need to be broad enough to identify broad factors of harm rather than specific thematic factors. The work remains on-going to develop this.

54. Based on the scientific evidence, I believe further work would be required to determine how a secondary risk assessment may be of benefit in the context of VFIs. I can see the benefit a multi-agency 'identification' tool to assist in the identifying a VFI, that brings together insights from different agencies and assist in identifying those who may be a VFI. The tool would support greater consistency in how

agencies assess, record, and respond to risk, ensuring that key indicators are considered through a common framework.

55. The NPCC and NCVPP are working with the Department for Education and Home Office in the development of a Single Unique Child Identifier which would further enhance the effectiveness of such a tool. This will consistently connect all data relating to the one child.

56. If a new tool were to be introduced, I believe the key challenges to be:

    a. Integration within existing mechanisms – The development of any new tool would need to be considered within the suite of existing risk assessment tools.
    b. Data availability and accessibility - the risk assessment process would need to be informed by existing knowledge within each organisation, and such information should be surfaced with ease. Risk aversion to the inclusion of information within a shared risk assessment would need to be overcome.
    c. Guidance – to ensure ownership and consistency of use, where the tool is intended for use across agencies, it may benefit from binding guidance.
    d. Investment in training – the delivery of such a tool would be a significant undertaking in terms of the population size who will need to be engaged and therefore resource will need to be made available to ensure successful adoption.
    e. Common language – the language used within the tool would need to be agency-agnostic to allow for a common understanding across partners for example not tailored specifically to a law enforcement audience.

57. I am unable to make a proper assessment of how effectively forces across the country co-ordinate management plans, case ownership and monitoring arrangements for VFIs. From my engagement to date, it is apparent that there is an absence of agreement on how to manage the risk post-referral, including the subsequent intervention pathways. This remains the primary problem that needs addressing by all agencies particularly where the individual has not met the criminal threshold. There is a risk that the existing “front doors” will result in a heavily law enforcement focussed approach.

58. I am aware of a below Prevent threshold pilot led by Counter Terrorism Policing North-East (CTPNE). This was a pilot to assure follow on support for cases referred out of Prevent where a risk of violence or concerning interest in mass violence had been identified. At the time of preparing this witness statement, I am not in receipt of the evaluation of this pilot which is being undertaken by the Home Office. Dependent upon those findings, it may provide learning for the development of a future management model.

59. It is important that within case ownership, there is clear responsibility *and* accountability. It is important that there is shared *responsibility* amongst agencies to provide a holistic response to the risk. However, where *accountability* is unclear, shared or fragmented there is a real concern that organisations will fail to adequately grip the risk and act to mitigate it.

60. I am asked to comment on the most appropriate multi-agency structure to manage VFIs with possible solutions being the identification of a 'duty holder', the appointment of a lead agency or the creation of a new structure, agency or department to manage VFIs.

61. I see a nominated 'duty holder' role as being potentially beneficial. When a risk is owned by a single person who holds accountability for that case, the co-ordination of the case and efficacy will often be improved. The process of identifying and agreeing the duty holder would be important to ensure the most appropriate agency has lead responsibility.

62. The NPCC is clear in that the management of VFI cases are not solely a law enforcement responsibility. Moreover, a key position of those within NPCC leading on child protection is that policing should never lead in a child protection process. Often cases where the criminal threshold is not met are better placed being managed by other agencies such as health or education. The involvement of a policing lead from the outset is likely to bring a law enforcement perspective and move away from a prevention approach of diverting the young person away from violence further. Therefore, whilst there may be occasions where a policing lead may perform the role of duty holder for a VFI, each would need determining on a case-by-case basis. It would be important that any duty holder was of sufficient seniority in each agency. If a police officer were to be a duty holder, I believe it would need to be assigned to an officer of at least the rank of Inspector.

63. For agencies to be prepared to own and manage risk, there may be benefit in a statutory framework that establishes the agency with primary ownership along with a named lead professional. Whilst establishing a primary owner is important, there should be collective ownership amongst partner agencies along with joint decision making throughout the case management. It is also important that agencies recognise that responsibility for the risk remains with the identifying agency until it has been formally accepted, understood and managed through safeguarding processes.

64. I believe the improvements in the management of VFIs can be achieved without the need for a new agency or department. There are existing frameworks and structures within the current multi-agency setting which can be adapted to ensure a more effective response to VFIs. The development of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Arrangements through the Families First national programme (and led by the Department for Education) provides a potential opportunity for the management of VFIs. Such a team would be best placed to coordinate the child's plan, record interventions, manage risk and ensure multi-agency oversight.

MAPPA arrangements

65. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are established under the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. These arrangements are in place to manage the risk posed by individuals who have committed serious sexual, violent and terrorist offences. The legislation creates a duty upon the "Responsible Authority" (RA) of which the Chief Constable of each force is one. For those reasons, NPCC does not have a role in the operational management of MAPPA. There is a NPCC portfolio lead who has strategic oversight of this area of business.

66. For an individual to be eligible for MAPPA they must fall into one of four categories. The categories that may be considered most relevant for VFI would be the following:

    a. Category 2 – for those convicted violent offences and received a sentence of twelve months imprisonment or more.

b. Category 3 – Other dangerous offenders who have been cautioned for or convicted of an offence that indicates they are capable of causing serious harm.

67. Category 1 which relates to sex offenders and Category 4 which relates to those convicted of a terrorism offence are less relevant in the potential management of VFIs.

68. For all categories, there are three different levels at which the offender may be managed. Level 1 will see a single agency manage the individual without the need for multi-agency meetings. Level 2 is for those cases that would benefit from multi-agency cooperation and is assessed as risk of serious harm. Level 3 where the risk level is such that it requires senior representation in the management of them.

69. Local police forces have statutory responsibilities to manage the notification requirements of sexual offenders in Category 1 and thereby perform the role of the lead agency. Category 2 offenders are managed by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPSS). It is likely that HMPSS would also be the lead agency for Category 3 offenders.

70. The College of Policing has produced clear Authorised Professional Practice (APP) relating to MAPPA which I exhibit as PAC/09. **NPCC000011**

71. The challenge in the management of a VFI within MAPPA, is that whilst those individuals may be displaying concerning behaviour, they may not have engaged in behaviour which meets the criminal threshold and therefore would not fall within the statutory provisions. Therefore, in its current form, MAPPA is not an effective mechanism for managing all VFIs. The key challenge remains how those who have not met the criminal threshold are managed.

72. MAPPA may provide a potential blueprint for the design of any future VFI management framework. However, whilst one of the strengths of MAPPA lies in the statutory responsibility it places upon the RA, the RAs would need broadening if a similar process was to be adopted for the management of VFIs for example the inclusion of local authorities or health trusts.

73. There does exist a non-statutory, 'police only' process in place for the management of Potentially Dangerous Persons (PDP) which is contained within the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice. I exhibit a copy of this as PAC/10. **NPCC000012**

74. Within APP, a Potentially Dangerous Person is defined as a person who "*is not currently managed under one of the four MAPPA categories, but reasonable grounds exist for believing that there is a risk of them committing an offence or offences that will cause serious harm*". The APP provides examples of those who may be considered a PDP including "*a patient with mental ill health has disclosed fantasies about committing serious violent offences*". I believe the definition of a VFI to be consistent with the definition of a PDP.

75. The legislative framework that applies to MAPPA does not extend to PDP. The PDP APP provides guidance in relation to the management of PDP in the following areas:

    a. Initial referral
    b. Risk assessment
    c. On-going management

76. Whilst the PDP process provides approved practice for police forces, it is not binding on other agencies who have no statutory responsibility in the management of a PDP. For this reason, there may be consideration as to whether the PDP process should be underpinned on a statutory footing.

Case management

77. In the development of VFI management practices, there will be a need for structured case management which allows for the assessment of an individual, a coordinated approach to any planned interventions and the continued monitoring of the risk. This would need to be informed by different agencies dependant upon the context of the case and so in that respect multi-discipline teams will often be required.

78. A structured case management system must have clear processes for the transferring of ownership to ensure there is a continual lead owner.

79. There already exist multi-discipline teams who undertake the assessment in the MASH. However, MASH models vary across the country. Whilst all MASHs manage child referrals, not all accept adult referrals. The MASH does not have a statutory

footing which leads to wide variation. At this point, I do not have the data to suggest the need for a new specialist team being introduced to manage VFIs. I believe they can be managed through the strengthening of existing systems. Lord Anderson's report discusses the concept of a big 'front door' and there may be an opportunity to strengthen MASHs to perform that function.

80. Due to the lack of clear referral routes for the public and partners for non-counter terrorism/risk of radicalisation concerns, Prevent has become a default referral route despite not being designed for non-ideological extreme violence referrals. Consequently, as Prevent is the most the used '*front door'*, it is now overwhelmed by referrals which it was not designed to manage. There has been a significant demand increase since the Southport incident. This needs to reduce to allow finite CTP resource to remain focussed on its primary mission. Also, within the current system Prevent do not have the interventions which are appropriate at managing those without a terrorist ideology and therefore whilst the system is managing the high demand placed upon it, it is neither sustainable or optimal for it to remain the system to manage VFIs without significant change in both mission and resources. The Senior National Coordinator within CTP will be best placed to offer an opinion on this.

81. Nevertheless, I believe that CTP would still need to assess and consider many, if not all VFI referrals. This will allow deconfliction of the persons involvement in on-going counter-terrorism casework. Consequently, I believe Prevent will continue to play a significant role in the VFI management process.

82. Whilst I am unable to comment on whether staff and officers feel able to make referrals to partner agencies for the provision of support, I am not aware of any barriers preventing this from happening. I am aware that over-notification or poor notifications have the ability to overwhelm the system. There is a careful balance needed to ensure that quality referrals are made from partner agencies.

83. The Inspectorate, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) may be able to provide a further information on referral process performance across forces.

POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

84. There is no VFI policy or guidance that has been produced or published by the NPCC. To the best of my knowledge, I am not aware of the College of Policing having prepared similar.

85. I have prepared a VFI position paper which defines the NPCC position on VFI (exhibit NPCC000004 PAC/02 refers). This position paper was presented to Chief Constables Council in July 2026.

86. I am aware that the approach to the COM network is being managed via a tactical plan (known as a 4P plan) which has been developed to address the COM network threat. VFIs may form part of a COM network and so this work has relevance in addressing the VFI threat. To deliver this plan, threat delivery groups have been stood up in each region. There are threat leads at a force level who deliver the activity contained within the 4P plan. This work is not led by the NPCC but rather is coordinated through the Regional Organised Crime Unit network. I exhibit this 4P plan as PAC/11. NPCC000013

TRAINING

87. To the best of my knowledge, Police officers and staff have not been provided with training regarding ASD in respect of VFIs. If they have done so, it would be a locally based activity rather than one directed from the NPCC.

88. There is currently no training facilitated or recommended by the NPCC around the management of VFIs. The NPCC considers that further training is required on this issue. The NPCC is working with the College of Policing to develop suitable training material around the identification, risk assessment and management of VFIs within the online harms training.

89. The point at which new policies and processes are created for the management of VFI, there will be a need to provide wider training to those teams who will have a role in the delivery of them. This will form a key workstream of the implementation plan.

INFORMATION SHARING

90. In my lead role, I have not become aware of any concerns in the sharing of information specifically relating to VFIs.

91. Police forces may share information on the risk posed by VFIs through the provisions of Part 3 of the Data Protection Act 2018.

92. That legislation states that data may be shared where there is a law enforcement purpose. This is defined within Section 31 of the DPA 2018 as "*for the purposes of the prevention, investigation, detection, or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties, including the safeguarding against and the prevention of threats to public security*".

93. Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 also establishes a power to disclose information amongst agencies where it is necessary to do so for the purposes of crime prevention.

94. The Code of Practice on police information and records management provides guidance on the sharing of information within Chapter 6. I exhibit a copy of that Code of Practice as PAC/12. **NPCC000014**

95. Within the information sharing provisions, policing does not require consent of the individuals involved where there is a law enforcement purpose. Therefore, in circumstances where a young person or their parents sought to frustrate that process, the police would be able to proceed in sharing that information.

96. Moreover, the new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 will introduce a new statutory Information Sharing Duty which will place a clear obligation on agencies to share information where it is necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This will have direct relevance in the management of VFIs.

97. From my experiences, a significant barrier to information sharing is a cultural one, where there is a defensive posture towards information management rather than an open posture which democratises data. As organisational policies are framed around '*data protection*', it leads to a more defensive posture. Whereas when framed through a 'data enablement' perspective, it is likely to lead to a more open posture. The Data Protection terminology sets a culture which does not encourage enablement. Having

spoken with peers in other public sectors, I believe this to be a significant challenge across other sectors.

98. Another barrier to sharing information, is the practicality of doing so in terms of the technology and processes that allow access, transferring, processing and ownership. There needs to be secure platforms by which data can be easily shared and accessed by partners and which presents a single version of the truth in relation to an individual. For those platforms to be developed, it will require appropriate resource, both human and financial. In the absence of such systems, data sharing will be time consuming and vulnerable to missed opportunities.

MANAGEMENT OF VIOLENCE FASCINATED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

99. CTPHQ analytical assessment indicates that the VFI cohort is predominantly aged under 18 (86%) with the majority being males aged between 12-16 years.

100. *Working Together* provides a statutory basis to share or request information for safeguarding children. This includes the sharing of information for those in need or at risk of significant harm (as defined under Section 17 and 47 of Children's Act 1989), as well for the purpose of assessing children's needs for early help. Within this statutory guidance, it places a duty upon Chief Constables to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children as provided within the Children's Act 2004. Therefore, there is a clear legal obligation to share information relating to children and for statutory safeguarding partners to be involved in the case management.

101. In relation to the issue of consent for sharing information, the NPCC is clear in its guidance titled "*MASH advice to police forces on Information Sharing for Child and Adult Safeguarding*" that consent is not required in law when do for the purposes of safeguarding children. The guidance also supports engagement with those with parental responsibility to explain what will be shared. I exhibit this guidance as PAC/13. **NPCC000015**

102. From a child protection perspective, where consent is withheld, withdrawn or manipulated, the issue should not only be viewed solely as a refusal to engage with services, but rather as a safeguarding and risk management concern. Where a

child's welfare may be compromised, decision making should be guided by risk level rather than parental agreement.

103. There is agreement amongst the NPCC leads that any future framework must be child-centred and trauma-informed and based on an assessment of harm and vulnerability. For these reasons and with an ethos of early intervention, NPCC does not believe that policing is necessarily the most suitable agency to lead on the response to those VFIs who have not reached a criminal threshold.

VFI INTERVENTIONS

104. The Government Office of Science held a roundtable on 27th May 2025. The roundtable was chaired by the Police Chief Scientific Advisor on behalf of the NPCC and sought to identify an evidence base for effective interventions for VFI. The findings of the group were that there is very little applicable evidence from evaluation of interventions to help VFIs. They also found that insights from more general approaches to violence reduction *may* be applied to VFIs but with limitations.

105. The online environment allows VFI access to harmful content and information which may be useful during ideation or preparation of the use of violence. The internet has enabled significant amounts of violent content and the means by which that can be distributed at scale. It is the case that algorithms will exacerbate the availability of violent material for those who have shown an interest in it and thereby encouraging engagement by the VFI with such material. The online environment also provides access to like minded individuals and communities and through these networks the VFI may become vulnerable to exploitation or encouragement. It is also of note that the internet provides a marketplace for a VFI to acquire items for use in attacks.

106. Consequently, I would consider it highly likely that the online environment could exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, normalise violence and contribute to an escalation in the risk posed by the VFI.

107. Policing has capabilities which allow for the identification of VFIs. The NCA are leading the law enforcement response to online harms and are best placed to be able to describe the response to COM networks for which VFIs may be a member. The approach to COM networks allows for the join up of national, regional and local capabilities.

108. There has been recent further investment in those intelligence capabilities to identify emerging threats which is allowing the identification of VFIs.

109. There are several challenges in managing the threat from VFIs from an intervention perspective. There remain capacity constraints across the sectors which can impact on the ability to provide consistent oversight and intervention where demand exceeds the available resources. The identification of interventions that work is also a challenge in the absence of clear evidence. Furthermore, investigations show that individuals are using Virtual Private Networks to conceal their identity and therefore their behaviour as well as numerous accounts and false aliases. This increases the complexity of the intelligence and investigation process and frustrates the risk assessment process.

110. There are a number of avenues by which police forces would be able to identify concerning patterns of behaviour such as online browsing and search activity, patterns of online purchasing or behaviours designed to evade safeguards:

    a. Intelligence reporting by a third party with knowledge of the individual's activity such as a close family member or teacher, a retail outlet or an Internet Service Provider. Intelligence gathering may also be achieved through covert methodologies utilised in targeted operations.

    b. Through effective investigation of potential offences. The most useful source of information is likely to come from the examination of an individual's digital devices or financial checks.

    c. For those individuals with existing orders (for example sex offenders), the police may have monitoring software installed on their devices which may provide such information.

    d. Policing has invested in additional capacity and capability within the Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Covert Intelligence Team funded as part of tackling child sexual abuse. Through Home Office Prevent funding, the emerging threats team has expanded this capability to identify VFI networks and offenders. This work is managed by the NPCC Lead for Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Undercover Online.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT LAWS AND SYSTEMS

111. The current legislative framework provides several challenges in the management of VFI. In circumstances where a VFI has committed a criminal offence, law enforcement has numerous powers to assist in the identification and management of the risk. This is no different to other offender types.

112. Policing experience difficulties in managing VFI who have not met a criminal threshold or meet the Prevent criteria. In these instances, there are limited options available for policing. The typical powers that come with a criminal investigation such as search, seizure and arrest are not available. The orders available to law enforcement (for example Violent Offender Order) are only available post-conviction.

113. The introduction of an order in circumstances where an individual has not been convicted but is engaging in behaviours which are deemed to be higher risk, may benefit law enforcement. The introduction of such legislation would not be novel as similar orders to manage sexual offenders prior to conviction already exist.

114. The orders would be most beneficial where they allow both prohibitive conditions (for example not to engage with others online) and positive obligations (for example to engage with a mental health programme). In creating such an order, law enforcement do not have to rely upon the consent of the individual (or their parental guardian).

115. In particular, I would consider it important to examine the merit of inhibitive conditions that seek to restrict:

    a. Access to certain devices, technologies or applications
    b. Possession or ownership of items which whilst legal may be used for harmful purposes
    c. Applications for licences (for example driving licence)
    d. Association with individuals whether online or offline,
    e. Restrictions on attendance at locations

116. The NPCC Knife Crime lead will be best placed to advise the Inquiry on legal powers to prevent individuals from acquiring dangerous but legal items, Vehicles are property that can be owned by a VFI and used to commit a low sophistication but high harm offences. Regardless of their driving licence status, a VFI could still own a motor

vehicle which would provide them with the means to undertake a mass casualty attack. Whether through new orders or a change to existing processes, the response to managing the risk may benefit from measures to limit access to vehicles.

117. It would also be beneficial to examine how these orders or other powers, may allow agencies to monitor individuals access to the internet when they have been assessed as a VFI. Whilst recognising the impingement on an individual's Article 8 rights, with the necessary safeguards, this may prove a useful tool in protecting the public. There is good evidence of the use of monitoring technology in the management of sexual offenders whereby police are alerted to any concerning content being viewed on an individual's device.

118. The use of orders for those aged under 18 may be more effective if they engage those with parental responsibility in the process. As the analysis of VFIs completed in 2025 indicates that the majority of VFI are aged under 18, it would be advantageous for any orders to compel those with parental responsibility to engage in the conditions of the order. This positive engagement will assist in the wider 'policing' of the order and place a burden upon them to actively engage in the child's development.

119. There is the potential opportunity to modify the qualifying criteria for existing orders rather than creating new ones. For example, the new Youth Diversion Orders (under the Crime and Policing Act 2026) may be expanded to include non-terrorism related activity. The Violent Offender Order (under the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008) could be expanded to include children and those not convicted of violent offences.

120. Whilst advocating for the use of orders to control the risk posed by VFI, it must be recognised that the use of orders increases the demand placed upon policing in relation to the monitoring and subsequent enforcement of any breaches. Policing has seen an increase in the resource required to manage the multiple orders that are already in existence and this comes from within existing capacity.

121. I am aware from my engagement with the Ministry of Justice that work is underway around the development of new offences namely those relating to the planning of a mass casualty attack and the sharing of extreme content. If enacted, these offences

will assist law enforcement insofar as some VFIs will likely meet the criminal threshold and thereby be subject to routine policing powers.

122. Within my evidence I have discussed the potential for a VFI (non-criminal threshold) management process to have a statutory footing. In order to secure the cooperation across agencies, where there is high demand and few resource, providing a legislative framework may provide the agencies with the imperative to work together in the management of VFIs and other similar high-risk individuals.

123. I am unable to comment on the efficacy of the management of VFIs by probation or youth offending teams. I have not seen case studies in which these partners have been involved to be able to make an objective assessment. Likewise, I am unable to offer an objective assessment of the efficacy of interventions for VFIs. Since undertaking this role, I am unable to provide any examples of interventions provided by this service.

124. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, and outside of partner agencies more broadly, I have not seen any evidence, academic or otherwise, which has identified or evaluated the success of interventions in the management of VFI.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed: **Signature**

Dated: 6th August 2026

ANNEX B: EXHIBIT INDEX TEMPLATE

Index to the Witness Statement of PAUL COURT

Exhibit No.	Inquiry reference No.	Document description
PAC/01	HOM000254	Joint letter to Home Secretary titled "*Proposals for action following Southport trial*" dated 28th January 2025
PAC/02	NPCC000004	NPCC VFI Position Paper dated May 2026 authored by DCC Court
PAC/03	NPCC000005	Meeting notes from roundtable chaired by Professor Paul Taylor on 5th March 2025 on the topic of VFIs (What is the current state of evidence around the aetiology of violence-fixated individuals?)
PAC/04	NPCC000006	Meeting notes from roundtable chaired by Professor Paul Taylor on 6th March 2025 on the topic of VFIs (What is the current HMG capability to identify VFIs and mitigate harmful impacts, and how does this capability reflect current evidence?
PAC/05	NPCC000007	Meeting notes from roundtable chaired by Professor Paul Taylor on 27th May 2025 on the topic of VFIs (What evidence exists, or is required, to understand the efficacy of interventions to reduce the risk of violence-fixated individuals?)
PAC/06	NPCC000008	Communication distributed within Sussex Police in April 2025 relating to VFI
PAC/07	NPCC000009	Communication distributed within Sussex Police on 27th July 2026 relating to VFI
PAC/08	NPCC000010	CTPSE process map for VFI referral between Sussex Police and Counter-Terrorism Policing South East (undated)

PAC/09	NPCC000011	College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice relating to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (dated 02/08/2026)
PAC/10	NPCC000012	College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice relating to Potentially Dangerous Persons
PAC/11	NPCC000013	Regional Organised Crime Unit COM Group 4P plan (undated)
PAC/12	NPCC000014	College of Policing authored Code of Practice on police information and records management
PAC/13	NPCC000015	NPCC MASH Advice to Police Forces on Information Sharing for Child and Adult Safeguarding dated June 2025
PAC/14	NPCC000016	Inquiry response from the Child Protection and Abuse Investigation lead
PAC/15	NPCC000017	Inquiry response from the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub lead
PAC/16	NPCC000018	Inquiry response from the Children and Young Persons lead