Witness Name: DR CHRIS LLEWELYN
Exhibits: CLI/01 – CLI/41
Dated: 07 August 2026

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF DR CHRIS LLEWELYN
ON BEHALF OF
THE WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

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I, Chris Llewelyn, will say as follows: -

Introductory matters

1. I am the Chief Executive of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) of One Canal Parade, Dumballs Road, Cardiff, CF10 5BF. I took up office in January 2019 having joined the WLGA as Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information in 2002, later becoming the Deputy Chief Executive in 2010. During my time at the WLGA, I have covered a wide range of the Association's portfolio areas, including periods covering local government finance and economic development.

2. While I have broad oversight of the WLGA's work, I do not have first-hand knowledge of everything that it does. Accordingly, in making this statement I have had to rely from time to time on information provided to me by officers of the WLGA. It is my belief that they have diligently and fairly undertaken this task. My statement should be read as representing a statement concerning the collective understanding and knowledge of the WLGA of matters relating to matters covered by Phase 2 of the Southport Inquiry (the Inquiry). The WLGA's officers are highly professional, and it is my belief that they have again diligently and fairly reported to me the information I have set out in this statement.

3. This witness statement is made to assist the Inquiry with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 3rd July 2026. I am authorised by the WLGA to make this statement on its behalf in response to this request.

4. At the outset of this statement, the WLGA wishes to extend its deepest sympathies to the victims, their families and all those affected in Southport. The tragedy serves as a stark reminder of the profound consequences that can arise when individuals who present a risk of serious violence are not identified, assessed or managed effectively, despite the efforts of numerous agencies working to safeguard the public. This Inquiry presents an important opportunity to strengthen the systems, partnerships and guidance that support the identification and management of violent fixated individuals (VFIs).

5. The WLGA was established in 1996 as an unincorporated Association and the membership body for local authorities in Wales. Membership is voluntary and councils make their own decisions on whether to join. All 22 Welsh local authorities are

members and all 3 fire and rescue authorities, 4 Police and Crime Commissioners and the 3 national parks authorities are Associate Members.

6. The WLGA is politically led and cross-party. It works to give local government a strong, credible voice with national government. As the national membership body for local authorities and the voice of local government, the WLGA's purpose is to promote, improve and support local government.

7. Among its core objectives, it seeks to -
    - Represent and negotiate, wherever possible by consensus, the interests of member authorities to the Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament, the Welsh Government, and the Government and Parliament of the United Kingdom,
    - Formulate sound policies for the improvement and development of local governance, effective management in local authorities and the enhancement of local democracy in Wales and elsewhere, now and for future generations, and
    - Provide forums for the discussion of matters of common concern to Member Councils and Associate Members, and as a means by which joint views may be formulated and expressed.

8. Specifically in relation to the Terms of Reference for Phase 2, the WLGA plays a key role in supporting and representing Welsh local government's contribution to the multi-agency safeguarding and prevention system. Safeguarding, social care and education are all core areas in which Welsh local authorities have statutory and operational responsibilities, and to which the WLGA provides support and representation. This is undertaken directly as the WLGA, but also indirectly through our work with associations and networks such as the Wales Safer Communities Network (see paragraphs 11 - 15), Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS Cymru), Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) and Trading Standards Wales (TSW).

9. In relation to multi-agency identification, assessment and management of VFIs, the WLGA supports local authorities in developing a consistent approach to recognising and responding to VFI-related concerns, including through the application of safeguarding, social care, community safety, and education functions. It facilitates sharing of emerging practice between authorities and represents local-government views on what works and where gaps exist.

10. The WLGA also provides support to local authorities in delivery of their regulatory and enforcement responsibilities through their Trading Standards services in relation to the sale of age-restricted and prohibited goods, including certain knives and other bladed products.

11. In providing this witness statement to the Inquiry, the WLGA has drawn on its knowledge of community safety in Wales obtained via its work with councils, Community Safety Partnerships, and the Wales Safer Communities Network.

12. The Wales Safer Communities Network connects, champions and supports practitioners, influences national policy, and informs practitioners to enhance local delivery to ensure safer communities. The Network aims to create a community of support for all those involved in community safety, acting as a trusted national voice on community safety that is inclusive and collaborative, evidence led, open, responsive and pro-active, and focused on prevention and early intervention.

13. The Network was established in January 2021 as a joint response by Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Policing in Wales, following the publication of the Welsh Government's review of community safety partnership working in Wales. This review set out a vision for community safety in Wales driven by a collaborative and integrated multiagency approach, so that every community is strong, safe and confident. This vision was founded on a shared responsibility of government, and public and third sector agencies, to work together to address harmful, anti-social, and unlawful behaviour.

14. The Wales Safer Communities Network is hosted by the WLGA. As host organisation, the WLGA supports the Network in acting as the national voice for community safety practitioners. Members of the Network are the key partners involved in community safety delivery in Wales, including Local Government authorities, Policing in Wales, Welsh Government, Fire and Rescue Services, Public Health, Probation, and the Third Sector. The Network also works closely with local Community Safety Partnerships.

15. This statement refers to views obtained through the Wales Safer Communities Network and those views are adopted as the views of the WLGA for the purposes of this statement. However, the Network does not speak on behalf of all 22 local authorities in Wales, and the statement should not be read as representing the individual position of each local authority.

Topic 1: Identifying and Managing Risk,

Identification of VFIs

16. Through the WLGA's engagement with community safety practitioners, Prevent leads, and partner agencies, we are aware that the term Violence Fixated Individual (VFI) is recognised and increasingly used within relevant professional settings, particularly those linked to Prevent, Channel, and wider counter-extremism activity. The Network does not define VFIs independently and instead relies on national guidance and Prevent-related materials. Within the Network, the term VFI is generally used to describe those individuals, who demonstrate a fixation with violence and may therefore present a risk of serious harm, but whose behaviour is not necessarily driven by a clear ideological motivation.

17. The Network has actively supported the dissemination of the Prevent Key Principles (see Exhibit CLl/01 – **DHSC000046**: Key Principals of Prevent and Exhibit CLl/02 – **OFST000048**: Key Principles of Prevent – FAQ), including information relating to VFIs. These were shared directly with Local Authority Prevent and Community Safety lead officers in June 2025 ahead of their official publication and subsequently promoted through the Network's BRIFF newsletter and website. Through events, meetings and conferences delivered or supported by the Network, the term VFI has featured in presentations, discussions, and referral pathway updates. For example, at a WLGA Conference fringe event on understanding extremism (June 2025), VFIs were discussed in relation to referral pathways following a presentation from Counter Terrorism Policing Wales. Those attending were informed that the key principles of Prevent make it clear that anyone who may be at risk of being drawn into terrorism, including those "fascinated with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks" should be referred to Prevent.

18. Minutes of the Wales Community Safety Officers (WaCSO) (Exhibit CLl/03 – **WLGA000002** 2025.11.04 WASCSO Minutes) demonstrates that Violence Fixated Individuals are no longer being discussed only as a specialist or exceptional concern, but are increasingly forming part of mainstream safeguarding, Prevent, and community safety discussions in Wales. It was highlighted that there had been "a significant increase in Prevent referrals across Wales since early 2025, with case volumes now substantially higher than in previous years." It was noted that this appears to reflect a changing threat landscape, including a growth in referrals relating to violence-fascinated individuals, school-targeted violence, extreme misogyny, online harms and

mixed or unclear ideologies, particularly among young males. In the WLGA's view, this demonstrates that the risks associated with violence fixation are becoming more visible to frontline practitioners and partner agencies, and that there is a growing need for clearer shared understanding, referral pathways and multi-agency responses.

19. The Wales Safer Communities Network cannot comment definitively on the extent to which the term Violence Fixated Individual (VFI) is consistently recognised and understood across all local authority services and partnership structures in Wales. However, through its engagement with practitioners, we are aware that the Prevent Key Principles have been widely circulated across relevant networks and agencies.

20. Within Prevent and Channel arrangements, the term is generally well recognised and understood. Based on discussions with practitioners, it is believed that there may be greater variation in awareness and understanding of the concept across other sectors, particularly within education settings. Practitioners have highlighted instances where Prevent referrals have been made that do not meet the relevant threshold. However, anecdotal feedback suggests that such referrals are often made not because Prevent is considered the most appropriate pathway, but because professionals who are seeking support for an individual, perceive that alternative referral routes or interventions are limited or unclear.

21. As of 8 July 2026, the term VFI is not specifically referred to in the Wales Safeguarding Procedures in relation to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. The WLGA is aware that the Wales Safeguarding Procedures are currently being reviewed and updated; however, the WLGA is not aware of the specific elements of the procedures that are being reviewed nor whether references to, and guidance on, violent fixated individuals are being considered as part of this work. The WLGA understands that professional curiosity is one element being reviewed and recognises the potential relevance of this to the identification and management of emerging safeguarding risks.

22. The Network is not aware of any evidence that would enable it to comment on regional variation or levels of understanding within specific services such as children's services, adult safeguarding, youth offending services or MAPPA arrangements.

Understanding of VFI in the educational sector

23. Local authorities have emphasised that teachers, and other education staff, should approach the identification of VFIs through established safeguarding practice, rather than as a separate diagnostic exercise. Education staff are not expected to determine motivation, assess ideology, or make clinical or threat-management judgements. Their role is to notice and record concerning patterns of behaviour, disclosure, online activity or communications, and to share those concerns promptly through the school or setting's safeguarding arrangements. This may, of course, include escalating concerns about an unhealthy or persistent fixation with extreme violence, weapons, previous attacks or perpetrators, particularly where this is accompanied by changes in behaviour, threats, planning indicators (observable behaviours that may suggest an individual is moving from violent thoughts or fixation towards preparation for harmful action), social isolation, or other safeguarding concerns.

24. Local authorities would recognise that teachers and other education staff, through their regular contact with children and young people, are well placed to identify changes in a learner's presentation, behaviour, relationships, attendance, and indications that they may be influenced by concerning online content or written materials. However, they should not be regarded as specialist assessors of VFI risk. Their capability depends on clear national guidance, appropriate training, effective designated safeguarding lead arrangements, and access to timely advice from local safeguarding partners, Prevent/Channel structures where relevant, and with police, youth justice, social care and mental health services.

25. In response to any identified concern, local authorities would expect schools and settings to follow their safeguarding policies, by:
    - recording concerns accurately and factually;
    - sharing them immediately with the designated safeguarding lead or senior safeguarding officer;
    - considering whether any immediate risk requires urgent action; and
    - ensuring that the concern is considered alongside wider information already known about the learner.

26. The designated safeguarding lead should then seek advice or make referrals through the appropriate local pathways, which may include children's services, police, Prevent/Channel, youth offending services or mental health support, depending on the

nature and immediacy of the risk. The response should be proportionate, child-centred and multi-agency, with education settings continuing to provide appropriate pastoral and safeguarding support while specialist partners assess and manage any wider risk.

27. The Wales Safer Communities Network is not in a position to comment on the expectations of all local authorities or education providers in relation to the identification and management of Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs), however as noted above, it is understood that education professionals play an important role in identifying concerning behaviours and vulnerabilities. Likewise, it is understood from discussions with practitioners, that educational settings generate a significant proportion of referrals which suggests that teachers and other education staff are alert to safeguarding concerns and can recognise indicators that may warrant further assessment or support.

28. Through its engagement with practitioners, the WLGA is aware that schools continue to face significant capacity pressures. Increasing demands on teachers and education staff, alongside a growing number of policies, strategies and safeguarding responsibilities, this can make it challenging to identify and respond to complex issues such as violence fixation.

29. Practitioners have also highlighted some uncertainty regarding appropriate referral pathways for individuals who present concerning behaviours but do not meet established thresholds for Prevent or other intervention routes. Anecdotally, some referrals to Prevent appear to be driven by a desire to secure support for an individual, rather than a belief that Prevent is necessarily the most appropriate pathway. This reflects wider concerns about the lack of availability of alternative interventions and clear referral mechanisms.

30. The Network has seen increasing engagement from schools with community safety activities, including more sign-ups to its monthly newsletter, and significant school presence at its 'Knives in school' seminar[1] held in May 2026. The seminar also shared 'Weapons in Schools and Educational Settings Guidance (Exhibit CLl/04 – **WLGA000003**: Weapons in Schools Guidance and Exhibit CLl/05 – **WLGA000004**: WISES Parents Guide) developed by Cardiff Council, which was distributed to all Cardiff schools in September 2025. The WLGA is also aware that Cardiff Council are

[1] Seminar can be viewed online: https://safercommunities.wales/knives-in-schools-seminar/

leading on work with Welsh Government to develop pan-Wales resources. The WLGA's Chief Officer for Education sits on the steering group. It is anticipated that these resources will be available by early 2027. In sum, this suggests a strong appetite from education professionals for training, guidance and opportunities to better understand emerging risks.

31. The network is also aware of, and supports, ongoing work intended to support education settings, including:
    - The Home Office Non-Ideological Extreme Violence (NIEV) Team's work to coordinate the cross-government response for schools,
    - Public Health Wales' support for the Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools [2], including the development of a violence prevention self-assessment toolkit linked to the National Standards for Health and Well-being Promoting Schools in Wales,[3] and
    - The recently established Welsh Government Prevent in Education Group, which is seeking to identify barriers, address training needs and support collaborative approaches to emerging issues. This builds upon guidance published in 2022 – Exhibit CLl/06 – **WLGA000005**: Keeping learners safe: The role of local authorities, governing bodies and proprietors of independent schools under the Education Act 2002. The Network and WLGA are represented within these discussions.

Understanding of VFI in Children's services

32. Local authorities in Wales have statutory responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. They deliver a wide range of children's services under legislation including the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004, and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.Their responsibilities span the full continuum of support, from early intervention and prevention through to child protection and care. Responsibilities particularly relevant to this Inquiry include:
    - *Safeguarding and child protection* – Investigating concerns where a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect, undertaking assessments, coordinating multi-agency child protection processes, and taking legal action where necessary to protect children,

[2] https://phw.nhs.wales/topic/welsh-network-of-health-and-well-being-promoting-schools-wnhwps/
[3] https://www.shrn.org.uk/views-sought-on-new-standards-for-health-and-well-being-in-schools/

- *Children in care* – Acting as the corporate parent for looked-after children, arranging foster or residential care placements, supporting adoption and permanence planning, and helping care leavers transition to adulthood,
- *Family support and early help* – Providing or commissioning services to support families before problems escalate, including parenting support, family intervention and targeted support for vulnerable children,
- *Youth justice and youth support* – Working with partners through Youth Offending Teams and supporting young people who are at risk of offending or disengagement, and
- *Multi-agency working* – Collaborating with health boards, schools, police, probation, the third sector and others through Regional Safeguarding Boards and other partnerships to protect children and improve outcomes.

33. Local authorities would generally expect children's social care practitioners to identify concerns relating to violence fixation through existing safeguarding, child protection, wellbeing and risk assessment processes, rather than through a separate VFI-specific framework. Children's services routinely work with children and young people presenting a range of complex needs and vulnerabilities, including trauma, adverse childhood experiences, mental ill-health, neurodiversity, social isolation, exploitation and exposure to violence. These factors are often considered as part of holistic assessments of both a child's welfare and wider risks.

34. Children's social care staff are experienced in recognising indicators of vulnerability, escalating risk and harmful behaviours, and in drawing together information from education, health, youth justice, policing and other partners to inform professional judgement. Practitioners would therefore be expected to recognise that the factors affecting a child's wellbeing may also be relevant to understanding behaviours that could present a risk of harm to others.

35. However, identifying violence fixation as a distinct issue, particularly where ideology is not the primary driver, is a relatively new and evolving area of practice. Whilst practitioners are skilled in assessing vulnerability and risk, WLGA is not aware of a nationally agreed framework within children's social care specifically focused on the identification of VFIs. The extent to which practitioners are equipped to identify violence fixation is likely to be influenced by the availability of specialist advice, workforce development opportunities and effective information sharing between partner agencies. The identification of potential VFIs is therefore most effective where

concerns are considered through a coordinated multi-agency approach rather than being seen as the responsibility of any single service.

36. Where a child or young person presents behaviours that raise concerns regarding violence fixation or the risk of serious harm to others, local authorities would expect children's social care staff to respond through established safeguarding and risk management arrangements. The precise response will depend on the circumstances of the individual case, including the nature and level of risk, the child's vulnerabilities and the involvement of other agencies.

37. Typically, this would involve gathering and sharing relevant information, undertaking or contributing to assessments of need and risk, considering whether statutory safeguarding interventions are required, and engaging with appropriate partner agencies. Depending on the circumstances, this may include liaison with education, health services, youth justice services, police, Prevent teams or other specialist services. Where risks are significant or complex, children's services would be expected to participate in or help coordinate multi-agency discussions and planning to ensure risks are appropriately assessed and managed.

38. Local authorities would not generally expect children's social care services to manage such risks in isolation. In common with other complex safeguarding and public protection concerns, effective management of potential VFIs depends on timely information sharing, clear arrangements for professional oversight and collaborative multi-agency working. Existing structures, including safeguarding arrangements, youth justice processes, MASH arrangements and, where relevant, public protection arrangements such as MAPPA, may all have a role to play depending on the circumstances of the case.

39. More broadly, local authorities would emphasise the importance of early intervention, access to specialist support and the availability of clear referral pathways. In our view, effective management depends on ensuring that concerns regarding a child's vulnerability, welfare and potential risk to others are considered together, rather than as separate or competing issues, within a coordinated multi-agency response.

40. The WLGA and the Wales Safer Communities Network do not collect or analyse data relating to VFIs and is therefore unable to provide any statistical trends or conclusions. We understand that relevant information may be held by operational partners,

including policing partners, Youth Offending Services, education services, social services and other agencies involved in safeguarding, risk assessment and public protection.

Policies and Guidance

41. In Wales, Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSBs) have an important role in coordinating, promoting and improving the way safeguarding information, intelligence and guidance are shared across partner organisations. RSBs are a statutory multi-agency partnership established under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to coordinate safeguarding arrangements across a region of Wales. The Act brings together local authorities, health boards, police, probation, the third sector and other key partners, to provide strategic leadership for safeguarding children and adults at risk. Rather than delivering frontline services, RSBs develop regional policies and procedures, promote effective information sharing, oversee safeguarding performance, coordinate multi-agency training, and ensure that lessons from practice reviews are embedded. The RSBs sit alongside the National Independent Safeguarding Board for Wales.

42. In relation to information and guidance, RSBs are expected to:
    - Develop and publish regional safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure partners follow consistent approaches to safeguarding children and adults,
    - Promote effective information sharing between partner agencies,
    - Identify and disseminate learning from practice reviews, audits and national guidance,
    - Produce guidance, training materials and best practice resources for practitioners, and
    - Monitor safeguarding trends and performance

43. While RSBs facilitate the exchange of information between organisations, they do not hold comprehensive operational safeguarding records about individuals. The Boards provide the governance, oversight and regional framework that enables information to be shared appropriately and consistently where it is necessary to protect children and adults at risk.

44. The six RSBs and their associated websites for sharing policies and guidance can be found below:

- Cysur, Mid and West Wales Safeguarding Board https://cysur.wales/exploitation/radicalisation/
- North Wales Safeguarding Board https://www.northwalessafeguardingboard.wales/extremism-and-radicalisation/
- West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board https://www.wgsb.wales/policies-procedures-and-practice-guidance/
- Cwm Taf Morgannyg Safeguarding Board https://www.cwmtafmorgannwgsafeguardingboard.co.uk/En/Home.aspx
- Cardiff and Vale Safeguarding Board https://cardiffandvalersb.co.uk/safeguarding-adults/radicalisation/
- Gwent Safeguarding Board https://www.gwentsafeguarding.org.uk/en/protocols-and-procedures

45. The WLGA itself does not, and would not be expected to, produce policy or guidance to be distributed to its constituent members. It expects all RSBs and local authorities to look to national and devolved government guidance, such as:

- Exhibit CLI/07 – **WLGA000006**: All Wales Practice Guide - Safeguarding children from radicalisation
- Exhibit CLI/08 – **HOM000014**: Home Office Prevent Duty Guidance
- Exhibit CLI/09 – **HOM000131**: Prevent duty toolkit for local authorities
- Exhibit CLI/10 – **HOM000021**: Channel duty guidance: Protecting people susceptible to radicalisation
- Exhibit CLI/11 – **WLGA000007**: CT Policing - Understanding the signs of extremism
- Exhibit CLI/12 – **WLGA000008** MAPPA guidance June 2026

46. Additionally, RSBs develop their own policies and procedures targeted at their regional partners, but that are also shared nationally with other regional safeguarding boards. Examples include the following, although the full range of such guidance may be more extensive and could be obtained directly from individual RSBs:

- Exhibit CLI/13 – **WLGA000009**: NWCSB Practice Guidance - Professional curiosity
- Exhibit CLI/14 – **WLGA000010**: WGSB Working with Uncooperative Individuals, carers and their families – Adults at risk
- Exhibit CLI/15 – **WLGA000011**: WGSB Working with uncooperative families

47. The WLGA is not responsible for monitoring compliance with such policies and

guidance. Oversight responsibility sits with Welsh Government, supported by the national and regional partnership structures, namely the National Independent Safeguarding Board, and the Regional Safeguarding Boards. These have statutory roles in supporting, promoting and improving safeguarding practice across Wales. The WLGA's role is one of representation, facilitation, sector engagement, and support, rather than formal compliance monitoring or assurance.

48. Given the increasing prominence and recognition of VFIs as a distinct risk within the safeguarding landscape in Wales, the WLGA would support the review and update of national safeguarding guidance and procedures to explicitly acknowledge such persons as a specific category of concern. While existing safeguarding frameworks provide mechanisms for identifying and managing individuals who may present a risk of harm, explicitly recognising VFIs within guidance, for both preventative and protection measures, would promote greater consistency in understanding, assessment and multi-agency responses.

Information Sharing

49. Part 7 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 recognises that effective safeguarding depends on timely, lawful and proportionate information sharing. It establishes duties that require organisations to share information where this is necessary to protect children and adults at risk. In 2019, Welsh Government published a guidance document and flowchart setting out the process for partner agencies to follow (Exhibit CLI/16 – **WLGA000012**: WG – information sharing to safeguard children and adults). The WLGA understands that the same 'seven rules' are used in Welsh national Safeguarding Procedures (Exhibit CLI/17 – **WLGA000013**: Wales Safeguarding Procedures – Pointers for Practice: Seven Golden Rules for Information-Sharing) and were developed by HM Government in 2018.

50. In addition, Section 9 of the National Independent Safeguarding Board's A Practitioner's Guide: Basic Legal Principles (Exhibit CLI/18 – **WLGA000014**: NISB – A Practitioners Guide) focuses on data protection and information sharing.

51. The WLGA is also aware that the Welsh Governments Wales Accord on Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) provides templates and guidance to support in the delivery of public service whilst complying with data protection legislation. Key guidance includes:

- Flowchart - What type of agreement is required? (Exhibit CLI/19 – **WLGA000015**: Flow diagram - What Type of Agreement is Required)
- Information Sharing Protocol Template (Exhibit CLI/20 – **WLGA000016**: WASPI ISP template)
- Information Reference Table (Exhibit CLI/21 – **WLGA000017**: WASPI Information Reference Table)
- Data Disclosure Agreement Template (Exhibit CLI/22 – **WLGA000018**: WASPI DDA Template)
- Joint Controller Agreement Template (Exhibit CLI/23 – **WLGA000019**: WASPI JCA Template)
- Data Processing Agreement Template (Exhibit CLI/24 – **WLGA000020**: WASPI Data Processing Agreement template)

Associated guidance for each template is also available via the WASPI website.[4]

52. As set out above, the WLGA is aware of the national arrangements in place for sharing information and data, but the WLGA does not play a role in operational data sharing.

53. Nonetheless, despite the steps noted above, information sharing continues to be a recurring issue identified in safeguarding practice reviews such as Adult Practice Reviews, Child Practice Reviews and Single Unified Safeguarding Reviews. Some examples from across Wales that the WLGA is aware of include:

- Our Bravery Brought Justice, recommendations 5, 26 and 27 (Exhibit CLI/25– **WLGA000021**: Extended Child Practice Review – Gwynedd)
- CYSUR 6 2021 Report , recommendation 5 (Exhibit CLI/26 – **WLGA000022**: CYSUR Extended Child Practice)
- CWMPAS 1 2022 Report, recommendation 1 (Exhibit CLI/27 – **WLGA000023**: CMWPAS Concise Adult Practice)
- WGA S25 2023 – APR Report , recommendation 7(learning point 6) (Exhibit CLI/28 – **WLGA000024**: West Glamorgan Safeguarding Adults Board Concise Adult Practice Review)
- SUSR-2024-01 CTM (Report), recommendations 5 and 8 (Exhibit CLI/29 – **WLGA000025**: Cwm Taf Single Unified Safeguarding Review)

[4] https://www.waspi.gov.wales/framework-documentation/templates-and-guidance/

- CVSB APR 012021, recommendations 7 and 8 (Exhibit CLl/30 – WLGA000026: Cardiff and Vale Safeguarding Adults Board)
- GWASB 2 /2020 Concise Adult Practice Review , recommendations 4, 5 and 7 (Exhibit CLl/31 – WLGA000027: Gwent Safeguarding Board Concise Adult Practice Review)

Parental consent and information sharing

54. There are instances where information and data are withheld or misrepresented by parents, carers and families. The RSBs in Wales have policies and produces in place to support partners in overcoming issues such as professional curiosity; uncooperative Individuals, carers and their families – Adults at risk; uncooperative families - children at risk; working with people displaying disguised compliance. Each RSB will have its own guidance or procedure in place. Examples of such guidance include:

- Exhibit CLl/32 – WLGA000028: North Wales Safeguarding Children Board - Working with people with disguised compliance
- Exhibit CLl/13 - WLGA000009: NWCSB Practice Guidance - Professional curiosity
- Exhibit CLl/14 - WLGA000010: Working with Uncooperative Individuals, carers and their families – Adults at risk
- Exhibit CLl/15 – WLGA000011: Working with uncooperative families

The impact of s. 4 of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026

55. Section 4 of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 gives provisions on consistent identifiers for children, with the aim of improving information sharing between organisations involved in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children by enabling a common identifier to be used across different services.

56. In Wales, compliance needs to be assessed within Wales's distinct devolved legislative and policy framework. Children's services, education and safeguarding are devolved matters, so any information-sharing duty or use of a Single Unique Identifier would need to align with Welsh law and Welsh Government policy, rather than being implemented solely by reference to arrangements in England.

57. Key compliance considerations would include:

- **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**: any information sharing must support the well-being, safeguarding and preventative duties placed on local authorities and relevant partners, while remaining proportionate and lawful,
- **Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018**: where information relates to learners with ALN, sharing arrangements would need to support statutory duties around identifying, assessing and meeting additional learning needs, including the preparation and maintenance of Individual Development Plans,
- **Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011**: Welsh Ministers must have due regard to the UNCRC, so any identifier or data-sharing system should be designed around children's rights, including privacy, participation, non-discrimination and best interests,
- **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**: public bodies would need to demonstrate that arrangements support the well-being goals and ways of working, particularly prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement,
- **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and Welsh Language Standards**: communications, privacy notices, consent processes where relevant, guidance and public-facing materials would need to be available bilingually and treat Welsh and English equally,
- **Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR:** any use of a Single Unique Identifier must have a clear lawful basis, defined purpose, data minimisation, role-based access controls, retention rules, security safeguards, transparency for families, and appropriate data protection impact assessment, and
- **Wales Safeguarding Procedures and Working Together-style Welsh guidance**: information sharing should strengthen safeguarding practice but not create indiscriminate data access. Professional judgement, necessity and proportionality would remain central.

58. Overall, compliance in Wales would require a Welsh-specific implementation route, clear statutory footing or Welsh Government guidance, bilingual public information, robust data governance, and engagement with local authorities, health boards, schools and safeguarding partners. The approach should support earlier identification of need and better multi-agency working while protecting children's rights, privacy and trust.

The impact of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025

59. In the view of the WLGA, it is probably still too soon to determine if the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 has had time to have a positive impact on safeguarding practices. Looking at the recognised legitimate interest list on the ICO website, the WLGA expects it to have a positive impact through use of either the 'national security, public security and defence condition'; the 'emergencies condition'; and the 'safeguarding condition'. The provisions of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 should integrate with the existing Wales Safeguarding Procedures and provide additional clarity and enable information sharing, but as noted, it has not been in place long enough for any reviews to be carried out since the Act was enacted.

Recommendations for changes to law, policy or practice concerning information sharing

60. The Wales Safer Communities Network considers that the development of a standardised information-sharing framework or data-sharing agreement would assist partners in sharing information consistently and with greater confidence. As noted above in paragraph 53, there are recurring issues in relating to information sharing and scope for improvement within the system. Improved communication, guidance and training for professionals regarding referral pathways, available interventions and sources of support would also be beneficial.

61. Through engagement with practitioners across Wales, the WLGA is aware of concerns regarding capacity and the increasing expectations placed upon frontline staff in education settings. Teachers and public service professionals are often managing complex and evolving risks alongside a wide range of existing responsibilities. Practitioners frequently report back that those making referrals feel uncertain around ownership of risk, referral thresholds and available pathways for support. Greater clarity regarding roles, responsibilities, processes and available interventions would help improve confidence and consistency in information sharing and risk management. This should be supported by adequate training, sustainable resourcing and clear multi-agency arrangements.

Training

62. The Wales Safer Communities Network does not currently facilitate training specifically focused on Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs). The Network is however aware that

Cardiff Council's Prevent Champions training, which was originally developed for local authority staff, has regularly been made available to partners across Wales. The Network supports the promotion of this training.

63. While not specifically focused on VFIs, the Network would also consider the following training to be best practice and would encourage its use for partner organisations:
    - *UK Government Prevent Duty Training*: Learn how to support people susceptible to radicalisation [5]
        - Course 1 – Awareness
        - Course 2 – Referrals
        - Course 3 - Channel or Prevent Multi-Agency Panel (PMAP)
    - *ProtectUK ACT Awareness E-Learning* [6]
    - Preventing Online Radicalisation – Supporting Parents/Carers & Early Help Practitioners (Prevent Cardiff and WISE KIDS) [7]

64. The Wales Safer Communities Network, Welsh Government, and the WLGA also jointly delivered two phases of Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses learning sessions between January and April 2026. [8]

    - Exhibit CLI/33 – **WLGA000029**: Disinformation & Information Threats and Responses – Post Session Guide
    - Exhibit CLI/34 – **WLGA000030** - Disinformation training session – FAQs

65. Whilst these sessions were not specifically focused on VFIs, they covered issues relevant to the wider risk landscape, including misinformation, disinformation, online harms and community resilience. The sessions were well attended by elected members and officers from across Wales and received positive evaluation feedback.

66. Beyond this, the Network regularly promotes training, guidance and learning opportunities provided by partner organisations, including Prevent-related training and resources relevant to safeguarding, radicalisation, extremism and online harms. The following are examples where VFIs are addressed but are not formally part of the training:
    - Knives in school' seminar[9] - May 2026

[5] https://www.support-people-susceptible-to-radicalisation.service.gov.uk/portal
[6] https://www.support-people-susceptible-to-radicalisation.service.gov.uk/portal
[7] https://www.wisekids.org.uk/wk/PrevRad/content/index.html#/
[8] https://safercommunities.wales/building-resilience-to-disinformation/
[9] Seminar can be viewed online https://safercommunities.wales/knives-in-schools-seminar/

- Lunch & Learn: Incels and the manosphere[10] – September 2025

Monitoring and assessing the value of training

67. As noted above, the Wales Safer Communities Network does not currently facilitate training specifically focused on Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs) and as such is therefore unable to assess the effectiveness of VFI-specific training. The Network is not in a position to comment on how individual local authorities evaluate training delivered locally or how learning is shared outside of established national and regional networks.

68. For training and learning events delivered or supported by the Network, participant evaluation forms are routinely used to capture feedback, assess effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. For example, the Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses learning sessions, funded by Welsh Government and WLGA, were evaluated through participant feedback. Evaluation forms were circulated by the Network and the results collated by Welsh Government (Exhibit CLl/35 – **WLGA000031**: Survey Results - WG Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses Learning Session). If the Network were to begin facilitating VFI training, the same form of evaluation would be undertaken.

69. Given the above, there is an apparent need for VFI specific training in Wales and the wider UK. The WLGA suggests such training should cover:
    - Recognizing concerning behaviours related to VFIs
    - actions to take when VFI and other forms of extremism are suspected
    - pathways for referrals
    - data sharing and how the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 should provide appropriate conditions that enable the sharing of information in these circumstances whether under safeguarding, emergency, or national security and public protection.

Assessment and Management of risk

70. Operational practice following the identification of a VFI by an employee, officer or agent of local government is not a matter on which the WLGA has comprehensive knowledge. The assessment and management of risk is undertaken by a range of local authority services and partner agencies, including Youth Justice Services, social

[10] Seminar can be viewed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4nYfAtOfTQ&feature=youtu.be

services, education, community safety and safeguarding partnerships.

71. The WLGA is not aware of a single, nationally mandated risk assessment framework specifically for Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs) across local government in Wales. Risk assessments are likely to draw upon established tools and processes used within particular services, with assessments informed, where appropriate, by information provided by partner agencies through existing safeguarding, public protection and multi-agency arrangement.

72. The WLGA is aware that recognized operational practice will be in place, and will be undertaken across partner agencies, however we are unable to provide this and would recommend that evidence be sought from operational agencies and practitioners to provide the most comprehensive perspective on current assessment approaches and their effectiveness in identifying and managing risks posed by VFIs.

73. The WLGA suggests that the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales would be better placed to provide a more comprehensive view on current risk assessment practice, the thresholds applied for different forms of assessment, and the appropriateness of those thresholds in identifying and managing risks posed by violent fixated individuals.

The perception and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder

74. The Wales National Neurodivergence Team (NNT) is funded by Welsh Government and hosted by the WLGA. NNT has expertise in neurodivergence and neuroinclusive practice, however it does not have specialist expertise in relation to VFIs, extremism, or the intersection between these areas and neurodivergence.

75. Through NNT's work with Youth Justice Services across Wales, training has been commissioned on subjects including neurodivergence and extremism, managing risk with neurodivergent children and young people, harmful sexual behaviours, effective participation, and substance use. The training promotes a neurodevelopmental and trauma-informed approach, encouraging practitioners to understand behaviour within context, recognise potential unmet need, avoid both over- and under-estimating risk, and balance safeguarding responsibilities with individual support needs.

76. From a neurodivergence perspective, it is important to avoid assumptions that autism

or other neurodevelopmental conditions are inherently associated with violence or risk. Most neurodivergent people are more likely to experience vulnerability, exploitation, victimisation, social exclusion, and mental health difficulties than to pose a risk to others.

77. NNT is not aware of any Wales-specific guidance that explicitly links neurodevelopmental conditions to the assessment of risk posed by VFIs. We are unable to comment on local authority referral practices or barriers relating to VFI referrals, as we do not currently hold evidence in this area. Similarly, we are not aware of any specific local authority practice in Wales that directly links neurodevelopmental conditions with the assessment of violent fixed ideation. NNT is keen to further develop learning in this area and meetings are in place with the Wales Community Safety Network to explore future collaboration and training opportunities.

Multi-agency arrangements

78. In England and Wales Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) provides the multi-agency framework for assessing and managing the risks posed by serious sexual, violent and other dangerous offenders in the community. Through information sharing and coordinated risk management, MAPPA contributes to wider community safety objectives, including safeguarding vulnerable individuals and preventing serious harm.

79. The Wales Safer Communities Network is aware that MAPPA is discussed within some community safety partnership arrangements across Wales. However, the Network is not involved in the operational management of MAPPA cases and is therefore not in a position to comment on how individual Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs) are managed through MAPPA processes, nor to assess the effectiveness of current arrangements in managing risks posed by VFIs, including those under 25 or under 18.

80. Local authorities, community safety partnerships and safeguarding partners have a duty to cooperate with MAPPA in managing offenders who present a risk of serious harm. However, the three MAPPA Responsible Authorities (Probation Service, the Prison Service, and the Police) would be better placed to provide information on operation practices, case management and risk assessment of VFI's

81. The coordination of management plans, case ownership and monitoring arrangements is largely an operational matter and may vary depending on the circumstances of the individual, the level of identified risk, and local partnership arrangements. Where a VFI is managed through MAPPA, relevant agencies are expected to share information, assess risk collectively and agree appropriate management actions through established governance structures.

82. The WLGA does not currently have a settled view on a single preferred multi-agency structure for managing Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs). Given the diversity of cases and local partnership arrangements across Wales, it is likely that the most appropriate structure will depend on the nature of the risk, the needs of the individual, and the agencies involved. The WLGA would, however, support approaches that promote effective information sharing, clear accountability, proportionate risk management and strong collaboration between relevant statutory and non-statutory partners.

The role of a duty – holder in the management of VFI cases

83. The Wales Safer Communities Network is not in a position to comment on whether senior local authority staff would support the introduction of a system where in every case, the multi-agency arrangements for VFI had to identify a named individual within a specific organisation as the lead for case management (a form of duty holder), or whether they would have the capacity to take on such additional responsibilities. Such proposals would require consultation across the 22 local authorities in Wales and discussions with partner agencies.

84. That said, multi-agency arrangements that bring together partner agencies to share information, assess risk and coordinate interventions are already well established. Structures such as MAPPA, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) demonstrate that collaborative approaches to risk management are both familiar and embedded within many areas of public service delivery. Practitioners consistently report that referral volumes and case complexity have increased significantly, whilst the capacity of local authority and partner agency teams has not always increased at the same rate. Many services are operating under considerable pressure, with high caseloads and stretched resources.

85. Whilst the identification of a lead coordinator may offer benefits in terms of accountability, ownership and oversight, the effectiveness of any such arrangement

would depend upon clear roles and responsibilities, authority, sufficient staffing capacity and access to the necessary support and intervention services. Adequate and sustainable funding would be essential to ensure that any additional responsibilities can be delivered effectively.

Children's services capacity to address the threat posed by VFIs to others

86. Local government children's social care practitioners routinely work with children and young people whose vulnerabilities and welfare needs are closely connected to behaviours that may present a risk to others. Through safeguarding, child protection and care and support processes, practitioners regularly assess the impact of factors such as trauma, adverse childhood experiences, mental ill-health, neurodiversity, exploitation, social isolation and exposure to violence. In practice, these factors are often relevant both to a child's welfare and to understanding behaviours that may place others at risk.

87. The WLGA would therefore expect children's services practitioners to recognise that the factors affecting a child's wellbeing may also contribute to the risk they present to others. However, identifying and assessing violence fixation as a distinct issue, particularly where ideology is not the primary driver, is a relatively new and evolving area of practice. Whilst practitioners are experienced in assessing vulnerability and risk, the WLGA is not aware of a nationally agreed framework within children's social care specifically focused on violence fixation. As a result, confidence and capability are likely to vary depending on local arrangements, training, access to specialist advice and the effectiveness of multi-agency working.

88. From a local government perspective, there may be value in strengthening existing safeguarding and public protection arrangements to provide greater clarity about how risks posed by a child should be assessed alongside risks faced by that child. Any future policy development should seek to support a balanced approach that recognises the interrelationship between vulnerability, welfare and the potential for serious harm, whilst avoiding the creation of parallel systems that duplicate existing safeguarding responsibilities.

89. Before considering new statutory duties, there would need to be careful assessment of whether existing safeguarding, public protection and information-sharing powers are sufficient but not being used consistently, or whether genuine legislative gaps exist.

Local authorities would wish to avoid creating additional statutory responsibilities without corresponding investment and clarity regarding accountability.

90. Any changes should support proportionate information sharing, clear lead-agency arrangements and effective multi-agency coordination while preserving the fundamental principle that children should be treated as children first, even where they present significant risks.

A single, shared multi-agency risk assessment tool?

91. The Wales Safer Communities Network would strongly support the development of a single, shared multi-agency risk assessment tool that is clear, accessible and capable of being used consistently across public sector services. Effective information sharing remains one of the most significant challenges within partnership working in Wales. Whilst legislative gateways generally exist, barriers are often practical, cultural and organisational rather than legal. A shared approach to risk assessment could improve consistency, provide greater clarity about what information is required and why, and help build confidence between partners. It could also reduce duplication and support earlier, more coordinated interventions for individuals and families with complex needs.

92. However, several challenges would need to be addressed to ensure successful implementation. Interoperability remains a significant issue, with many organisations operating different systems that are unable to communicate effectively with one another. There is also a need for greater awareness and understanding across services of the importance of information sharing and the role it plays in safeguarding, prevention and risk management.

93. Practitioners frequently report that effective information sharing is often driven by strong personal relationships rather than embedded processes. Whilst these relationships are valuable, reliance on individuals can create vulnerabilities when staff change roles, are absent, or leave organisations. A national approach would therefore need to be supported by clear policies, guidance and ongoing training.

94. The quality and consistency of information available can also affect partners' willingness and ability to share data. Where the purpose for sharing information is unclear, or where there are concerns about how information will be used, organisations can become understandably cautious. In some cases, concerns about organisational reputation and perceived risk can contribute to an overly risk-averse approach to

information sharing.

95. Overall, in the Neworks' view the benefits of a shared risk assessment framework are likely to outweigh the challenges. However, successful implementation would require investment in systems, workforce development, governance arrangements and cultural change across partner organisations.

The extent and effectiveness of consider joint decision making between police, health services and local authority safeguarding services

96. Joint decision-making between police, health services and local authority safeguarding services is well established in many areas of Wales, and there are many examples of established multi-agency working arrangements. Structures such as MASH arrangements, MARACs, safeguarding boards and other partnership forums provide important opportunities for shared assessment, discussion and decision-making.

97. However, the consistency of these arrangements varies across Wales. Differences in local structures, capacity, thresholds, devolved and non-devolved responsibilities, information-sharing practices, and access to partner agencies can result in differing experiences and outcomes. While relationships between partners are generally positive, we are aware that engagement from health services continues to be challenging in several areas. There remains scope to strengthen and standardise information-sharing arrangements, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure that effective joint decision-making is consistently embedded across all areas.

98. We would therefore suggest that, whilst the foundations for joint decision-making are in place, further work is required to improve consistency, reduce variation and support a more coherent multi-agency approach across Wales.

Innovative and specialised local approaches to risk management and other examples good practice

99. As noted earlier in this statement, the Network has regularly shared and promoted work by Cardiff Council's Policy, Partnerships and Community Engagement Team. Cardiff has produced Weapons in Schools and Educational Settings Guidance, delivered the Prevent Champions programme, and participated in a Home Office pilot to explore how individuals presenting concerning behaviours but falling below Prevent

thresholds can be managed through multi-agency pathways.

100. It continues to offer free training to other local authorities across Wales, and the Network regards the work by Cardiff Council as a leading source of innovative and specialised community safety practice. The Network is not aware whether Cardiff is developing, or has considered developing, specialist approaches to VFIs, but would recommend that the organisation be involved in any such discussions.

101. The Network is not aware of any evaluated models specifically designed for VFIs. However, practitioners frequently reference existing multi-agency approaches, including Prevent Champions (Cardiff), MAPPA, MASH and MARAC arrangements, as examples of collaborative practice from which lessons may be drawn.

The utility of Prevent and Channel in addressing VFI issues

102. From the perspective of the Wales Safer Communities Network, Prevent is not the most appropriate mechanism for the identification, assessment and management of all VFIs, although it remains an important and necessary safeguarding and referral pathway for individuals at risk of radicalisation linked to a defined terrorist ideology. Prevent and Channel have been established to address the risk of terrorism and are supported by statutory duties, guidance, referral pathways and specialist interventions. These arrangements are appropriate where there is evidence of ideological radicalisation or vulnerability to terrorism-related influences.

103. However, practitioners report increasing numbers of individuals who present a risk of serious violence, but whose behaviour is not easily explained by a coherent ideology or motivation that falls within the traditional understanding of terrorism. Attempting to manage such individuals solely through Prevent risks stretching the purpose of the programme beyond its original design and creating uncertainty around thresholds for referral, assessment and intervention.

104. The Network's view is that VFIs require a broader, multi-agency public protection approach which brings together policing, mental health services, social care, education, probation and other relevant partners. In some cases, existing public protection arrangements, including MAPPA where appropriate, may provide a useful framework for coordinating risk assessment and risk management, particularly where individuals present complex combinations of violence, vulnerability, mental ill-health,

neurodiversity, trauma or social isolation.

105. A recurring concern raised by practitioners is that the complexity of individuals presenting to services is increasing at a time when many local partnership arrangements are facing resource pressures. Short-term funding cycles, workforce reductions, recruitment challenges and changes to commissioning arrangements have reduced capacity across several frontline services. Any new approach to managing VFIs must therefore be accompanied by sustainable long-term funding, sufficient staffing capacity, access to specialist interventions, and investment in collaborative multi-agency working.

106. The Network would also note that Prevent and Channel panels are not consistently resourced or designed to provide specialist assessment of mental health conditions, neurodiversity or broader violence fixation where terrorism-related motivations are absent. Whilst Channel mentors provide valuable support within their area of expertise, additional specialist capabilities and intervention pathways may be required to respond effectively to the diverse range of factors that can contribute to violence fixation.

Topic 2: The role of the online environment

Overview

107. The Wales Safer Communities Network cannot provide a definitive view on behalf of all local authorities regarding the extent to which online disinhibition, anonymity or harmful online platforms contribute to violence escalation of by Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs). This is an operational matter, and local understanding is likely to vary across areas.

108. However, through our engagement with practitioners across Wales, there is a strong and consistent view that online environments can play an important role in the escalation of risk for some individuals. Practitioners frequently identify concerns around access to harmful content, exposure to violent or extremist narratives, participation in online forums and chat groups, and the ease with which individuals can access information, imagery and communities that may reinforce violent beliefs or behaviours.

109. The level of concern amongst practitioners is reflected in demand for training and

awareness raising. Local authority members and officers continue to express a desire for greater understanding of the harm and the need to proactively tackle misinformation, disinformation and online harms, both to support their communities and to help them respond appropriately when harmful or inaccurate information is circulating. Similarly, events delivered by the Network on topics such as knife crime in schools, online extremist influences, and the manosphere/incel movement have attracted significant interest, suggesting these issues are increasingly relevant to community safety practitioners and other partners.

110. Practitioners also report, anecdotally, that individuals coming to the attention of services, for example, education, social services and homelessness services, are presenting with increasingly complex needs and behaviours. Whilst it would not be appropriate to draw a direct causal link between online activity and violent behaviour, there is a perception that online platforms can accelerate grievance, reinforce harmful beliefs, normalise violence, and provide access to material that may not otherwise be readily available.

Reporting challenges

111. Local authorities, however, face challenges in responding to these issues. Responsibility for many aspects of online regulation and safety sits outside devolved competence, creating limitations in the actions available to Welsh and local government partners. While local authorities, police and other agencies undertake monitoring, safeguarding and preventative activity, resource and capacity constraints remain a significant challenge.

112. More broadly, concerns relating to anonymity are not confined to online environments. Practitioners report concerns about intimidation, harassment and anti-social behaviour perpetrated by individuals who conceal their identity in physical spaces, including the use of face coverings, scooters and off-road motorcycles. While distinct from online anonymity, these issues raise similar concerns regarding accountability, community confidence and public safety.

113. We would also note that concerns about online abuse and intimidation extend beyond VFIs and are increasingly affecting elected members, public officials and communities more widely. Local authorities work closely with policing partners to address these issues, and the impact of online threats, harassment and abuse on individuals in public

office and community cohesion has been discussed repeatedly through community safety partnership structures and the Wales Safer Communities Board.

Recurring challenges

114. The Wales Safer Communities Network cannot provide a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by all local authorities in discharging their duties and responsibilities within the online environment. Local authorities have a broad range of statutory functions, including safeguarding, public protection, health and wellbeing, community safety and alongside other specified authorities, responsibilities under the Serious Violence Duty. The challenges faced are likely to vary according to local circumstances, capacity and demand. However, through engagement with community safety practitioners across Wales, several recurring themes emerge.

115. Practitioners consistently report increasing demands on services at a time when resources are under significant pressure. Community safety teams are often small and, in many areas, have experienced reductions in capacity whilst responsibilities and expectations have continued to grow. Practitioners are increasingly expected to respond to a complex range of online harms and risks, alongside existing statutory responsibilities.

116. The governance and policy landscape can also be challenging to navigate. Local authorities are required to respond to a range of priorities and duties originating from both UK and Welsh Government, and practitioners often report that governance structures, reporting requirements and partnership arrangements do not always align neatly. This can create complexity when responding to emerging online threats that cut across multiple policy areas, including safeguarding, community cohesion, extremism, violence prevention and public health.

117. The ability to identify and understand emerging online risks can be constrained by analytical capacity. Dedicated analyst resource within local authorities is extremely limited and often focused on statutory performance requirements or operational priorities. As a result, some authorities may face challenges in proactively monitoring trends, identifying emerging risks and developing an evidence-based understanding of local online harms without additional specialist support or resources.

118. Finally, practitioners frequently highlight the challenge of communication and public

reassurance. Following the disorder experienced across parts of the UK during summer 2024, there has been increased recognition of the importance of timely, accurate and trusted communication. Local authorities are often expected to respond quickly to misinformation, disinformation and harmful narratives circulating online. However, practitioners report that determining when to intervene, what information can be shared, and how best to communicate in rapidly evolving situations can be difficult, particularly where information is incomplete or where there is a risk of inadvertently amplifying harmful content.

Best practice concerning VFI's in children's services and educational settings

119. Local Authorities would generally regard best practice as taking a holistic, multi-agency approach to the assessment and management of risks arising from online activity, recognising that online behaviour should not be considered in isolation from a child's wider circumstances, vulnerabilities and support needs.

120. In a children's services context, effective practice is likely to involve considering online activity as part of broader safeguarding, wellbeing and risk assessments, drawing together information from families, education, health services, youth justice, policing and other relevant partners where appropriate. Practitioners would be expected to consider not only the content a child may be accessing online, but also the potential impact of online interactions, social influences, exploitation, harmful networks, social isolation, mental health concerns and other contextual factors that may contribute to vulnerability or harmful behaviour

121. Local authorities would also regard timely information sharing and effective multi-agency decision making as important components of good practice. Risks associated with online activity can evolve rapidly and may not be fully understood by any single agency. Effective assessment and management therefore depend on agencies sharing relevant information, developing a shared understanding of risk and agreeing proportionate responses based on the individual circumstances of the child.

122. Best practice would also include a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention. Wherever possible, concerns should be identified and addressed at an early stage through appropriate support for children and families, alongside access to specialist advice and interventions where required.

123. More broadly, local authorities would regard workforce development as an important element. Practitioners require ongoing training and development opportunities to develop and enhance their understanding of emerging risks, online behaviours and digital environments, supported by clear guidance and access to specialist expertise when concerns arise.

Support, co-working, and guidance in the education sector for managing and monitoring in relation online safety

124. In educational settings in Wales, support and guidance for managing and monitoring learners' access to the internet sits within a wider national framework for safeguarding, digital resilience and online safety. Welsh Government provides guidance and resources through Hwb, including materials to support schools with online safety, cyber security, digital learning and responsible use of technology. Through Hwb[11] over 100 resources are freely available to practitioners, parents and governors in relation to 'Keeping Safe Online'. Examples include:

- Exhibit CLl/36 – **WLGA000032**: Cyber Heroes: Intergenerational cyber security – Lesson plan
- Exhibit CLl/37 – **WLGA000033**: Cyber Heroes: Intergenerational cyber security – Presentation
- Exhibit CLl/38 - **WLGA000034**: Supporting your child when they're online - Leaflet
- Exhibit CLl/39 – **WLGA000035**: Online safety support for the school community – Leaflet

125. Schools and local authorities are also expected to operate within safeguarding duties and procedures, including the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, and to ensure that online safety is embedded within wider safeguarding, well-being and behaviour policies.

126. The importance of managing and monitoring internet access is generally well understood by schools, local authorities and education partners in Wales, particularly given the increased use of digital learning platforms and devices. There is a strong recognition that effective filtering, monitoring and supervision are essential to protect learners from harmful or inappropriate content, online abuse, grooming, bullying,

[11] https://hwb.gov.wales/repository/discovery?sort=recent&catalogs=50f72adb-cdf7-4da9-a01a-d9b5ecafd264&strict=1&query=

misinformation and other digital risks.

127. This also aligns with the Curriculum for Wales, which places emphasis on digital competence, responsible digital citizenship, health and well-being, and developing learners' critical understanding of online environments. This wider agenda has been reinforced by recent Welsh Government work on mobile phone use in schools: following national engagement, including a workforce survey and practitioner/stakeholder input, Welsh Government has announced that it will consult on and issue statutory guidance to local authorities and schools on restricting mobile phone use during the school day, with the aim of providing clearer national expectations while retaining appropriate local flexibility and exceptions, for example where devices are needed for medical reasons.

128. However, effective implementation can vary depending on local infrastructure, resources and capacity. Barriers may include differences in school and local authority systems, the cost and complexity of filtering and monitoring tools, varying levels of staff confidence and training, and the challenge of keeping pace with rapidly changing technology and online harms. There may also be practical difficulties in monitoring personal devices, home internet use, encrypted platforms, social media and activity outside the school network. In Wales, additional consideration must also be given to bilingual communication with learners, parents and carers, and ensuring that online safety guidance is accessible in both Welsh and English.

129. Overall, in Wales the approach to managing and monitoring online activities combines technical safeguards, clear local policies, staff training, learner education, parental engagement and robust safeguarding escalation routes. Managing and monitoring access to the internet is not seen solely as an IT function, but as part of a whole-school and system-wide approach to safeguarding, well-being, digital competence and children's rights.

130. The WLGA is aware of the Welsh Government's intention to issue statutory guidance on restricting the use of mobile phones in schools, as announced on 16 June 2026 (Exhibit CLl/40 – **WLGA000036**: WG - Guidance to restrict mobile phones in schools announcement) and will work with local authorities to support its effective implementation. The guidance is intended to provide greater consistency and clarity on expectations for mobile phone use during the school day, responding to workforce feedback that highlighted a strong desire for a more consistent national approach.

While recognising that many schools already have mobile phone policies in place, the WLGA will support education authorities in understanding and enacting the statutory guidance, sharing good practice, and working collaboratively with schools to ensure that local arrangements align with the new national expectations.

Monitoring, reporting and responding to online harms, browsing and searching

131. The Wales Safer Communities Network cannot speak on behalf of all local authorities regarding barriers to monitoring, reporting and responding to online harms. However, practitioners across Wales consistently identify several common challenges.

132. Capacity remains a significant issue. Community safety and safeguarding teams are managing increasing demands with limited resources, whilst the scale and pace of online activity make effective monitoring and response difficult.

133. Analytical capability is also a challenge. Dedicated analyst capacity within local authorities is often limited, reducing opportunities to proactively identify emerging risks, understand local trends and develop evidence-based responses.

134. Practitioners also note that online safety remains primarily a reserved matter. Whilst local authorities are often expected to respond to the impact of online harms within their communities, their ability to influence online platforms, remove harmful content or regulate online activity is limited.

135. Challenges are particularly acute in relation to children and young people. Although local authorities and schools may be able to apply controls to devices and networks within educational settings, their ability to influence online activity outside of those environments is far more limited. Practitioners frequently observe that young people's digital skills can exceed those of parents and carers, making oversight and intervention increasingly difficult.

136. The Wales Safer Communities Network supports local authorities through practitioner networks, training, information sharing and the dissemination of good practice, including activity relating to misinformation, disinformation, extremism, community cohesion and online harms.

137. The Wales Safer Communities Network is not aware of any consistent approach used by local authorities to identify concerning patterns of online behaviour, including

browsing activity or attempts to evade safeguards. This is an operational matter best addressed by individual local authorities and policing partners.

The utility of the Online Safety Act 2025

138. WLGA has not undertaken a formal assessment of the Online Safety Act and would not be able to comment on the effectiveness of its provisions from a regulatory perspective. However, through engagement with local authorities and safeguarding partners, there is a recurring concern that online harms continue to evolve rapidly and that children and young people may be exposed to harmful content, online communities and social influences that can contribute to the escalation of risk, including an interest in violence, long before concerns come to the attention of statutory services.

Topic 3: The effectiveness of current laws and systems for identifying, monitoring, and disrupting the activities of VFIs

The limits of the WLGA's ability to comment

139. The WLGA does not consider it can assess the adequacy of specific local authority powers, as this is primarily an operational matter. As evidenced throughout this statement, the WLGA's position is that local authorities already operate within a range of statutory safeguarding, wellbeing, community safety and public protection duties and powers which can assist in identifying, monitoring and responding to risks associated with violence fixated individuals.

140. These frameworks provide important mechanisms for assessing vulnerability, sharing information and coordinating multi-agency action, particularly where concerns arise in relation to children, adults at risk, community safety, youth justice, mental health, exploitation or wider public protection.

The role of professional awareness, advice, and governance in supplementing limited legislation

141. However, the current arrangements are not designed around violence fixation as a distinct category of risk, and there is no single nationally agreed local authority framework for identifying, assessing, monitoring or disrupting VFIs, particularly where

behaviour is not clearly linked to a terrorist ideology or does not meet existing thresholds for statutory intervention.

142. The WLGA therefore considers that the suitability and efficacy of existing duties and powers depend heavily on professional awareness, effective information sharing, access to specialist advice, clear multi-agency governance and sufficient capacity across services. While existing legal frameworks can support proportionate intervention in some cases, they are unlikely to provide a fully consistent or comprehensive response to VFIs without clearer national guidance, agreed referral and risk management pathways, specialist support and sustainable resourcing.

143. The WLGA would therefore support further development of national safeguarding and public protection arrangements to explicitly address VFIs, while recognising that responsibility for managing this risk cannot sit with local authorities alone and must be approached as a shared multi-agency responsibility, and that any new arrangements or duties would need to be supported by sufficient long-term resources and specialist interventions.

Additional powers and guidance

144. The Inquiry may wish to consider whether local authorities should be encouraged, or provided with clearer statutory guidance, to use Community Protection Notices where businesses persistently fail to manage the sale of bladed articles responsibly and their conduct contributes to ongoing community safety concerns. This could provide a complementary tool to criminal enforcement by requiring improvements to retail management practices designed to reduce the risk of unlawful knife sales.

Youth Justice Services and youth offending

145. In Wales, Youth Justice Services do not currently operate a distinct VFI management framework. Rather, risks associated with violence-fixated individuals are managed through existing youth justice, safeguarding and multi-agency public protection arrangements. This includes assessment, intervention and risk management undertaken in partnership with police, education, health, social care and safeguarding agencies.

146. The Welsh Government's Youth Justice Prevention Framework (published June 2025)

(Exhibit CLI/41 – **WLGA000037**: WG Prevention Framework - Supporting Youth Justice Services to prevent offending) is a Welsh Government guide to help agencies work together to stop children becoming involved in crime by providing early support and addressing the factors that increase the risk of offending. It discusses violence prevention, trauma-informed practice, adverse childhood experiences, safeguarding and multi-agency intervention, but does not contain specific VFI guidance or a VFI pathway.

147. The WLGA does not assess the effectiveness of individual Youth Justice Services in identifying behavioural or psychological indicators of fixation or violent intent, nor does it hold information on the quality or frequency of referrals. These are operational matters managed locally by Youth Justice Services and their partners.

148. The WLGA does not evaluate the effectiveness of Youth Justice Service interventions for Violence-Fixated Individuals (VFIs) or hold evidence on their impact on reducing the risk of violent offending. Responsibility for assessing risk, delivering interventions and monitoring outcomes rests with local services and relevant statutory agencies.

149. Youth Justice Services (Youth Offending Teams) in Wales are hosted by local authorities with their performance monitored through a combination of local governance arrangements including Youth Justice Management Boards, Youth Justice Board (YJB) oversight and inspection activity by HMI Probation.

150. Through its engagement with practitioners, the Wales Safer Communities Network is aware of ongoing concerns regarding the increasing complexity of young people presenting with multiple and overlapping needs, often requiring support from a range of agencies. Practitioners consistently emphasise the importance of prevention and early intervention and are supportive of approaches that seek to avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of children and young people.

151. Practitioners also report frustration (although not necessarily in relation to VFI cases specifically) where repeated interventions have failed to reduce risk and behaviour continues to escalate. In such circumstances, concerns are sometimes raised that the absence of more formal interventions or sanctions can leave practitioners, victims and communities without sufficient protection, whilst also failing to address the underlying needs and behaviours of the child or young person.

Topic 4: The sale and possession of offensive weapons and articles with a point or blade

The Community Safety perspective

152. The Wales Safer Communities Network's view is that significant legislative changes have been introduced in recent years, including measures within the Crime and Policing Act 2026 relating to offensive weapons, online sales and possession offences, alongside existing provisions under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and subsequent amendments (Offensive Weapons). Given the scale of recent legislative change, our priority would be to ensure the effective implementation, enforcement and evaluation of existing powers before considering whether further measures are necessary.

153. Through engagement with practitioners, the Network frequently hears that challenges are often less related to the availability of legislative powers and more closely linked to capacity, early identification, information sharing, safeguarding arrangements and access to appropriate interventions. As such, we would welcome continued investment in education, training and safeguarding measures within settings such as schools, social care and healthcare services and community-based organisations to support the identification and management of individuals who may present a risk of serious violence. We also welcome the provisions introduced through the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law), which strengthen preparedness and protective security arrangements within publicly accessible locations.

The Trading Standards Perspective

154. The prevention of harm from offensive weapons and bladed articles requires a whole-system approach involving legislation, enforcement, safeguarding, education, policing, public health and community safety partners. Any further measures should therefore be considered within this broader preventative framework, recognising the role of local government, particularly through Trading Standards, licensing and community safety functions.

155. While responsibility for offensive weapons legislation rests with the UK Government, there are opportunities to strengthen the systems that prevent children and vulnerable individuals from obtaining knives. The Inquiry provides an opportunity to consider whether existing arrangements provide sufficient protection in an increasingly complex

retail environment, particularly online. Online purchasing, third-party sellers and cross-border supply chains can present additional enforcement and investigative challenges.

156. One of the most significant areas for consideration is the regulation of knife sales through online platforms. Current arrangements can allow individuals to purchase bladed articles from third-party sellers, including overseas businesses that may not operate under the same regulatory expectations as UK-based retailers. The growth of online retailing has created challenges for age verification, enforcement and seller accountability, particularly where products are sold through third-party marketplaces or businesses based outside the UK. Consideration should be given to strengthening requirements on online marketplaces, including mandatory age verification before purchase and at delivery, improved seller verification, and requirements for businesses supplying knives to UK consumers to maintain a verifiable UK registration and address, enhanced responsibilities on online marketplaces and social media platforms facilitating sales, improved mechanisms for removing non-compliant listings. These measures would improve regulatory oversight and make enforcement action more practical.

157. However, it is also important to recognise the limitations of retail controls. Restrictions on sales can help reduce opportunities for unlawful acquisition, but they cannot address all routes through which individuals may gain access to bladed articles. Many incidents involve commonplace household knives that may already be readily available within domestic settings. This underlines the need for a broader prevention strategy that extends beyond retail regulation alone.

158. Trading Standards services have an important preventative role in restricting access to knives, but their capacity must be considered within the wider pressures facing regulatory services. Knife sales enforcement competes alongside a wide range of statutory responsibilities, including product safety, illicit tobacco, vaping, scams, animal health and consumer protection. A more strategic approach could include recognising Trading Standards as a contributor to violence prevention, supported by better intelligence sharing, stronger links with Community Safety Partnerships and closer working with police and licensing colleagues.

159. Improved coordination between agencies is particularly important. Information about emerging risks can sit across different parts of the public sector, including policing, Trading Standards, licensing, education, youth services, safeguarding and health

partners. Strengthening proportionate information sharing and joint risk assessment arrangements would support earlier identification of concerns and enable a more coordinated preventative response. Trading Standards services should be considered as part of this wider partnership approach rather than operating separately from community safety activity.

160. A further consideration is the concept of "designing out" opportunities for harm through changes to the retail environment. Local government has experience of using regulatory approaches to reduce risks associated with other age-restricted or harmful products. Similar thinking could be applied to bladed articles. Potential measures could include greater control over the display and accessibility of higher-risk knives, improved retailer practices around storage and sales, secure packaging arrangements, and voluntary retailer accreditation schemes that exceed minimum legal requirements.

161. Such measures would not eliminate the risk of determined individuals obtaining weapons, but they could reduce opportunities for impulsive acquisition, improve compliance and reinforce the principle that bladed articles are controlled products requiring responsible retailing.

162. Clarity is also needed in the legal definitions of knives, bladed products, bladed articles and articles with a blade or point. The current legislative framework uses overlapping terminology across different provisions, and case law has added further complexity for enforcement purposes. Decisions such as R v Deegan [1998] 2 Cr App R 121, R v Davies [1998] Crim LR 564 and Brooker v DPP [2005] EWHC 1132 (Admin) illustrate the practical difficulties that can arise when determining whether an article falls within scope, including where items that would not ordinarily be viewed by the public as weapons may nevertheless be treated as bladed articles. This can create uncertainty for businesses, consumers and enforcement authorities. Clear, workable and consistently applied definitions are therefore essential if any future scheme is to be enforceable, proportionate and capable of being applied consistently by Trading Standards and other agencies.

163. The Inquiry may therefore wish to consider whether the current balance of responsibilities, powers and resources is sufficient. The issue is not simply whether individual agencies have failed, but whether the overall system provides adequate prevention, intelligence, enforcement and accountability. Local government services such as Trading Standards form part of the preventative infrastructure available to

communities, but their contribution depends upon appropriate strategic recognition, effective partnership working and sufficient capacity to deliver proactive interventions.

164. A key lesson for consideration is that preventative services are often measured by harms that do not occur. From a local government perspective, ensuring that these preventative services have the capacity, resources and partnerships necessary to fulfil their role is therefore an important component of any long-term strategy aimed at maintaining effective Trading Standards and regulatory capacity. This should be seen as an investment in reducing future risk, even where success is difficult to measure through traditional enforcement outcomes. The WLGA therefore considers that any recommendations which place additional responsibilities on local authority services should be accompanied by appropriate resourcing and a clear understanding of delivery implications.

Improvements and other matters

165. The Network's overarching observation is that practitioners across Wales are managing increasingly complex individuals and risks at a time of significant resource pressure. Whatever future arrangements are developed for VFIs, they will require clear ownership, effective multi-agency governance, specialist intervention pathways and sustainable long-term investment.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings many 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: 7th August 2026

Annex : Exhibit Index

Index to the Witness Statement of DR CHRIS LLEWELYN

Exhibit No.	Inquiry reference No.	Document description
CLI/01	DHSC000046	Key Principals of Prevent
CLI/02	OFST000048	Key Principles of Prevent – FAQ
CLI/03	WLGA000002	2025.11.04 WASCSO Minutes
CLI/04	WLGA000003	Weapons in Schools Guidance
CLI/05	WLGA000004	WISES Parents Guide
CLI/06	WLGA000005	Keeping learners safe: The role of local authorities, governing bodies and proprietors of independent schools under the Education Act 2002
CLI/07	WLGA000006	All Wales Practice Guide - Safeguarding children from radicalisation
CLI/08	HOM000014	HO Prevent Duty Guidance
CLI/09	HOM000131	Prevent duty toolkit for local authorities
CLI/10	HOM000021	Channel duty guidance: Protecting people susceptible to radicalisation
CLI/11	WLGA000007	CT Policing - Understanding the signs of extremism
CLI/12	WLGA000008	MAPPA guidance June 2026
CLI/13	WLGA000009	NWCSB Practice Guidance - Professional curiosity
CLI/14	WLGA000010	WGSB Working with Uncooperative Individuals, carers and their families – Adults at risk
CLI/15	WLGA000011	WGSB Working with uncooperative families
CLI/16	WLGA000012	WG – information sharing to safeguard children and adults
CLI/17	WLGA000013	Safeguarding Procedures – Pointers for Practice: Seven Golden Rules for Information-Sharing
CLI/18	WLGA000014	National Independent Safeguarding Board - A Practitioner's Guide
CLI/19	WLGA000015	Flow diagram - What Type of Agreement is Required
CLI/20	WLGA000016	WASPI ISP template
CLI/21	WLGA000017	WASPI Information Reference Table
CLI/22	WLGA000018	WASPI DDA Template
CLI/23	WLGA000019	WASPI JCA Template
CLI/24	WLGA000020	WASPI Data Processing Agreement template
CLI/25	WLGA000021	Extended Child Practice Review – Gwynedd
CLI/26	WLGA000022	CYSUR Extended Child Practice

CLI/27	WLGA000023	CMWPAS Concise Adult Practice
CLI/28	WLGA000024	West Glamorgan Safeguarding Adults Board Concise Adult Practice Review
CLI/29	WLGA000025	Cwm Taf Single Unified Safeguarding Review
CLI/30	WLGA000026	Cardiff and Vale Safeguarding Adults Board
CLI/32	WLGA000027	Gwent Safeguarding Board Concise Adult Practice Review
CLI/32	WLGA000028	North Wales Safeguarding Children Board - Working with people with disguised compliance
CLI/33	WLGA000029	Disinformation & Information Threats and Responses – Post Session Guide
CLI/34	WLGA000030	Disinformation training session – FAQs
CLI/35	WLGA000031	Survey Results - WG Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses Learning Session
CLI/36	WLGA000032	Cyber Heroes: Intergenerational cyber security – Lesson plan
CLI/37	WLGA000033	Cyber Heroes: Intergenerational cyber security – Presentation
CLI/38	WLGA000034	Supporting your child when they're online - Leaflet
CLI/39	WLGA000035	Online safety support for the school community – Leaflet
CLI/40	WLGA000036	WG - Guidance to restrict mobile phones in schools announcement
CLI/41	WLGA000037	WG Prevention Framework - Supporting Youth Justice Services to prevent offending