

Witness Name: NICHOLAS HUNT

Exhibits: [NH/01 – NH/14]

Dated: 28/11/2025

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF NICHOLAS HUNT

I, Nicholas Hunt, Deputy Director of Firearms and Weapons Policy in the Public Safety Group (PSG) in the Home Office, will say as follows: -

INTRODUCTION

1. I make this statement further to my witness statement dated 8 October 2025 [NH/01 - HOM000202] and my oral evidence to the Southport inquiry of 14 October 2025.
2. I have been asked by the Inquiry to provide further evidence in relation to the topics set out below.
3. As with my previous statement, I have been provided with assistance from colleagues within the Home Office to provide this statement on behalf of the Home Office, as well as (where possible) my own direct knowledge.

A. Licensing/Registration of Knife Sellers

4. I have been asked to provide an update on the anticipated timeline for the Government's proposed consultation on a licensing or registration scheme for knife sellers.
5. To provide context to this consultation, as set out in Cathryn Ellsmore's first statement at paragraph 259 [NH/02 - HOM000078], a scheme for registering knife sellers was recommended by Commander Stephen Clayman in the Independent End to End Review

of Online Sales of Knives (commissioned by the Home Office and published on 19 February 2025) [NH/03 – HOM000160]. The review stated:

It is understood that there will be a mixed response from retailers who read about potential future registration requirements. Any registration fees would require full cost recovery from the local police force. It will no doubt increase upfront costs and bureaucracy associated with selling all knives and we would assume those costs will be passed onto the consumer, raising the costs for purchasing a knife. Those we have spoken to are broadly in favour of a registration or licensing scheme for retailers similar to firearms, but others have urged some learning from the introduction of licensing in Scotland. This should be considered for all knives and all devolved areas of the UK included [[NH/03 - HOM000160] (at page 84)].

6. In its response to the Clayman review, on 19 February 2025, the Government announced a number of measures including the intention to hold a consultation on such a registration scheme:

The government will also explore through a consultation later this year whether a registration scheme should be put in place for all online retailers selling knives so that only responsible sellers are able to sell knives [[NH/04 - HOM000125] (at page 2)].

7. The consultation is expected to be launched by the end of this year (or shortly afterwards in the new year), subject to agreement to a publication date within Government. I have asked that the Inquiry is updated if this anticipated timeline changes. The Home Office is planning on the basis that the consultation period will be 10 weeks in length. A link to the Government announcement and consultation paper will be shared with the Inquiry as soon as the consultation is launched. Following the consultation, the Home Office aims to consider the responses received and agree the Government response to the consultation within three months of the end of the consultation. However, this timing is subject to factors such as the number of responses received, agreement from Home Office Ministers, securing collective agreement to the response and agreeing a publication date within Government.
8. I have also been asked whether the consultation will include proposals for mandatory reporting of suspicious transactions. The consultation will comply with the Government's Consultation Principles 2018 as published on the gov.uk website [NH/05 [HOM000220]],

which include that it must be clear, concise and targeted, and part of an on-going process of engagement. Its focus will be the principles as to whether a licensing or registration scheme should be set up, and, if so, whether it ought to include knife importers (see section B below). It will seek views on the potential impacts of such a system on the public, businesses and importers. It will not be concerned with the specific conditions which would need to be fulfilled in order for a vendor to obtain or keep its licence to sell knives, and it does not include any consultation questions about possible conditions to be imposed through licensing, as that will need more detailed further work as set out in the paragraph below. The consultation paper does however refer consultees to the suggested conditions set out in the Clayman review **[[NH/03 - HOM000160]** (at page 49)) such as mandatory reporting of suspicious or bulk purchases, clear age verification livery on marketing material, complying with the criminal law on the sale and marketing of knives, and agreement to inspections and test purchases. The consultation paper also suggests possible conditions relating to bricks and mortar shops and how knives are displayed in such stores, to illustrate how the conditions underpinning a licensing scheme might work.

9. As a licensing scheme will require Ministerial decisions and both future primary and secondary legislation, the Home Office intends more detailed work and further targeted consultation to seek views on potential conditions to be applied to sellers through licensing in order to inform further decisions by the Government and any future consideration by Parliament. In devising the scheme, it is likely that the starting point will be the Clayman recommendations, but the Home Office will also be informed to an extent by the existing primary and secondary legislation used to support firearms licensing and the registration of firearms dealers, although there are significant differences between the two markets and therefore a limit to the insights that can be gained.
10. Although I have not been asked this specifically, it may be helpful to the Inquiry for me to consider what I envisage are the potential consequences of a breach of conditions of a knife seller licence. Although any final decision would be dependent on the answers to any consultation and subsequent legislation, I expect that a breach of a condition in the licence (likely subject to the civil 'balance of probabilities' standard of proof) could, depending on the gravity of the offence, be addressed by sanctions such as a warning at the bottom end of the scale, or the revocation of the licence nearer the top – if a licence were revoked the seller could no longer trade in knives. However, criminal prosecution may be available for the most serious breaches of a licence, depending on the facts of the case, as is the position now with firearms licensing.

11. I note that although the Home Office considered making failure to report suspicious transactions a criminal offence in the Crime and Policing Bill, the Home Office was concerned that there would be significant challenges in bringing prosecutions against retailers where the police and prosecutors would be required to prove to the criminal standard that a transaction was 'suspicious'. It was also considered that uncertainty over what amounted to 'suspicious' in this context might create significant issues for retailers and the police. If sellers were to be exposed to criminal sanctions for not reporting a transaction, they were entitled to clarity as to what would amount to 'suspicious' behaviour. The high volume of knife sales and the widespread use of knives as tools or implements rather than weapons distinguish them in this respect from firearms, or even poisonous substances, in relation to which it is often easier to determine what constitutes a suspicious purchase. The Bill therefore focuses on requiring the reporting of bulk online purchases of knives, and the reporting of suspicious transactions will be included in further consultation/s as set out above.

B. Cross-Border Importation of Knives

12. I have been asked to give an update on the progress of work relating to the control of cross-border importation of knives.

13. This was also an issue raised in the Clayman review **[[NH/03 - HOM000160]** (at page 13)):

Knife retailers have expressed concern around regulation and have pointed to importation as the biggest risk in knife supply. However, case studies have shown UK retailers being the source of knives involved in violent offences. A risk in this area will be businesses moving abroad and as such registration of knife dealers with subsequent offences for selling knives without registration may need to be accompanied by regulations covering the importation of knives. Some retailers would be in favour of importation licenses to that extent.

14. The Home Office will be consulting on the licensing of knife importers as part of the consultation for registration and licensing of knife sellers (as discussed in section A above).

15. The Home Office is also looking to improve the detection of illegal knives and offensive weapons at the border as recommended by Commander Clayman in his review **[[NH/03 - HOM000160]** (at page 19)), which explicitly recognised the complexity of this area and the

necessary involvement of a number of agencies and stakeholders **[NH/03 - HOM000160]** (at page 11)). His report highlighted the difficulties of developing a full picture of the importation of knives through online sales due both to the volume of such sales and to problems with the transparency of information about knife imports. In particular he noted that *“many knives fit into a tax bracket that leaves the possibility of importation through bulk imports”* **[NH/03 - HOM000160]** (at page 75)). This was a reference to tax relief under the Low Value Imports (LVI) routes: the Bulk Import Reduced Data Set (BIRDS) is a customs procedure which allows for the importation of multiple low value items (‘low value’ being defined as under £135) using a single customs declaration with reduced data. In April this year, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a review into the customs treatment of LVI **[NH/06 - HOM000214]**. The Home Office is working with HMRC and other partners across government on the next steps.

16. The Clayman review also recommended reviewing the training and awareness around prohibited knives for Border Force staff **[NH/03 - HOM000160]** (at page 19)). This is currently being progressed as the Home Office agrees that frontline staff in Border Force would benefit from clearer guidance and information on prohibited knives and offensive weapons. As a result, new pictorial guides have been created for fast and easy use by frontline Border Force staff and it is anticipated these will be available for use by the end of this year, with training sessions taking place in the course of 2026.

C. Regulation of Machetes

17. I have been asked to confirm whether a formal consultation on the regulation of machetes is planned, and if so, provide details of its intended scope and timing.
18. In the course of oral evidence given to the Inquiry, there was reference to a consultation on banning machetes (for example, in the oral evidence of Luke Bullock, day 15, 30 September 2025, page 133:5-9, and in my own evidence, day 23, 14 October 2025, page 131:22-132:6). This consultation took place in 2023: it began on 18 April 2023 and concluded on 6 June 2023. It may assist the Inquiry if I provide further information in relation to that consultation and the responses to it, as the Chair asked me to do in the course of my oral evidence (day 23, 14 October 2025, page 179:14-23).
19. The consultation questions are exhibited at **NH/07 [HOM000206]**, and the Government response is at **NH/08 [HOM000207]**.

20. Respondents to the consultation included businesses, charities, organisations working with children at risk, outdoor enthusiasts, collectors, gardening associations, museums and enforcement agencies **[NH/08 - HOM000207]** (at page 4, paragraph 10)].

21. In response to Question 2 of the consultation – whether respondents agreed with the proposal to ban ‘certain types of knives and machetes which we suggest have no practical use and seem to be designed to look menacing and suitable for combat’ – there was a majority who opposed that proposal. The consultation response noted that of the 2,443 respondents, 1,550 (63%) selected that they did not agree with the proposal. It stated **[NH/08 - HOM000207]** (at pages 7-8)]:

7. The most common reason provided for not supporting the proposal was that it would affect people’s legitimate need to use knives and machetes for work purposes and for leisure. Some respondents were concerned that they would not be able to use machetes in rural environments, where it would not be feasible or desirable to use an alternative, powered tool. Some other respondents were concerned that the ban would impact on the ability of outdoor enthusiasts to pursue activities where a machete is needed to clear a patch to set camp, etc.

8. Respondents were also uncertain of how effective this change would be in tackling knife crime and expressed the view that the government should focus its efforts on those who use knives as weapons, rather than on measures that will impact on the wider population.

9. A significant number of respondents also argued that the addition of these style of knives to the list of offensive weapons would be open to interpretation; therefore, they emphasised the strong need to be clear on the definitions and descriptions of the knives and machetes the government intends to ban.

10. Comments from those who responded ‘yes’ to this question included the view that there is little to no need for people to own the knives described in the consultation. Others were of the opinion that alternatives could be found and used.

22. Question 5 of the consultation stated, ‘We would like to understand whether and to what extent machetes and large outdoor knives may be needed currently in the UK.’ The response to the consultation noted that:

36. The government is not proposing to ban machetes that have legitimate uses for agricultural or other purposes. Therefore, we sought to better understand the full range of legitimate uses.

37. A total of 2,104 responses were received to this question.

*38. In summary, the following legitimate uses were highlighted: agriculture, forestry, camping, bushcraft, gardening, fishing, diving, shooting and conservation, clearing waterways and collecting special interest knives or antiques **[NH/08 - HOM000207]** (at pages 11-12).*

23. Concerns were raised, for example, by allotment associations about their urban-based members who used machetes on their allotments, and the increased cost and danger associated with alternative tools, such as chainsaws and billhooks.

24. Notwithstanding the majority of respondents who opposed the Government proposal, the Government proceeded to pass the ban on machetes of a particular menacing description (“zombie-style machetes”), as set out at paragraph 215 of Cathryn Ellsmore’s first statement **[NH/02 - HOM000078]**. I note that given the answers to the 2023 Consultation, it likely remains the case that a wholesale ban on machetes will face opposition from those who use machetes for a legitimate purpose in circumstances where they consider that they cannot easily be replaced by other tools, and this opposition to a complete ban is likely to be reflected in any future consideration of legislation in Parliament.

25. As well as proceeding with the ban on machetes of a certain description, following the 2023 consultation, the Government has sought to put in place a package of other legislation, in my understanding one of the intentions of this measure is to tackle, in a targeted manner, the possession of machetes in neighbourhoods where it is unlikely that they are intended to be used for legitimate purposes such as clearing bush, whilst allowing such legitimate use to continue in other more rural locations. For example:

- a) The effect of clause 27 of the Crime and Policing Bill, if passed, would be that possession of an otherwise lawful machete in private would be a criminal offence if it were proven that the possession was with the intent to use unlawful violence against another person; to cause another person to believe that unlawful violence will be used against them or anyone else; to cause serious

unlawful damage to property, or to enable another person to do any of the above.

- b) The effect of clause 29 of the Crime and Policing Bill would be to permit police officers to seize an otherwise lawful machete found on any premises (including domestic homes) if the officer has reasonable grounds for suspecting that the relevant article would be likely to be used in connection with unlawful violence (if it were not seized). Unlawful violence includes unlawful damage to property and a threat of unlawful violence (including of unlawful damage to property).

When authorities come to assess whether an individual may be intending to use a machete for unlawful violence (or to create the fear of such), a relevant factor will therefore inevitably be whether the possession is taking place in a town or city, by someone without any legitimate use for such, or (for example) by an individual in a rural location with a proven record of using such items for bushcraft.

- 26. The surrender scheme for zombie style machetes and knives which ran from 26 August to 23 September 2024 led to 47,795 knives, which included 19,180 Machetes being handed in during the 4-week period of the scheme [NH/09 - HOM000208]. Many of these will have been surrendered by retailers from their stock. Though knife surrender schemes are not the whole answer, this statistic may give an indication as to the impact of this scheme.
- 27. With regard to data in relation to the volume of sales of knives, the 2023 consultation is an example of where the Home Office specifically asked manufacturer/wholesaler/retailer respondents to identify how many non-culinary blades were sold by their organisation [NH/07 - HOM000206] (at page 27)]. The answers to that question were very limited as the questions were not answered by retailers (for example, it was deemed commercially sensitive data which they were reluctant to share this with the Home Office).
- 28. Although there are no current plans to reconsult on a wholesale ban on machetes, my colleagues and I have been following the evidence given to the Inquiry with care. The priority always remains public safety, but this has to be balanced with ensuring any new measures will be effective in reducing knife crime and regarded by the public and Parliament as a proportionate measure to take.

D. Other information which may assist the Inquiry.

Government guidance on children caught in possession of a knife.

29. The Government's manifesto included a commitment that '*every young person caught in possession of a knife will be referred to a Youth Offending Team and will receive a mandatory plan to prevent reoffending*'. The Government is working on new guidance, as mentioned at paragraph 270 of Cathryn Ellsmore's first statement [NH/02 - HOM000078], which will make it clear that the police should refer every case of child knife possession offences to a Youth Offending Team (YOT). We anticipate it will be published in the coming months and the Home Office will update the Inquiry as soon as it is able to do so regarding publication.

Other recommendations made by the Clayman Review of Online Sales of Knives

30. I have set out above how the Home Office is responding to the recommendations in Commander Clayman's review in respect of licensing or registration of knife sellers and controls on importation. Cathryn Ellsmore's statement identified how the Government is also legislating in the Crime and Policing Bill for stronger age verification controls, reporting of bulk online purchases of knives, to introduce requirements for technology companies to take action on illegal weapon content online, and making illegal sales offences indictable, which were recommended and supported in the Clayman review [[NH/02 - HOM000078] (paragraphs 255 - 265)].

31. The Home Office is also taking forward the other recommendations made, as I set out below, and looking further at the areas for exploration identified by the review, and where it did not make specific recommendations.

32. The review recommended exploring the concept of a 'prohibited person' for the purposes of selling and buying of knives. It is envisaged that the licence scheme upon which the Government is consulting could provide the mechanism for the police to deny a licence to sell or import bladed articles and offensive weapons to a person, where the police consider that the person should not be able to do so. Alongside this, the Home Office is also exploring whether and how to prohibit specified persons from buying or owning certain types of knives and offensive weapons.

33. The review also recommended improving data collection across Law Enforcement and the Criminal Justice System, including data on the types of knives used in offences. The Home Office is working with Commander Clayman and the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) to review ways of improving this data collection, including consulting with police

information management system leads and all forces to see where improvements can be made and how to bring about this systemic change. There is no date yet set for the completion of this project, as it is ongoing work and the Home Office is testing the views of all forces in England and Wales as to how they would achieve this and provide such data in a robust and regular form, and this will help inform by when this can be done.

34. In addition to working with police forces and others on knife type data collection, the new police coordination unit, currently being set up as a pilot, is looking to collect data pertaining to investigations and intelligence around online unlawful knife sales and bulk purchases, and this will form part of its ongoing work on which it will report to the NPCC and the Home Office. The new police unit is being set up to improve enforcement and action against knife crime in the online space, including unlawful weapons sites, as described at paragraph 266 of Cathryn Ellsmore's statement [NH/02 - HOM00078].

35. Key activities of the new police unit include instigating proactive investigations, taking action on referrals to social media companies for content removal, and intelligence-building using data. These efforts are expected to lead in the immediate future to better identification and more arrests of individuals involved in the unlawful sale of knives, improved crime data collection and analysis and closure of unlawful knife sales sites. Over the longer term, the unit is intended to disrupt illegal grey market activity, improve police and multi-agency coordination, and improve intelligence on unlawful online knife markets. If the measures in the Crime and Policing Bill, known as 'Ronan's Law', are passed into law by Parliament, the current Home Office plan is for the police unit will act as the coordination body for these measures and support police forces and trading standards authorities in taking enforcement action.

Enforcement of the Knives Act 1997

36. I referred in my oral evidence to the fact that the Clayman review identified the Knives Act offence as being 'challenging' to law enforcement (14 October 2025, day 23, page 149:9, and see the Clayman review at page 55 [NH/03 - HOM000160]). It may assist the Inquiry as background if I draw attention to the decision in *R v STC Limited* [2021] EWCA Crim 1237, in which the Court of Appeal considers the breadth of the offence under s1 of the Knives Act 1997.

37. I note that Commander Clayman concluded in his review that "*it is rare to find any listings that contravene UK legislation in terms of the Knives Act marketing offence with many*

choosing to omit words associated with combat from their websites” **[NH/03 - HOM000160]** (at page 54)]. Notwithstanding this, the new police unit is intended to identify sales contrary to s1 of the Knives Act 1997 to support their prosecution.

Further information on early intervention and prevention

38. The latest national evaluation of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) programme published this year **[NH/10 - HOM000209]** showed that the VRUs, in combination with additional hotspot police patrols, are reducing violence, with a clear impact on their target cohort of young people under 25. There were statistically significant reductions in hospital admissions for violence amongst this age group in the areas the programme operates.
39. In Cathryn Ellsmore's first statement at paragraph 256 **[NH/02 - HOM000078]**, it was noted that the Government had commissioned new multi-agency Young Futures Prevention Partnership Pilots. 51 of those Partnerships are now operational. These pilots operate at local authority level and bring together a combination of statutory and voluntary sector partners proactively to identify and refer into support those children (predominantly aged 10-17 years old) who are vulnerable to being drawn into crime and violence and who may currently be falling through the gaps between services.

Update on knife crime trends

40. On 23 October 2025, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published statistics on Crime in England and Wales for the year ending June 2025 **[NH/11 - HOM000210]**. This showed that police recorded knife-enabled offences (excluding possession) fell by 5% in the year ending June 2025, from 54,215 to 51,527 offences. The decrease in the last year was driven by a 6% reduction (to 22,141) in knife-enabled assault offences, and an 8% reduction (to 21,256 offences) in knife-enabled robbery **[NH/12 - HOM000215]**. There were 196 homicides committed with a knife or other sharp instrument in the year ending June 2025, an 18% fall compared with the previous year (239). Hospital admissions in England and Wales resulting from an assault with a sharp object among those aged under 25 were also down 8% and down 10% for all ages compared with the previous year **[NH/13 - HOM000216]**. Overall, police recorded violence showed a 2% fall, with homicide at the lowest level since 2014, declining 6% year on year.
41. On 15 October 2025, the Home Office published more recent Management Information **[NH/14 - HOM000211]** on knife-enabled robbery offences which showed recent falls in these offences for the seven forces who were on the Knife-Enabled Robbery Taskforce

established in October 2024. The latest provisional management information, for the 12 months to August 2025, shows that there were 14,474 knife enabled robbery offences recorded by the police in the seven force areas, a fall of 10% compared with the year to June 2024 baseline.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

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

Signature

Signed:

Dated 28 November 2025