

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

OPENING STATEMENT FOR PHASE 2 ON BEHALF OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

1. The Department for Education (“DfE” or “the department”) remains committed to assisting the Inquiry in understanding and learning from the tragic events of Southport. The department continues to be ready to provide any necessary support and information to aid this important process.
2. The department remains committed to taking action in relation to the recommendations made by Sir Adrian Fulford (“the Chair”) in his Phase 1 report. The department welcomes the Chair’s recognition of both the government’s strong response to his Phase 1 report, and of the significant activity that has taken place already to address the recommendations made. The department also welcomes the Inquiry’s intention to monitor the ongoing response, across government, to the Phase 1 report recommendations.

PHASE 2

3. DfE further welcomes the Chair’s commitment to identifying ‘practicable, readily enforceable and proportionate’ solutions in Phase 2, as set out in his Opening Remarks in the Phase 2 hearing on 8 July 2026.
4. In compliance with the Chair’s timetable for submission of witness evidence, the department has filed the second corporate witness statement of Kate Dixon, dated 28 July 2026.

5. The statement sets out the department's answers to the questions raised, and topics considered, in the Rule 9 request received. The department's evidence addresses four broad themes. Across each, the department recognises both the strengths of existing safeguarding systems and the need for further development, particularly in relation to children and young people who may present a risk of serious harm to others.

Chapter 1: Identifying and Managing Risk

6. DfE is responsible for the policy, accountability and regulatory framework for safeguarding within education and children's social care. Through statutory guidance such as *Keeping Children Safe in Education* ("KCSIE") and *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, the department sets expectations for how concerns about children should be identified, managed and referred. Current DfE guidance does not yet specifically refer to violence fixated individuals ("VFIs"). As Ms Dixon explains in her statement, VFI is a term used to describe a newly identified threat, but there is not yet a clear definition or understanding of the behaviours that may identify this group. The focus of education and care professionals is rightly on providing high-quality education, safeguarding and care, rather than assessing the risk of a child committing a crime. The department's role is to ensure that education, care and safeguarding professionals understand how to recognise concerns and engage appropriate agencies.
7. *KCSIE*, is the principal statutory safeguarding guidance for schools and colleges. The department reviews the guidance annually and updates it regularly to reflect emerging evidence, changes in safeguarding practice and relevant recommendations. The most recent version, published on 7 July 2026 and coming into force on 1 September 2026, includes a number of changes made in response to the Inquiry's Phase 1 report, as set out in the Government's response. The established annual review process will similarly provide an opportunity for the department to consider the evidence and recommendations arising from Phase 2 and, where appropriate, to incorporate further changes into subsequent versions of *KCSIE*.
8. The department also regularly reviews *Working Together to Safeguard Children*. Following Phase 1 of the Inquiry, the department reviewed and strengthened its safeguarding guidance. The department is considering the responses to a

consultation on proposed revisions to *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026* and the *Children's Social Care National Framework 2026* that ran from 22 June 2026 to 4 September 2026, and anticipates publishing revised versions in spring 2027.

The consultation included consideration of how the safeguarding system can better identify children who may pose a risk of harm to others, including those at risk of extreme violence. The department's continuing review of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* will provide a corresponding opportunity to consider the evidence and recommendations arising from Phase 2 and to make any further changes considered appropriate.

9. Further developments include a new statutory information-sharing duty, to apply from September 2026 in conjunction with new statutory guidance; a Single Unique Identifier to improve data linking and identity management; and information standards and a code of practice to improve the way data is stored and shared.
10. The department accepts that further work is needed to improve identification, assessment and management of risk. It notes in this regard the August 2026 report of the Children's Commissioner: '*Children referred to the Prevent programme*'. The department welcomes and acknowledges the findings and recommendations in that report, which will inform the department's ongoing work. It is anticipated that it will also inform the Inquiry's further consideration of issues relating to the identification and management of risk. The department will continue to support the Inquiry's consideration of these issues and contribute to cross-government work to develop a better understanding of the VFI cohort, including relevant behaviours, effective interventions and clearer responsibility within the system.

Chapter 2: The Role of the Online Environment

11. DfE is responsible for ensuring that schools and colleges safeguard children from online harms while they are in educational settings. Through statutory guidance and national standards, it sets expectations for filtering, monitoring and online safety arrangements in schools and colleges. The department also supports schools in building resilience to harmful and extremist content.
12. Schools are required to implement filtering and monitoring systems in accordance with the department's core standards. The department is working alongside the

Home Office to strengthen the consistency and safeguarding application of filtering and monitoring arrangements following Lord Anderson's review.

13. Updated guidance has reinforced the expectation that schools should be mobile phone-free environments during the school day. Additional support is being provided through Educate Against Hate resources, national webinars and evidence-based violence prevention tools. The department has contributed to wider government work on children's screen use and online safety beyond the school environment.
14. The department recognises both the significance of the online environment, and the limits of what education settings alone can achieve. Education settings may provide information about individual pupils of concern, but they are not generally best placed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which online disinhibition, anonymity or harmful content platforms may contribute to escalation in the risk of violence. The department will continue to work with relevant government partners, regulators and the Inquiry to better understand the relationship between online activity, harmful content and violence risk.

Chapter 3: Knives and Bladed Articles

15. DfE provides the policy framework governing behaviour, safeguarding, searching, screening, confiscation, suspension and exclusion in schools. It supports schools in preventing serious violence and responding appropriately when incidents occur. Responsibility for policing and crime recording rests with police forces and the Home Office.
16. The department has issued guidance on searching, screening and confiscation of prohibited items, including knives and bladed articles.
17. Relevant work includes: new violence prevention resources being developed through a Preventing and Responding to Violence guidance hub; work with the Youth Endowment Fund to strengthen schools' prevention activity; the Safety in and Around Schools Partnership programme, which is providing targeted support in areas most affected by knife crime; new data collection arrangements from September 2026, which will provide a more detailed national picture of incidents involving weapons that lead to suspension or exclusion; and research and monitoring activity to improve understanding of violence and knife-related risks affecting children.

18. The department remains committed to improving schools' ability to prevent and respond to serious violence. It will continue to strengthen evidence, improve partnerships and provide assistance to the Inquiry as required.

Chapter 4: Future Policy Considerations

19. DfE considers that no single existing system currently provides a complete framework for identifying and managing VFIs. The department also recognises that there is currently a lack of evidence-based approaches to effective intervention with VFIs. Whilst identification and flagging of these individuals is clearly important, the department notes that without successful models for intervention, the effectiveness of increased identification will be limited.
20. Education and children's social care can make important contributions to identification and support but are not designed to lead criminal risk assessment and management. Greater clarity is required regarding responsibility, ownership of cases and effective interventions.
21. The department is actively participating in cross-government work to develop understanding of violence-fixated individuals. This includes consideration of behavioural indicators, intervention models, information sharing and multi-agency arrangements.
22. The department welcomes the Inquiry's examination of these complex issues. It will continue to engage openly with the Inquiry's work and carefully consider any recommendations that emerge. The department remains committed to ensuring that education and safeguarding systems play their full part within an effective multi-agency response to protecting the public and preventing serious harm.
23. The department is conscious of the need for the voices of children to be heard, and of the importance of considering the impact on children generally of any measures recommended in Phase 2. The department has a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. When formulating recommendations, the department invites the Chair to consider the impact of his recommendations on children's rights and their wider wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

24. As set out at the close of Phase 1 - the Department for Education remains committed to learning from the tragic events of 29 July 2024 in the interests of doing everything reasonably possible to prevent anything similar happening in future.

25. Those were not, and are not, empty words. The department has provided evidence in response to the Inquiry's Rule 9 request and has set out the work undertaken, ongoing and proposed, in response to the issues raised in Phase 1. DfE will continue to assist the Inquiry and support its important work in Phase 2.

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