

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

WRITTEN OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT

Introduction

1. As we work with the Inquiry in this critical second Phase, we never lose sight of the devastating loss of Alice da Silva Aguiar, Bebe King and Elsie Dot Stancombe, their families and all the survivors. As the Home Secretary has made clear, the Government is committed to tackling both the root causes of such an unspeakable act of evil, and strengthening our systems to identify and manage the risks posed by non-ideological extreme violence (NIEV) because we must do all we can to protect the public and prevent anything like this ever happening again.
2. This is a cross cutting, complex and challenging commitment. Change is urgent but it must be effective and deliverable, both at a systems level and by practitioners on the ground. Phase 1's evidence, conclusions and recommendations have already been instrumental to the work the Government is progressing. The work of Phase 2 - with its programme of seminars, case studies, expert evidence and witness evidence - will be of central importance in both the framing of and the decisions Ministers will soon be asked to make.
3. It follows that the Home Secretary does not, by this Opening Statement, seek to advance even preliminary submissions on the Chair's findings or recommendations. The Home Office will review the disclosure and follow the evidence closely over the coming months, and in turn ensure the Inquiry is updated on progress that is made by the relevant policy teams. It does not repeat the contents of the Home Secretary's Phase 1 Opening or Closing Statements but provides an overview of some of the key matters addressed in the Home Office witness statements provided for Phase 2.

Home Office Phase 2 evidence

4. Topics 1 to 3 of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference are addressed primarily in the corporate witness statements of Jonathan Emmett, Director of Counter-Terrorism at the Home Office¹. Topic 4 is primarily addressed in the corporate witness statements of Nicholas Hunt, Deputy Director and Head of Firearms and Weapons Policy Unit². Some limited closed evidence has been provided on discrete issues at the request of the Inquiry. In its witness evidence and disclosure, the Home Office has sought to ensure full candour and transparency with the Inquiry, and supports the Inquiry's commitment to, as far as possible, the principles of open justice.
5. The Home Secretary recognises that although Phase 2 is forward looking, and therefore government decision making between the attack and the present day is not of itself under investigation, it is necessary for the Inquiry to understand the work that has already been done in the Home Office and other departments, the work that is in progress, and the department's current views on the future direction of key policy areas. It is also, we agree³, necessary for the Inquiry to understand all sides of a debate where teams or departments have different views or perspectives on next steps relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. Accordingly, the witness statements were prepared with a view to providing a comprehensive overview of the completed and ongoing policy work and the key themes that have emerged.
6. Given the demanding timescales under which the Chair is operating, witness statements have necessarily been prepared under considerable pressures of time and policy development has continued and will continue as the Inquiry progresses. The Home Office will provide briefings to the Inquiry over the coming months to advise of updates or developments relevant to the matters under investigation.

¹ Jonathan Emmett, Phase 2: first witness statement [HOM000964]; second witness statement (dated 7 September 2026).

² Phase 1: First witness statement [HOM000202], second witness statement [HOM000221] and oral evidence [DAY 23/115/18-182/11]. Phase 2: first witness statement (dated 7 August 2026).

³ Southport Inquiry – Chair's Ruling on Restriction Orders dated 14 September 2026, for example at paragraph 37.

Topic 1: adequacy of existing arrangements in England and Wales for managing the risk from VFIs [in the Home Office's current terminology, individuals who pose a risk of NIEV]

Definition of the harm we seek to prevent / the gap

7. A significant aspect of the work that has been undertaken since the attack has involved defining the harm we are seeking to prevent that is not managed by existing systems. Whilst this may sound like a simple step, it is a crucial one because – as was evident from the Inquiry's opening seminar – definitional clarity must underpin the processes and systems that are put in place.
8. As Mr Emmett's witness statement explains⁴, although the term "Violence Fixated Individual" (VFI) has been used in policy development work until recently, thinking has evolved and developed since the initial categorisation of VFIs as the risk group was first proposed, and it does not accurately reflect the Home Office's latest understanding of the threat. There is consensus across government and policing analytical and assessment bodies that violence fascination is more appropriately understood as a behavioural indicator or risk factor (although not of itself a reliable indicator of risk mobilising), which can be present in both ideological and non-ideological contexts, rather than a stand-alone category of person or offender cohort.
9. The term 'Non-Ideological Extreme Violence' (NIEV) is now in use⁵ across the Home Office to describe the threat we are working to address. The working policy definition of NIEV is 'the use or threat of extreme violence, not driven by a clear ideological purpose, which is communicative in nature and intended to shock, intimidate or outrage the public or a section of the public'⁶. The intention to shock, intimidate or outrage the public or a section of the public (that is an audience beyond the immediate victims) can be explicit (stated intent) or implicit (due to nature of target(s) of violence).

⁴ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §§7, 153 – 156 [HOM000964].

⁵ The purpose of the definition is to provide a shared conceptual understanding to support the development of a coherent policy response.

⁶ Whilst the Home Office has given careful consideration to the Phase 2 seminar expert evidence, the proposed formulation of Non-Ideological Violent Extremism (NIVE) has not been adopted because the term 'extremism' is, under the Government's definition, inherently ideological in nature.

10. The Home Office recognises that, as touched upon by a number of the seminar witnesses, distinguishing between NIEV risk and terrorist risk cases will not always be easy, particularly in the early stages of risk identification⁷. The Key Principles of Prevent, first circulated to Prevent networks in September 2025 and published in February 2026, emphasised that a clear identifiable ideology is not necessary to make a Prevent referral⁸. In some cases the distinction between NIEV risk and terrorist risk may remain difficult to assess; even following an attack, it is not always straightforward to determine if it was or was not for the purposes of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause.
11. Whilst we await the Inquiry's recommendations and, ultimately, ministerial decisions on options to tackle the problem of people being radicalised to extreme violence, the Home Office is preparing Interim NIEV Guidance to be shared with frontline professionals in October⁹. Its objectives are to assist frontline professionals to understand what NIEV is and what the risk factors might be, make clear when a referral should be made to Prevent and, if Prevent is not appropriate, identify the other routes that might be available. The Interim Guidance, together with the Key Principles of Prevent and the learning and recommendations from the Below Thresholds pilot¹⁰, should serve to further mitigate the risk of dangerous individuals like AR falling through the gaps because they are not considered to pose a terrorist risk whilst long term options are under consideration.

Key themes

12. Over the course of 2025 and 2026 there was a cross-government effort to develop VFI (now NIEV) policy, a narrative of which is provided in Section D of Mr Emmett's witness statement. In addition to definitional challenges, a number of key questions and themes emerged from that work. For many of these, lack of data is a common and important thread:

⁷ For example, as touched upon by seminar witnesses Lord Anderson [DAY 2/8/1-10/2; 18/12-19; 31/1-4], Jonathan Hall KC [DAY 2/45/20-46/8], Dr Paul Betts [DAY 2/87/2-88/5].

⁸ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §319 [HOM000964].

⁹ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §§320-321, 351-352 [HOM000964].

¹⁰ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §§349 – 350 [HOM000964].

- a. Risk factors and risk prediction: whilst there are a number of identified potential risk factors, behaviours, characteristics and drivers of NIEV risk, they do not easily lend themselves to predictive models for behaviour.
- b. Size of the cohort: there is not sufficient data available to enable a well-informed estimate of the number of individuals who pose a risk of NIEV.
- c. Relationship between mental health, neurodiversity (MHND) and risk: again, whilst the evidence basis for the interplay between MHND and NIEV risk is limited, there does appear to be a raised prevalence in the NIEV cohort of MHND conditions. Recent academic research emphasises that certain neurodivergent traits contextualise rather than cause a person's vulnerability to extremist involvement, and identifies particular challenges in identifying whether certain common behaviours of neurodivergent individuals are in fact relevant to risk. Operationally, there remains significant practitioner uncertainty about how MHND should be factored into risk assessments, and concerns about the length of waiting lists for assessment and treatment which have practical implications for case management of risk.
- d. Effectiveness of interventions to prevent NIEV: There is no clear evidence-based framework for what interventions reduce NIEV / violence fascination risk. The task of assessing success of interventions is inherently difficult and whilst in Prevent there is now a widely understood or agreed approach to changing behaviour or measuring impact over time, that is not the case for NIEV (although a mixture of anecdotal, clinical and emerging empirical insights suggest that some existing interventions can be effective).
- e. Limitations of powers to require engagement or impose interventions: in the Prevent context, individuals who have declined to engage with Channel but whose risk remains cannot be compelled to engage with a specific intervention.
- f. Data and information sharing: our ability to identify across relevant sectors NIEV risk in casework, and associated risk factors, characteristics, behaviours or to assess the utility of interventions, is inhibited by issues with data sharing and data

synthesis across central and local government and public services. Those include cultural issues and technical / practical barriers.

- g. Geographic variation: there is significant variation both at a structural and operational level in the frameworks and practices that may play a role in mitigation of the NIEV risk in different English regions and Devolved Nations. That is not an inherent weakness but requires consideration as clear frameworks and standards that are required for consistent practice will need to allow flexibility for practitioners to work with local resources and structures, including in areas of devolved competency.
- h. Law enforcement challenges: NIEV poses significant challenges to Counter-Terrorism Policing (CTP) and operational policing generally, arising from various factors including the pressure on the system, the particular detection difficulties for planned acts of NIEV and the limits of existing civil orders which are not specifically targeted at the NIEV cohort.

NIEV policy responsibility

13. The Home Office's areas of policy and strategic responsibility of relevance to the matters under investigation, including Prevent, offensive weapons, online harms and policing, were addressed in the Home Secretary's Opening for Phase 1, and an overview is provided in Mr Emmett's Phase 2 witness statement¹¹.

14. In respect of NIEV:

- a. Overall NIEV policy leadership sits in the Counter-Terrorism (CT) Directorate of the Home Office. The reason for this is primarily because the CT Directorate holds significant experience in system leadership to tackling serious public protection risk. Further, the Prevent Delivery Unit (which sits in the CT Directorate) has strong experience of and competence in multi-agency risk management and safeguarding policy, both central to managing the NIEV risk.

¹¹ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §§6-38 [HOM000964].

- b. Whilst policy leadership sits with the Home Office, other departments and operational partners have responsibility for and lead / will lead changes on key areas. The landscape is complex, and there are overlapping, and sometimes competing priorities to consider and navigate at each stage, as well as differences of emphasis (in particular as between public protection and safeguarding) that run through much of the work.
- c. The Home Secretary created the NIEV Taskforce in April 2026. The Taskforce is led by the Home Office and brings together departments and operational partners with responsibilities in relation to prevention, online safety, safeguarding, health and social care, policing and criminal justice. Ultimately its role – having reflected on the Inquiry’s evidence, findings and recommendations - will be to provide effective and proportionate options and recommendations for decision to Ministers. The Taskforce comprises a Steering Board and a strategic delivery board, supported by five thematic Working Groups and a Practitioner Advisory Group.
- d. The Taskforce secretariat and policy development functions are provided by the NIEV Team, which is also responsible for tracking delivery of the Inquiry’s Phase 1 recommendations and coordinating the Home Office’s evidence and input to Phase 2 of the Inquiry. The NIEV Team sits within the Prevent Delivery Unit to allow it to learn from policies and approaches taken to tackle the terrorist threat, explore in detail how any approach to tackling NIEV would integrate with the Prevent system, and understand the operational impact NIEV is currently having on the CT system.

Potential frameworks for addressing NIEV

- 15. When looking to manage individuals who pose a public protection risk, there are degrees of statutory and non-statutory frameworks that can exist, ranging from guidance only (e.g. the non-statutory framework that sits behind Violence Reduction Units), through to a statutory duty with leeway on how this is implemented at the local level (e.g. Community Safety Partnerships and MAPPA) to more prescribed statutory frameworks with a national case management capability and ongoing business assurance and performance management (e.g. Prevent).

16. There is a range of existing frameworks, services and interventions which are used to intervene with and support individuals with risk factors that may lead to NIEV behaviour. They vary in their design, the nature of the service they deliver and the safeguarding or public safety risks they address. None is precisely focused on violence fascination or NIEV risk¹². Prior to creation of the NIEV Taskforce and NIEV Team, the Home Office conducted a scoping exercise that identified – on a very preliminary basis - the pros and cons of utilising or adapting these existing options¹³. A more detailed review into viable multi-agency options for managing the NIEV risk is now being conducted by the NIEV Team. Separately, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is leading a review into youth justice devolution, in conjunction with the Home Office and Department for Education (DfE). This review will also consider the role of crime prevention and safeguarding and the multi-agency partnerships which deliver early-intervention. The review will determine how the wider system can be rationalised, including through the development of an expanded role for strategic authorities as part of the Government's 'rewiring the state' agenda.

17. Whilst we are not at the stage where government has a clear view on what system or combination of systems would be the most suitable, effective and deliver value for money¹⁴ to manage the risk of NIEV, in Section H¹⁵ of his statement Mr Emmett sets out the key, although not exhaustive, elements of a system approach:

- 1) Support to frontline professionals to identify NIEV risk – as they would other public protection or safeguarding risks.
- 2) A way of raising a concern to an agency or multi-agency structure that can take action to provide support to an individual and manage the NIEV risk.
- 3) A way of assessing whether someone does pose a risk of NIEV or is being drawn in to NIEV, and what support or intervention is required to reduce this risk.

¹² Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §73 [HOM000964].

¹³ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §379 [HOM000964].

¹⁴ HM Treasury [Guidance: The Green Book \(2026\)](#).

¹⁵ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §376 [HOM000964].

- 4) An appropriate level of management for individual cases appropriate to the risk, to enable the exchange of information between relevant parties and appropriate actions and mitigations to be identified.
- 5) Suitable support and intervention options, which would include multi-agency support (based on the likely complex and varying needs of each individual), plus specialist interventions which may not be readily accessible at the local level.
- 6) Clear consideration of online elements, including how to identify people online who are at risk, considering someone's online behaviour and interactions when assessing risk, and having sufficient understanding of the online information environment to deploy the right support and interventions to manage the NIEV risk linked to an individual.
- 7) Appropriate governance, management and performance oversight consummate to the risk being managed.
- 8) A culture that prizes shared risk ownership and management over the transfer of risk between organisations

18. In his statement Mr Emmett expands on these elements and some of the options within them and the learning from the evolution (now over 20 years) of Prevent.¹⁶ Those considerations are not repeated in this Opening Statement, but it is important to highlight one observation Mr Emmett makes, namely that placing Channel on a statutory footing has, in the Home Office's assessment, been essential to its effective delivery.

19. As Counsel to the Inquiry recognised in opening Phase 2 on 8 July 2026, the question of whether Prevent is the best vehicle to tackle these cases is fundamental, and the inevitable starting point. Mr Emmett's witness statement sets out in significant detail the measures that have already been implemented or are being developed that are relevant to managing violence fascination risk (§§316 – 358 [HOM000964]). These changes and prospective changes – whilst relevant to NIEV risk – do not provide a framework which will fill the

¹⁶ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §§388-410 [HOM000964].

gap which the Inquiry is asked to consider and make recommendations on. In the Home Office's assessment, if government were to expand Prevent's remit so that it becomes the default route for NIEV risk, we consider that legislative change to the scope of Prevent would likely be required.¹⁷

20. Drawing the threads together, there are three principal factors – over and above the obvious point that Channel is an existing, mature, multi-agency case management environment – that warrant looking carefully at expansion of Prevent:

- a. Prevent accepts referrals where there is no clear ideology and manages, through Channel, cases where violence fascination is a risk factor for individuals as long as there is a reasonable belief (pursuant to the statutory threshold under s.36 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA)) they are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, and will continue to do so. Whatever system is ultimately adopted to manage the NIEV risk cohort, Prevent will (i) continue to assess referrals where ideology is unclear and violence fascination is a risk factor, and (ii) manage the risk posed by violence fascinated individuals where there is a reasonable belief they are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. As already noted, that assessment – and particularly the ideological component – is not always straightforward and can take some time. Practically, this means that if NIEV is dealt with under a separate framework there will be referrals where it is unclear if they should be assessed and managed in Prevent or the NIEV framework, and there will also be adopted cases where the decision as to whether there is terrorist risk or NIEV risk changes as more information becomes available.
- b. The Channel programme designs support plans and offers interventions for individuals for whom violence fascination is a risk factor¹⁸. There is likely to be considerable crossover between the support plans and interventions for some terrorist risk cases and NIEV risk cases.

¹⁷ The Government has accepted the recommendation of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation (IRTL) Jonathan Hall KC, to retain the existing definition of terrorism for the reasons he gives. (Independent Review on Classification of Extreme Violence used in the Southport Act on 29 July 2024 [HOM000542]). There are no plans to revisit the Government's decision on this issue.

¹⁸ Mr Emmett's witness statement addresses the recent and ongoing intervention pilot activity that may be relevant to cases where ideology is unclear and / or where there are violence fascination concerns - §§338 – 341 [HOM000964].

- c. As Jonathan Hall KC observed, it is important that, in the (entirely appropriate) focus on multi-agency arrangements, we do not lose sight of the need for the most qualified professionals to take responsibility for public protection, which will generally be the police¹⁹. While this is currently CTP in the Prevent context, other areas of policing have expertise in violence reduction, and could play a role in NIEV cases.

21. However, as Mr Emmett recognises, expanding Prevent's remit would require careful consideration to ensure clarity of purpose, proportionality, and the right fit with existing safeguarding and public protection frameworks. The Home Office recognises there are important questions over whether the stigma of a referral to CTP has an impact on the referrals that are made and the engagement of the subject / parents when they are adopted²⁰. Such a change would also be subject to capacity and resourcing considerations²¹ which are of particular importance given the priority which the public rightly place on counter-terrorism measures.

22. In the Home Office's assessment there will be significant overlap between the Inquiry's exploration of: (i) existing safeguarding structures that might either already play a role in managing NIEV risk (most likely in the early intervention stages) or be expanded, with an additional focus given to public protection to manage the NIEV risk; (ii) comparator prevention models in different jurisdictions and; (iii) the principle and design of a 'Big Front Door' as proposed by Lord Anderson and others. In tandem with its own ongoing review of multi-agency structures and the work of the NIEV Taskforce the Home Office will closely follow the evidence provided to the Inquiry about these matters.

23. It is helpful to set out what the Home Office understands the central elements of the Big Front Door proposal to comprise:

¹⁹ §5.17, Independent Review on Classification of Extreme Violence used in the Southport Act on 29 July 2024 [HOM000542].

²⁰ See, for example: Lord Anderson Independent Report 'Lessons for Prevent' at §5.36(d) [HOM000128]; Seminar 2, 9 September 2026 [DAY 2 182/19 – 183/4].

²¹ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §383(4) [HOM000964]; DAC Victoria Evans third witness statement §§49, 61-63 [CTP000409].

- a. Replacing the current requirement for frontline professionals to direct referrals to a variety of different agencies or multi-agency groups with a requirement to direct referrals, irrespective of the type of concern, to a single triage function which could assess against a range of risk factors and refer onwards to a suitable specialist intervention pathway.
- b. Multi-agency risk management of particular sets of risk (for example relating to: the risk of abuse in the home, the potential to become involved in criminality, terrorism etc) brigaded around a series of special intervention pathways along the Prevent and Channel model.
- c. Capability to manage the onward transfer of individual cases within and between these special pathways according to the assessment of risk at a particular point, thus ensuring the right interventions were available for the right person at the right door.

24. As Mr Emmett explains, the NIEV Taskforce is progressing its consideration and testing of this very significant proposal and, whilst it undoubtedly presents some considerable challenges, the Home Office does not rule out a proposition for Ministers which draws on some or indeed all of these elements to a greater or lesser extent.²²

Topic 2: The role of the internet and social media in influencing and enabling VFIs to prepare and carry out violent attacks

25. Incidents of what is now being defined as NIEV pre-dated the internet, but it is clearly the case that the internet and social media play a significant role in influencing and enabling NIEV offenders to prepare and carry out violent attacks. The precise nature of that role is, however, complex and highly individualised.

26. The Home Office has endeavoured to give an overview of its current understanding of these issues under the following sub-topics, all of which are discussed in more detail in Mr Emmett's statement²³:

²² Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §387 [HOM000964].

²³ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement at §§200-226 [HOM000964].

- a. **Extreme Violence Content (EVC):** There is a huge volume of material which depicts real-world acts of violence and resulting injuries against humans or animals, clearly and in graphic detail, available online. Consumption of EVC has become more mainstream, including on platforms such as Instagram, where posts sharing EVC and gore material have millions of views. Bespoke platforms for EVC, often referred to as ‘gore websites’, also exist to share particularly graphic EVC, often with little or no safeguards or access requirements. While the role of EVC in driving, motivating or encouraging violent acts is unclear, the prominent role of gore in several recent NIEV cases suggests a connection. These individuals show a persistent, intense fixation with violent ideation or violent acts, often accompanied by obsessive rumination, emotional investment, or fantasising about committing violence. The ability of susceptible individuals to access, create and share this material, and the potential to reinforce fixated behaviours, has become immeasurably easier due to the internet and social media.
- b. **Online platforms and communities:** Online platforms, algorithms, design features, recommendations, systems anonymity and niche online communities may contribute to fixation, escalation and attack planning.
 - i. Recommender systems may drive online users towards increasingly extreme content that reinforces their inferred interests, through at least three common features and design choices: (i) algorithms that push more of the same or similar content to users to what have actively sought out; (ii) algorithms that push more extreme or intense versions of those forms of content; (iii) algorithms that push to users content that is not related to what they have sought out at all. Users can be fed increasingly extreme content (due to its tendency to be more engaging) without the need actively to seek it out and further research is needed to understand the role of these dynamics in contributing to escalation of harms or violent mobilisation.
 - ii. Violent online communities likely mobilise individuals to violence through offering powerful solution-oriented frames for individual-level grievances and unmet needs. Prominent online subcultures that have been associated with offline violence in the last 10 years including violent misogynistic spaces, school massacre fandoms and coercive online networks. The influence of these online communities has been made explicit in the manifestos, diaries and attack methodologies of some mass violence perpetrators who signal their desire to

be memorialised and celebrated by their subcultural ingroup. In these cases, violence appears to be driven by an individualised desire for notoriety rather than in pursuit of any ideological goal. Risks emerge not just from the consumption and sharing of EVC online, but its aestheticisation, commodification and gamification within violent online ecologies which can shape and incentivise harmful behaviours. This is a particular feature of some sadistic and coercive online networks where the suffering of victims is turned into content which can be traded for other content or for status within the social network.

- c. **Pathways from online activity to real-world harm:** Existing understanding of pathways is orientated primarily towards terrorism and research specific to the NIEV cohort, both internal government research and external academic, is limited and still in progress. A key principle within terrorism research is *equifinality* - the idea that there are multiple pathways to common outcomes such as terrorism or other forms of mass violence – and so online activity is highly likely to play different roles in different cases. Some attackers may be heavily embedded in online subcultures, others may be passive 'lurkers', still others may arrive at their attack plan independently of any online influence, drawing instead on previous attackers documented through mainstream media. However, in some cases, online activity can more directly drive real-world harms. The 'Com' networks, for example, incentivise participants to engage in real-world harms ranging from online extortion to encouraging suicide and livestreaming murder. In this subculture providing such extreme content is often required for group membership and to remain active within groups. The Home Office is currently engaging in analysis of potential online indicators of escalation towards violence in the real world and will share with the Inquiry further evidence or data as it becomes available.

- 27. The Preventing Radicalisation Online (PRO) team within the Home Office works to prevent individuals from becoming radicalised into terrorism, by reducing the availability and accessibility of radicalising content, reducing permissive spaces for terrorist and extremist activity, and identifying individuals susceptible to radicalising narratives in order for the appropriate support to be provided. This work has developed over several years, through phases of engaging with industry and setting the overall legal framework, then working with the regulator to support them in implementing that framework, preparing

iterative improvements to the system, and then more specific projects and measures targeting individuals or particular problems.

28. In relation to terrorism, the Home Office does not consider the current system is sufficient; on the contrary there remains much to do, and the picture is always evolving. However, much has been learned and much thinking developed through this work. While PRO's efforts are focussed on terrorism, the Home Office assesses that similar activities would also go some way to addressing the NIEV risk online. For that reason, Mr Emmett's statement sets out the current work of PRO in some detail²⁴, and the insights of the Inquiry and witnesses being called in Phase 2 on the extent to which this could be applied (and how it might be adapted) to NIEV are very much welcomed.

Topic 3: The effectiveness of current laws and systems for identifying, monitoring and disrupting the activities of VFIs online and reducing the harm caused by online spaces which promote extreme violence.

29. Since July 2024, the overall approach of the Government has been to implement the Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA) as the foundational regulatory regime, whilst in parallel testing whether additional criminal justice, enforcement or system-level interventions are also required to address harms not adequately mitigated by the OSA alone. The OSA gives Ofcom powers to regulate internet services and places new duties on social media companies and search services to implement proportionate "systems and processes" to reduce risks that services are used for illegal activity and to takedown illegal content.
30. However, the OSA does this by defining illegal content by reference to specified offences found in other legislation. The Government is therefore taking action to address potential gaps where particular content, currently not covered by existing criminal offences, is assessed to be causing or inspiring real-world harm. This includes certain types of EVC, including material known to have been consumed by the Southport attacker, which would not currently be captured by any risk mitigation measures that platforms must have in place under the OSA.
31. The National Security Bill, as announced in the King's Speech on 13 May 2026 and to be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows, will contain two measures related to the

²⁴ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §230-254 [HOM000964].

Southport attack. The first is the criminalisation of the dissemination and creation of EVC online. The intention is to stop the spread of content that glorifies, trivialises, or normalises serious violence and the measure will enable law enforcement to disrupt individuals who are encouraging violence. The second is the criminalisation of planning a mass casualty attack. This will close a gap in the current law by capturing cases where a lone individual undertakes preparatory steps towards a mass casualty attack without an ideological motive, a situation which is not currently covered by existing conspiracy, attempt, or terrorism offences. The Home Office is progressing the EVC measure and the Ministry of Justice is responsible for the mass casualty attack planning measure

32. In addition to these developments, Mr Emmett's witness statement sets out the work done by the Home Office to explore potential new 'takedown powers'²⁵. Currently, government and law enforcement lack powers to compel a provider of an online service to take down specific pieces of illegal content, which creates problems in responding swiftly to significant or rapidly evolving harm. Currently there are plans to update sections 3 and 4 of the Terrorism Act 2006 to provide a relevant authority with an enforceable power to require technology companies to remove specific terrorist content from their platforms.

33. A range of other changes being considered to fill gaps within, or strengthen, the regulatory framework are set out by Mr Emmett. These include:

- a. **Potential amendments to the OSA**, on which DCMS²⁶ will be able to provide the definitive update on the current government position and any live or proposed changes. There are various potential policy options for consideration, including: expanding priority illegal content where justified; strengthening design / risk duties around recommendation systems and amplification; improving transparency around how platforms handle violent-but-lawful material; and strengthening child protections where violent material is not clearly illegal but is plainly inappropriate for children.

²⁵ Jonathan Emmett first witness statement §271-277 [HOM000964].

²⁶ DSIT was dissolved in July 2026 and its functions split across the Cabinet Office, the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

- b. **The proposed social media ban for under-16s**, which represents significant progress in the online harms space, moving from reliance on platform-led safety measures towards a more preventative model of child protection online. The Government has committed to banning social media companies from offering services to under-16s, using a model similar to Australia, and to restricting high-risk features across a wider range of online services. The next stage is to move from announcement to detailed design and implementation. Further work will be needed on scope, exemptions, high-risk functionalities, age assurance, VPN and circumvention risks, and enforcement. Ofcom is expected to play a central role, including on what constitutes highly effective age assurance, with the first regulations expected before the end of the year and implementation currently expected in Spring 2027. The Home Office will continue to support the direction of travel while pressing for a comprehensive, enforceable and future-proofed regime.

 - c. **Device-level interventions** are another possible avenue to explore. The Government announced in June that smartphones and tablets should implement comprehensive nudity detection by default at operating system level – to prevent the taking, sharing and viewing of nude imagery – coupled with age assurance for users to switch it off by proving they are over-18. It was confirmed on 8 September 2026²⁷ that legislation would be forthcoming as companies had not yet taken sufficient action. While this proposal has been developed specifically to tackle child sexual exploitation and abuse, and the creation of nude imagery, it may also provide useful insights into the potential role of preventative interventions built into devices themselves. These would complement the OSA regulatory approach by addressing a different part of the technology stack from user-to-user and search service: the operating system itself. This is a preventative measure, seeking to stop harmful content being created, shared or viewed in the first place, rather than tackling its dissemination.
34. Finally, Mr Emmett also addresses longer-term issues relating to online harm of potential significance to NIEV risk, including how achievable age verification for the use of VPN software would be, and the introduction of civil orders that could be used to restrict or

²⁷ UK to have world's strongest online child safety laws as government prepares legislation on nude images - GOV.UK [HOM000986]

monitor access to the internet by a person assessed as presenting a risk of NIEV, if a significant threshold was passed concerning the risk they may pose to others. DCMS, as it leads on online safety policy, will be able to provide more detail on VPNs. As to civil orders, there is precedent in relation to both terrorism (in the form of Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIMs) under the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011, and part of the forthcoming Youth Diversion Orders, introduced under the Crime and Policing Act 2026) and CSEA (in the form of Sexual Risk Orders (SROs) under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003). However, there are significant civil liberties concerns and many practical issues to weigh up. The Home Secretary welcomes and will take into account any views the Inquiry may have on how such measures could be made to work in a proportionate and effective manner.

Topic 4: The effectiveness of policies, regulation and criminal enforcement in relation to the sale and possession of offensive weapons and articles with a point or blade

35. In opening Phase 2 of the Inquiry, Counsel to the Inquiry identified a number of examples of the significant work being carried out by the Home Office relevant to this topic. This opening does not intend to duplicate either that opening or the Home Office's own extensive witness evidence. Whilst we can therefore address Topic 4 more briefly than other topics, that does not mean it is treated with any less importance.

36. In brief, then, some of the key developments include:

- a. The Government's Halving Knife Crime plan, published on 7 April 2026, which set out how the Government's intention to halve the level of knife crime in the ten-year period up to 2034 was to be fulfilled;
- b. The passing of the Crime and Policing Act 2026 on 29 April 2026, which strengthened provisions relating to online sale and delivery of knives and crossbows; gave new powers to the police regarding seizure, and introduced new offences and increased sentences for knives offences; allowed senior managers of online platforms to be held personally liable for failure to take action to remove illegal content relating to knives and offensive weapons.

In response to evidence heard in Phase 1:

- c. The announcement in March 2026 of the Government's intention to ban the sale of crossbows and consult on that proposal and licensing for existing users. The Government has also conducted its consultation on a licensing scheme for knife sellers, which closed in February 2026;
 - d. The publication in February 2026 of new non-statutory guidance for child knife possession offences to the effect that at all children caught in possession of a knife will receive a mandatory intervention plan.
37. On 8 October 2026, the Home Office will host a summit to discuss the concerns identified by the Inquiry regarding the marketing of bladed articles and to consider how compliance with the Knives Act 1997 can be strengthened across the sector. Statutory guidance is also being drafted which will inform retailers of the expectations upon them when it comes to age verification and suspicious purchasing of knives and crossbows, and the guidance will also provide advice on suspicious purchases of conventional archery bows. The Home Office will continue to update the Inquiry of its work.
38. Topic 4 is vitally important. The violent misuse of knives and other bladed articles devastates families. The Government has publicly stated its challenging ambition to reduce such crime. It is already targeting the sale and possession of illegal knives and swords; the online sale of knives to children, and the unlawful marketing of knives. The Office for National Statistics figures show knife crime falling every quarter from June 2024. The Home Office will continue to work to reduce it further. There will, however, always be capacity for criminals to take items made for an innocent purpose and possessed lawfully, and use them violently: kitchen knives remain ubiquitous in society and other items with a point or blade are used in agriculture, construction, industry, or sport. The Home Office respectfully shares the Chair's stated ambition at the opening of this Phase that the Inquiry and Core Participants work towards solutions that are practicable, readily enforceable and proportionate – our society must be kept as safe as possible, whilst avoiding if possible unintended negative impacts to society or unworkable legislation. The Home Office is grateful that the far-reaching powers of the Inquiry to obtain evidence will allow for full consideration of these issues, to ensure as far as possible that atrocities such as that which occurred on 29 July 2024 are prevented in future.

18 September 2026