

THE SOUTHPORT PUBLIC INQUIRY – PHASE 2

WRITTEN OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

1. This written opening statement is made on behalf of the Ministry of Justice (“MoJ”). For the purposes of Phase 2 of the Inquiry, the MoJ adopts representative responsibility for the Sentencing Council and the MoJ’s five Executive Agencies: His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (“HMPPS”); the Office of the Public Guardian (“OPG”); the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (“CICA”); the Legal Aid Agency (“LAA”); and His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunal Service (“HMCTS”). Throughout this opening, the MoJ and these agencies and bodies are collectively referred to as the ‘MoJ’ unless otherwise stated.
2. The MoJ first wishes to offer the most profound of condolences to the families of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar, and to recognise the strength, dignity and resilience shown by them and by all of the children, adults and families who suffered grave harm and whose lives were forever marked by the horrific acts carried out on 29 July 2024.
3. In his Phase 1 Report, the Chair was rightly unsparing in his findings and rightly uncompromising in his recommendations. Though the MoJ was not a Core Participant in Phase 1, it echoes the support expressed for these findings and recommendations, as set out in the Government Response to Phase 1.¹
4. The matters set out to be addressed in the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference for Phase 2 are of the very greatest of consequence. The phenomenon of non-ideologically motivated, violence fixated individuals (“VFIs”) and the risks posed by these individuals are such that they demand concerted efforts from all quarters to address how best to identify, assess, and manage those risks. The MoJ recognises that, through its roles in relation to the youth and adult criminal justice systems, it is well placed to assist the

¹ ILT000113

Inquiry in its work for Phase 2. The MoJ is fully committed to supporting and engaging with the Inquiry to the fullest extent possible.

5. This opening statement begins with a summary of the MoJ's role and responsibilities, which it is hoped will aid comprehension of the evidence within this phase of the Inquiry. The statement then sets out some observations concerning the definition of VFIs and possible interventions. Following on from that, the MoJ is grateful to have the opportunity to highlight certain matters arising from the findings made in Phase 1 of the Inquiry. Finally, this opening statement addresses some of the issues that the Inquiry has indicated will be considered within Phase 2 and makes suggestions concerning certain matters that the MoJ would respectfully suggest would warrant consideration by the Inquiry.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF THE MOJ

6. The MoJ is responsible for delivering prison, probation and youth custody services, and for administering, in partnership with the judiciary, the criminal, civil, and family courts and tribunals, as well as supporting victims, children, families and vulnerable adults. The MoJ provides these services across England and Wales and for certain non-devolved tribunals in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The MoJ also has responsibility for Government policy in areas including criminal and civil law and procedure, the management of offenders, coroners and inquests, burials and cremation, and the domestic law framework for human rights.
7. So far as relevant to the Inquiry, the MoJ is responsible for or engages with the following bodies and processes:
8. Youth justice and sentencing policy: the MoJ sets policy for the youth justice system, advising Ministers and implementing their policy decisions. The MoJ also has responsibility for the Government's policy for the sentencing framework.
9. Youth Offending Teams ("YOTs"): are multidisciplinary partnerships comprising representatives from local authorities, the police, probation, health and education. They are managed at local authority level and work closely with other partners such as housing organisations, charities and local communities. YOTs are responsible for supervising children subject to Court orders and have, in recent years, increasingly worked with children at an earlier stage of offending. Operational responsibility for

YOTs sits with the relevant local authority. The MoJ is not involved in the day-to day operations of YOTs but is responsible for Youth Justice Policy and providing some funding at a national level. YOT performance is currently overseen by the Youth Justice Board ("YJB") which is responsible for the youth justice system in England and Wales.

10. Probation: HMPPS is responsible for probation supervision and the ongoing management of risk for individuals on community sentences and following their release from custody on licence. Probation practitioners monitor compliance with court orders and licence conditions, assess and manage the risk to the public, support rehabilitation, and take enforcement action where necessary. Where licence conditions are breached, or risks escalate, the Probation Service can initiate a recall to custody. Where a young person turns 18 whilst subject to a custodial sentence or community supervision, there is a transition process to transfer responsibility for the young person from YOTs to the Probation Service.
11. Prisons: at a central government level, HMPPS and the MoJ are also responsible for the statutory arrangements relating to prisons, which determine the purpose and rules for different forms of establishment. (This is in addition to HMPPS's responsibilities for probation supervision, and the ongoing management of risk for offenders released on licence.) Responsibility for the prison estate includes the policies and procedures directed towards identifying and managing the risks posed by prisoners to others.
12. The Youth Custody Service ("YCS"): is a distinct part of HMPPS that is responsible for the provision of secure custody arrangements for children and young people, and for the placing of all children remanded or sentenced to custody. It is also responsible for the operational running of the public sector custodial sites across the Children and Young People Secure Estate, and for the commissioning of services and contractual management of sites run by the private sector, local authorities, and one charitable organisation. In these roles, YCS seeks to support the positive development of children in the secure setting, and to work with partners to reduce the risk of reoffending and promote reintegration into the community upon release.
13. The National Security Division ("NSD") within HMPPS was created to provide a specialist, dedicated and highly skilled division capable of providing an enhanced level of management and intervention in the community for the most high-risk, complex and high-profile offenders. The NSD works alongside Counter Terrorism Policing, prisons and wider criminal justice agencies to manage individuals both in custody and in the

community. NSD cases are allocated to specialist probation practitioners, who hold smaller caseloads than in probation delivery units. This enables more intensive supervision, greater professional curiosity, more frequent contact with offenders, and a more detailed understanding of risk factors, motivation, and behaviour.

14. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements ("MAPPA"): are processes through which the Police, Probation and Prison Services cooperate with other agencies to assess and manage the risks posed by individuals convicted of serious violent, sexual and terrorism offences. MAPPA are operated locally by 42 Strategic Management Boards across England and Wales.
15. The Sentencing Council issues sentencing guidelines to the courts, which must be followed unless it is in the interests of justice not to do so. The Sentencing Council is a public body sponsored by the MoJ. Individual sentencing decisions are a matter for the independent judiciary.

VIOLENCE FIXATED INDIVIDUALS AND POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS

16. Although a working-definition has been in use within government since June 2025, there is, currently, no single official cross-government definition of what constitutes a VFI.² Whilst policies and procedures already exist for the management of violent individuals across the MoJ's areas of responsibility more generally, the absence of an agreed definition for VFIs has presented a degree of difficulty in the formulation and implementation of policies to target this cohort specifically.
17. In relation to those under the age of 18, there are currently no youth justice specific policies and procedures targeted at VFIs. Given its institutional responsibilities, the MoJ recognises that it has an important role to play in discussions about how VFIs under the age of 18 are identified and managed within the system, and on what interventions may be effective in reducing the risks posed to the public by such individuals. But it would also highlight existing limitations, for example, in considering how VFIs who have not yet committed an offence that would bring them within the

² On 9 June 2025, a working definition was proposed in a paper for a meeting at the Cabinet Office at which issues relating to Southport were discussed. This suggested a VFI was an individual who has a *"...fascination with extreme violence and intent to inflict extreme violence, where ideology is not the primary driver"*.

current criminal justice framework can be identified within the community, and how the risks that they pose can be safely mitigated and managed, including through referral to appropriate support services.

18. Since the Southport attack, the MoJ has been participating in work being co-ordinated by the Home Office on what earlier intervention and service involvement might look like for VFIs and children who are exhibiting concerning behaviours, with a particular focus on risk management arrangements. MoJ officials have also been contributing to policy development at the monthly Home Office-led Non-Ideological Extreme Violence (“NIEV”) Early Intervention Working Group meeting, sharing learning from previous MoJ engagement with frontline services (including youth justice services and counter-terrorism policing). The reports from these meetings are then fed into the NIEV Strategic Delivery Board, which meets every two months, and into a quarterly steering board, which is attended by senior civil servants from the MoJ and other government departments.

PHASE 1 OF THE INQUIRY

The effective management of risks

19. The MoJ acknowledges the findings from Phase 1 of the Inquiry that there are gaps in the systems intended to collectively identify and intervene with children who pose significant risks to others. Failing to share information or take ownership of risk can result in escalating and concerning behaviour being left unmanaged. Although there is good evidence that indicates that youth justice services have contributed to a substantial long-term reduction in youth offending, through successful prevention, diversion, and early intervention approaches,³ the MoJ accepts that evidence of broad effectiveness does not preclude significant individual failings or systems-level weaknesses that require policy intervention.
20. In May 2026, the MoJ publicly acknowledged the need for further reforms to youth justice, acknowledging that genuine diversion means gripping problematic behaviour early, with timely and effective action where offending does happen, which addresses the root causes of offending behaviour. The government has also announced plans to reform youth sentencing, which will include re-consideration of Referral Orders and

³ The number of children cautioned or sentenced fell by around 88% between 2009/10 and 2024/25.

making provision for Youth Rehabilitation Orders following a first conviction in certain cases. In July 2026, the MoJ also published a consultation on proposed changes to strengthen central government's approach to the oversight of youth justice services.

21. Whilst reforms in these areas are necessary, the MoJ acknowledges that the combination of national systems and policies, alongside local systems and processes, can create a landscape that frontline practitioners find difficult to navigate. The MoJ would welcome the Inquiry's thoughts on how national strategies and policies can effectively be implemented locally, and any recommendations the Inquiry might make about how to streamline or reform statutory and other arrangements in furtherance of that objective.
22. In relation to the risks that VFIs pose, the MoJ accepts that more needs to be done to identify and manage VFIs, and it will welcome the Inquiry's recommendations as to how sufficient resilience throughout the structures and systems can be secured.

The effectiveness of YOTs in identifying, assessing and managing the risk of youths who present a VFI risk

23. In Phase 1 of the Inquiry, the Chair found that there had been significant shortcomings in the YOT's supervision of AR. Whilst the MoJ is not involved in the day-to-day operations of YOTs, which are managed at a local authority level, it is committed to supporting and improving the operation of YOTs and has issued a substantial multi-year settlement to 2028/2029, which will help YOTs retain skilled staff, plan more effectively with partners, and commission services more efficiently.
24. In May 2026, recognising the need to strengthen oversight of YOT performance, the Government announced reforms to the YJB. Responsibility for national oversight of the youth justice system, and the monitoring of youth justice service performance, will transfer to the MoJ, while the YJB will be reformed to focus on providing expert insight, promoting best practice, and supporting continuous improvement across local services. Together, these changes are intended to provide clearer accountability for the oversight of youth justice services at a national level and a stronger framework for identifying performance concerns, supporting improvement and promoting greater consistency in the quality of services delivered to children.⁴

⁴ Youth Justice White Paper '*Cutting Youth Crime, Changing Young Lives*': **EC/02 – INQ000000000**

25. Despite the problems identified by the Inquiry in Phase 1 in AR's case, it remains the MoJ's view that a multi-disciplinary approach can provide an effective mechanism for managing and reducing youth offending. This approach will only work if YOTs are able to intervene before harm occurs and, at present, if a youth has not been issued with an order by the court or police that requires mandatory engagement, intervention may not occur. Where a child presents a risk, including a risk of causing significant or mass harm to others, but has not yet committed an offence, a YOT cannot guarantee monitoring or disrupting that child before harm occurs. To try to address this issue, the MoJ has introduced and leads the 'Turnaround' youth intervention programme, which enables YOTs to intervene with children earlier (on a voluntary basis) and stop those who are not on their statutory caseload from being drawn into crime. In relation to VFIs and risks of a mass attack, the MoJ also considers that the new offence of planning a mass killing will assist in providing a basis for earlier mandatory engagement with YOTs, thereby strengthening YOTs' ability to intervene before harm occurs.

PHASE 2 OF THE INQUIRY

Reviewing existing arrangements

26. In Phase 2, the Inquiry will be examining the current arrangements that are in place for managing risk from violent individuals and whether these are adequate to address the specific risks that VFIs pose to society. This is an area in which the MoJ has a significant interest and the Inquiry's investigations into this issue will, it is anticipated, make a very valuable contribution to identifying whether existing arrangements could be applied to VFIs, either in their current or in some modified format, or whether a new bespoke approach should be taken.
27. Having reflected on the existing systems and structures within its areas of responsibility since the Southport attack, the MoJ wishes to highlight the following, which it considers would merit consideration by the Inquiry within Phase 2:
- a. Violence Reduction Training / Guidance: although there is currently no formalised training specifically in relation to VFIs, existing violence reduction training and resources within the adult prison estate might be capable of adaptation to address risk factors particular to VFIs. These resources include the 'Risk Identification Toolkit', the 'Extremism Risk Guidance - Revised'

("ERG-R") and the 'Historical Clinical Risk Management-20' ("HCR-20"). In relation to those under the age of 18, there is also the 'Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth' tool ("SAVRY"). The MoJ considers that it may be possible to identify lessons from the use of such tools to address risks associated with other types of offending, such as terrorism, which could be applied in relation to VFIs. However, before any decision could be made to adapt these resources to address risks posed by VFIs, further evidence would need to be gathered to determine how well they would capture the assessment needs of individuals whose primary risk relates to violence fixation, rather than ideology or a more general risk of violence.

- b. The Offender Assessment System ("OASys") / The Assessing Risk Needs and Strengths ("ARNS") Service: HMPPS has significant experience of using the OASys to assess the risk of serious harm and the risk of serious and general reoffending. OASys is in the process of being replaced by ARNS, which is being implemented in stages and is expected to be fully implemented by 2029. The ARNS service builds on the evidence base underpinning OASys and will continue to use a combination of validated actuarial reoffending predictor tools and professional judgement. The Inquiry may wish to consider how these tools contribute to the assessment of the risks posed by offenders and how those might inform the approach to be taken to VFIs.
- c. Multi-Agency Sharing of Risk Assessments: the MoJ considers information sharing to be critical to public protection. HMPPS has significant experience of information sharing arrangements with other agencies relating to risk and public protection. The sharing of information within MAPPA, particularly now that this has been put on a statutory footing, has also been recognised to operate effectively in relation to individuals with an existing conviction or caution. The Inquiry's consideration of whether similar multi-agency information-sharing arrangements could be utilised to address the risks posed by unconvicted VFIs will therefore be welcomed by the MoJ.
- d. NSD: applying a similar approach to that carried out by the NSD, to the supervision and risk management of VFIs post-conviction, may also be a viable option. The MoJ has considered this possibility and has identified that it may be viable to adopt a more streamlined approach in relation to VFIs. This is because although certain aspects of the NSD's processes are considered likely

to also be of benefit for managing VFIs (such as additional training, enhanced supervision and a reduced caseload for relevant staff to allow for additional multi-agency working), there are other elements of the NSD's supervision and risk management that would not need to be replicated, as they concern ideological motivation issues that are applicable to terrorism, but not to VFIs. It should be noted that the NSD currently supports individuals who could be identified as VFIs, but who have also attracted a TaCT⁵ conviction, or qualify for the Critical Public Protection scheme due to their risk of serious harm and / or media profile.

- e. Court Orders: as the department responsible for the Government's sentencing policy, the MoJ has a significant interest in how court orders might be applied in relation to VFIs. This interest includes a consideration of whether existing court orders are sufficient to address the risks that VFIs present to the public. One aspect of this, in relation to Youth Justice, is the recent commitment to consider whether Referral Orders continue to be appropriate for certain offences and whether they require reform. Although the majority of mechanisms available to address the risks of youth reoffending arise from a conviction or caution, the MoJ respectfully suggests that the Inquiry might also wish to give consideration to Youth Diversion Orders ("YDOs"), which are new civil orders introduced in the Crime and Policing Act 2026 that were designed to manage and reduce the risk posed by children and young people who may be vulnerable to engaging in terrorism-related activity, including acts of violence, without the need for a criminal conviction. YDOs can include a range of prohibitions and requirements tailored to the individual, including restrictions on association, communication, travel and access to places, as well as requirements to attend appointments or participate in specified activities. YDOs may also include notification requirements and monitoring provisions. Although not designed for VFIs, the Inquiry may wish to consider whether YDOs are an example of the threat management system for terrorism from which lessons might be learnt for the management of VFIs.

The offence of planning a mass killing

⁵ TaCT convictions refer to criminal acts defined under counter-terrorism legislation, primarily the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Terrorism Act 2006.

28. In addition to these existing arrangements, the MoJ also wishes to highlight and express its support for the work that is being undertaken to address the gap in the existing law that was identified by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation (Jonathan Hall KC) concerning lone actors who plan, but do not attempt to commit, a mass casualty attack without an ideological motive. Following the publication of the Inquiry's Phase 1 report, the government confirmed that legislation will be brought forward in the current session of Parliament to address this issue, through the creation of a new offence of planning a mass killing. This new offence would apply to a VFI if they were planning an attack and, crucially, would provide a basis for intervention before plans progress to an attempted attack. The MoJ considers this new offence will strengthen the ability of operational partners to investigate, arrest and disrupt individuals who pose the most serious threat. In terms of sentencing, the MoJ is currently in the process of finalising the sentencing options for this new offence. Given the seriousness of the conduct that the offence is intended to capture, it considers that it will be appropriate for the sentencing and management framework to align broadly with that which is available for comparable serious non-terrorism offences, including custodial sentences with supervisory and ancillary measures.

Sentencing

29. In its consideration of the current and future arrangements for managing the risk from VFIs, the MoJ anticipates the Inquiry will wish to give detailed consideration in Phase 2 to the sentencing options available for VFI offenders. As the department responsible for the Government's policy for sentencing legislation, the MoJ acknowledges the role that it can be expected to play in those considerations.
30. Although there may be lessons to learn from the sentencing of terrorist offenders, terrorism, as the Inquiry will no doubt appreciate, comprises a defined category of offences. By contrast VFIs may commit a broad range of different offences, depending on their particular activities. The current sentencing framework already enables courts to address both the seriousness of the offending and the ongoing risks posed by high-risk violent offenders, a category likely to include VFIs.
31. For example, for certain specified violent offences (as well as for sexual and terrorism offences), an Extended Determinate Sentence ("EDS") may be imposed where the court is considering a custodial sentence of at least four years (and is not required to impose a life sentence, e.g. following a conviction for murder) and assesses the

offender to be 'dangerous'; in other words, that there is a significant future risk of the offender committing further specified offences from which the public need to be protected. An EDS is available for both adult and child offenders and comprises an appropriate custodial term followed by an extended licence period of up to 10 years (for certain offences) to support the management of ongoing risk in the community. Offenders become eligible for release at the two-thirds point of the custodial term, which is subject to Parole Board approval, or are otherwise released at the expiry of the custodial term. These provisions therefore already provide enhanced public protection arrangements for high-risk violent offenders which could also be deployed for VFIs, provided they were convicted of certain specified offences. The Inquiry may therefore wish to give consideration as to whether there are other offences that should qualify for an EDS, which are specific to VFIs. In that regard, the MoJ would respectfully remind the Inquiry that factors associated with VFI offending, such as significant planning and premeditation, acquisition or use of weapons, and attempts to maximise harm, are already capable of being treated as aggravating factors where relevant and taken into account by the courts when assessing the seriousness of the offending and determining the appropriate sentence.

32. For VFIs who may be convicted as a child and who do not meet the threshold for an EDS, there are alternative custodial sentences available, although these do not require Parole Board-directed release arrangements or an extended licence period. Both a Detention and Training Order ("DTO"), which may be imposed on children aged 12 to 17, and a sentence made under Section 250 of the Sentencing Act 2020, which is available for children of any age who commit a serious offence punishable by 14 years' imprisonment or more (or another specified offence), allow for ongoing supervision in the community following release. Supervision may be imposed through standard and additional conditions during the licence period or notice of supervision; the latter is similar to a licence period but applies to DTOs and Section 250 sentences of less than 12 months.
33. The Inquiry will be aware of the Sentence for Offenders of Particular Concern ("SOPC") that was originally introduced in the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 (which has since been consolidated in the Sentencing Act 2020 at Section 265). An SOPC is a type of determinate sentence which includes a custodial element followed by an extended licence period of one year. It is a mandatory sentence type (i.e. the court must impose it if the conditions are met). It is currently only available for a limited range of terrorist offences, national security offences, and sexual offences against a child

under the age of 13. An equivalent order exists for offenders under the age of 18 at Section 252A of the 2020 Act, though it is not available for sexual offences against a child.

34. Whilst there may be similarities between the seriousness of those offences and offences that could be committed by VFIs, the MoJ would wish to highlight that extending the availability of SOPCs to include the much broader range of offences that VFIs may commit would risk undermining the distinct purpose of a SOPC within the sentencing framework as a whole. This is because including serious violent offences (such as GBH) within the list of specified offences would result in a SOPC having to be applied to all offenders who commit that offence (as it is a mandatory sentence) and not just to VFIs. This would risk increasing significantly the number of SOPC that the courts would have to issue, including to many offenders for whom that type of sentence was never previously intended. Whilst it would be possible, alternatively, to limit the types of additional offences to be added to the specified offences list, this would risk failing to capture the full spectrum of VFI offending behaviour that any change to this sentencing approach would be intended to address.
35. When the Inquiry is considering the potential sentences that might be applied in relation to VFIs, the MoJ would therefore respectfully request that careful consideration is given to all the potential consequences before any recommendations are made that existing sentence types should be applied to address VFIs' offending behaviour in the future.

The online environment

36. The MoJ welcomes the Inquiry's investigations into the role of the online environment within Phase 2, which it acknowledges can provide a platform for the dissemination of harmful content that can facilitate violence fixation and attack planning in non-ideologically motivated individuals.
37. Although policy development is being led by the Home Office, the MoJ is broadly supportive of the proposed introduction of Cyber Crime Risk Orders ("CCRO") as a means of protecting the public by providing a mechanism to restrict individuals who may be at risk of causing serious harm relating to or arising from their online activity. The MoJ would, however, wish to highlight that deploying CCROs against children will require careful consideration, as evidence that it has gathered through the youth justice

system shows that the greater a child's involvement in the criminal justice system, the greater the risk this creates in terms of further offending.

38. When examining the role of the online environment and the measures that might be deployed to mitigate the risks that it can present, the MoJ would therefore respectfully urge the Inquiry to consider the need for proportionality when examining how orders such as CCROs are applied to children, and the potential impact that this might have on their risk of offending.
39. The MoJ would also respectfully wish to promote the valuable contribution that youth justice services can bring to the development of policies relating to the use of such measures. Youth justice services have substantial experience of assessing the needs of child offenders and their wider circumstances and are well-placed to contribute to a consideration of these issues within Phase 2.

A BASIS FOR WIDER REFORM

40. The focus of the Terms of Reference for Phase 2 is understandably directed towards VFIs and the arrangements that are in place to identify, assess and manage the risks that such individuals pose. But the issues that will be considered in this regard also engage wider questions concerning the challenges to multi-agency working and information sharing that are not limited to VFIs, but which extend to risk management of other individuals across education, youth justice, health, and other services.
41. Phase 2 of the Inquiry therefore presents a valuable opportunity, in a cross-cutting and independent inquisitorial process, to consider the wider question of whether broader system reform and better coordination across existing multi-agency arrangements can provide a more effective response to tackling similar threats and risks in the future. In forming its recommendations following Phase 2, the MoJ would therefore also welcome the Inquiry's consideration of whether there is in fact a case for wider changes to be made to existing systems that would more effectively address risks posed by individuals in whatever form that risk may take.

MOJ 2024 DATA BREACH

42. Before concluding, the MoJ wishes to take this opportunity to address the recent discovery of unacceptable instances of unauthorised access by staff from MoJ

agencies of sensitive personal data held as part of the Southport attack court records in 2024. A compliance check at the time established that certain staff members had accessed records relating to the Southport attack through the electronic court record system, which is used to administer criminal proceedings. The staff in question were legitimate users of the system, but they had no legitimate business reason to access and view the information in question. There is no evidence at this stage to suggest that this information has been disclosed more widely.

43. This conduct was wholly unacceptable and should not have occurred. HMCTS investigated the staff concerned and dealt with the matter through established conduct and discipline processes. Regrettably, however, the matter was not brought to the attention of the HMCTS Executive team until July this year, when it was identified that the matter should have been referred to the MoJ's independent Data Protection Office, which has now taken place.
44. Investigations are continuing, and an external review commissioned, but the MoJ has taken a number of actions in response to this discovery, including increasing monitoring of system use; and strengthening staff policies, guidance and training. The MoJ has informed the Information Commissioner's Office and the Chair of the Inquiry.
45. Most importantly, the MoJ has written directly to the individuals and/or families affected by this incident to explain what has happened, provide a point of contact should they have questions, and to apologise to them. The MoJ wishes to reiterate those unreserved apologies here and to repeat that this incident is wholly unacceptable and should never have occurred.

CONCLUSIONS

46. The MoJ recognises that the arrangements for managing the risks posed by VFIs call for further consideration. It therefore welcomes the Inquiry's investigations into the issues that will be considered within Phase 2. The issues are complex and cut across organisational and departmental boundaries. They therefore call for careful consideration, with full and frank involvement from all those whose responsibility it is to protect the public, with the aim that the tragic events that occurred in Southport on 29 July 2024 are not repeated.

47. Finally, the MoJ wishes to reiterate its profound sympathies for the victims of the events of 29 July 2024 and to affirm its commitment to supporting and assisting the Inquiry throughout its work in Phase 2 in any way that it can.

PAUL MERTENS
Pump Court Chambers

DARRAGH COFFEY
1 Crown Office Row