Witness Name: D/Supt X0204 Steve Watkins

Exhibits: SW/01 – SW/16

Dated: 26 August 2026

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF D/SUPT STEVE WATKINS

I, Detective Superintendent Steve Watkins, will say as follows:-

Introduction

1. I am Steve Watkins, a Detective Superintendent working for Northamptonshire Police, a role I have held since April 2023. I have been a Police Officer in various roles and ranks since January 2006. My current role is Head of Central Intelligence Services, a department with various functions but includes the lead for Offender Management, the Management of Sex or Violent Offenders (MOSOVO) and Northamptonshire MAPPA level 3 Core Panel Member,

2. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (the "**Inquiry**") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 29 July 2026.

The Role and remit of the Northamptonshire Police's Potentially Dangerous Person Panel ('PDP') and Youth Referral Pathway ('YRP')

3. Operation Airforce is the collective term used by Northamptonshire Police to describe the Potentially Dangerous Persons (PDP) process and the Youth Risk Panel (YRP).

4. The PDP process provides a framework for identifying, assessing and managing adults who present a risk to the public but who may not meet the threshold for management through statutory offender management arrangements. The YRP performs a similar function for children and young people, utilising a multi agency approach to identify risk, coordinate interventions and safeguard both the individual and the wider public. this is set out in the following files:

5. There are policies for PDP and YRP that set out the role and remit of PDP and YRP, which are exhibited as follows:

   i) Northamptonshire Police PDP Policy. I exhibit this policy as SW/01 – **NPDP000005**

   ii) Northamptonshire Police Youth Risk Panel Policy 2026 updated. I exhibit this policy as SW02 – **NPDP000006**

   iii) Northamptonshire Police PDP Terms of Reference. I exhibit this as SW03 – **NPDP000007**

6. Operation Airforce has relevance to the management of individuals who present concerning behaviours, including those associated with violence, sexual harm, exploitation, vulnerability and other forms of risk where statutory management frameworks may not apply.

7. In recent years Northamptonshire Police has developed a referral pathway whereby individuals referred through Counter Terrorism/Prevent processes but not meeting the threshold for ongoing Prevent management may be considered through the YRP where a residual local policing risk remains. This ensures that risk is not lost when concerns fall below counter terrorism thresholds but still require management and oversight. This is set out in exhibit SW04 – **NPDP000008** Northamptonshire Police. and the YRP Terms of Reference June 2026 which I exhibit as SW05 – **NPDP000009**.

8. The YRP is a police-led multi agency panel and includes representation from social care, youth justice, youth services and Counter Terrorism representatives. The PDP currently operates as a police-led process but can engage other agencies where required including Northamptonshire Children's Trust and any other body which is felt can add value. The guidance for the panel is set out in police file titled Guidance for the YR Panel 2026 which I exhibit as SW06 – **NPDP000010**.

<u>The term "Violence Fixated Individuals" (VFI)</u>

9. Operation Airforce does not use the term "Violence Fixated Individuals" (VFI), nor a specific VFI classification or terminology. Individuals are assessed according to the nature of the risk they present, including violent behaviour, concerning conduct, exploitation risks, safeguarding concerns, sexual risk, or vulnerability factors. Cases are managed based on the identified risk rather than a specific VFI designation.

10. The term VFI is not routinely used by Operation Airforce or by most agencies participating within PDP and YRP processes. Counter Terrorism and Prevent

practitioners are more likely to recognise the terminology due to its use in wider national discussions, but it is not commonly used within local multi agency risk management arrangements.

11. It is my view that the term is not consistently defined or understood across policing and partner agencies. There is no nationally recognised assessment framework or commonly applied operational definition that provides consistency between organisations.

12. The primary concerns regarding identification and description of VFIs is the absence of a clearly defined national framework for identifying, assessing and managing individuals who may be considered VFIs. This creates inconsistency in terminology, thresholds, risk assessment and operational responses. The lack of a standardised identification methodology may lead to variation between organisations and police forces.

Overview of identifying and managing individuals

13. Operation Airforce begins with a referral process to identify and manage individuals who are assessed to potentially be dangerous. Referrals may originate from Northamptonshire Police, partner agencies or, in the case of YRP, multi-agency safeguarding partners including Children's Social Care or others. Referrals may also be received through the Counter Terrorism/Prevent pathway where concerns are identified but do not meet the threshold for ongoing Prevent intervention.

14. The decision-making structure differs between PDP and YRP. The PDP is almost exclusively an internal police forum with invited partners, whereas the YRP is a police-led multi agency forum including representatives from:

- Northamptonshire Police
- Children's Social Care
- Youth Justice Services
- Youth Services
- Counter Terrorism representatives
- Other relevant safeguarding partners

15. Cases are reviewed collectively and decisions are informed by partner agency input. The panel decisions are collective and decided by the panel, with police taking the Chair for the meetings. This is set out in the following file - Police file titled Guidance for the Panel – PDP. I exhibit this as SW/07 – **NPDP000011**.

16. YRP interventions differ according to the age, risk profile and needs of the individual.

17. For children and young people, interventions are largely delivered through partner agencies. The purpose of an intervention is to reduce or manage the risk posed by the individual. These is no restriction on the nature and type of intervention, aside from the capacity and capability of the agencies involved. These interventions are limited only by what agencies can provide, and any idea or proposal to mitigate or reduce the risk will be considered and can include:

    - Social care plans
    - Child Protection Plans
    - Child in Need Plans
    - Youth offending interventions
    - Education based support
    - Youth services engagement
    - Family support

18. Interventions are set out in – Northamptonshire Children's Trust file - YPS summary of Services, exhibited as SW/08 – **NPDP000012** and Northamptonshire Police NYJS summary of services which I exhibit as SW/09 – **NPDP000013**

19. For adults, interventions are more limited and may involve engagement with:

    - Adult Social Care
    - Housing providers
    - Mental health services
    - Local policing teams

~~20.~~ Operation Airforce seeks to identify and manage individuals who present a risk of serious violence irrespective of whether ideology is a motivating factor. Although the specific VFI terminology is not used, individuals presenting concerning violent behaviours have historically been considered through PDP and YRP structures.

21. Operation Airforce utilises local risk assessment processes adapted for PDP and YRP purposes.

22. Where individuals are referred from Counter Terrorism pathways, any existing Counter Terrorism assessments are considered alongside local assessment processes. Prevent staff would complete the necessary referral and would present the individual

and the nature of the concern to the panel, and include any risk they feel the individual would pose, including any internal assessments where it was felt would add value to the overall plan, or understanding of the risk. The CT pathway is outlined in police file titled 'YRP CT Pathway updated' which I exhibit as SW10 – **NPDP000014** and Police file 'New Youth Risk Panel Pathway from CT into local' which I exhibit as SW11 – **NPDP000015**.

23. There is no dedicated VFI-specific assessment tool, however, assessments made will consider indicators of violence, escalation, vulnerability, safeguarding concerns and public safety risk. A structured assessment format is used to support consistency. This is the initial referral form which is assessed by the PDP Officer and Supervisor to assess if it is suitable for PDP or YRP.

24. Northamptonshire Police retains oversight of referrals entering Operation Airforce until ownership is formally allocated to another agency, with actions or agreed by the YRP. Where a case is not adopted, the relevant panel documents the rationale, identifies the agency best placed to manage the risk and records any agreed actions. Risk management plans are reviewed and monitored through established governance processes to manage and evaluate any ongoing risk of harm.

25. Information sharing between the agencies is facilitated through:

- Existing policing powers
- Multi agency information-sharing agreements
- MASH arrangements
- MAPPA principles where applicable
- Common law policing powers and safeguarding authorities

26. Generally the information sharing arrangements are effective, as current legislative and policy frameworks enable effective information sharing where safeguarding or public protection concerns exist and these can be deployed if required to enable the sharing of information. To date there have been no concerns or reticence from partners in sharing information.

27. Parental consent is not generally required where safeguarding or public protection concerns justify information sharing. Where consent is withheld, agencies continue to share information when lawful and proportionate to protect / safeguard children and / or the wider public.

28. Operation Airforce works with a range of statutory and non-statutory partners in relation to the identification and management of the risk posed by individuals. Counter Terrorism Policing representatives attend YRP meetings where relevant and Operation Airforce engages with regional and national policing colleagues regarding PDP development, although it is not formally recognised as PDP in some forces. Partnership working takes place through social care, Domestic Abuse Charities, Housing and youth services. Healthcare providers contribute to safeguarding and risk management planning where appropriate. Prevent referrals that do not meet counter terrorism thresholds but continue to present local risk may be referred into YRP processes. Education agencies contribute safeguarding information, support intervention plans and participate in multi-agency discussions where relevant.

Statistical Information

29. No specific statistical analysis concerning VFIs has been undertaken because Operation Airforce does not utilise a VFI classification, however, Northamptonshire Police maintains data relating to:

- Number of PDP referrals.
- Number of YRP referrals.
- Cases adopted and not adopted.
- Referral sources.
- Management outcomes.

30. No formal evaluation specifically examining VFI-related trends has been completed. The data shows that the number of referrals has increased since the panel was set up and is demonstrated by police file titled 'PDP referrals 2025 – 2026' which I exhibit as SW12 – **NPDP000016**; 'PDP Stats' which I exbibit as STW13 – **NPDP000001**; 'RE_PDP figures – Text' which I exhibit as STW14 – **NPDP000002**; and 'PDP_YRP' figures which I exhibit as STW15 – **NPDP000003**.

National PDPs

31. Operation Airforce engages informally with a number of regional and national police forces regarding PDP and YRP practice where significant regional variation exists. Some forces have well established PDP structures with dedicated resources and governance arrangements whereas others operate less formal processes, and in some cases there appears to be minimal active management of PDP cohorts despite national guidance. There is no consistent national model, threshold or governance framework, which hinders broad uptake.

Current arrangements for identifying and managing VFI risk

32. Agencies in Northamptonshire work collaboratively to help manage the risk, but it is my view that there is a wider risk to the efficacy of the management of VFIs as there no legal requirement to engage (in the same way as MAPPA for example). There is no overall framework and so nationally there lacks consistency, and there is no single agency with clear line of responsibility for the management of these individuals. This creates a risk, particularly in areas where Policing has not proactively taken the lead to manage these cases.

33. Prevent has developed expertise, assessment mechanisms and intervention pathways specifically designed to identify individuals with harmful fixations and escalating risk behaviours. The Northants CT referral pathway ensures that individuals not meeting Prevent thresholds are not simply exited from consideration but remain subject to local safeguarding and risk management arrangements.

34. Operation Airforce provides a mechanism for managing risk where concerns exist, but statutory offender management arrangements do not apply, however, neither PDP nor YRP was originally designed specifically to manage violence fixated individuals.

35. Multi-agency arrangements are effective in facilitating information sharing and coordinated responses, particularly in relation to children and young people, but will have limited to no experience in VFI's. MASH in Northants along with MARAC would identify a risk without labelling as VFI.

36. Northamptonshire Police does not operate a dedicated Violence Reduction Unit equivalent for VFI management, although youth violence interventions contribute to risk management where appropriate.

37. There is significant inconsistency nationally regarding referral pathways, thresholds and ownership of VFI risk. Furthermore, there is no nationally recognised VFI-specific risk assessment tool which is currently used.

38. Information sharing arrangements are generally effective locally and enable agencies to collaborate in managing public protection and safeguarding risks. It is not clear to me if this is the case nationally, due to the differing approaches and the lack of an overall framework.

39. The primary challenges or barriers to the effective and appropriate identification and management of the risk posed by VFIs are:

    - Absence of a nationally agreed VFI definition.

- Lack of standardised risk assessment tools.
- Limited specialist training for practitioners.
- Inconsistent referral pathways nationally.
- Lack of statutory intervention powers.
- Reliance on voluntary engagement.
- Limited diversionary and behavioural intervention programmes.
- Restricted funding and resources.

40. For adults in particular, intervention opportunities become limited where there is no criminal justice disposal or mental health threshold. For persons under the age of 18 there are greater opportunities for collaboration with other agencies, including Children's Social Care and less legal ambiguity around agencies cooperating due to safeguarding concerns.

41. Operation Airforce provides an effective local mechanism for balancing safeguarding and public protection, however, the absence of nationally consistent identification criteria, specialist intervention programmes and statutory management powers naturally limits its overall effectiveness. Whilst Northamptonshire Police has developed pathways to identify and manage concerning individuals, opportunities to compel engagement remain limited.

Options for future management of VFI risk

42. A comprehensive safeguarding and violence prevention model incorporating Prevent expertise would be beneficial. The preferred approach would be a multi-agency 'front door' arrangement incorporating existing safeguarding structures while embedding Prevent expertise within the decision making process. A completely new structure that runs parallel to this is likely to create duplication and add additional complexity.

43. Prevent should have a significant role in managing individuals who present a credible risk of serious violence or mass casualty harm, regardless of whether ideology is the primary driver. Prevent possesses specialist expertise, assessment capability and intervention mechanisms not currently available within PDP and YRP structures.

44. Where individuals are not accepted by Prevent, responsibility should fall to the most appropriate existing safeguarding or risk management structure, including YRP, PDP, MASH or mental health services. Clear national criteria are required to determine ownership and onward management.

45. PDPs and YRPs can contribute to the identification and management of VFI risk but are not currently the most suitable primary mechanism for leading such work. To undertake this role effectively they would require:

- Dedicated funding.
- Specialist VFI training.
- National risk assessment tools.
- Access to specialist interventions.
- Additional staffing.
- Stronger multi agency participation.
- Clear governance and statutory support.

46. Expanding existing Prevent capability may, in my view, represent a more efficient solution than creating a parallel national framework.

Other Proposals for Future Change

47. A single accountable individual acting as the 'duty holder' may improve clarity and oversight, however, assigning sole responsibility to one individual creates risks, including:

- Single points of failure.
- Organisational dependency.
- Absence or turnover issues.
- Reduced resilience.

48. A lead agency model with clear governance and supervisory oversight may be more effective than assigning responsibility to a single individual. Suitable agencies would depend upon the nature of the risk but may include Prevent, Police, Social Care or Mental Health Services.

49. A culture of ownership where individual agencies and organisations are prepared to own and manage risk is supported by:

- Appropriate staffing levels.
- Manageable workloads.
- Clear accountability.
- Access to training.
- Effective information sharing arrangements.
- Specialist support services.

- Confidence in decision making frameworks.

50. Agencies are more likely to retain ownership of risk when adequately resourced and supported.

51. I would support the creation of a single, central and accessible tool for conducting risk assessments to be utilised across the public sector. This would:

    - Improve consistency.
    - Support practitioner confidence.
    - Reduce variation between agencies.
    - Improve risk identification.
    - Support governance and quality assurance.
    - Facilitate multi agency working.

52. To improve the assessment of risk and the provision of support for VFIs in cases where neurodiversity is suspected or diagnosed, I would recommend the following:

    - Earlier neurodiversity screening.
    - Access to specialist clinicians.
    - Improved mental health provision.
    - Specialist training for practitioners.
    - Development of neurodiversity informed intervention plans.
    - National guidance on the interaction between neurodiversity, fixation and violence risk.

53. Multi-agency public protection arrangements, safeguarding partnerships and Prevent structures provide examples of good practice that could inform future VFI frameworks. In particular, structured information sharing, clearly defined ownership and multi-agency decision making processes offer transferable principles.

Improvements

54. Practical improvements relevant to my involvement with Operation Airforce could include:

    - Development of a nationally recognised VFI definition.
    - Creation of a standardised risk assessment process.

- Specialist practitioner training.
- Increased access to intervention programmes.
- Enhanced mental health support.
- Greater Prevent involvement for violence fixated individuals.
- Statutory powers to support engagement where risk is significant.
- Additional staffing and funding for risk management teams.

Other Matters

55. For completeness I include a copy of the PDP referral for, exhibited as SW16 – **NPDP000004**.
56. Northamptonshire Police has developed local arrangements intended to ensure that individuals presenting concerning behaviours are not left unmanaged where they fall outside existing statutory frameworks, however, the Inquiry may wish to consider the absence of nationally consistent arrangements for identifying and managing VFIs, variations in force practice, limited intervention opportunities and a lack of specialist assessment tools. These issues present systemic challenges that extend beyond any individual force and may warrant national policy consideration.

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.

Signed: **Signature**

Dated: Tuesday 26th August 2026