

Friday, 15 October 2026

(10.00 am)

MS HELEN RANCE (sworn)

SIR ADRIAN FULFORD: Thank you very much, Ms Rance, have a seat. Yes, Mr Boyle.

Questions by MR BOYLE

MR BOYLE: Thank you. Ms Rance, can you give your full name, please.

A. My name is Helen Rance.

Q. Thank you, and your role is Temporary Director of the Threat Leadership Command of the NCA, is that right?

A. That's correct, yes.

Q. I'm just going to start by pulling up your statement and then I will go through the structure of the questions.

Could we have up, please, thank you, one step ahead of me, so that's NCA000032, for your reference, sir, and it is a statement dated 28 August 2026. Could we please have page 41 NCA000032_0041.

Ms Rance, your signature would sit under that box. Can you confirm the contents of this statement is true to the best of your knowledge and belief?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. Could we also, please, have up NCA000005. Ms Rance, this is the statement of Mr Timothy Wright, which I think was an earlier statement provided by the

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NCA to the Inquiry, is that right?

A. That's correct.

Q. Would it be fair to say that Mr Wright provided a relatively high-level overview of the work the NCA does?

A. That's correct.

Q. And in your statement you go into your detail about the NCA's work, where it is relevant to the Inquiry?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you. This isn't your statement, but I think you say in your own statement that you agree with the overview given here, is that right?

A. Yes, I do.

Q. Thank you. I have already asked you about your role, that was Temporary Director of the threat leadership command. You have been in that role since April 2026, is that right?

A. That is right.

Q. Could you just give us a short précis of what that role involves?

A. Yes. So the threat leadership command in the NCA is the system leadership function. So we oversee seven different SOC threats and really provide the system response, and cohere law enforcement to lead the system against those serious and organised crime threats.

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Q. SOC being serious and organised crime?

A. That is right, yes.

Q. Thank you. And threat leadership command specifically, could you just explain, is that a number of directorates in the NCA?

A. That is right. There are a number of different directorates. There is the threat leadership command which is where I work. There is also investigations command and intelligence command and international command.

Q. Thank you. Before your current role you spent just over a year as Deputy Director of the child sexual abuse team and the modern slavery and human traffic team, is that right?

A. That is right.

Q. And prior to that, you were an officer in the MPS for 23 years including four years leading the MPS cyber crime unit as a detective superintendent?

A. That is right.

Q. I want to move on, please -- let me just give you the structure of questioning. So I'm going to move on next to the role of the NCA. Then ask you some questions about the Com network. Move on to that, to the interplay between the Com network and Violence Fixed Individuals, or VFIs. Then ask you about the NCA's work

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with Com Networks and Project Rhyobasalt that we've heard about in our seminars; the definition of a VFI and your views on that; the NCA response to the Southport attack and the issue of VFIs as it has followed from there.

Potential future pathways or structures to deal with Com Networks and VFIs. The issue of online harms and interventions and the effectiveness of current laws and systems.

So starting, then, with the role of the NCA. The NCA was formed, is this right, on 7 October 2013 through the Crime and Courts Act 2013?

A. Yes.

Q. And it superseded what was the Serious Organised Crime Agency?

A. That is right.

Q. It is an independent, non-ministerial department headed by a Director General who is accountable to the Home Secretary as sponsoring minister, is that correct?

A. That is right.

Q. Thank you, and you have exhibited the NCA 2015 framework, which sets out NCA's accountability, management, operational and financial arrangements, could we have that up on screen, please. It is NCA000006.

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1 So we see the front page there. Could we move on to
2 page 7 please NCA000006_0007. Thank you. I will just
3 read the opening paragraph, which is paragraph 1.1:

4 "The National Crime Agency (NCA) is accountable to
5 the Home Secretary and, through the Home Secretary, to
6 Parliament. The NCA's core mission, as set out by the
7 Government in National Crime Agency: A Plan for the
8 Creation of a National Crime Fighting Capability
9 (published in June 2011) is to lead the UK's fight to
10 cut serious and organised crime. An integral part of
11 the UK law enforcement, the NCA will have strong,
12 two-way links with local police forces and other law
13 enforcement and intelligence agencies."

14 No doubt we all have a broad understanding of what
15 is meant by "organised crime". Can you help us with
16 what's meant by "serious crime"?

17 A. So, the NCA deals with the highest harm of organised
18 crime. So as I mentioned there, are seven key crime
19 types that we divide our work into and we would deal
20 with the most complex of those seven crimes. So the
21 most serious and complex crimes within the seven crime
22 types.

23 Q. Thank you. Forgive me for going into the law, but is
24 this right, the meaning of serious crime is referred to
25 in the Serious Crime Act 2007?

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1 considered our operational priorities. So, that's the
2 mechanism where we will deliver the Home Secretary's
3 priorities.

4 Q. Thank you. Just put to one side whether this is in any
5 way feasible or desirable in practice, but purely
6 engaging with the theory, if there is an intended new
7 offence of preparing to carry out a mass casualty
8 attack, if that was brought within the definition of
9 "serious crime", then work to counter Violence Fixed
10 Individuals could be made a priority for the NCA, is
11 that right?

12 A. Yes, it could.

13 Q. Just continuing through this document.

14 Page 12 NCA000006_0012 and paragraph 7.1 sets out
15 that:

16 "The NCA will work collaboratively with other
17 government departments, UK police forces and law
18 enforcement agencies ..."

19 Then 7.3, it says:

20 "Collaboration between work on counter-terrorism and
21 organised crime is a priority."

22 We will come onto some of that collaboration in
23 time. Is this right, you tell us in your statement that
24 there is a statutory obligation on the NCA to ensure it
25 is transparent and publishes information about the

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1 A. That is right.

2 Q. And that includes certain offences relating to things
3 like terrorism, firearms offences, computer misuse,
4 blackmail and so on?

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. Thank you. Could we turn over, please, to page 8
7 NCA000006_0008 and paragraph 4.1. So, we have the kind
8 of legal theory and structure and then we move on to the
9 role of the Home Secretary at 4.1, where it says:

10 "The Home Secretary is charged with safeguarding the
11 public, preventing crime and protecting the UK's borders
12 and national security. The Home Secretary will have
13 a legal duty to determine the strategic priorities for
14 the NCA, in consultation with the Director General and
15 with the NCA's strategic partners."

16 We then see, at 4.2(a), that the Director General
17 determines:

18 "... the 'operational priorities' ... in line with
19 the 'strategic priorities' set by the Home Secretary."

20 Are you able to help with how that works in
21 practice, beyond the kind of black letters on the page?

22 A. Yes, of course. So, Graeme Biggar is our Director
23 General and the Home Secretary sets the strategic
24 priorities and then we are operationally independent, so
25 how we respond to those strategic priorities is

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1 exercise of its functions?

2 A. That is correct.

3 Q. Thank you. Mr Wright just gives a sort of pithy
4 overview of the way this works in practice in his
5 statement. If we could have that up, please, page 2
6 NCA000005_0002 and paragraph 9.

7 Ms Rance, would you be able just to speak to those?
8 So taking them in turn:

9 "... single national intelligence picture of the
10 [serious organised crime] threat facing the UK ..."

11 So that's the serious organised crime work.

12 A. That's correct. So, we have intelligence from a number
13 of different sources. One of the key things about the
14 NCA is our international liaison officers and our
15 international partnerships. So we deal with
16 international intelligence that affects the UK as well
17 as sensitive intelligence and together, we have
18 an overall picture specifically related to serious and
19 organised crime threat.

20 Q. Thank you. Following from that:

21 "Investigating and taking action against the
22 highest-harm offenders ..."

23 Which you spoke to previously. We have talked about
24 setting the operational priorities and also:

25 "Hosting and providing partners with ... national

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1 and specialist capabilities, including support to
2 serious and major crime investigations across policing".
3 Is that right?

4 A. That is right.

5 Q. Thank you.

6 Can we move on then, please, to the Com network.
7 Those who heard the talk of Mr Richardson of the NCA in
8 seminar 6B will have learnt really only too well about
9 them. But for the sake of re-cap, could we have
10 Mr Wright's statement at paragraph 17, please
11 NCA000005_0004.

12 So he sets out there the background to the work of
13 NCA with the Com networks and talks about what the Com
14 networks are. Can you, just in your own words, give
15 just a brief précis of the Com Networks for anyone who
16 might have missed Mr Richardson's talk?

17 A. Yes, so "Com" is short for community and these are
18 networks of -- that are hosted online, of groups of
19 people, generally young people, generally young males,
20 who communicate with one another in a network and they
21 look to gain kudos or notoriety from some horrendous
22 acts that they either commit themselves or entice others
23 to commit for their notoriety.

24 The reason we and the NCA have looked at this is
25 because we have had the child sexual abuse threat and

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1 referred to is an offline Com Network which might be
2 sort of closest to matters that the Inquiry is looking
3 at. Can you just describe what that is?

4 A. So offline would be the opposite online. So this would
5 be -- we would sometimes describe them as real-world
6 acts. So perhaps acts of arson or graffiti or -- we
7 have had instances of self-harm that are actually
8 committed, as opposed to the cyber crime elements, which
9 is online. So, yes, there are offline elements to these
10 networks as well as online elements.

11 Q. Might that include either carrying out acts of violence
12 or encouraging others to do so?

13 A. That's correct, yes.

14 Q. Mr Wright's statement tells us that the NCA became aware
15 of Com groups in 2024. So were they a relatively new
16 phenomenon?

17 A. Yes, a relatively new phenomenon that started in the US
18 but certainly, we first -- the NCA really started to see
19 them and work out our response to them in 2024.

20 Q. Thank you. No doubt, this is a broad and complex
21 question, but do you have any insight into what has
22 driven them to emerge?

23 A. There are a number of different pathways and a number of
24 different reasons. They have emerged because young
25 people spend an awful lot of time online. Because these

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1 the cyber crime threat and these are two places where
2 the Com networks can sort of interlock and they really
3 are a hybridisation of threats. They are not one
4 specific threat. It is not just child sexual abuse or
5 just cyber crime or indeed terrorism. The individuals
6 can work and be involved in a hybridisation of those
7 different threats.

8 Q. Thank you, and maybe this is a little over theoretical
9 for the thinking that you have done about it, but is it
10 the offending type that has brought them within the
11 orbit of the NCA or the fact that they are a network and
12 could be said to be organised, although probably not in
13 conventional terms?

14 A. A bit of both, if I'm honest. So the offending type, so
15 as I said, we are the receptacle for national -- the
16 national receptacle for child sexual abuse referrals
17 from the US and going through those referrals, that was
18 something that we have identified that this was
19 an increasing trend because it often initiates by
20 perhaps an indecent image of a child. So, yes, through
21 our work in CSA and our work in cyber crime we became
22 aware and involved and indeed, as you say, they are
23 a network and the organised elements then fell to us to
24 work through and understand.

25 Q. Thank you. One of the types of Com Network that's

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1 young people are often looking for an online community
2 or a network. They may have gathered in gaming networks
3 and begun talking to one another and perhaps the social
4 isolation has driven them to do this. Then the kudos
5 that some have gained from this, has then been
6 attractive to other members.

7 Q. And is this right, that there is an increase in
8 referrals to the NCA for Com Network members year on
9 year?

10 A. Yes, that is correct.

11 Q. You pause. Is there any further detail --

12 A. Well, yes, in that when you are looking out for
13 something and you are raising awareness of something,
14 then often you see more of it because you understand
15 what it is.

16 Q. So we shouldn't take that to mean that they have
17 expanded, the Com networks, in terms of membership?

18 A. I think they have -- we think they have expanded but we
19 also have worked very hard to raise the awareness. So
20 how much is expansion and how much is just
21 internationally, we are looking for these things. It
22 will be a mixture.

23 Q. Thank you. I want to move to the interplay between
24 Com Networks and VFIs or Violence Fixated Individuals.
25 Mr Wright tells us that Com Network members are

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1 predominantly but not always males between the ages much
2 14 to 17 years old who may have been socially rejected
3 and isolated offline, hence displaying a preference for
4 these online interactions. Sir, that is paragraph 25 of
5 his statement.

6 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you, that's very helpful.

7 **MR BOYLE:** I don't know the extent to which you have been
8 able to hear the evidence of the Inquiry's expert cadre
9 but would you agree that that seems to share many of the
10 characteristics that were identified as features of
11 Violence Fixated Individuals as well?

12 **A.** Yes, I would agree.

13 **Q.** And if we could actually just have, please, paragraph 24
14 of Mr Wright's statement NCA000005_0006. He talks a bit
15 more about the pathways, which I think you have touched
16 on already. But perhaps just to paraphrase, he talks
17 about boredom and social isolation, unsupervised time
18 online. Again, I think features, would you agree, that
19 might be shared with VFIs?

20 **A.** Yes, they may be shared with VFIs.

21 **Q.** Thrill seeking, which is perhaps a point of distinction.
22 Bullying or rejection by peers can lead to a retreat
23 into the online environment. Again, we might say
24 similarities with VFIs, would you agree?

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 **A.** Yes.

2 **Q.** Thank you very much.

3 I want to move on then, please, to Project
4 Rhyobasalt, so that's the NCA's project to deal with
5 the Com network. Is this right, it started in
6 June 2024?

7 **A.** That's correct, yes.

8 **Q.** And is it built jointly with Counter Terrorism Policing?

9 **A.** Yes, I think it is fair to say that in 2024, it wasn't.
10 It was given a name when we identified this threat and
11 it was given that name, RHYOBASALT, to work on the
12 project and it sort of developed and evolved over time.
13 So it's not now what it was then, and yes, we have
14 worked with Counter Terrorism Policing but probably not
15 so much in 2024, that sort of evolved.

16 **Q.** Can you just help us with what the evolution would have
17 been?

18 **A.** Yes, of course. So as I explained, the reason that we
19 had identified this was because of our focus on child
20 sexual abuse material and in terms of cyber crime and so
21 we had called it a sub-threat of child sexual abuse and
22 that's how we developed it and then, fast-forwarding
23 into 2025, the letter which I am sure you will come
24 onto, it was a good vehicle to be -- we had already
25 convened this, we had already started this project, and

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1 **Q.** But it then goes on to say:

2 "... where charismatic personas can be constructed
3 and some young people seek belonging in online
4 communities which validate their identities."

5 Potentially a point of difference, do you agree?

6 **A.** That potentially is a point of difference, yes.

7 **Q.** Thank you, and then, of course, the paragraph 25,
8 Mr Wright moves on to talk about this kudos which you
9 have talked about which again appears to be potentially
10 a point of difference with VFIs, or at least some of
11 them?

12 **A.** Yes. I would say that the biggest difference really
13 was -- is the group as opposed to individual that's
14 explained there, yes.

15 **Q.** Thank you. But do you agree with Mr Wright saying that
16 many of the characteristics, drivers and underlying
17 factors for engagement in Com Networks are similar to
18 those of VFIs?

19 **A.** Yes.

20 **Q.** Thank you. And that, given Com Network members must
21 spend significant time online, and that you and
22 Mr Wright have both identified that there can be
23 an interest in gore, violence, sexual abuse and even
24 animal abuse, there must be VFIs within the Com
25 networks, is that right?

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1 then when we -- when it was gathering traction, we
2 hooked our response onto the work that we had already
3 done.

4 **Q.** So, yes, you are quite right, we will come on to this
5 but I think you are referring to the joint letter sent
6 by NCA, NPCC and CTP in early 2025?

7 **A.** That is right.

8 **Q.** Thank you. Yes, we will pick up on that. It is
9 a project, is this right, that seems to bring together
10 law enforcement but also safeguarding partnerships and
11 industry and so on?

12 **A.** Yes.

13 **Q.** We will come to look at some examples of that. And
14 there is a RHYOBASALT intelligence coordination cell
15 that was established in October 2025, is that right?

16 **A.** That is right, yes.

17 **Q.** And where does Project Rhyobasalt receive referrals
18 from?

19 **A.** So, the intelligence coordination's cell, if I can call
20 that the RICC for shorthand, that's the point of -- that
21 the NCA and CTP de-conflict some of the cases. Where it
22 receives cases from, they come through a number of
23 different channels. Do you want me to talk you through
24 the different way they --

25 **Q.** Yes, please.

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1 A. So they enter into the UK law enforcement, often via
2 platforms identifying the material, referring it into
3 the NCMEC in the US and onto the NCA, our bureau. We
4 then, at the NCA, we triage those, we do some
5 intelligence enrichment and ultimately, we disseminate
6 those out to policing.

7 Now, at that stage, we wouldn't necessarily know if
8 it was a Com investigation because that can take some
9 further enquiries that are done by local policing,
10 perhaps digital downloads and review and at that point
11 they may realise that they have got an offender that
12 looks like part of a Com Network.

13 Those domestic enquiries from policing can then be
14 referred into the RICC for intelligence de-confliction.
15 So at no point does the RICC take control of those
16 investigations, they may contact them to wash against
17 the intelligence systems, if you will, to see if they
18 are known to CT Policing or to the NCA.

19 So many come from domestic law enforcement via the
20 routes that I explained. Also, there is enquiries that
21 come from international. So, they may have enquiries
22 that come into the RICC, perhaps the FBI are doing
23 an investigation that might have a UK nexus or a UK
24 victim and the RICC would work with them to be able to
25 get those enquiries to the right part of the law

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1 extent does the NCA hold onto the case or is it just
2 a matter of when the case is brought back, if at all, by
3 local policing?

4 A. The NCA doesn't hold onto the cases, not at all.

5 Sorry, if can I just clarify, it may have cases if
6 they reach the threshold of the NCA, we may take on some
7 Com cases if they reach the complexity level that would
8 mean the NCA would take them on but that's separate to
9 the function of the RICC.

10 Q. Understood, okay. So that's Project Rhyobasalt as
11 a whole but not within the RICC, or maybe that's not
12 a helpful distinction?

13 A. Not quite. It is not quite that. It would go to one of
14 our child abuse investigation teams if it reached the
15 complexity level that met that national tasking for
16 those teams.

17 Q. Thank you. Could we have Mr Wright's statement at
18 page 12 and paragraph 50. Mr Wright there talks about
19 "for a referral to be progressed by the RICC". Can you
20 just help explain what that means, based on the
21 explanation you have just given?

22 A. Yes, so they would be able to help with those factors
23 (a) to (d). If it was just one image -- one indecent
24 image, it wouldn't look like it was in a Com Network and
25 wouldn't be referred into for further advice.

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1 enforcement system.

2 Q. In general terms, is it material that is being referred
3 to the NCA, or people?

4 A. It is material, but when we talk about referrals into
5 the RICC, that might be a referral for a training
6 package or some best practice or some tactical advice.
7 So a referral in isn't necessarily a material that is
8 a Com Network. "Referral", we have used that word but
9 it refers to any time they are contacted.

10 Q. Understood. I think what I'm asking is where something
11 of concern is being raised with the RICC, is that just:
12 we flagged this image or might it be: we have flagged
13 this user who seems to be sharing lots of these images?

14 A. It could be either. The local officers, as I said, in
15 territorial policing will hold onto those
16 investigations. So at no point are they saying: here
17 you go RICC, this looks like one for you. They are
18 holding onto that but they may be saying: we think this
19 looks like a Com offender, what do you know about this
20 username or -- and they can wash some of that
21 intelligence through the system.

22 Q. Understood. So you talked about the kind of
23 intelligence collection work that the NCA does. Can
24 I just understand, for an individual case, there is
25 a sort of a triage, de-confliction process. To what

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1 So I think, you know, that word "progress", they
2 don't -- the RICC don't actually progress the case, they
3 will help with the case, I think is the way of
4 distinguishing it.

5 Q. So providing specialist support for local police using
6 NCA's expertise in this online world?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Thank you. I just wanted to look at the definition or
9 the sort of sub-factors given there about where
10 an individual "should be suspected of being a member of
11 a Com group". Is that definition a kind of working
12 definition that is used by Project Rhyobasalt?

13 A. That is right, yes.

14 Q. Just going through those:

15 "Operate within an online chat group [or] platform;

16 "Communicate or claim credit for their offending;

17 "Use identifiers distinct to a Com Network ..."

18 Just pausing there. "Identifiers", what might that
19 be?

20 A. So, you may have heard in Mr Richardson's presentation
21 that they may have tag-lines or symbols that they use,
22 so that would be an identifier.

23 Q. So they are associating themselves with particular
24 network?

25 A. Yes, that is right.

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1 Q. And then (d):
 2 "Be involved in sextortion, and/or involved in cyber
 3 criminality, and/or involved in sharing extremist
 4 content, and/or encouraging real-world violence."
 5 Do you have a view on how -- whether people working
 6 in Project Rhyobasalt find this definition easy to
 7 apply?
 8 A. I don't have a view. I haven't been told that they
 9 don't, but the Com network work is continually evolving
 10 and this is some guidelines to understand what might be
 11 dealing with.
 12 I just think, when we talk about the RICC, I think
 13 what I want to make clear is it is not just the NCA, it
 14 is very much NCA officers and CTP officers together that
 15 are working through this. So that's just one
 16 clarification I want to make.
 17 Q. Thank you. One of those sub-factors is "communicate or
 18 claim credit for their offending"; is that something
 19 that's easy to determine when looking at a Com
 20 network -- potential Com network subject?
 21 A. Yes, because it is often, their chats are online and so
 22 visible. So we have seen that in the chat logs, that
 23 that's part of their notoriety-gathering is claiming
 24 credit for what they have done.
 25 Q. Thank you. I just ask you to put a pin in that thought

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1 A. That is right.
 2 Q. And what signs would be looked for to identify that
 3 risk?
 4 A. So, if there had been a real-world violent act that was
 5 part of the investigation or -- yes, I would leave it at
 6 that, that there was a real-world violent act.
 7 Q. Evidence of attack planning?
 8 A. I'm -- would that be a real-world violent --
 9 Q. Would that lead to a triage, can it be spotted?
 10 A. I mean, that would go straight -- the CTP officers
 11 within the RICC would certainly look at that, yes.
 12 Q. And do you have any idea of how easy that is to
 13 identify? Are you able to give us any insight of how
 14 that process works? The reason I ask is that, we will
 15 perhaps come onto the idea that -- of what's called
 16 open-source intelligence, in other words, the use of
 17 open-source information on forums, et cetera, to
 18 identify Violence Fixated Individuals.
 19 That triaging function, in your experience, how does
 20 that work, is it effective?
 21 A. I wouldn't -- the incident that you described in terms
 22 of real-world violence, the CTP officers would deal with
 23 that side and I really couldn't comment on how they
 24 would do that.
 25 Q. The triage process that would take it to the CTP

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1 and we will come back to it when we look at definitions
 2 for VFIs because there is some read-across. Just
 3 looking at these definitions, I would just observe --
 4 and again, help me with your view, do you have you
 5 a view if whether the case studies that the Inquiry has
 6 used would have met these requirements? It looks like
 7 some of them would have met some of the requirements.
 8 But if we were to look at AR, for example, he wouldn't
 9 have met certainly requirements (a) to (c) and there
 10 would be a question mark as to whether he was involved
 11 in sharing extremist content as well, do you agree with
 12 that?
 13 A. I do agree with that and I'm familiar with some of the
 14 other case studies and I would say that they would not
 15 meet this definition.
 16 Q. Yes. So we see shared characteristics but not
 17 necessarily complete overlap?
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. Thank you. Or at least not complete overlap in those
 20 case studies?
 21 A. Correct.
 22 Q. Thank you. One part of Project Rhyobasalt's role is
 23 triaging cases which pose a risk of real-world violence,
 24 and is this right, those would be triaged to Counter
 25 Terrorism Policing?

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1 officer, is that a slightly artificial distinction I'm
 2 making because it is both NCA and CTP work jointly?
 3 A. Correct.
 4 Q. Thank you. If we could move, please, to paragraph 44
 5 NCA000005_0011 of Mr Wright's statement. Thank you very
 6 much.
 7 So we see there the results of the RICC so far. So
 8 it has been 1,200 referrals between October 2025 and
 9 June 2026, including 252 from online partners and that's
 10 led to a supported executive action leading to
 11 37 arrests in the UK and ensured the safeguarding of
 12 58 vulnerable individuals in the UK and abroad.
 13 It is obviously a reasonably new project. Do you
 14 view that as a kind of effective output?
 15 A. I think it is quite complicated and because it's new and
 16 there's no overarching case management system or -- what
 17 constitutes a referral isn't clear. It is not the same
 18 as -- as I said, a referral could be: please could we
 19 have some training on the Com? Or: please could you
 20 present to this? Or: could you send us some guidance.
 21 So that 1,200 referrals doesn't quite meet with what
 22 you might think of as a referral.
 23 Q. So it is certainly not 1,200 individuals?
 24 A. No, absolutely not.
 25 Q. But can I ask you just to comment, maybe even putting

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1 these figures to one side, on how you think Project
 2 Rhyobasalt is working?
 3 A. I think it is working effectively and it really is
 4 raising awareness and offering advice and being that
 5 point of call when officers don't know what they might
 6 be looking at, to be able to advise them and help them.
 7 So I think it is serving a good purpose there,
 8 absolutely.
 9 Q. Yes, I don't think anyone, particularly who heard
 10 Mr Richardson's seminar, would take issue with the
 11 purpose. I suppose another side of the coin is whether
 12 it is a kind of fruitful and feasible exercise to try
 13 and dismantle the Com networks, or at least lead in
 14 taking them on?
 15 A. It is a big task to do this and certainly it's not one
 16 that the UK can do alone. I think that's really clear
 17 because so often the perpetrator may be overseas and the
 18 victim may be in another country. So it's not a fight
 19 that the UK can solve on its own but I do think that the
 20 work that we are doing is having an effect, absolutely.
 21 Q. Thank you. The Com network is -- perhaps a point of
 22 difference, it is almost entirely located online,
 23 whereas the Violence Fixed Individual might show
 24 concern elsewhere. No doubt, a Com network member may
 25 do too. But that kind of online focus on the activity,

25

1 Q. We will come onto some of that. Can I just ask you
 2 about the safeguarding side of Project Rhyobasalt. So,
 3 Mr Wright notes that the NCA has a team of child
 4 protection advisers. Are you able to help us with what
 5 their qualifications are and what their role is?
 6 A. Yes, so there is a team of approximately 20 and they
 7 generally come from a social work background but often
 8 an education background, and they work with our
 9 investigations teams to help with the safeguarding
 10 strategies for child sexual abuse investigations. So,
 11 they also -- we have a -- it is called Click CEOP,
 12 online, where children can report in if they are
 13 suffering from abuse or need some help and they respond
 14 to those Click CEOP enquiries. So it is really giving
 15 advice. They are not -- they don't -- they also do the
 16 links into the local safeguarding teams.
 17 Q. So this isn't multi-agency working because they are
 18 actually within NCA, but it is multidisciplinary
 19 working?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. Has that been an important feature of NCA's work in
 22 respect of the Com network?
 23 A. I would say in respect of child sexual abuse
 24 investigations, certainly. The Com networks
 25 specifically, as we don't hold a huge amount of those

27

1 are the kind of tools -- does NCA have the kind of tools
 2 and ability to use that online focus to get to real kind
 3 of law enforcement results?
 4 A. Well, we are bound by RIPA and the law like every other
 5 law enforcement agency. So we don't have -- we don't do
 6 any additional -- I think it would be quite difficult
 7 for me to answer that without getting into sensitive
 8 matters.
 9 Q. Yes, sorry, I'm not trying to invite you to do that. It
 10 is my fault, the question could be clearer.
 11 The kind of online focus of the exercise of Project
 12 Rhyobasalt, perhaps that's not unusual to NCA because of
 13 the work it does in child sexual abuse and so on. But
 14 again, perhaps looking at the idea of open-source
 15 intelligence, which we will pick up on in the future,
 16 but is that kind of online focus, do you think,
 17 effective in tackling Com network individuals?
 18 A. I think it is one of the tools and I think it's
 19 necessary because -- obviously, we have talked about the
 20 offline elements but they are almost entirely doing
 21 their work online. So it needs to be -- we need to be
 22 able to access and to see what they are doing online.
 23 The issue is often we can't see what they have been
 24 doing online until after they have been arrested and we
 25 have their devices.

26

1 investigations ourselves, they can offer some guidance
 2 but they wouldn't -- we don't take it on, so they don't
 3 take it on; it is for more for the guidance capacity.
 4 Q. Thank you. You said that the child protection advisers
 5 might be the point of contact to a referral onto, for
 6 example, a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. Is that
 7 an ongoing process? Is there ongoing communication
 8 between the child protection advisers and the MASH?
 9 A. I would say it is not ongoing. They set the strategies
 10 and put the links in but the MASHs would hold the --
 11 would do the multi-agency arrangements from there.
 12 Q. Would that be helpful, to have that kind of joint law
 13 enforcement and safeguarding relationship ongoing?
 14 A. Yes, I think it probably would.
 15 Q. We will come onto some of the structures that we might
 16 think about and the way in which that could manifest
 17 itself. You also, I think, tell us that NCA has
 18 statutory child protection obligations under the
 19 Children Acts and equivalents elsewhere around the UK.
 20 I think the NCA will also be subject to the new
 21 information sharing duty from the Children's Wellbeing
 22 and Schools Act 2026. Is that an area you are familiar
 23 with?
 24 A. I'm not overly familiar with, no.
 25 Q. This might be an issue which is better directed at the

28

1 safeguarding professionals and the child protection
2 advisers but a consistent theme in the Inquiry is that
3 the concept of safeguarding legislation addresses the
4 risk to the child and the Com network is obviously
5 an area where -- we heard from Mr Richardson --
6 an interplay between victims and perpetrators. People
7 can be both, is that right?

8 A. Both.

9 Q. Do you have an idea of the NCA's approach to that?

10 A. We would have an obligation, if there was a risk to
11 a child, to make the relevant referrals and there would
12 also -- there could be Article 2 risks within this as
13 well. So I think, whether the child was the victim or
14 the perpetrator, there would be referrals that we would
15 put through. I do not think we would distinguish.

16 Q. Would you ever have cause to consider whether the
17 concept of risk to a child might also incorporate
18 a consideration of the risk posed by that child to
19 others?

20 A. There may be instances where we would consider that.
21 I have heard the evidence so far and I do understand
22 that that is a difficulty. But we would deal with that
23 risk in the same way that local policing would deal with
24 that and we would make the referrals and whether that
25 child posed a risk to others, we would deal with that

29

1 Q. And it provides education, early intervention and
2 diversion?
3 A. That is right.
4 Q. Could we have on screen, please, ILT000285. These are
5 the slides from that talk. Could we go to slide 4,
6 ILT000285_0004, please and just expand that.

7 So I don't know, Ms Rance, whether Cyber Prevent
8 sits within your area of expertise but it might just be
9 helpful to look at it to draw an analogy. We see the
10 process on a page there, which has a few different
11 directions and arrows, but can I just pick out some
12 features from that.

13 So, the referral is received and it is then
14 assessed, priority triaged, de-conflicted and local
15 intelligence checks are carried out. Would you agree
16 that seems to be reasonably similar to the CT Prevent
17 process?

18 A. Yes. I would say the difference is it is -- the
19 referral is received by a police officer, not a portal.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. There isn't a central mechanism where they are referred
22 into. They would be -- it would be a Cyber Prevent
23 officer, who is generally a police officer or a member
24 of police staff and they would take that referral.

25 Q. Understood. And there is then a check against the

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1 child and they are still a child and would have
2 obligations to do that.

3 Q. So, in your view, the wording of the statutory
4 definitions isn't a barrier to, at least from the NCA's
5 perspective?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Thank you. I just want to now move on to NCA work in
8 the preventative space. So, you tell us in your
9 statement that the NCA sets out its annual operational
10 ambitions in the four P's approach. So we will know
11 this from our CTP evidence: Pursue, Prevent, Prepare and
12 Protect, to deliver impact against those ambitions. So,
13 is this right, that that four Ps approach the NCA
14 applies to its own work, distinct from the kind of
15 CONTEST, Counter Terrorism Policing context that we know
16 it in?

17 A. Yes, correct. We have adopted the four P approach and
18 each of the different threats will have a four P plan
19 for it, yes.

20 Q. Thank you. So, just moving briefly away from Project
21 Rhyobasalt. We heard from the NCA officer in seminar 6A
22 about Cyber Prevent. Is this right, that seeks to
23 educate and deter individuals from becoming involved in
24 cyber crime?

25 A. That is right.

30

1 national record conducted and then we see step four, if
2 a case is opened. So could you just help us out, I know
3 the NCA officer would have told us, but "SOI not known",
4 that means?

5 A. Subject of interest.

6 Q. Yes. So, in other words, they are not being looked at
7 under Pursue, would that be the right way of putting it?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Thank you, and the case opens and national intelligence
10 checks are conducted. De-confliction again at step 5.
11 Then we see step 7 onwards. So a baseline risk
12 assessment is made, the Cyber Prevent interventions are
13 conducted by the Cyber Prevent officers. Are you able
14 to help us on what sort of interventions are available?

15 A. Yes, just to reiterate, this is a NCA-designed process
16 but it is not delivered by the NCA. It is delivered by
17 local policing, just for that clarity, and the guidance
18 though comes centrally.

19 So, the risk assessment is done and depending on the
20 risk scoring, an intervention is done. That could be
21 a knock at the door and a chat and education about the
22 Computer Misuse Act, and -- because that's what this is
23 dealing with -- and perhaps talking about how victims
24 may feel. So an education talk from a police officer or
25 similar.

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1 It could be trying to divert them by suggesting:
 2 there is a local coding club where your skills could be
 3 put to good use, so giving them other options to use
 4 their skills. And it can go to, if there are a number
 5 of candidates with similar needs, a panel together where
 6 they get previous offenders in to come and talk to them
 7 about their experiences and how they should try and
 8 divert to a different pathway.
 9 **Q.** Thank you. The NCA officer talked about the idea of
 10 family engagement?
 11 **A.** Yes.
 12 **Q.** How does that work in a cyber setting?
 13 **A.** So, the reason you would need family engagement is
 14 because it is voluntary. It's actually called Cyber
 15 Choices and "choices" because they have got a choice and
 16 as given they're generally under 18, it would need to
 17 engage the family because the parental agreement would
 18 need to happen. So, obviously, a lot of the protective
 19 factors are within the family. So it is engaging with
 20 the family, perhaps to educate the family as well as the
 21 person on the pathway.
 22 **Q.** So a common theme of the Inquiry's evidence,
 23 particularly from the experts, is this idea that the
 24 young person is a digital native and the parents may not
 25 have an understanding of their devices and what they are

33

1 through, what the outcome was, and know those effects,
 2 yes.
 3 **Q.** Thank you. I don't know if you are able to give
 4 specific numbers, but can you give us any idea of the
 5 scale of number of referrals that progress through?
 6 **A.** I think there is approximately 200 a year, nationally.
 7 **Q.** Thank you. So, we can see points of difference but
 8 certainly also points of similarity with CT Prevent, is
 9 that right?
 10 **A.** Yes, and certainly a lot of the design was from CT
 11 Prevent best practice, so that there are similarities,
 12 yes.
 13 **Q.** Thank you. Could we have, please, page 10
 14 NCA000032_0010 of your statement and paragraph 47. So,
 15 going back to Project Rhyobasalt, you tell us there,
 16 that it:
 17 "... has developed a Prevent response focusing on
 18 Com networks, including options for the production of
 19 educational products, new policy and legislation,
 20 academic research, online messaging and further
 21 engagement with international and industry partners."
 22 I think Mr Richardson told us in the seminar that it
 23 didn't incorporate the kind of equivalent sort of
 24 intervention with an individual that we would probably
 25 come to associate with CT Prevent, is that right?

35

1 doing. So this is aimed to address that, is it?
 2 **A.** Yes.
 3 **Q.** And what about teaching parents about controls and ways
 4 in which they might supervise and appropriately sort of
 5 guide the use of devices by their children?
 6 **A.** Yes, that could be done too. Whether that's in person
 7 or by advice, we have got various "stay safe online"
 8 documents that we could share with families. So, yes,
 9 that would be important.
 10 **Q.** Thank you. Then, moving on to number 9, we have:
 11 "Post-intervention risk assessment made by Cyber
 12 Prevent."
 13 So there is an assessment as to whether the
 14 intervention has been effective?
 15 **A.** Yes.
 16 **Q.** And then:
 17 "Referral closure sent to NCCU Prevent by a Cyber
 18 Prevent officer".
 19 Am I right, is that giving NCA oversight of what has
 20 happened with the referral?
 21 **A.** Yes, it is. But just again to reiterate, this isn't on
 22 a system that talks with the local policing, this will
 23 be by an email and updating a spreadsheet, effectively.
 24 So it's not a terribly sophisticated tracking
 25 mechanism, but the NCA would know how many had come

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1 **A.** That is right. It is really a project in its infancy
 2 and it's not developed to that, no.
 3 **Q.** Given NCA's expertise on the Com networks, the use of
 4 the four P approach with Prevent and the expertise
 5 gained from Cyber Prevent, isn't that something that
 6 could be useful?
 7 **A.** Yes, we would need to understand a lot more about the
 8 pathways into the Com network and that's -- one of the
 9 reasons we haven't done it yet is we need to understand
 10 what diversion and what tactics would be useful. Many
 11 of those would sit with our safeguarding partners. So,
 12 yes, we could. The Cyber Prevent is about deterring
 13 people -- young people from effectively hacking, whereas
 14 this is -- RHYOBASALT is deterring people from much more
 15 sinister -- I don't want to say more sinister, but more
 16 violent potentially and so that is not necessarily where
 17 our skill-set would lie but we could certainly work with
 18 statutory safeguarding partners to develop that, yes.
 19 **Q.** So, part of the challenge would be then setting up the
 20 kind of Channel equivalent that would sit beyond the
 21 Prevent process, is that right?
 22 **A.** Yes.
 23 **Q.** And are you able to help in terms of how much sort of
 24 work has been done in that area to scope it out, how
 25 long it has been progressing for, whether there's any

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1 next sort of decision stages coming up?

2 **A.** I can help in that it has not been scoped out at all.

3 Most of our work over the last year has been producing

4 the various alerts that we have done to safeguarding

5 partners, to industries, to parents and carers and

6 working with international partners to understand the

7 threat. We haven't gone beyond that in terms of

8 developing preventative tools.

9 **Q.** So is that a sort of resource challenge then, there

10 hasn't been the time to do the work to consider it?

11 **A.** A resource challenge but also a skill-set challenge as

12 well. Whereas cyber is very much within our skill-set,

13 some of the responses for these young people may not

14 be -- a combination of: we haven't got to it yet. Will

15 we ever get to it? Well, we would need to work with

16 others to develop that.

17 **Q.** It would need to be perhaps set as -- I'm not sure if it

18 would come as high as a strategic priority, but

19 certainly an operational --

20 **A.** It would be yes.

21 **Q.** Sorry, it would be a strategic --

22 **A.** Oh, sorry. Depending on the resource level. I mean, if

23 it was a whole new pathway then absolutely, we would

24 need direction from the Home Secretary that that would

25 be for us, yes.

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1 of -- so, it is education across the board really.

2 **Q.** What kind of level of awareness has NCA -- has the

3 project -- does the project have a measure of the level

4 of awareness that -- of frontline practitioners,

5 thinking in education and social work, of these types of

6 issues?

7 **A.** No, I would suggest that's quite hard to evaluate. It

8 would need to be -- in order to be successful, it would

9 need to be kind of a part of every training package that

10 every professional or educator is -- has and it is

11 certainly not that. But we have done an awful lot of

12 presentations and sent out documents to as many partners

13 as we can. So, we have tried; it is not part of every

14 training package, though, for safeguarding

15 professionals, no.

16 **Q.** So the aim is to educate frontline practitioners of the

17 warning signs to look out for?

18 **A.** That is right.

19 **Q.** Would you agree that that's an example of practice that

20 could be carried over into work addressing VFIs?

21 **A.** Yes, it could.

22 **Q.** Another is that Project Rhyobasalt is establishing

23 an academic research working group, which I think you

24 tell us that the aim is to inform the development of

25 early intervention initiatives, through a better

39

1 **Q.** Can I just ask about the other aspects of Project

2 Rhyobasalt which you have referred to in passing. So,

3 alerts to policing industry and child safeguarding

4 partnerships to help identify Com offending. Can you

5 help us on what work that the project has done in that

6 respect?

7 **A.** Yes, this is all about awareness raising, which is what

8 I alluded to earlier when I said the numbers have gone

9 up. So for example, the industry alert was sent to

10 65 different platforms and tech platforms to say: this

11 is what we are seeing, this is what you need to look out

12 for, this is how you may need to amend your safety and

13 your trust and safety guidelines and moderation. So

14 that's the industry one. The safeguarding has gone out

15 to education and to social workers and local

16 authorities. Again, to explain the phenomenon, what

17 they may be presented with and how they may -- how they

18 may approach that or some guidance around that.

19 Safeguarding -- and for the police officers, it is

20 really -- we have done a lot of work with -- across the

21 network. Obviously, there is an enormous amount of

22 police officers in this country and trying to get the

23 message out to them as: this is something you may be

24 presented with, an individual with cut signs and that

25 might be you need to look further, it could be because

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1 understanding of offender pathways to Com offending and

2 victim vulnerabilities. That's your paragraph 66, just

3 for your note, sir.

4 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you.

5 **MR BOYLE:** What are your views of the importance of this?

6 What's it brought to Project Rhyobasalt?

7 **A.** There is an awful lot of people interested, a lot of

8 academics that are interested in this, I think it is

9 fair to say. So by pulling together those interested

10 parties, we have really ensured that we are not all

11 doing -- they are then not all doing the same research.

12 So really ensuring that we have got an understanding

13 across the board. And perhaps directing them to areas

14 perhaps where we haven't yet got an understanding. So

15 it is really bringing together those academic

16 researchers and trying to ensure that we have got lots

17 of different areas covered.

18 **Q.** So, the aim then is to direct the academic research into

19 a kind of consistent output, rather than necessarily

20 commissioning any from the working group itself, or

21 a bit of both?

22 **A.** Bit of both, yes.

23 **Q.** Thank you. Is that something that's been necessary

24 because the Com groups are a new -- relatively new

25 phenomenon?

40

1 A. Yes, that is right.
 2 Q. And, again, presumably you would agree, that's
 3 an example of practice that could be carried over into
 4 any sort of work on VFIs?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. Thank you. I want to move on, now please, to more focus
 7 on the VFI issue to the extent that you are able to
 8 assist on it and it is relevant to NCA.
 9 We will come onto the question of whether, in your
 10 view, the VFI cohort should be treated separately to
 11 others or whether we should just be looking at baskets
 12 of risk and the importance of ideology, shortly. But
 13 before we do that, I just want to consider the
 14 appropriate definition for VFIs.
 15 Could we have up on the screen please Mr Emmett's
 16 statement, it is HOM000964 and page 56 HOM000964_0056
 17 and paragraph 159, please. We have had this up on the
 18 screen a number of times. But this is the explanation
 19 of the working definition that's being used, I think as
 20 you will know, across Government, of the -- well, at
 21 least across much of Government, of "Non-Ideological
 22 Extreme Violence", and the essential components given
 23 are "extreme violence"; "no clear ideological purpose";
 24 and "intent to shock, intimidate or outrage wider
 25 [violence] (sic)."

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1 A. I think we would be happy to work through any of them.
 2 Perhaps none of them are quite there. I haven't spoken
 3 with all colleagues at the NCA about these but,
 4 personally, I prefer NIVE to NIEV, for some of those
 5 reasons, as the expert witness explained, may be better.
 6 But we will work with what we have got and we will work
 7 with the Home Office to get it as good as we can.
 8 Q. Could you just help us with the reasons for preferring
 9 NIVE?
 10 A. I think about describing the person as opposed to the
 11 act may make it simpler, in terms of law enforcement.
 12 Q. Thank you. We will come -- I will pick up on that
 13 perhaps shortly. Another concept, without wanting to
 14 muddy the waters, the NCA work with is the idea of
 15 "online-enabled offending". Is that a helpful
 16 definition or helpful sort of category to understand in
 17 this context?
 18 A. I think it is helpful because it is a catch-all and we
 19 don't want anyone to fall through the gaps if that's
 20 helpful. It is not helpful because there is no
 21 guide-rails as to where it may begin and end. So with
 22 such a broad definition, it may then need some further
 23 breaking down but we -- as a catch-all as to what we may
 24 be describing, yes, we have used it.
 25 Q. I'm just going to focus now still on definitions and

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1 I had focused on the subsection of "credit for
 2 offending", when we looked at the Com network because it
 3 might be thought there is a link to that third element
 4 of the NIEV definition.
 5 Do you have any views on this definition and whether
 6 you think it meets the need for "Violence Fixated
 7 Individuals" or "NIEV"?
 8 A. I think definitions are necessary but very difficult.
 9 I think definitions need to be broad enough so as people
 10 don't fall through the cracks, but narrow enough to give
 11 clarity. So I appreciate that it's a tough one. My
 12 view is that we could work with this and work with the
 13 Home Office to develop it, if necessary. I do agree
 14 with DAC Evans that it is not quite right yet and I do
 15 feel that the violence for violence's sake, the sort of
 16 nihilistic element, could be included or is missing.
 17 Q. Thank you. Is that something that NCA sees in its work
 18 on the Com networks, violence for violence's sake or
 19 nihilism and concepts like that?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. Thank you. I don't know if you are aware of any of the
 22 other definitions, Violence Fixated Individual, we had
 23 a seminar from Professor Cassam who talked about
 24 a definition of "Non-Ideological Violent Extremism".
 25 Were there any of those that you were more attracted to?

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1 understanding and we will talk about the practical
 2 consequences of this shortly but could we have your
 3 statement back up, please, page 13, NCA000032_0013
 4 paragraph 60. So just putting, perhaps, the first
 5 sentence to one side for the moment but you ask the
 6 question of:
 7 "... whether the current system has adopted
 8 an overly narrow understanding of harm and risk, based
 9 upon 'ideological' and 'non-ideological' distinctions
 10 which are increasingly difficult to sustain in
 11 practice."
 12 That's a theme that goes throughout your statement
 13 and the learned Chair will have seen the other sections
 14 where you talk about this. Could you just explain your
 15 thinking there for us and expand on it?
 16 A. Yes, and I think this is around the difficulty with
 17 definitions and what we feel is really important is,
 18 whether they are ideological or non-ideological and go
 19 down different paths, depending on the risk level, there
 20 needs to be an equity and parity in the outcomes and the
 21 diversions and what they require.
 22 Q. Thank you. So, you describe, I think, in your
 23 statement, and we see there at paragraph 61, about
 24 individuals frequently moving different forms of harmful
 25 behaviour, motivations and ideological positions over

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1 time. Can you just help us with what that looks like
 2 within a Com network?
 3 **A.** Yes, so what we have seen and what we have seen
 4 internationally is perhaps a motivation or a -- we might
 5 see misogynistic behaviour and talk that over time, then
 6 proceeds into violent talk. They don't stick on a route
 7 perhaps of misogyny, they may then move to nihilism or
 8 misanthropy. So it varies and it is all about causing
 9 shock. So causing shock and gaining notoriety and maybe
 10 over time that changes, maybe it gets worse, but it
 11 definitely isn't fixed.
 12 **Q.** Obviously your work is focused on the Com network rather
 13 than other things --
 14 **A.** Absolutely.
 15 **Q.** -- but is that a feature, from your experience, that is
 16 specific to Com networks?
 17 **A.** No. I would say it is also similar to child sexual
 18 abuse. The barriers to entry have got higher. You used
 19 to be able to enter groups with one level of material
 20 and now that level of material that you need to access
 21 some of these platforms/groups is much more severe. So
 22 I think barriers to entry have changed in other crime
 23 groups as well.
 24 **Q.** Thank you. Just, it might be helpful, I don't know, to
 25 draw a -- kind of think about this visually. At the

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1 **Q.** And CTP's role has been obviously combating terrorism
 2 and both of those existed well before Com networks and
 3 VFIs, at least as far as we understand them?
 4 **A.** Yes.
 5 **Q.** So if we then perhaps see your reflections on this, just
 6 going back to paragraph 57, NCA000032_0012, you say:
 7 "In my opinion, current safeguarding and criminal
 8 justice mechanisms were developed around established
 9 offline harm types and do not adequately address newer
 10 forms of online-enabled offending such as Com networks,
 11 online CSA and exploitation and cyber crime. Based on
 12 NCA's significant engagement with partners in relation
 13 to Com network offending, I have particular concerns
 14 regarding effective early intervention pathways for
 15 children identified in harmful online spaces,
 16 particularly where vulnerabilities are recognised before
 17 criminal offences have occurred and they enter the
 18 criminal justice system."
 19 So, I think perhaps there are two elements to this,
 20 (1) you are referring to the evolution of the threat, is
 21 that correct?
 22 **A.** Sorry, which paragraph were you referring to?
 23 **Q.** Sorry it is 56. My apologies for a bad reference.
 24 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** You went from 57 to 56, I think.
 25 **MR BOYLE:** Sorry, it is 56, yes. Take a moment to read that

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1 moment what we have is a kind of Venn diagram with
 2 perhaps VFIs in the middle, on the left-hand side, Com
 3 networks and NCA's work on it, and on the other side,
 4 vulnerable to terrorism, fascination with extreme
 5 violence and mass casualty attacks that CTPHQ would deal
 6 with, and potentially some cases that might sit in all
 7 three categories?
 8 **A.** Yes, potentially.
 9 **Q.** The VFIs who are not sitting in more than one category,
 10 they are there because they are not part of a Com
 11 network nor potential terrorists, is that right?
 12 **A.** Yes.
 13 **Q.** They are not in the middle because they present any sort
 14 of lower risk, is that right?
 15 **A.** That is right.
 16 **Q.** So might it also be the case that their lack of network
 17 and lack of ideology makes them actually harder to
 18 identify?
 19 **A.** Yes.
 20 **Q.** In terms of the current structure that's in place,
 21 that's really for historical reasons, isn't it? It is
 22 because the NCA's role historically has been against
 23 organised crime and child sexual abuse and cyber crime,
 24 is that right?
 25 **A.** Yes.

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1 if it would help. *(Pause)*.
 2 **A.** Yes.
 3 **Q.** So, I think you are referring here to the evolution of
 4 the threat, driven by online harms?
 5 **A.** Yes, that society is -- now lives much of its life
 6 online, so crime has also moved online.
 7 **Q.** Do you have a view on how that threat is likely to
 8 evolve over time?
 9 **A.** I think that it is only going to increase.
 10 **Q.** Thank you, and just putting forward a question that's
 11 helpfully been fed through by the victim groups, the
 12 question is: individuals can move between different
 13 forms of harmful ideological positions unpredictably.
 14 Is it right to summarise the NCA or your view that to
 15 clearly define VFIs is likely to be ineffective and will
 16 potentially miss those at risk?
 17 **A.** Yes, and I think that it is just this difficulty with
 18 definitions and dividing ideological and
 19 non-ideological, when really we need to be dealing with
 20 the risk that's posed and there shouldn't be -- as
 21 I said before, there should be a parity and an equity in
 22 the diversionary support that the individual is getting
 23 or the prosecution, indeed.
 24 **Q.** Thank you, and just before we break, the other thing
 25 that I think you are talking about in paragraph 57 is

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1 concerns regarding effective early intervention
 2 pathways. Is that a concern that the pathway for VFIs
 3 is missing, or is it a concern that the structure of
 4 these kind of early intervention pathways isn't meeting
 5 the threat as a whole?
 6 **A.** I'm not and we are not experts in VFIs. So I only know
 7 where it is related to the Com network and from what
 8 I have read and heard and learnt. So I couldn't give
 9 you -- tell you exactly what the pathway is for a VFI
 10 and what support and diversion mechanisms there are. So
 11 it is difficult for me to say whether they are effective
 12 or not but what I would say is that I know that there is
 13 a dedicated ideological route and we feel that the
 14 non-ideological route should be offered the same level
 15 of support.

16 **MR BOYLE:** Thank you. Sir, is that a convenient moment to
 17 take a break?

18 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** It certainly is, Mr Boyle, thank you.
 19 We will sit again, Ms Rance, just after 11.30 am.

20 (11.15 am)

(A short break)

22 (11.31 am)

23 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes, Mr Boyle.

24 **MR BOYLE:** Ms Rance, I want to move on, please, to the NCA
 25 response to the Southport attack and matters that

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1 "The shocking consequences of his actions sit at the
 2 extreme of trends that we have been highlighting for
 3 some years, and which Matt and Graeme ..."
 4 Help me, Matt Jukes --
 5 **A.** Matt Jukes who was ACSO and Graeme Biggar who is the DG
 6 of the NCA.
 7 **Q.** Thank you. Have been discussing, and we will skirt
 8 around the redaction:
 9 "These threats and their volume have been growing,
 10 and the trajectory is still upwards."
 11 There is a list of statistics or details there.
 12 I think one of particular interest from the NCA's
 13 perspective, perhaps, is that:
 14 "70% of 13-17-year-olds reported seeing real-world
 15 acts of violence on social media, with Tik Tok and X
 16 being the platforms where violent content was most
 17 commonly seen."
 18 So is this right, that the level of concern with
 19 those two platforms was clearly enough for it to be
 20 emphasised in this letter?
 21 **A.** Yes.
 22 **Q.** If we could move on to page 2 HOM000254_0002 and
 23 paragraph 5. So, these are two initiatives which are
 24 being put forward in the letter. The first bullet point
 25 is:

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1 happened thereafter. Then we will move on to the kind
 2 of future of how VFIs might be handled, online harms and
 3 interventions.

4 So, starting with the NCA response to Southport.
 5 I think the first thing to address is a joint letter
 6 that I think we have already had in our evidence in the
 7 Inquiry that was sent to the Home Secretary, which was
 8 sent by the heads of the NCA, CTP and NPCC. Could we
 9 have that on screen, please, it is HOM000254.

10 Now, there are a lot of points of interest in this
 11 letter, including the annex, it is nine pages long. The
 12 learned Chair has the reference to read it in totality.
 13 I just want to pick out a few points.

14 It is obviously not apparent on the face of it which
 15 is fed in by NCA, but you will be able to help us with
 16 your views on things. Starting at the first paragraph,
 17 it says:

18 "The horrific actions in Southport last July, and
 19 the detail that is now available following the
 20 perpetrator's conviction have brought into stark relief
 21 and the public consciousness just what can happen when
 22 toxic online content is served up to a teenager with
 23 mental health issues, who had fallen out of mainstream
 24 education, and who was living in the isolation of his
 25 home and online life.

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1 "We will consider were there is value in better
 2 coordinating [and] consolidating our approaches to
 3 Prevent in relation to online crimes, including
 4 terrorism, cyber crime, child sexual abuse and other
 5 serious crimes -- which are currently at very different
 6 levels of maturity."

7 Clearly, some of that offending is directly related
 8 to NCA's work. Are you able to explain to us in
 9 practical terms what is meant by this, firstly?

10 **A.** So we are talking about online crimes and then the
 11 description of which of those crimes facilitate online.
 12 And the Prevent angle will be the development of the
 13 Prevent, in terms of CT, and the Cyber Choices Prevent
 14 programme that I discussed earlier and the Prevent
 15 programmes within child sexual abuse. Some, I would
 16 suggest, the most mature, would be the CT Prevent and
 17 less mature would be cyber crime and child sexual abuse
 18 that fall within the NCA.

19 **Q.** The reference to "other serious crimes", do you know
 20 what that was to?

21 **A.** No. But I imagine it could be fraud, illicit finance,
 22 it could be drugs, firearms, it could be one of many of
 23 serious crimes.

24 **Q.** Thank you. Then the next bullet point:

25 "We will explore establishing a multi-agency

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1 taskforce, supported by a fusion cell to bring together
2 an all source intelligence collection capability,
3 including potentially with industry, against this range
4 of increasingly overlapping ... threats."

5 Can you help us on work that's been done on that?
6 **A.** Yes, so this was January 2025, and shortly after that,
7 we, together with CTP, set up what we have called
8 a silver taskforce and brought together partners to
9 discuss this issue, and underneath that structure we had
10 Project Rhyobasalt. So, that's where this -- when
11 I said -- when we are talking about the evolution of
12 Project Rhyobasalt, I said it started in 2024, but it
13 really gathered pace, that was because we slotted that
14 kind of function into responding to this letter.

15 **Q.** But is that Project Rhyobasalt, the RICC as you call it,
16 is it delivering against that broader range of issues in
17 the bullet points above?

18 **A.** No, not all of those. No.

19 **Q.** And so is it meeting the requirement of the second
20 bullet point, that the taskforce will be working against
21 this range of increasingly overlapping online threats?

22 **A.** Well, in some ways it is because it's brought together
23 the terrorism, cyber crime, child sexual abuse, which
24 are overlapping and manifest in the Com threat. So in
25 some ways it is. But it certainly hasn't tackled the

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1 "Current MASH processes run the risk of delays in
2 assessment due to volume. A tendency towards single
3 agency ownership and [the] inability to track through to
4 meaningful outcomes that can be demonstrably shown to
5 mitigate risk. Some exploratory work to use AI to sift
6 the volumes would be useful with the right algorithms in
7 place to help focus this effort and prioritise and
8 accelerate the highest risk."

9 Are you able to just talk to the reference to AI?
10 Do you know what was meant by this?

11 **A.** I don't know. I don't know specifically and I haven't
12 had any involvement in that project since, to use AI for
13 this purpose.

14 **Q.** So it is not being used by Project Rhyobasalt?

15 **A.** No, no.

16 **Q.** Looking forward, do you have any idea of whether it's
17 planned to be, whether it could be effective?

18 **A.** There are no plans for Project Rhyobasalt, specifically.
19 I think, more generally, the use of AI within law
20 enforcement is being invested in and is being looked at
21 across all different areas and threats.

22 **Q.** Thank you. Then, just finally please, page 7,
23 HOM000254_0007 paragraph 22, which says there:
24 "Consistency in the understanding, and tolerance of,
25 risk across the partnerships, and clear and definitive

55

1 VFI threat, if that's where we are going, other than
2 where the VFI may sit within the Com.

3 **Q.** Thank you. I just want to pick up on some other
4 features which are relevant to Topic 2 of the Inquiry,
5 so online harms.

6 Could we go to page 5 HOM000254_0005 and
7 paragraph 6. There's a suggestion that:

8 "The Online Safety Act stopped short of violent
9 ideologies."

10 And that could be addressed and in bold, where we
11 see the reference to violence towards women and girls
12 and also in bold:

13 "Any position that such material is 'harmful but
14 lawful' is not tenable."

15 So, this, I think, is calling for stricter measures
16 under the Online Security (sic) Act and we will come
17 onto to consider some of those.

18 **A.** The Online Safety Act, yes and it is.

19 **Q.** Then, at the bottom of the page, again skirting around
20 the redactions, paragraph 11. It talks about the
21 question of:

22 "... 'pull through' those who pose the greatest risk
23 whether to themselves or others, between policing and
24 partners at a local level and on a nationwide scale."

25 If we can just go over the page HOM000254_0006:

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1 ownership for the support and management or risk."

2 It talks about the hazard of several different
3 multi-agency forums, each identifying different forms of
4 youth vulnerability and we see a list of acronyms and
5 panels, to which we could add many more, and:

6 "... the risk that these compartmentalised
7 approaches see high risk nominals that do not fit their
8 specific criteria 'fall through the cracks'."

9 Then, in bold:

10 "A single, threat agnostic forum for child violence
11 would have merit ..."

12 Is this letter picking up on the themes that we have
13 discussed before, that potentially looking at trying to
14 categorise behaviours or subjects can carry risk?

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** Thank you. So, moving on from that, the NCA, I think,
17 continued to attend something called the Southport
18 Diamond Group and then also participated in the Home
19 Office's Violence Fixated Individuals Unit work as well,
20 is that right?

21 **A.** That is right, yes.

22 **Q.** Just picking up on one point on that, as part of its
23 involvement, the NCA was provided with a draft paper.
24 That is at HOM000345. So, this is an interim update and
25 we should be clear that it is a draft document. It

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1 talks about "Responding to non-ideological extreme
2 violence: interim update" and you will see it is dated
3 22 May 2025.
4 Just, please, to pick up some points on that. Could
5 we have page 6, HOM000345_0006. Thank you, and looking
6 at paragraph 18 at the top of the page:
7 "In addition to providing assurance on cases
8 identified through the CT system, NCA and CTP are also
9 working to identify a cohort of high-risk cases (such as
10 Com network cases) where interventions by local services
11 would be appropriate. It will be important that
12 processes designed as part of the above work are capable
13 of being used by NCA too."
14 Now, this is drafted document and it is not written
15 by the NCA. Do you know what this refers to?
16 **A.** This would be the work that we were doing under Project
17 Rhyobasalt.
18 **Q.** Project Rhyobasalt, okay, thank you. You will see
19 there, it says "a cohort of high-risk cases (such as Com
20 network cases)", was there ever consideration that
21 Project Rhyobasalt would be wider than that?
22 **A.** I think early on there were conversations, following the
23 January letter and the initial meetings that were held.
24 But, at that stage, the VFI unit -- the Home Office was
25 working through the VFIs and there was policy and

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1 I would imagine because of that.
2 **Q.** Okay, but presumably where it says "realistically",
3 there is also a consideration of what the appropriate
4 entity would be for this task and at that time, the
5 thinking of whoever put in that drafting note was NCA.
6 Are you able to help us, do you know whether there were
7 discussions around this or anything further?
8 **A.** No, nothing further. We were never -- it was never
9 proposed that we should do this. This is -- obviously,
10 I have seen this before and I don't know who wrote the
11 drafting note. It was someone at the Home Office. We
12 replied to this paper and then --
13 **Q.** Yes, we will go to that --
14 **A.** Okay, but no, it was never raised as something for us to
15 do.
16 **Q.** Thank you. Sorry, what I was asking was, do you know if
17 there were discussions with the VFI Unit that led to it
18 being proposed? In other words, do you know whether NCA
19 had ever suggested that it might be the appropriate
20 single law enforcement agency?
21 **A.** No. Not that I'm aware of, just to caveat, but I think
22 I would have been aware.
23 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** You say that you responded to this.
24 **A.** Yes.
25 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** What was the response?

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1 procedural -- and then this letter came out of that.
2 So, I think it was very much like: we will work through
3 the Com issues, whilst the Home Office was working
4 alongside this. So I think there was consideration but
5 it was the Home Office's view that they had the unit to
6 work on this.
7 **Q.** Thank you, and just picking up further on this, could we
8 go to page 12, HOM000345_0012, so looking at the bottom
9 paragraph on this half of the page:
10 "Ongoing work and deadlines."
11 "Law enforcement with Home Office to develop options
12 for strengthened ownership of non-ideological violence
13 by mid-July. Options could include.
14 "Creating an additional national portfolio ...
15 within the NPCC ..."
16 We heard from DCC Court, then (b):
17 "A single law enforcement agency is named to lead on
18 non-ideological ... violence."
19 Then there is a drafting note:
20 "... realistically would have to be CTP or NCA."
21 Again, with the caveat that this isn't NCA's
22 document, are you able to say why NCA was proposed as
23 one of the two possible leads?
24 **A.** Because it is a single law enforcement agency, of which
25 there are only two, CTP and NCA, that are national. So

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1 **MR BOYLE:** Sir, should we go to that? NCA000012.
2 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** I shall keep quiet.
3 **MR BOYLE:** Sir, it was a question I had myself but we do
4 have the document. I think we want to go to page 2
5 NCA000012_0002 and paragraph 8. The response was:
6 "NCA seniors will want to take a view on any
7 suggestions/recommendations that the NCA should be the
8 operational lead, given tough prioritisation decisions
9 and the pressures on the Agency to focus on other high
10 priority issues like Organised Immigration Crime."
11 Just looking at that, it wasn't a dismissal of the
12 proposal outright, would you agree?
13 **A.** No, it wasn't a dismissal, it was a: if we are to
14 progress this, we need to have some serious
15 conversations about it, but then it never rose its head
16 again.
17 **Q.** The objection given is actually based really on resource
18 isn't it, rather than lack of expertise and inability?
19 **A.** The reason given there is based on that and at the time
20 and still, the strategic priority around organised
21 immigration crime and specifically small boats, was very
22 much in the forefront of our minds.
23 **Q.** If we turn over to page 3 NCA000012_0003 and
24 paragraph 11(b) please:
25 "It is worth mentioning somewhere ..."

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1 So I think this is a reference to what will go in
2 the draft:
3 "... that the NCA's (annual) National Control
4 Strategy, which is informed by our annual National
5 Strategic Assessment and informs prioritisation of the
6 UK's whole system response to [serious organised crime],
7 has this year recommended doing more on Online-Enabled
8 Violence ... which includes VFIs and also includes
9 offenders in 'Com' groups identified under the
10 RHYOBASALT work. The RHYOBASALT cohort can be described
11 as those in the yellow and red sections of the diagram
12 below ..."

13 Which we will come to quickly:
14 "... and will be subject to Secondary and Tertiary
15 Prevention interventions. These will feed into the
16 Primary prevention space which this paper describes.
17 That feed should ensure a holistic response to the
18 totality of the threat."

19 So do we take from this that there was serious
20 consideration being given, in the NCA, as to whether it
21 should do more on VFIs?

22 A. There was consideration about the whole of the
23 online-enabled threat in the NCS, the National Control
24 Strategy.

25 So the National Strategic Assessment isn't just what

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1 were working with the cross-governmental -- and the VFI
2 Unit, as was, who were working on this and just
3 specifically wanted to be working on this. So we were
4 feeding into that group and not developing things
5 separately to that group.

6 Q. Is that right though on the time lines? Is there a gap
7 between this correspondence and then work on the
8 NIEV Taskforce, which I think would have picked up in
9 May 2025?

10 A. Yes, so there was this letter, response was on 2 June
11 and you are right, the NIEV Taskforce picked up the
12 following year. At that time, there was the VFI Unit,
13 that then sort of morphed into the -- they changed their
14 name but I think effectively they were doing a similar
15 role. So the NIEV Taskforce didn't come from
16 a stationary position, it just moved forwards.

17 Q. You will understand, obviously, the concepts of these
18 being forwarded by both pull and push?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. It might be said that from the NCA's perspective there
21 was a lack of push, would that be fair?

22 A. It doesn't necessarily work like that, that -- we work
23 to our strategic priorities and if this was to become
24 one of them, then we would have done that. It didn't
25 come up again. We were feeding into the VFI Unit who

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1 the NCA does, it is the UK's whole system in response to
2 SOC. And that's where it recommends the online-enabled
3 violence and of course, we understand that VFIs are
4 enabled partially online, so it would fall into that.
5 But beyond the Com groups, that wasn't a route that the
6 NCA went down. As I say, the work was progressed by the
7 Home Office and we were focused on the Com work.

8 Q. So can you help us on that? Was it a decision
9 consciously taken within the NCA not to pursue this
10 further or was it actually the fact that the trail went
11 cold, in that the VFI Unit didn't progress it any
12 further with NCA?

13 A. Probably a bit of both. Sorry if that sounds evasive
14 but I think the trail did go cold because we didn't hear
15 back from this letter, not that we should have done
16 because this was informing a group that we were invited
17 to. So no criticism there. But it was never picked up
18 again that that should happen.

19 Q. It might be said that we know there's a gap handling
20 VFIs and, you know, much time has progressed since
21 mid-2025. Shouldn't the NCA have been developing its
22 thinking, regardless as to whether there was a response
23 to the letter or not?

24 A. I think the NCA was developing its thinking with the
25 taskforce. We weren't developing separate thinking, we

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1 were developing the response. So, I don't really agree
2 with that.

3 Q. And it is the Home Secretary who sets the strategic --

4 A. It is, yes.

5 Q. I want to move on, please, to future pathways and
6 structures to deal with Com networks and VFIs. So the
7 first possibility to consider is the potential for
8 expansion of the Prevent programme to include VFIs and
9 you deal with that in your statement. Could we have up,
10 please, page 13, NCA000032_0013 paragraph 58. So you
11 consider there the option and you say that the model of
12 an expanded Prevent:

13 "... has also been adopted and implemented with
14 success by Canadian counterparts via The Canada Centre
15 for Community Engagement and Prevention of Violence
16 programme."

17 Obviously you are not in that programme, but are you
18 able to help at all in terms of how that has worked?

19 A. It is the prevention of violence programme that includes
20 ideological and non-ideological. I think that's the key
21 point of this, that they have developed a response that
22 merges both.

23 Q. Which goes to your point that it removes the risk of
24 trying to draw a distinction between the two, and
25 I think you later say in your statement that, in any

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1 event, when we are looking at short-term measures, that
 2 having Prevent adopt cases where there is a risk of
 3 non-ideological extreme violence would be appropriate.
 4 Obviously, the way it is done, in some ways, is a matter
 5 for CTP and the Home Office but did you have in mind
 6 a kind of expanded triage or an expanded holding of case
 7 management process?

8 **A.** I mean, the reason we put that down was that the CTP
 9 currently have the mechanisms in place and the links
 10 through to the local authorities for these referrals to
 11 be made. So, in the short-term, if we weren't creating
 12 an entirely new system and there had to be one system,
 13 then that would be the most sensible and having already
 14 taken the FEVMCA type, then if there had to be one, then
 15 that's an option.

16 **Q.** I don't know if you heard DAC Evans, her evidence about
 17 the idea that it might -- there's obviously a resource
 18 issue but that -- it might be possible to address that,
 19 but another is kind of pulling the system out of shape?

20 **A.** Yes, absolutely. I mean, I heard all that and it's not
 21 ideal and wouldn't suggest that it was. You know, the
 22 volume, the pulling the system out of shape, the fact
 23 that they are there for terrorist policing and this
 24 could completely overwhelm, makes it far from ideal.

25 **Q.** But just thinking about the NCA's work with the Com

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1 That is that ideologies can change and might be
 2 fluid?

3 **A.** And that the threats could be from child abuse, to
 4 cyber, to terrorism, to fraud. You know, they could
 5 span multiple threats and the ideology can kind of come
 6 and go.

7 **Q.** "Encouraging agencies to focus on definitions rather
 8 than behaviours."

9 So, in practical terms, is that the worry that
 10 people spend too much time trying to decide where a case
 11 goes rather than dealing with the risk that's being
 12 presented?

13 **A.** Exactly that, yes.

14 **Q.** "Creating gaps where responsibility becomes contested
 15 because an individual's motivations do not align neatly
 16 with existing categories."

17 I think that's self-explanatory:

18 "Duplicating capabilities that already exist
 19 elsewhere within government, policing and safeguarding
 20 structures ..."

21 What's that reference to?

22 **A.** So there are -- if there are already structures through
 23 to a MASH and local panels, then creating more could be
 24 a duplication of those and I think we have heard before
 25 that attending more meetings and duplicating efforts is,

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1 network, that has actually been pulled together in
 2 a very short period of time. I don't know if you have
 3 a measure of the kind of comparison in terms of volume,
 4 I think the Project Rhyobasalt is much smaller than what
 5 we might term the "FEVMCA cohort". But it does show
 6 that it can be done?

7 **A.** Yes, it is much smaller. So, as I said, the referrals
 8 wouldn't necessarily relate to the number of cases. It
 9 is much smaller, there's no mechanism for reporting up
 10 other than by email from law enforcement, whereas FEVMCA
 11 would be more and there would be the existing routes.
 12 So I think we don't have the same system, we do not have
 13 a case management system, the intel, the technology and
 14 the working arrangements. It is far from ideal is what
 15 I'm trying to say. It is a great model that could be
 16 fantastic, but currently, it's in development as opposed
 17 to being something shiny and easy to use.

18 **Q.** Thank you. Could we have up, please, now paragraph 75
 19 NCA000032_0017 of your statement, so moving on to
 20 a potential new structure, and you have, I think, given
 21 a helpful indication here that, actually, you see risks
 22 in the idea of creating a VFI pathway. So, you talk
 23 about the risks there. You say:

24 "Creating a new silo around a threat that is
 25 inherently cross-cutting."

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1 for something very specific, is really difficult because
 2 then you end up with a meeting for every possible
 3 threat.

4 **Q.** You end up having the same practitioners meeting under
 5 a different name?

6 **A.** Correct, yes.

7 **Q.** But implementing the same types of interventions?

8 **A.** Yes.

9 **Q.** And:

10 "Creating a system which continually requires
 11 individuals to be reclassified as their motivations,
 12 behaviours, or expressions of ideology evolve."

13 Is that the risk that people might have to move from
 14 one pathway to another?

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** Presumably, each time that happens, there is a risk of
 17 loss of information, understanding, expertise?

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** Thank you. Just to put the counter-point to that;
 20 creating something like this would involve an element
 21 of -- and I do not mean this pejoratively, but
 22 dismantling some of the structures currently in place.
 23 If you were to remove an ideological distinction, then
 24 you would have to fundamentally change Prevent, do you
 25 agree?

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1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Would there be a risk that that concentration of CT

3 expertise would be lost?

4 A. Of course. There is no easy solution here and of course

5 that is a risk of that. But this is just highlighting

6 other risks as well. I'm not saying there isn't a risk

7 to do that.

8 Q. I think the other question is, is the Com network

9 particularly changeable in terms of its ideology? In

10 other words, is the NCA's perspective on this perhaps

11 guided by a smaller subset of the problem that perhaps

12 don't necessarily behave consistently with some of the

13 other areas? Do you have a view on that?

14 A. Yes, it is a small subset but that's where -- because we

15 haven't dealt with -- our experience isn't with VFIs, so

16 we are dealing with a smaller subset, that we are trying

17 to be helpful to be able to give some of our learning

18 from, but we haven't worked with the VFI structure.

19 Does that answer the question?

20 Q. Yes. The other question is the importance of the

21 subject's motivations. So for someone that is committed

22 to an ideology, that is an important feature that should

23 be grappled with, correct? Does this system, in any

24 way, lessen the weight on that?

25 A. It would be clear that there were some interventions

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1 Sorry, that's at paragraph 69.

2 It is within a different area, but isn't the NCA

3 doing that work in relation to Cyber Prevent?

4 A. It's certainly set the guidelines in relation to Cyber

5 Prevent, it doesn't actually conduct the work. That is

6 done by territorial policing. But in terms of the

7 national guidelines, it has worked on that over the last

8 number of years, yes.

9 Q. So we picked up the issues of resourcing and skillset

10 that sit behind the possibility of a Prevent for a Com

11 network and I assume that would apply for a wider

12 concept too?

13 A. Absolutely, yes.

14 Q. The other thing you say is that the risk at looking at

15 a subject of whatever structure we are talking about

16 through a criminal intelligence lens. One alternative

17 that's been suggested by the Inquiry's experts was

18 a multi-agency, high-risk adolescent team, which would

19 have two chairs, one in law enforcement and one in

20 safeguarding. Do you have any views on whether that

21 would be effective?

22 A. I don't have an enormous amount of experience in

23 multi-agency panels. I do have some. I would think

24 that it certainly could be by having co-chairs would

25 help with the multi-agency responsibility and I think

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1 that somebody who had been radicalised would need to

2 follow. So potentially, yes.

3 Q. You have already given, helpfully, the idea of

4 a short-term solution in terms of Prevent and there

5 might even be short, medium and long-term solutions.

6 But might some of the issues that you have raised be

7 mitigated by a triaging service that takes in the

8 referral but then passes it onto the relevant pathway?

9 A. Yes, and I think to remember that most of these

10 referrals come locally. So, ideally, the pathway in

11 would be locally, in order to avoid delays and for that

12 local knowledge and experience.

13 Q. Thank you, and might it also be mitigated by strong

14 principles of multi-agency working being put in place?

15 A. Absolutely.

16 Q. We will come onto some of those. You have helpfully

17 addressed in your statement whether the NCA, within any

18 sort of structure -- and there are obviously lots of

19 possibilities -- could be a lead agency for VFIs, and

20 you have explained, at your paragraph 68 to 71, why you

21 don't view that as appropriate. One of the reasons is

22 that NCA000032_0015:

23 "The identification and management of individuals

24 who have not necessarily crossed a criminal threshold is

25 a significantly broader challenge."

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1 that, as long as it is resourced and bolstered

2 accordingly, then that could be a way forward. But

3 there would be others, better than I, that could talk to

4 that.

5 Q. Thank you. The other issue that you talk about is the

6 lack of operational footprint. Are we talking there

7 about a lack of local expertise or a lack of sort of

8 boots on the ground, as it were, in the way that local

9 policing might have?

10 A. Sorry, is that operational footprint in terms of the

11 NCA?

12 Q. Yes.

13 A. Yes, so we are an agency of around 6,000 that works

14 nationally and internationally. So, in terms of boots

15 on the ground, we would not have an officer in every

16 town like you would across policing. So we would be

17 very stretched to operate on a -- yes, we would be very

18 stretched to operate nationally at this level.

19 Q. Mr Richardson did refer to a network of Regional

20 Organised Crime Units. Can you just explain what those

21 are?

22 A. Yes, sure. So, you have probably heard there is 43

23 police forces and there are also, I believe, it's ten

24 ROCUs, Regional Organised Crime Units and they are

25 secondees from the local forces. So Southwest ROCU

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1 would second in officers and staff from their forces and
 2 they work on many different areas of serious and
 3 organised crime that may need some regional capability.
 4 So it's perhaps more capability than the local police
 5 forces and then it could tier up to the national
 6 capability that the NCA has.

7 **Q.** So just going back to that concept of an operational
 8 footprint that you use at your paragraph 70, would the
 9 ROCUs be able to provide that? It's through a process
 10 of secondees, is that right?

11 **A.** Yes. I mean, I'm not one to answer, that would be
 12 a policing question because they are not NCA officers.
 13 I would suggest that they could geographically still be
 14 quite a long way from any subject and they are generally
 15 detectives who are working on serious and organised
 16 crime. So, it wouldn't necessarily be appropriate for
 17 a local response.

18 **Q.** Thank you. So to kind of perhaps wrap this all up, if
 19 NCA were to be made the lead for VFIs, that would, in
 20 your view, require a fairly fundamental change to the
 21 structuring of NCA?

22 **A.** It would require a huge change. Personnel, technology,
 23 completely the way we work would fundamentally change.

24 **Q.** But would you agree that, just on the other hand, the
 25 work that NCA does on Project Rhyobasalt has given NCA

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1 are already being looked at and feeding in the
 2 information that the NCA has about that person?

3 **A.** I mean, it could be both, proactively identifying or
 4 feeding into de-anonymisation. There are lots of
 5 technical aspects of this, that would take -- don't get
 6 me wrong, this could be a large task and it would also
 7 need to involve CTP because obviously they have access
 8 to some different capabilities than we do.

9 I'm not sure if you will come to it, but in my
 10 statement I did talk about the future of the national
 11 police service and whether those -- the proposal for the
 12 agencies to be closely aligned may be a suggestion in
 13 a design phase.

14 **Q.** Thank you. So, you explained why you didn't view NCA as
 15 a plausible lead agency but is this right, you do see
 16 that it could play a part in triaging of a pathway and
 17 providing expertise to it?

18 **A.** I don't think I said the word "triage". I think
 19 "intelligence de-confliction" would perhaps be different
 20 to triage and obviously the NCA, like every other
 21 agency, wants to be as helpful as possible and I think
 22 that if we were to play a part in this, I do not think
 23 triage but I do think areas of de-confliction and
 24 perhaps using our specialist capabilities for
 25 identification may be an area.

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1 a lot of skills that could be used in this area?

2 **A.** I think there's some learning that could be shared but
 3 scale-wise, we are talking about 10/12 people. It's
 4 just really an infancy project to address a threat that
 5 spans harms, that we can share the learning but it is
 6 not scalable.

7 **Q.** Thank you. So then, to look at it with a slightly more
 8 narrow perspective, if there were to be a VFI pathway,
 9 how would you see NCA's role?

10 **A.** I think part of our experience and our expertise lies in
 11 intelligence. So, we have talked about and we know
 12 about the online area and I would suggest that our
 13 role -- our involvement could be, using those -- that
 14 area of our skills and our experience, which would be in
 15 intelligence.

16 **Q.** And would that be particularly with a view to giving
 17 technical expertise on online issues to practitioners?

18 **A.** It could be. That's not something that we do. We don't
 19 generally give out -- I mean, yeah, it could be giving
 20 skills. It could be working on large datasets. It
 21 could be anything along the technical angle of things,
 22 which would be -- which could, if -- which would be the
 23 most relevant part of this, I think, for the NCA.

24 **Q.** So when you talk about intelligence, is that the concept
 25 of identifying cases or being asked about cases which

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1 **Q.** Thank you. Just moving on to the concept of the Big
 2 Front Door, which we have touched on already. But if
 3 you were to have subject matter experts like CTP
 4 officers sitting in that triage function, would that
 5 mitigate the risk of people falling between the gaps
 6 because their ideology is unclear?

7 **A.** Yes, it could.

8 **Q.** Thank you. And if we could move on to your
 9 paragraph 86, which is on page 19 NCA000032_0019. You
 10 talk about -- you touch, then, on this Big Front Door
 11 idea. So you talk about a potential model with:

12 "A national referral and triage function;
 13 "Joint assessment by policing, CTP, intelligence and
 14 safeguarding professionals ..."

15 We have already been talking about that:
 16 "Access to shared intelligence and data sets."
 17 Again, I think that's what you have been giving
 18 evidence about. Touching on some other points here:
 19 "A common risk assessment methodology."

20 Can you help with that? Is that something you think
 21 is an important part of any potential model?

22 **A.** I do. I do think it is an important part. I think it
 23 is a really difficult part because different agencies
 24 will view -- may view risk in different ways. So it
 25 would take a lot of training and some technology to

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1 assist with it but it would be enormously helpful.

2 **Q.** Thank you. You talk about the management of risk in law
3 enforcement, is that morally?

4 **A.** MoRiLE.

5 **Q.** MoRiLE. That's a tool the NCA uses; is that right?

6 **A.** That is right.

7 **Q.** If VFI sits within the Com network then is it being used
8 on people who -- on VFIs? Not because they are VFIs but
9 because they happen to be members of the Com network?

10 **A.** So, a MoRiLE scoring could be done -- it is generally
11 done on the network as opposed to an individual. So it
12 has not been done specifically. I couldn't say that it
13 has been done on any VFI.

14 **Q.** So it is not then something that one might look at to
15 adapt for a VFI because it is not necessarily
16 person-specific?

17 **A.** No, no. Well, it can be person-specific, but it's a law
18 enforcement tool that's looking at criminal threat,
19 criminal harm. It doesn't combine any other
20 safeguarding threats and harms. So, part of it perhaps
21 could be adapted but it is a long way short of common
22 risk assessment methodology.

23 **Q.** Thank you. That's a helpful list of useful principles
24 to bear in mind for multi-agency working. We have heard
25 evidence about various other ones as well, such as:

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1 law, so it's not as easy perhaps as a private industry
2 doing open-source intelligence checks. I imagine that's
3 what he means. Sorry, we work not just within the law
4 but within RIPA which is applicable to us. So the
5 interpretation and application of that may appear
6 fragmented.

7 **Q.** So I think he was actually talking about the idea that
8 there are capabilities in, for example, NCA and CTP.

9 **A.** Ah right.

10 **Q.** But just putting that to one side, would a unified
11 approach to open-source intelligence, perhaps in
12 partnership with private companies, be beneficial, do
13 you think?

14 **A.** I think it certainly could be, yes.

15 **Q.** Just, the point about RIPA which Mr Hadley referred
16 to -- do tell me if this is straying into kind of
17 operational sensitivities, but from your perspective, is
18 that a hindrance on being able to carry out this type of
19 work?

20 **A.** It's within the law that we work to. So I suppose
21 anything that takes an additional layer of authority and
22 forms, could be seen as a hindrance but it is there for
23 a reason. So --

24 **Q.** It is not part of your role to think outside the box of
25 what you might want to do if RIPA didn't apply?

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1 culture of professional curiosity; a sufficiently good
2 fit approach; the approach to a lack of consent;
3 auditable decisions; escalation routes; considering the
4 digital environment; and adequate resourcing. I assume
5 you don't take issue with any of those?

6 **A.** No, no.

7 **Q.** Thank you. I want to move on, please, to addressing
8 online harms. We have touched on this. Mr Wright says
9 that individuals linked to Com networks have been
10 identified on open platforms, posting recruitment
11 messages and links then to closed platforms where there
12 might be more exposure to harmful content.

13 So it is not the case that Com networks are hidden,
14 is that right?

15 **A.** No, they are not hidden in terms of -- I think there is
16 a misconception that some of this is on the dark web and
17 no one can find it. It is certainly on the open web,
18 but sometimes behind layers of encryption, but -- yeah.

19 **Q.** So, in the seminar with Mr Richardson, we had Mr Hadley
20 of Tech Against Terrorism, who talked about the use of
21 open-source intelligence that I mentioned. He stated
22 that Government departments have isolated open-source
23 intelligence capabilities and suggested a somewhat
24 fragmented approach. Do you agree to that?

25 **A.** Fragmented -- I mean, law enforcement works within the

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1 **A.** No.

2 **Q.** Mr Hadley did suggest that there might be a slightly
3 cautious interpretation of RIPA that might prevent --
4 that's preventing open-source research. It may be
5 a legal question. I don't know if you have a view on
6 it?

7 **A.** Potentially, I'm not an expert on that.

8 **Q.** Thank you. The other side of the coin to this, or
9 another element of this idea of perhaps identifying
10 perpetrators, is also identifying victims. We know,
11 from your statements, that NCA actually also looks to
12 put out supportive messaging as well. I won't pull it
13 up on the screen, but Chair, we have NCA000034 which is
14 an example of a recent briefing note, as part of the Com
15 group victim prevention campaign.

16 Are you able to assess how effective that is?

17 **A.** I think that would be really hard to assess if you don't
18 know how many people -- how many victims there are, if
19 you haven't found all of the crimes. So I think
20 anything that raises awareness is worth doing. But
21 I don't think I can evaluate the success of it.

22 **Q.** Thank you, but clearly, as a sort of matter of logic, it
23 would seem to be worthwhile?

24 **A.** Yes.

25 **Q.** Can I move on, please, to tech platforms. So Mr Wright

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1 explains that the NCA directly engages with social media
2 platforms and tech companies such as Meta, Snapchat,
3 Discord, Roblox, TikTok and Telegram.

4 Sir, for your note, that is paragraph 59 of
5 Mr Wright's statement.

6 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you.

7 **MR BOYLE:** He also says that commonly used platforms by Com
8 networks include Discord, Roblox and Telegram and
9 explains that Discord and Telegram are frequently seen
10 as primary platforms used by Com offenders for operating
11 and communicating. That's paragraphs 28 and 30.

12 We heard the same, I think, from Mr Richardson. Why
13 is it that certain platforms seem to attract Com
14 networks?

15 **A.** There's a number of reasons. It could be because they
16 are simply where young people gather. So, for example,
17 Roblox is grounded in gaming. So young people would be
18 on Roblox if they are gaming and it also has
19 a functionality to chat. So that could be a reason.
20 Discord is often used for -- when people are gaming, to
21 do live streaming and chatting of their gaming. So
22 again, it is connected to the gaming community. So that
23 may be why. Telegram, it could be less trust and safety
24 standards, less moderation, or it just could be
25 that's -- they all have and they have some

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1 **Q.** Thank you. We have the identification of the platforms
2 where the Com network are using and that's helpful.
3 I just want to pick up on the NCA's response to the
4 social media ban for under 16s. So at that time, there
5 was -- we see in your witness statement, page 29,
6 NCA000032_0029 paragraph 115, NCA publicly called for
7 restrictions to be placed on children under 16,
8 published a joint NCA and NPCC position paper. And you
9 have helpfully exhibited this along with a press release
10 and a media briefing containing the Director General,
11 Mr Biggar's remarks, at a press conference.

12 I just wanted to pick up on the media briefing which
13 you have helpfully included in your statement at
14 paragraph 118, page 30, NCA000032_0030. It said:
15 "We have worked with the tech sector on these issues
16 for a decade. This is a diverse sector with companies
17 that have taken different approaches to child safety.
18 Some have made important changes to their platforms to
19 reduce some risk."

20 Over the page NCA000032_0031:

21 "But the problem has been getting worse not better.
22 And that is because, at the corporate level, the
23 companies have chosen not to make safety a core design
24 principle.

25 "It is unrealistic to expect tech companies to

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1 functionalities that are helpful. Like if you close
2 down a group, you can set up another one quite quickly.
3 But there are functionalities, there is safety and there
4 is just the fact that they are drawn there because
5 that's where the young people happen to be because of
6 some of their interests.

7 **Q.** Telegram, I think, has age gating, but the Com network
8 is mainly for people -- or certainly features many
9 people under the age of 18. Do you have a view on why
10 that is? Is the age gating ineffective?

11 **A.** I'm not an expert, but I will assume so, yes.

12 **Q.** Thank you, and we readily understand the fact that NCA
13 engages with tech platforms and so needs to maintain
14 relationships and engagement but we will also come onto
15 see that NCA has put out a lot of press releases -- and
16 we already saw it in the joint letter -- to draw
17 attention to this issue and in broader terms, say that
18 there are issues with the way that online and tech
19 platforms are handling child safety and so on.

20 With that in mind, are there any platforms that the
21 NCA has any particular concerns about in terms of its
22 willingness to put in appropriate measures?

23 **A.** No. It's not really for us to work with it. That would
24 be more of a question for the regulator, as opposed to
25 the -- Ofcom rather than the NCA.

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1 prioritise safety over profit unless we legislate. When
2 the market fails, the Government has to step in.
3 "The Online Safety Act is a powerful piece of
4 legislation, and we welcome the progress being made by
5 Ofcom in implementing it. But the legislation took
6 six years to pass, and has been three years in
7 implementation. Tougher legislation is now required ...
8 if their products are to be made available to children."

9 So I said before, the NCA has been perfectly
10 prepared to call out tech platforms in general terms,
11 and it's for these reasons that the NCA supported the
12 under-16s social media ban, is that right?

13 **A.** That is right.

14 **Q.** You talk about a position paper in the following
15 paragraph, 119, and that made various recommendations.
16 The first was: scope the under-16 restriction by
17 "function, not brand/platform". So, in other words, it
18 is the kind of harmful functions and safety by design
19 that needs to be looked at, rather than the type of
20 platform, is that right?

21 **A.** That is right. So when the Australians did a ban, they
22 named ten platforms, whereas we would recommend
23 a different approach and ban the actual feature that is
24 on those platforms, as opposed to platforms themselves.

25 **Q.** Thank you:

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1 "Pair with device-level nudity blocking."
 2 I think that there has been progress on that since.
 3 Do you have a view on the use of device-level controls
 4 more widely?
 5 A. Beyond the nudity blocking --
 6 Q. Beyond the nudity blocking.
 7 A. -- the taking, viewing and sharing of nude images which
 8 we have supported. More widely than that, we have not
 9 been in a position to -- we haven't spoken with the Home
 10 Office about anything about that.
 11 Q. I don't know if it fits within your expertise but could
 12 that be applicable to extreme violent content, for
 13 example?
 14 A. It is not within my expertise but I could imagine it
 15 could be.
 16 Q. Thank you:
 17 "Targeted enforcement of the Online Safety Act ..."
 18 Looking at the last paragraph:
 19 "... and improved Highly Effective Age
 20 Assurance ..."
 21 Does it sit then, just looking over the page,
 22 please, 32, NCA000032_0032, is there a concern that age
 23 assurance is not effective at the moment, sitting behind
 24 this?
 25 A. Yes.

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1 position is currently, at least publicly, that it is not
 2 going to progress with an age gating of VPNs. Is this
 3 an alternative whereby the same issue could be tackled?
 4 A. Yes, it is. Yes.
 5 Q. Thank you, and then we see the remainder there:
 6 "Safeguarding first reporting.
 7 "Effective prevention online safety education.
 8 And the enforcement in relation to:
 9 "Algorithmic recommendations that promote harmful
 10 content or contacts ..."
 11 Some other possibilities, in terms of legislation,
 12 picking up on the comment that we need tougher
 13 legislation. One is that we heard in the seminars that
 14 the Online Safety Act is designed around the "safe
 15 harbour concept", so that's if a service complies with
 16 Ofcom's codes it is deemed to have satisfied its duties.
 17 Is that something you have a view on, whether it is
 18 sufficient, or is that overly technical?
 19 A. I'm worried that I'm going to the very edge of my
 20 technical experience, I'm afraid. I wouldn't want to
 21 get it wrong.
 22 Q. No, and say if the answer to this is the same, but other
 23 possibilities would be deeming extreme violent content
 24 to either be primary priority content?
 25 A. Yes.

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1 Q. Thank you. The next:
 2 "Anti-circumvention by design. Require multi-factor
 3 geolocation, active VPN/proxy detection and blocking and
 4 re-verification for any change of country or age ..."
 5 So Phase 1 of -- the Phase 1 report of this Inquiry
 6 referred to the potential of age gating VPNs. Is that
 7 what this goes to, the risk that VPNs can be used to
 8 bypass age restrictions on other websites?
 9 A. That's what this goes to, yes.
 10 Q. I think we see here a slightly technical explanation, or
 11 at least as far as I'm concerned, but "multi-factored
 12 geolocation", can you explain what that is?
 13 A. So for example, if a user -- if the person was using
 14 a VPN, and they changed location so that it was then
 15 apparent that the VPN showed they were in France, you
 16 could ask for a re-verification. So this would be
 17 a layered approach to -- I think that's what it means --
 18 forgive me if I have got that wrong, because I'm not
 19 terribly technical either -- but a layered approach to
 20 age assurance, which we call "highly effective age
 21 assurance". So it's -- you verify your age once and
 22 then it registers you have got a VPN and it spots that
 23 you are in France, it would make you verify it again at
 24 platform level.
 25 Q. I paraphrase but I think what was DSIT, now DCMS's

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1 Q. Do you have a view on that?
 2 A. Yes. I think that we would support that. Anything that
 3 stops young people, or people -- but let's say young
 4 people -- from viewing content would be welcome, or
 5 anything that makes it harder for viewing extreme
 6 content, we would support.
 7 Q. This might be a technical distinction but another
 8 possibility would be to deem extreme violent content
 9 illegal, alongside the new offence of glorifying extreme
 10 violence?
 11 A. Yes, I'd support it, absolutely.
 12 Q. If I were to ask, do you have a preference between the
 13 two, would that be overly technical?
 14 A. Well, I suggest illegal if that's possible would be
 15 a stronger protection.
 16 Q. Thank you. I'm going to move on now, please, to
 17 interventions and effectiveness of current laws and
 18 systems. Mr Wright talks about serious crime prevention
 19 orders, which are available upon conviction for
 20 a serious offence -- and we talked serious offending,
 21 but things like drug trafficking, child sex offences and
 22 so on. They are, is this right, preventative not
 23 punitive?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. So they have terms proportionate to restrict or disrupt

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1 involvement in serious crime?
 2 **A.** Yes.
 3 **Q.** But that you have to be 18 to be subject to one of these
 4 orders?
 5 **A.** You do.
 6 **Q.** But the NCA, I think, has monitored and managed a number
 7 of these -- 300-plus is the number given in the
 8 statement?
 9 **A.** That is right.
 10 **Q.** Some of those must have, presumably, involved an online
 11 element to the offending?
 12 **A.** I would imagine, yes. I don't have the details of all
 13 of them and what they -- I could certainly find out for
 14 you, if that would be something helpful.
 15 **Q.** Can I just ask, do you have an idea of the sort of
 16 measures that can be put in place under these orders to
 17 control someone's online use?
 18 **A.** Restricting the number of phones or devices, making
 19 a phone available to an officer to view when asked --
 20 not necessarily an officer, someone from probation or
 21 authorities, things like that.
 22 **Q.** Is that effective because, in other inquests, that
 23 position has been explored and the phone was handed over
 24 to law enforcement but I don't think the law enforcement
 25 had any way to see what was going on, on private

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1 monitor these. So they would have to be for -- not
 2 a mass solution, I would suggest.
 3 **MR BOYLE:** Thank you. Thank you, Ms Rance. Those are my
 4 questions. I think there is a request from the combined
 5 victims groups -- no? No further questions?
 6 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** And none from me. Thank you very much.
 7 Extremely helpful witness statement and very clear
 8 and -- very clear evidence this morning, which will be
 9 of great assistance.

10 Where are we going to now, Mr Boyle?

11 **MR BOYLE:** Sir, we could break to 1.30 pm and then --

12 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes, and then start with the next
 13 witness at 1.30 pm?

14 **MR BOYLE:** Exactly.

15 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes, that makes abundant good sense.
 16 I will rise and sit again at 1.30 pm.

17 (12.37 pm)

18 (The short adjournment)

19 (1.30 pm)

20 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes.

21 **MR JAMIESON:** Sir, good afternoon.

22 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Good afternoon. Can the witness take
 23 the oath please.

24 **DS STEVE WATKINS (sworn)**

25 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you very much. Please have

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1 browsing, by way of example. Do you know how that works
 2 in practice?
 3 **A.** I'm afraid, I don't. I don't know exactly how would
 4 work. But, again, I could certainly write in and
 5 explain, if that was helpful.
 6 **Q.** Thank you. There is work being done to develop a Cyber
 7 Crime Risk Order as well with the Home Office, is that
 8 right?
 9 **A.** That is right, yes.
 10 **Q.** Thank you, and I think Mr Wright says it will be
 11 a significant tool in the fight against Com offending in
 12 this online environment?
 13 **A.** Yes.
 14 **Q.** We have talked already, then, about the kind of controls
 15 that these orders might put in place on online use.
 16 **A.** Yes.
 17 **Q.** Presumably, those could be carried across for
 18 consideration for VFIs, as well?
 19 **A.** Yes. Just on -- it's probably been mentioned before,
 20 just on civil orders and the monitoring, it is
 21 incredibly labour intensive to monitor. So I think that
 22 we -- and I'm not suggesting it is not the right thing,
 23 but in any recommendation I think we have just got to
 24 bear in mind the technical -- what's needed technically
 25 and in terms of law enforcement resources, in order to

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1 a seat. Yes, Mr Jamieson.

2 **Questions by MR JAMIESON**

3 **MR JAMIESON:** Thank you, sir. May we have your name and
 4 rank, please?

5 **A.** Stephen Watkins, Detective Superintendent for
 6 Northamptonshire Police.

7 **Q.** Thank you very much, Mr Watkins. Please may we have on
 8 the screen NPDP000018, which will be your statement when
 9 it comes up. May we go to page 11 NPDP000018_0011. We
 10 can see it is a statement of 11 pages, 56 paragraphs,
 11 signed. We have redacted it but was that your signature
 12 at the end?

13 **A.** It was, yes.

14 **Q.** Dated 26 August 2026. Is that statement true and
 15 accurate to the best of your knowledge and belief?

16 **A.** It is, yes.

17 **Q.** Thank you. Then that will enter into our evidence.
 18 What I will do is ask you some questions about some of
 19 the issues that arise, to assist the Chair and the
 20 issues that he has to consider.

21 Please may we go back to page 1 NPDP000018_0001.

22 Ahead of me, brilliant. I will just, if I may, use the
 23 first paragraph or two to give you a brief introduction.

24 You, as you have already told us, are a Detective
 25 Superintendent in Northamptonshire Police?

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1 A. That's correct.
 2 Q. And have been since 2023?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. Otherwise, in that police force for 20 years or so?
 5 A. That force and one other force as well.
 6 Q. Which other one?
 7 A. The Ministry of Defence Police.
 8 Q. Thank you, and your current role is Head of Central
 9 Intelligence Services and you have given some of the
 10 underlying responsibilities that you have: offender
 11 management, the management of sex or violent offenders
 12 (MOSOVO) which I think is an acronym that we are going
 13 to encounter as we go along, and Northamptonshire MAPPA
 14 which is something that the Chair and the participants
 15 are familiar with.
 16 What's the sort of global responsibility and role
 17 that you have that those encapsulate?
 18 A. So Central Intelligence Services is a broad department
 19 within Northamptonshire Police and includes functions
 20 such as digital forensics, collision investigation
 21 forensics, and the force authorising officer for covert
 22 authorities, the Central Authorities Bureau, which
 23 includes communications data and surveillance
 24 authorities, firearms and explosives licensing --
 25 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Just slow down slightly. We have got
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1 Q. If we just look at your paragraph 4 there, where you
 2 give an explanation:
 3 "The PDP process provides a framework for
 4 identifying, assessing and managing adults who present
 5 a risk to the public but who may not meet the threshold
 6 for management through statutory offender management
 7 arrangements."
 8 Of which the most obvious example is MAPPA?
 9 A. That's one example.
 10 Q. But there are others:
 11 "The YRP performs a similar function for children
 12 and young people, utilising a multi-agency approach for
 13 identify risk, coordinate interventions and safeguard
 14 both the individual and the wider public."
 15 Just so as we understand what the purpose of these
 16 structures is, there appears to be a safety net that you
 17 are describing that sits underneath other statutory
 18 processes, that have particular criteria. Is that
 19 an appropriate way of thinking about it?
 20 A. Yes, I would say so.
 21 Q. The other thing that comes out of that paragraph 4 is
 22 that, although the PDP for the adults and the YRP for
 23 the under-18s are designed to go to the same end, that's
 24 underlying safety net, they function differently and
 25 have different constituent elements, is that right?
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1 a stenographer who is trying to make a note. So don't
 2 go at snail's pace, but not at quite such a rush.
 3 A. Noted.
 4 **MR JAMIESON:** It is my fault because I have asked you and
 5 there is a long list. I think we can see a broad remit
 6 but underneath that remit, do we have what we might
 7 think of as public protection responsibilities?
 8 A. A degree of public protection responsibilities.
 9 Primarily, public protection sits within our protecting
 10 vulnerable persons department within Northamptonshire,
 11 which is a different department again.
 12 Q. Okay. We have asked you here to speak to us about
 13 a programme that you run within Northamptonshire Police,
 14 called Operation Airforce and that is -- you begin to
 15 introduce that at paragraphs 3 and 4 of your statement,
 16 so just at the bottom of the page. Before we get to the
 17 detail of how that works, may we just introduce the
 18 broad concepts of it.
 19 So, Operation Airforce, as you tell us there, is the
 20 global name that you use to refer to two different
 21 panels, the Potentially Dangerous Persons process, or
 22 PDP, and the Youth Risk Panel. Is the dividing line
 23 between those two, the PDP is for adults, those who are
 24 over 18 and the Youth Risk Panel is for under 18s?
 25 A. That is correct.
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1 A. Yes. They are both intended to help manage and mitigate
 2 the risk against individuals who otherwise aren't
 3 managed, but the means by which to attain that is subtly
 4 different between the two.
 5 Q. We will come on and we will look at that in more detail
 6 as we go through. May we just go over the page, please,
 7 to page 2 NPDP000018_0002 and paragraph 6 because one
 8 thing that you and I need to get clear at the moment is
 9 that these panels are not specifically guided at the
 10 cohort that this Inquiry is concerned with, are they?
 11 They are not VFIs or NIEV. You tell us there, at
 12 paragraph 6:
 13 "Operation Airforce has relevance to the management
 14 of individuals who present concerning behaviours ..."
 15 Really of any sort:
 16 "... including those associated with violence,
 17 sexual harm, exploitation, vulnerability and other forms
 18 of risk where statutory management frameworks may not
 19 apply."
 20 A. That is correct.
 21 Q. So, just to return slightly to a point that you have
 22 made already, where these -- such individuals are
 23 managed by statutory processes already, your Operation
 24 Airforce doesn't need to come into play, but where there
 25 are individuals of risk, across the fields of violence,
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1 sexual harm, exploitation and other forms of
2 vulnerability, that's where Operation Airforce is
3 designed to work?

4 **A.** Yes, that's correct.

5 **Q.** So it is not aimed at Violence Fixated Individuals or
6 individuals who may be on a path to offending of the
7 horrendous sort of AR, but people who pose a risk of
8 violence, those individuals, if they existed in
9 Northamptonshire, would be caught within that cohort,
10 potentially?

11 **A.** Yes, so Operation Airforce was initially intended to
12 capture sexual risk that was otherwise unmanaged. So
13 an example might be where you had individuals that might
14 have non-convictions for sexual offences, they would not
15 necessarily be managed through the MOSOVO process,
16 therefore the PDP panel was designed to identify
17 individuals that we believed posed a sexual risk to the
18 wider public, but -- and still, therefore, required
19 a degree of management and degree of control and the PDP
20 panel then would seek to apply, for perhaps a civil
21 order, in order to control the risk, which would then
22 bring them into the MOSOVO process where they could be
23 then managed.

24 **Q.** So it started there but I think you have told me
25 already, the remit is now broader?

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1 that might be, including where they are not assessed to
2 be vulnerable for radicalisation, for terrorism, but
3 nevertheless the thought is that they pose a risk, those
4 people will potentially come to your panel; is that
5 right?

6 **A.** Yes, that's correct. So the Youth Risk Panel is
7 designed to problem-solve risk in a general sense,
8 rather than just a specific sense. So, in that regard,
9 if CT believe that a person poses a risk -- and we are
10 not prescriptive as to what necessarily that risk is --
11 then they can be referred into the YRP and effectively,
12 we will problem-solve them as individuals and find a way
13 to reduce that risk downwards.

14 **Q.** Just -- I will get to the detail, but I do just want to
15 come back on what you have just said there. The purpose
16 of your panel is not to think about narrow subsets of
17 risk, it is to manage risk generally?

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** How did you arrive at a situation where you decided
20 that's what you were going to do? What caused that to
21 be?

22 **A.** The absence of a solution, frankly. So where we -- the
23 PDP process started in response to unmanaged sexual risk
24 for individuals. After a period of time, we realised
25 that there were young people who also posed a sexual

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1 **A.** That's correct.

2 **Q.** May we just -- final piece of introduction before
3 I think we get to it, another important feature is there
4 at your paragraph 7. So the panels existed anyway, but:
5 "In recent years [Northants] Police has developed
6 a referral pathway whereby individuals referred through
7 Counter Terrorism/Prevent processes but not meeting the
8 threshold for ongoing Prevent management may be
9 considered through the YRP where a residual local
10 policing risk remains. This ensures that [the] risk is
11 not lost when concerns fall below [CT] thresholds but
12 still require management and oversight."
13 Again, just to have a sort of broad look at that
14 before we come to the detail. We have heard some
15 evidence from Counter Terrorism Police Headquarters
16 about some referrals from Prevent, where an individual
17 meets the criteria for adoption, would go through to
18 Channel potentially for management but doesn't consent,
19 and so there can be a role for the police in that
20 circumstance -- provide a variety of roles, but
21 essentially to encourage them to consent, was the
22 explanation we were given.

23 Your function is broader than that, I think. Yours
24 is, if a person is not going to be put forward for
25 Channel because they don't meet the criteria, whatever

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1 risk, that were unmanaged. We didn't feel it was
2 appropriate to put them into a PDP panel because we
3 didn't necessarily want to label young people as
4 "potentially dangerous". So we created the Youth Risk
5 Panel with a more neutral name.

6 But in retrospect, the separate Youth Risk Panel was
7 more appropriate anyway because the partners who
8 contribute to the Youth Risk Panel are not necessarily
9 the same partners who might contribute to the PDP panel.
10 But, effectively, their remits mirror each other.

11 **Q.** Thank you, and I will -- there are a number of bits of
12 interest and facts that you have mentioned there that
13 I will come back to.

14 Just before I move on, may I ask you a question that
15 comes from our family victim and survivor groups which
16 is: you have just told us, effectively, this is a local
17 arrangement that you developed to meet a particular
18 problem, how have you made sure that there is awareness,
19 wide awareness, of the fact that you are doing this?

20 **A.** So, locally within Northamptonshire Police, we have
21 publicised it considerably. We get a number of
22 referrals internally from lots of different departments.
23 Obviously we get a number of referrals from our local
24 CT, who are very, very engaging and very co-operative
25 and they contribute actively to the panel. Externally,

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1 we shared our good practice with the College of
2 Policing. It is available as part of their good
3 practice toolkit and our partners, obviously they
4 contribute to the panels and they are aware of it as
5 well.

6 Q. Thank you. Well, then let us get -- let's get into how
7 it works. Just before we go to the underlying
8 documents, let's just flesh out a point you have just
9 made. If we go to page 3 NPDP000018_0003 and
10 paragraph 13.

11 So the beginning of any PDP or youth referral is
12 a referral that comes in. Those can come from within
13 your police force or from external partners?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. You have listed some of the ones there in your
16 paragraph 13 as to where these may come from. Is it
17 a closed door? Can a member of the public make such
18 a referral, if they consider it appropriate, a concerned
19 family member, something like that?

20 A. Not directly to the panel but in a circumstance such as
21 that, the individual would presumably refer their
22 concerns either to police or to Prevent or to another
23 provider, who would then refer into the panel.

24 Q. As you have said already, you do take referrals directly
25 from -- you have called it "Counter Terrorism/Prevent",

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1 rules. We could tailor the panel or the make-up of the
2 panel to suit the circumstances.

3 That being said, PDP and YRP isn't intended to be
4 a long-term offender management function. It is
5 predominantly to identify what interventions need to be
6 put in place, in order to mitigate the risk and for
7 onward management elsewhere.

8 Q. Thank you. We will look at that. But just finally on
9 this paragraph, you have listed -- so we have dealt with
10 the PDP, almost exclusively internal police but you can
11 bring in other agencies if necessary. Whereas, the YRP
12 is multi-agency in its nature. It is police-led but it
13 includes representatives from children's social care,
14 Youth Justice Services, youth services, CT
15 representatives and other relevant safeguarding
16 partners.

17 Those that you have bulleted there, are they regular
18 attendees at these meetings that you hold?

19 A. Yes, so the bulleted individuals are the ones that
20 attend most, if not all, of the YRP panels. Other
21 representatives come where it is felt that they would
22 add value to the process. So education, for example.

23 Q. Okay. If we may, I'm going to leave your statement for
24 a moment and just deal with some of the underlying
25 materials that you have given us. We will deal first

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1 but either, presumably, the Counter Terrorism police
2 officers themselves, or perhaps somebody from the local
3 authority who is involved in the wider process?

4 A. That's correct.

5 Q. Whilst we are on this page, let's just deal with a point
6 that you have made already. Paragraph 14, you tell us
7 about the different decision-making structures between
8 the two panels: the PDP is almost exclusively internal
9 to your police force, is that right?

10 A. Yes. Again, PDP almost exclusively deals with sexual
11 risk that's unmanaged. Therefore, the control mechanism
12 is invariably the need to obtain a civil order in order
13 to control that risk. Therefore, it's not common for us
14 to require the input of external partners. However, we
15 do sometimes, probation, for example, social services or
16 housing if it is relevant. But generally speaking, it
17 is an internal police forum.

18 Q. If you had perhaps an individual that had begun as
19 a youth, where the risk was violence and perhaps the
20 risk was serious violence but they had gone over that
21 age threshold and were now in their late teens, early
22 20s, can you bring in external agencies or partners to
23 assist you with that case?

24 A. Yes, the good thing about a panel process such as PDP or
25 the YRP is its flexibility. There is no hard or fast

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1 with the Potentially Dangerous Person Panel but we have
2 in mind the caveats that you have given us already. We
3 will probably deal with that one quite quickly.

4 May we have on the screen, please, NPDP000007.

5 So, these are the terms of reference for the
6 potentially dangerous persons. If we could go to the
7 second page, please NPDP000007_0002. Under 1.1, the
8 purpose, there, the second bullet point bears out what
9 you have told us. The purpose of this panel, the reason
10 it exists, is to:

11 "Provide a mechanism to consider offender management
12 of nominals who are believed to be a risk and there is
13 no current ownership."

14 So it is to provide an ownership of that risk. Then
15 the third bullet, again, built into these terms of
16 reference:

17 "To use problem solving skills to consider ways to
18 reduce the risk the nominals present, whether or not
19 they are adopted."

20 Now, there are just a number of facets of that
21 I would welcome your input on. Problem-solving skills,
22 pragmatism, why is that there at the start of your terms
23 of reference? Why is that necessary?

24 A. I think it's probably key to the PDP and the YRP process
25 is we don't wish to be fixed when we consider how to

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1 solve the problem or how to mitigate the risk. It is
 2 very much an open forum, led by the chair, to work out
 3 what's the best way to manage the risk to other people
 4 and to reduce the risk of the individual. And that open
 5 forum approach within these panels really helps to
 6 create an actual solution, as opposed today something
 7 that might look good on paper.

8 **Q.** So, we have heard from other witnesses a real advocacy
 9 of the value of such an approach but also a recognition
 10 that, with public agencies that are under budget, stress
 11 and high workloads, it is an extremely difficult culture
 12 to create. How have you managed to achieve that?

13 **A.** We are a small force and we have a very good
 14 relationship with our partners. This refers
 15 particularly to PDP, which is almost exclusively
 16 police-led. However, when it comes to both forums,
 17 being a reasonably small force with good relationships
 18 with our partner agencies means that we can really
 19 engage them and seek the best outcome that we are --
 20 they are able to provide.

21 Funding obviously is always a constraint, I think
 22 particularly when you are looking at more complex
 23 interventions. But where the intervention is more
 24 proactive policing, perhaps obtain a civil order to
 25 control the risk, then that is something that's

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1 it is essentially a police-led forum?

2 **A.** That's correct.

3 **Q.** The deliverables is set out underneath by reference to
 4 other criteria in another document but it is principally
 5 what you have just told us. You are looking towards
 6 a short-term risk mitigation if you can, potentially the
 7 obtaining of a civil order?

8 **A.** That's correct.

9 **Q.** All right. Let's just look at one more document,
 10 please, in relation to PDPs then. NPDP000011, please.

11 If we can crop in so we can read it a little easier,
 12 top of the page. This is a guidance that is for the
 13 panel, I think particularly for the Chair of the panel.
 14 It is a short one-page document which sets out what you
 15 have been telling us. The purpose of the PDP there is
 16 set out in the first three sub-paragraphs, which
 17 includes using problem-solving skills, being proactive,
 18 finding solutions?

19 **A.** That's correct.

20 **Q.** The criteria for a Potentially Dangerous Person is set
 21 underneath and it is effectively the safety net. So if
 22 they are caught by another process, MAPPA, a civil
 23 order -- or they might be MAPPA which is, I think, how
 24 I interpret that third criteria?

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 relatively easy to do.

2 **Q.** Okay. So, the consistency in those local relationships
 3 or the consistency of individuals is an important part
 4 of achieving that culture?

5 **A.** Very much so.

6 **Q.** That might be something we come back to in a moment, but
 7 if we just -- so we can make the rest of the points we
 8 need to on this document quickly:

9 "Attendance.

10 "Attendance to the panel is requested for
 11 representatives [of] the following departments ..."

12 Those are all police departments I think, apart from
 13 the last one, which would only apply if the referral was
 14 for a child and that's the Youth Offending, is that what
 15 that final one is?

16 **A.** Yes. YOS could also be invited to the Potentially
 17 Dangerous Person panel if, for example, the offender
 18 is -- or the potential offender is slightly older and
 19 maybe they were engaged to YOS previously so they might
 20 be invited to past comment on the individual.

21 **Q.** Thank you. May we go over the page, please
 22 NPDP000007_0003. So you will hold meetings, there will
 23 be -- they will last no more than an hour. Guests may
 24 be required to present referrals which would be agreed
 25 in advance. But this is chaired by a police officer and

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1 **Q.** Because if they have a MAPPA-eligible conviction, even
 2 if they are not currently being managed by MAPPA, they
 3 could be, then you will pick up that risk which is
 4 otherwise going undetected and unmanaged?

5 **A.** Yes, that is correct.

6 **Q.** May we just look at outcomes for a moment because again,
 7 one of the issues we are grappling with is ownership of
 8 risk; how we ensure that somebody owns a risk and is
 9 responsible for a risk rather than referring it onwards
 10 and having no oversight of what happens with that
 11 referral.

12 For these cases, where a case is not adopted by the
 13 panel, the person who owns that risk is still
 14 identified; it is the officer in the case who brought
 15 the case in the first place?

16 **A.** Yes, that's correct.

17 **Q.** In some cases where -- the second alternative, where
 18 a case is not adopted, a panel will still maintain
 19 oversight and will ask for the case to be brought back,
 20 presumably, so that they can review?

21 **A.** Yes, so in circumstances where perhaps the risk picture
 22 was incomplete or there's actions that could be
 23 undertaken in short order that might mitigate the risk,
 24 or it might be that there's other offences that perhaps
 25 could be investigated and therefore, there are other

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1 options available to manage that individual's risk.
 2 But the panel would wish to review that to make sure
 3 that those actions have been completed or to see where
 4 that case has gone, to make sure that they have not left
 5 it unmanaged.
 6 **Q.** Thank you.
 7 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Presumably it's important that the word
 8 there is "oversight" and not "ownership"?
 9 **A.** Yes, that's correct. Very much so.
 10 **MR JAMIESON:** Thank you. Sir, for your record, there is
 11 also a policy for this structure, it is NPDP000005. But
 12 I don't suggest we bring that up now.
 13 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you very much.
 14 **MR JAMIESON:** May we move to the youth referral pathway.
 15 You have dealt with the membership at -- in your
 16 statement. I won't go back to that but could we bring
 17 up the terms of reference for that structure, which is
 18 NPDP000009.
 19 We will be able to see some common features with the
 20 PDP and some different and it is the differences that
 21 I will be interested in. So, here is our terms of
 22 reference for the Youth Risk Panel. If we turn over to
 23 the second page NPDP000009_0002 and just crop in on the
 24 top box.
 25 If I look at the second bullet under 1.1, it is not

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1 your terms of reference?
 2 **A.** Through experience and again, through identifying
 3 that -- through investigation of offences and through,
 4 simply -- identifying the gap around young people who
 5 might pose a risk. I suppose, I would say common sense,
 6 but perhaps --
 7 **Q.** There's nothing wrong with that.
 8 **A.** That might be oversimplifying it somewhat but
 9 effectively, yes. There is no science behind it beyond
 10 knowing that that's how you keep children safe.
 11 **Q.** I think that's what I'm really interested in drawing out
 12 from you, is that that recognition, it is not special,
 13 it is not specific to this cohort that we are dealing
 14 with, that's a common feature across all sorts of
 15 species of risk, when it comes to vulnerable, risky,
 16 young people?
 17 **A.** Whenever children or young people commit offences, in my
 18 experience, it is linked to a vulnerability of some
 19 description, either -- usually a combination of
 20 environment, circumstances, perhaps mental health and
 21 neurodiversity and substance misuse. A confluence of
 22 different factors and by addressing those factors we can
 23 generally help to reduce the risk of further offending.
 24 **Q.** Thank you.
 25 I will just note and read out that the penultimate

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1 just offender management anymore, it is also the:
 2 "... safeguarding of children who are either a risk
 3 or at risk, particularly where there is no current case
 4 ownership."
 5 So the first and last parts of that sentence are
 6 familiar to us. But really, it's the fact that you have
 7 alighted upon and recorded in this bullet that I'm
 8 particularly interested in, is the middle of that
 9 sentence because there is a recognition there, isn't
 10 there? Is that, at least in the case of children, "at
 11 risk" and "posing a risk" are -- it is a metaphor I have
 12 now overused, but two sides of the same coin?
 13 **A.** That's correct. So the two aren't mutually exclusively.
 14 In fact, in many occasions where a young person poses
 15 a risk of harm, it may very well be the case that it's
 16 their environment or their circumstances that add to
 17 their vulnerability or to their propensity to commit
 18 violence. Therefore, identifying those concerns and
 19 addressing them will not just help the child but also
 20 will protect the public.
 21 **Q.** May I just ask -- so that explanation you have just
 22 given matches, I think, entirely, I can say, the
 23 evidence that this Inquiry has received from other
 24 experts. How have you developed that understanding?
 25 How have you got to the place where that's written into

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1 bullet under this section, is:
 2 "[The facilitation of] a multi-agency approach to
 3 reduce ..."
 4 A number of alternatives are given, but can I group
 5 that as reducing risk generally, through that
 6 multi-agency approach?
 7 **A.** Very much so, and I think anyone who works in the child
 8 safeguarding arena will say that the only way to
 9 effectively manage the risk of harm to and from children
 10 is through a multi-agency approach.
 11 **Q.** Just help us to understand why that is?
 12 **A.** Because you can't police your way out of protecting
 13 children. There's lots of different agencies that are
 14 involved with young people who are much better placed to
 15 be able to deliver effective interventions and to
 16 monitor their safety. Social services, education,
 17 et cetera. So, having those different agencies at the
 18 table is a much more joined up way of managing that
 19 risk.
 20 **Q.** Those interventions that those safeguarding agencies, if
 21 I put them in that basket for the moment, those sort of
 22 interventions deal with the vulnerability of the young
 23 person but they also mitigate and manage the risk that
 24 they pose?
 25 **A.** They do. They help to manage the vulnerability but they

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1 also provide a degree of reassurance that the person or
 2 the young person is being effectively monitored, to make
 3 sure that they are being supported and that they can
 4 escalate back to police, or whoever the lead agency is,
 5 if they feel the risk has changed, particularly if it's
 6 escalated.

7 **Q.** I think we're going to see, that's built into your
 8 structure, isn't it, that feedback loop, when we come to
 9 it in just a moment? But I will follow the structure,
 10 if I may. May we just look at the bottom half of the
 11 page. We have dealt with this briefly already but those
 12 are the standard attendees for this panel?

13 **A.** Yes, that is correct.

14 **Q.** Presumably, others can be invited if they are relevant
 15 to the case?

16 **A.** Very much so.

17 **Q.** We note not listed there, I think, is Counter Terrorism
 18 Police but they are also regular attendees, where
 19 relevant?

20 **A.** Where it is relevant, yes.

21 **Q.** May we just go on to the next page, please
 22 NPDP000009_0003. So, these are monthly meetings, longer
 23 than the PDPs, two hours in duration. Just so the Chair
 24 and the Core Participants have a feeling of how many
 25 people might be being discussed, how many individuals

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1 a process is overtly police or risk-focused, there can
 2 be a reticence for referrals from families, from
 3 safeguarding organisations. Is that something you have
 4 encountered? Is that part of the reason why you have
 5 called this panel what you have called it?

6 **A.** Absolutely. So partner agencies and obviously
 7 individuals would certainly be hesitant to describe
 8 an individual as "potentially dangerous", particularly
 9 where we are talking about an individual that may not
 10 have a conviction. They just present with risky
 11 behaviour.

12 And so the phrase "potentially dangerous" is very
 13 unhelpful in that respect to illicit support. But more
 14 broadly the individual will receive a flag within our
 15 intelligence system and having "potentially dangerous"
 16 as a flag against the individual might suggest that they
 17 are a particularly risky individual and therefore,
 18 having a Youth Risk Panel flag shows -- gives a more
 19 subconscious indication that they are at risk of some
 20 sort of vulnerability, as opposed to someone who might
 21 cause a risk of harm. But for reassurance, if they are
 22 violent and they have demonstrated violence, they would
 23 receive a violence flag as a separate marker.

24 **Q.** There's a marker for that. But you don't want a patrol
 25 officer that encounters somebody with a vulnerability

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1 might be being discussed at one of those meetings?

2 **A.** It very much depends. So, sometimes the panels have one
 3 and sometimes the panels will have four or five and
 4 anything else in between.

5 **Q.** Yes, but it is -- across that two hours, there will be
 6 a proper opportunity to discuss each individual?

7 **A.** Absolutely, and it says meetings will be no longer than
 8 two hours, but in reality, obviously if it took longer,
 9 then it will take longer.

10 **Q.** An aspiration rather than a tramline. Thank you.
 11 May I -- we will take that document down if we may
 12 and go to NPDP000006. This is the policy. We will just
 13 briefly look at the policy for this organisation, or for
 14 this panel. So there's the front page. May we go to
 15 page 2 NPDP000006_002, please, and to paragraph 4. So
 16 the introduction and the legislative compliance, I don't
 17 need, thank you.

18 But here is the formalisation of a point that you
 19 have made with me already as to why this panel isn't
 20 called a PDP:

21 "Northamptonshire Police do not actively label and
 22 identify a child as 'potentially dangerous' therefore
 23 the Youth Risk Panel has been implemented."

24 It goes on and I just want to ask you about that
 25 nomenclature. Other witnesses have told us that where

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1 that's on your panel to have their index of concern
 2 about personal safety raised, such that they might,
 3 I don't know, deploy some sort of tactic or equipment to
 4 mitigate that, when it is not necessary?

5 **A.** Absolutely, and also worth noting that they may -- the
 6 young person may be in a different county where they
 7 don't have a Potentially Dangerous Persons --

8 **Q.** The nuance doesn't carry?

9 **A.** Exactly.

10 **Q.** May we just look, please, at the bottom of page 3 very
 11 briefly. So the criteria for adopting at the youth
 12 panel. It is similar in relation to the adults. This
 13 is the risk safety net for individuals that aren't
 14 caught by some other process or managed by some other
 15 process?

16 **A.** Correct.

17 **Q.** If we go, please, to page 4 NPDP000006_0004 and to
 18 paragraph 5. It is the first sentence of this that
 19 I am -- the second paragraph, in fact. Whenever
 20 a referral -- sorry, the second sub-paragraph of
 21 paragraph 5. Whenever a referral is made -- and we will
 22 look at one of the forms in a minute -- to the Youth
 23 Risk Panel, a parallel child safeguarding referral must
 24 be made at the same time?

25 **A.** That is correct.

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1 Q. Why is that?

2 A. So that's probably one of the most important initial

3 parts of this process. The public protection notice

4 that is submitted will go into our Multi-Agency

5 Safeguarding Hub, our MASH, where the information is

6 then shared with all the different relevant agencies

7 that plug into MASH. The purpose of that is to make

8 sure that all the agencies are aware of the information

9 that we are aware of and is shared accordingly, which

10 helps not only inform their risk assessment process but

11 also makes sure that they can attend the panel and be

12 candid with the information that they provide, rather

13 than simply reactive.

14 Q. Yes, and so there are really two aspects of that that

15 I just want to unpick with you. The first is sending

16 the safeguarding referral alerts all the MASH partners,

17 but aren't those many of the same partners that are

18 sitting round your table in this referral panel anyway?

19 A. That is correct but I'm very cognisant of the fact that

20 there's always potentially a difference between the

21 individual that sits on a panel and the organisation

22 that sits behind the individual, and I wouldn't like to

23 assume that the two are always intimately connected.

24 Q. So it is a sort of safeguard to ensure that that takes

25 place?

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1 looking for to help safeguard the young person.

2 Q. Can I ask, this sort of parallel MASH referral, was that

3 always part of the Youth Risk Panel or was that

4 something you added to meet a problem that you had

5 encountered?

6 A. No, it was designed from the beginning with the PPN in

7 mind.

8 Q. Thank you. May we just go to paragraph -- or

9 subheading 6, the bottom half of this page, just so we

10 have an understanding of what this looks like. So the

11 people that are going to come along and speak are

12 expected to:

13 "... Provide the panel with a short presentation

14 around [the] concerning behaviour, incidents, events or

15 intelligence that may have led [the person or their

16 organisation] to submit ..."

17 Their referral in the first place, and some guidance

18 is given:

19 "Think 'threat, harm and risk' and what quick or

20 early intervention from an ..."

21 Offending Manager?

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. "... might look like to negate potential serious [that

24 word is emphasised] harm."

25 Then is that final sentence directed at a police

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1 A. And to make sure that the information has been formally

2 documented within MASH.

3 Q. Well, that's the second part of -- the second part of

4 what you said was to enable to facilitate proper

5 information sharing with you, with your panel. Have you

6 found that making that parallel concurrent referral into

7 MASH, a safeguarding referral, has allowed your panel to

8 receive the information that it needs to work?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. A difficult question, but why? Why is it that that is

11 necessary to make the difference? What's the reticence

12 to share the information otherwise, do you think?

13 A. I would say that MASH is a process, as much as it is

14 a thing, an entity, and so agencies are familiar with

15 sharing information in a frank way with MASH and when

16 they ask for information and documentation, then there's

17 a free-flow of information provided to MASH who then can

18 provide the information to officers. Whereas, relying

19 on individuals who contact either individuals or

20 organisations separately risks information blockage.

21 Q. So you are effectively piggy-backing on that familiar

22 process, to ensure that you get the same information for

23 your panel?

24 A. Yes. Using a well trodden path of MASH means that we

25 are much more likely to get the information that we are

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1 officer:

2 "You may also be asked to comment upon the

3 status ..."

4 In fact, the whole policy, presumably, is directed

5 at a police officer, is it?

6 A. It is, but there are occasions where a youth might be

7 presented by someone not within the police, so, for

8 example, Prevent.

9 Q. May we just look at a referral form, which I think will

10 bring that point to light. NPDP000008, please. If we

11 just crop in on the top half of the page.

12 So this is an incoming form that your panel would

13 receive?

14 A. Yes, that is correct.

15 Q. It tells us it is only for people who are under 18. It

16 tells us, in red there, just towards the bottom of the

17 screen that we are looking at, that the safeguarding

18 referral has to be made before this referral is

19 submitted?

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. If we just scroll down the page. It is the person

22 making the referral, that is the person that's being

23 referred, onto the next page, please NPDP000008_0002.

24 Just here, right at the top, the parent and the guardian

25 of the young person, details are asked for. Their care

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1 needs or carer details, if different. Who they are
 2 living with, any appropriate adult and then may we
 3 just ... come down:
 4 "Relevant third-party agency/relevant person such
 5 [as] school/college safeguarding officer ..."
 6 Is this for the referrer to identify other sources
 7 of information?
 8 A. Yes, and other people that we might think would be
 9 appropriate to attend the panel, to help better
 10 understand the young person and the risk that they pose.
 11 Q. It says there:
 12 "Please supply as much information as possible."
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. Because a broad view of the individual is important?
 15 A. Very much so, and the individual completing the form may
 16 not have that information, but then they might. So by
 17 way of example, if it is an officer who has
 18 an understanding of the young person, they might be
 19 aware of a support or youth worker who is very important
 20 to that individual, that social services might not, or
 21 MASH might not.
 22 Q. Somebody with an ongoing relationship with the
 23 individual who can give you a particular insight into
 24 their vulnerabilities and risks?
 25 A. And might be able to take part in whatever the

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1 understanding of that young person when, in actual fact,
 2 all you are seeing is what they want you to see.
 3 Q. So that sounds like a recognition that online life is
 4 potentially very important to the risks and
 5 vulnerabilities and that mitigation and management, by
 6 recognising that that's evidence that's missing, and
 7 there needs to be vigilance in this risk assessment?
 8 A. I would expect anyone who has identified a risk,
 9 particularly from a Violence Fixated Individual, whose
 10 interest is in causing people harm, or is particularly
 11 interested in violence, would be proactive and seek out
 12 information about their online life, but with the caveat
 13 that they inevitably, will not have a complete picture.
 14 Q. You might not be able to find out which websites,
 15 which -- what browsing history, but if you had
 16 an engaged social worker, if you had information from
 17 the family, you could know that they spent a tremendous
 18 amount of time online, or something of that nature?
 19 A. Correct. But without specific powers, we wouldn't be
 20 able to intrusively access their devices or identify
 21 what websites they have been on.
 22 Q. You started your answer a moment ago, by talking
 23 about -- I think you said cases where the original risk
 24 was online, or the original concerns were online. Were
 25 you talking more about sexual offenders in that

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1 intervention looks like.
 2 Q. May I just ask this. One of the features of the
 3 evidence, again, that we have been hearing, is that
 4 young people's online life is a particularly important
 5 area of information for understanding their
 6 vulnerabilities and risk, but it is one that's
 7 particularly difficult to capture and to have visibility
 8 of. Is that something that you have encountered? Is
 9 that something that you have a way of mitigating?
 10 A. We have not encountered it within the Youth Risk Panel,
 11 at the moment. Where the risk originated from online,
 12 then I would expect there to be a detailed
 13 understanding, as best we could, of that person's online
 14 life. Where it is not directly relevant or it is not --
 15 where it is not understood, then, whilst you may conduct
 16 some open-source research to try and find out more
 17 information, I would be hesitant about relying on it too
 18 much because inevitably there is a lot of unknowns when
 19 it comes to a person's online identity and I think it
 20 would be risky to assume that you have a good
 21 understanding of someone's online life without having
 22 access to all their devices, because some people,
 23 particularly young people, they are quite adept at
 24 obfuscating their online activities and may use
 25 pseudonyms. So you may think you have a good

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1 circumstance?
 2 A. Could be sexual offenders but it could be the risk has
 3 been identified because they have been discussing
 4 violent events online, perhaps glorifying violent
 5 conduct abroad, which is how they come to the attention
 6 of Prevent. They don't meet the threshold for Prevent
 7 referral but then Prevent might say: but this person
 8 still is a risky individual and we feel that that risk
 9 needs to be managed in some way.
 10 Q. I'm going to come onto Prevent in a minute and to ask
 11 you about that specifically. But just so we understand,
 12 when Prevent officers -- I use that word generally,
 13 I don't necessarily mean police officers -- but when
 14 Prevent individuals attend your panels, are they able
 15 to provide information about the general nature of their
 16 concerns, the risks, to you in this forum?
 17 A. Yes, they are.
 18 Q. And a safe way of ensuring that the gist of that
 19 information that can be provided to you has been
 20 devised?
 21 A. Yes, that is correct.
 22 Q. Can you tell us, in simple terms, how that works?
 23 A. In simple terms, they attend, they describe the
 24 nature -- so they would present the case to the panel.
 25 So that's an example where another agency would initiate

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1 the referral, as opposed to it being police-initiated.
 2 So Prevent would come, they present the case, they would
 3 share whatever information they felt was relevant and
 4 then would form part of the problem-solving process.

5 **Q.** Thank you. We will come back to Prevent in a little
 6 more detail but may we just complete our consideration
 7 of this document. So reason for the referral, simple
 8 question: why are you referring this subject to the
 9 Youth Risk Panel? May we go to the next page, just at
 10 the top NPDP000008_0003, an indication of the sorts of
 11 information that's being sought. May we just scroll on.

12 Top of the next page, please NPDP000008_0004. So
 13 "Risk Assessment", and this is the next aspect of your
 14 process that I wanted to draw out. The risk assessment
 15 that is performed by the panel, the form of it or the
 16 structure of it is set out in the referral document?

17 **A.** That's correct.

18 **Q.** And is this -- does this document and its contents and
 19 its form set the terms for that consideration?

20 **A.** Yes.

21 **Q.** So let's look at it:

22 "What is the risk?"

23 Would you expect a general description? Is this
 24 a sexual risk, is it a violence risk, is it
 25 exploitation? Is that what we are looking for?

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1 Forensic CAMHS? Are those the sorts of people we are
 2 talking about?

3 **A.** That is correct.

4 **Q.** Have there been occasions when you have asked people
 5 from those organisations to come?

6 **A.** I'm not aware of any times where we have specifically
 7 asked for their attendance but only because it has not
 8 been relevant.

9 **Q.** But the potential relevance is set out here and
 10 a referrer is invited to think about that?

11 **A.** That is correct.

12 **Q.** "Known patterns of behaviour."

13 May we go to the next page, please NPDP000008_0005.
 14 The safeguarding reference for that referral, is that
 15 what that box is?

16 **A.** Yes. So that's the occurrence number for the Public
 17 Protection Notification.

18 **Q.** Thank you. So that risk assessment process, is that
 19 what we have -- there aren't any scores, there aren't
 20 any boxes that are attached to that. How does that work
 21 in the panel? How is that risk assessment performed?

22 **A.** So it would be discussed and it doesn't seek to come to
 23 a conclusion as to whether the risk is high, medium or
 24 low. Albeit, I think that would be useful. But clearly
 25 this isn't a matrix or a complex means by which to

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1 **A.** Yes, a broad description of what they feel the risk is.

2 **Q.** "Who is at risk?"

3 Could that include both the person being referred
 4 and other people?

5 **A.** Yes. Named individuals, members of the public, police
 6 officers, probation officers, et cetera. So it is very
 7 much identifying, in broad terms, who is at risk of
 8 harm.

9 **Q.** Yes: which factors might increase the risk? And some
 10 individual items are listed there, including mental ill
 11 health and medication. Can I ask this, does your panel
 12 have expert assistance in relation to the relevance of
 13 mental ill health or neurodiversity?

14 **A.** We don't have standing members of the panel who are
 15 experts in those areas. But if it was felt that someone
 16 with that expertise would add value, then they would
 17 certainly be invited. The difficulty, obviously, would
 18 be identifying and obtaining the presence of that
 19 individual at the panel. However, the Chair would
 20 certainly seek to obtain that representation.

21 **Q.** That sounds like a polite and diplomatic way of saying
 22 it is quite difficult to get such individuals to come?

23 **A.** It can be difficult to identify who might be the most
 24 appropriate person and elicit their attendance.

25 **Q.** So CAMHS, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services?

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1 identify the precise nature of the risk. I think it
 2 would be -- without some science behind it -- I think it
 3 would be difficult to do that.

4 **Q.** It is a structure by which a professional judgement can
 5 be made?

6 **A.** Exactly, yes.

7 **Q.** May we just look at the guidance to the panel for the
 8 YRP. Sir, that is NPDP000010. So this, as it says on
 9 its face, is the guidance that the panel gets.

10 The purpose is there. The criteria are there. We
 11 have looked at those before. May we just look at the
 12 bottom half of the page:

13 "Outcomes of the Panel."

14 Here, what I'm interested in, again, is ownership of
 15 risk because these are the four possible outcomes. So
 16 where the panel, just flat, does not adopt this case,
 17 the full ownership of the risk remains with the officer
 18 in the case?

19 **A.** That is correct.

20 **Q.** So the risk is assigned and everybody knows where it is.
 21 Secondly, as with the PDP: "no adoption", the "Panel
 22 maintain oversight, actions are taken away by
 23 agencies/[departments] and ..."

24 The case brought back.

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 Q. Can you give us an example of what that might look like?
 2 A. So again, very much like the PDP process. It might be
 3 that the risk is not fully understood, or the risk
 4 picture is incomplete. So the Chair would set actions
 5 and it might be that there are other partner agencies
 6 that need to be engaged with, that would better
 7 contribute to the discussions. It might be that
 8 there's -- actually there is an investigation that's
 9 ongoing where the risk is already -- has a degree of
 10 control, but it might be that case is coming to
 11 a conclusion shortly, therefore it might be that it
 12 better heard in a week or two weeks later. But,
 13 effectively, it is where there are other things that
 14 need to be elucidated before we can determine whether or
 15 not the PDP -- the YRP process can add value.
 16 Q. Thank you. So it is a "more information required"
 17 category?
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. The third:
 20 "No adoption but partner agency takes lead -- update
 21 back to the panel."
 22 Can you explain that? Give us an example of what
 23 that might look like?
 24 A. So that's where the risk is understood, but it's felt by
 25 the panel that another agency would be better placed to

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1 Q. Am I right? So in a more early intervention stage?
 2 A. An early intervention stage or where it is felt that the
 3 risk is low enough that another agency is better placed
 4 to conduct an intervention, rather than law enforcement
 5 trying -- needing to put guardrails around that
 6 individual.
 7 Q. May I ask, can you give us some examples from your
 8 caseload, what sort of things are you talking about?
 9 You mentioned social services, children's services?
 10 A. Children's services, could potentially be education --
 11 Q. Can you give us a real-world example?
 12 A. Because you have asked, I can't think of a particular
 13 example. However, hypothetically speaking, it could be
 14 a young person who's demonstrating concerning
 15 misogynistic tendencies, perhaps with concurrent,
 16 low-level violent offences that have not resulted in
 17 a conviction. It may be that social services or
 18 education feel that they are able to undertake
 19 an intervention programme with that individual, to
 20 address those concerns. Perhaps also to undertake some
 21 neurodiversity assessment and intervention, to help them
 22 address their underlying neurodiversity. In those
 23 circumstances, the lead agency would probably be
 24 education to report back to the panel to see if that
 25 intervention has mitigated the risk.

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1 manage that individual, manage that risk and for
 2 a period of time, there might be actions that are set,
 3 there are structured agreements. So social services,
 4 for example, might be better placed to run a single
 5 intervention or try and improve the circumstances of the
 6 individual, before returning them back to panel.
 7 Because if the adoption of -- from the Youth Risk Panel
 8 is that our MOSOVO unit, which is predominantly
 9 an offender management unit, would take on the
 10 individual and would seek to add some sort of control,
 11 some sort of legal control, in order to manage that
 12 risk. So obviously that's quite a big step to take for
 13 a young person.
 14 Q. So if we are in the fourth outcome, MOSOVO maintain
 15 ownership, that's where some sort of -- perhaps our
 16 index of concern about risk precipitating is going up
 17 and some sort of disruptive action, police-led action,
 18 is thought to be the appropriate outcome. That's that
 19 space.
 20 But the third one, I have inferred from what you
 21 have said that that's the circumstance where somebody
 22 else, some non-law enforcement agency, has the right
 23 sort of intervention to deal with that risk, at that
 24 stage?
 25 A. Yes.

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1 Q. That is the point that you have just mentioned there,
 2 that I just wanted to draw out and focus upon. So
 3 even -- the way your panel works is even where somebody
 4 else is best placed to provide that intervention to meet
 5 that area of vulnerability, the panel is still going to
 6 audit, assure, expect a report back, to make sure that
 7 that risk is being mitigated?
 8 A. Yes, that's correct.
 9 Q. Why is that feature there?
 10 A. To make sure there are no cracks in the process and for
 11 accountability, as well.
 12 Q. Having put you on the spot in relation to potential
 13 interventions, I think I can probably help you. If we
 14 go to, please, another document, NPDP000012. So you
 15 have provided us with a number of these documents, they
 16 are called "YPS Summary of services for the purpose of
 17 the Youth ... Panel". Is this a guidance document that
 18 one of your partners has given you as to the sort of
 19 interventions that they can provide?
 20 A. Yes, that is correct.
 21 Q. So the panel has, in front of them, the summary of
 22 services when they are thinking about what interventions
 23 might be provided?
 24 A. Yes, that is correct.
 25 Q. On this particular example, the second paragraph, where

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1 it tells us -- the first paragraph tells us who they are
 2 and who they work with:
 3 "As a specialist service in extra familial harm, YPS
 4 provides targeted intervention across contexts and works
 5 closely with the multi-agency Child Exploitation Hub,
 6 alongside colleagues from Social Care, Health and the
 7 Police.
 8 " ... may act as the lead professional, completing
 9 Family Help Conversation and coordinating a Team Around
 10 the Family ..."
 11 So where one of your areas of concern is
 12 exploitation and where the intervention that is looked
 13 for is some sort of support for the family, this might
 14 be a lead agency in that circumstance?
 15 **A.** Absolutely, yes.
 16 **Q.** We have some others, sir. Unless it is helpful to you,
 17 I was not going to look at all of them.
 18 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** No, agreed.
 19 **MR JAMIESON:** Thank you. Case closure. May we just go back
 20 to your statement to deal with that, at page 5,
 21 NPDP000018_0005 paragraph 24, where you spell out what
 22 we have just been talking about:
 23 "Northamptonshire Police retains oversight of
 24 referrals entering Operation Airforce until ownership is
 25 formally allocated to another agency, with actions or
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1 **Q.** What sort of civil orders are we talking about in those
 2 circumstances that we might be applying for?
 3 **A.** So it could be a Sexual Risk Order, it could be
 4 a Trafficking Prevention Order. It is a civil order of
 5 that nature, that has the ability to attach active or
 6 prohibitive conditions.
 7 **Q.** Because one of the things that, again, we have been
 8 hearing evidence about is that there is presently no
 9 particularly applicable civil order for the cohort that
 10 we are concerned with, Violence Fixated or Fascinated
 11 Individuals. If there were such an order, that is the
 12 sort of forum in which consideration for applying for
 13 it could be given?
 14 **A.** Very much so.
 15 **Q.** Thank you. I said I would come back to the issue of
 16 Prevent and how you receive those referrals. May we
 17 just bottom that out now.
 18 NPDP000014. So this is the "Youth Risk Panel
 19 Pathway CT into Local Policing", which I think you told
 20 us already, this was an evolution of the YRP. It wasn't
 21 initially created for this but you recognised that this
 22 was a gap that needed to be filled?
 23 **A.** Yes, and it was our Prevent team that actively --
 24 proactively approached us with a case that they felt
 25 wasn't -- they weren't able to provide management of.
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1 agreed by the YRP. Where a case is not adopted, the
 2 relevant panel documents the rationale, identifies the
 3 agency best placed to manage the risk and records any
 4 agreed actions. Risk management plans are reviewed and
 5 monitored through established governance processes to
 6 manage and evaluate any ongoing risk of harm."
 7 How are cases brought to a conclusion? How is the
 8 risk assured at the end of the process?
 9 **A.** So they are reviewed by the PDP supervisor, or the YRP
 10 supervisor as well, but they perform the same function,
 11 and the detective inspector who is -- over sees the
 12 process, they will evaluate the actions taken. They
 13 will evaluate the attendant risk that is believed to be
 14 posed from that individual and if the risk has been
 15 adequately mitigated against, then the case will be
 16 brought to a conclusion.
 17 If the case has been adopted, in all likelihood, we
 18 have sought some sort of control order, which then means
 19 that the individual is managed through MOSOVO and so
 20 they will be managed through that process, the offender
 21 management process in MOSOVO, accepting they won't
 22 necessarily be offenders.
 23 **Q.** Yes, and as you have told us already, that is in the
 24 circumstance where the risk is thought to be more acute?
 25 **A.** Yes.
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1 They knew about our Youth Risk Panel and they wanted to
 2 know what the appropriate means by which to refer into
 3 was and that's why we formalised the process.
 4 **Q.** I'm going to give you and they, particular credit
 5 because I can see the date of this presentation is
 6 March 2026. So it is before the Phase 1 report in this
 7 case. If we go to the next page, please
 8 NPDP000014_0002.
 9 So the context was AR, or that was certainly part of
 10 what was being discussed in this presentation. May
 11 I just ask about what the final bullet recognises, that
 12 at the time, as you have just been saying, there is no
 13 national pathway and solution, where there is this
 14 cohort of vulnerable children that present
 15 an identifiable risk but were falling through gaps in
 16 the service, in particular in relation to Prevent
 17 referrals that don't meet the CT threshold.
 18 The penultimate bullet there:
 19 "Local cohort -- less than 10."
 20 It sounds as if the presenter, or potentially the
 21 Prevent team who brought this to you, had an idea, even
 22 before assessment ahead of time, as to which individuals
 23 they were talking about?
 24 **A.** Yes. The person that wrote this, working with Prevent,
 25 we realised that we were talking about a very small
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1 number of individuals, which obviously is a good thing.
 2 But probably explains why there hasn't been
 3 a particularly structured process up until this point
 4 because of the relatively low number of individuals that
 5 we are talking about.
 6 **Q.** "Low index but high risk" I think is how others have put
 7 it?
 8 **A.** Yes.
 9 **Q.** The other feature of that that I'm interested in is --
 10 again, other witness have said, whilst the lack of
 11 a definition is a problem -- and we will come onto
 12 that -- experienced public safety and safeguarding
 13 professionals know it when they see it, a particular
 14 basket of risk and vulnerability developing in a young
 15 person. Is that the sort of thinking reflected here?
 16 **A.** Absolutely.
 17 **Q.** May we just go on to the next slide, please
 18 NPDP000014_0003. So this was the solution that was
 19 alighted upon. A pathway into your Youth Risk Panel:
 20 "Cases referred into [Counter Terrorism] that do not
 21 have an ideological intent."
 22 So that was the particular problem that your Prevent
 23 provider was identifying. As far as they were
 24 concerned, they were not being able to find a home for
 25 cases without ideological intent?

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1 doesn't necessarily means stop, I think, which is --
 2 **A.** No.
 3 **Q.** I'm not sure that helps very much either.
 4 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** It is good enough.
 5 **MR JAMIESON:** It is good enough. Thank you, sir, that's
 6 very kind. So let's see if we can work it out. First
 7 question:
 8 "Has a referral been made into CT/PREVENT?"
 9 Well, if the answer to that is "no", then we are not
 10 even into this route because it's not a Prevent case so
 11 case closed?
 12 **A.** Correct.
 13 **Q.** So assuming it is "yes", I think we move down the blue
 14 boxes, do we?
 15 **A.** Yes.
 16 **Q.** "Has it been deemed no [Counter Terrorism]/ideology
 17 basis?"
 18 If that is a double negative, ie if there is
 19 a Counter Terrorism ideology, back to Prevent for
 20 review?
 21 **A.** Correct.
 22 **Q.** But if it is a no ideology case, we come to the next
 23 question:
 24 "Is the nominal still a risk ...?"
 25 If there is no risk, then again, there is nothing to

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1 **A.** Yes. I believe that the issue that our legal Prevent
 2 team had was finding an adequate owner for the risk and
 3 my understanding is that they were always able to, but
 4 it was always through individual negotiation, as opposed
 5 to a formal structured process that provided that
 6 reassurance. Obviously, where you have -- you are
 7 negotiating individual cases, there's a risk that the
 8 owner isn't adequate enough to deal with that risk.
 9 **Q.** Yes, so it is to provide some -- rather than ad hoc
 10 coverage for what might be a very large risk, to provide
 11 a safe system?
 12 **A.** Correct.
 13 **Q.** But I do just want to come back to that third bullet,
 14 that these were the cases that they wanted
 15 a systematic -- or a systematic home for, the referrals
 16 that they had received, of risky individuals who didn't
 17 have an ideological intent?
 18 **A.** Yes.
 19 **Q.** Thank you, may we just go to the next page
 20 NPDP000014_0004. Now, that is very difficult to read
 21 but happily, you have provided a slide of that at
 22 greater magnification. We will just look at that,
 23 please; it is NPDP000015.
 24 **A.** I don't think the colour scheme helps.
 25 **Q.** I don't think the colour scheme helps and the red

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1 do and the case is going to be closed?
 2 **A.** Correct.
 3 **Q.** If the person is a risk:
 4 "Is the risk sexual, violent, exploitation, drug or
 5 gang related?"
 6 If not -- if it is none of those, then it is not for
 7 the police, effectively?
 8 **A.** Yes, correct.
 9 **Q.** Why is that gateway there? Why is that criterion there?
 10 **A.** I think what that point is trying to make is that if it
 11 is a risk -- I am trying to think of a risk that isn't
 12 encapsulated in one of those particular brackets, but
 13 I think perhaps it is inviting the person who is
 14 considering the referral to think that we are talking
 15 about a serious risk, as opposed to a hypothetical risk
 16 of safety.
 17 **Q.** I don't, in any way, mean this pejoratively or to
 18 minimise, but it is not a pure safeguarding risk either.
 19 Those are all broadly, with the potential exception of
 20 exploitation which could be either way, but those are
 21 broadly risks that that individual would pose outwardly
 22 to the public, rather than risks that they would suffer?
 23 **A.** Correct, and it is a nontrivial risk.
 24 **Q.** Yes. The next gateway:
 25 "Has the [individual] been open to local policing in

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1 the last 12 months?"

2 If the answer to that is "no", slightly confusingly,

3 to the right, that's how we are ending up in the YRP

4 pathway?

5 **A.** Correct.

6 **Q.** If they are open to police, there is a different route.

7 That will be referred to the Detective Inspector?

8 **A.** Yes.

9 **Q.** Of that department, to review and assess whether any

10 action is required, based on new information.

11 "[Is] action required?"

12 No:

13 "Add [a] review."

14 Case closed. What is the review there? What does

15 that achieve, to the right-hand side?

16 **A.** So the review is to determine whether or not -- what

17 information needs to be addressed, whether that risk is

18 being managed in another way and making sure that the DI

19 of the department -- the other department that might

20 have that risk, has the -- has management of that.

21 So that is -- in thinking, specifically, a youth

22 violence or a child exploitation hub. So this

23 effectively is saying that where you have a case -- and

24 I'm thinking where someone might be at risk of gang

25 violence, as opposed to the non-violent ideology that we

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1 young person.

2 **Q.** I see. So if I had read that as open to local policing

3 because there might have been some low-level arrest for

4 something, that's -- the important information is what's

5 in brackets at the bottom there, those hubs, the YVIU

6 and the CE hub, are already engaged in the case?

7 **A.** Yes, that is correct, and the pathway referral would

8 still be completed in any event.

9 **MR JAMIESON:** Thank you. Sir, those are all the questions

10 I was going to ask about that subject. Did you have

11 anything before I move on?

12 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Not on that, no.

13 **MR JAMIESON:** Thank you. That can come down. So we have

14 been through Operation Airforce in some detail and

15 I hope you can understand why. I did just want to come

16 onto some of the wider comments that you had.

17 Information sharing we have dealt with broadly but there

18 is just one point that it might be useful to make.

19 Could we go back to the statement, please. Page 5

20 NPDP000018_0005.

21 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Paragraph 25, I think.

22 **MR JAMIESON:** Yes, thank you, sir. Exactly so. I had

23 written "11" in my notes for some reason. Thank you.

24 I'm not very far from the end, sir, but we have been

25 going for an hour and 15, so a matter for you if we have

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1 are talking about here -- where there is a gang risk,

2 then it would be more appropriate for our Gang

3 Intervention Unit to manage that risk, as opposed to

4 through this panel.

5 **Q.** In relation to that question "Any action required?" If

6 the answer is "yes", then we come down to the bottom.

7 Actions are being identified:

8 "... DI review.

9 "Allocate within department to progress."

10 So ownership of that risk and its management.

11 (Pause).

12 May I just ask why that 12-month criterion is there,

13 in terms of, if it is a recent case we are going to stay

14 within the police? Do you see, three blue boxes up? If

15 it's recent -- if the nominal has been open to local

16 police in the last 12 months, it is going to stay inside

17 the police force. If it hasn't, it is going to go to

18 the multi-agency pathway?

19 **A.** Because if they have been open to -- that "YVIU" is the

20 Youth Violence Intervention Unit and the "CE" is our

21 Child Exploitation hub -- if they have previously been

22 engaged to those particular services then -- within the

23 last 12 months, then it would be more appropriate for

24 them to manage that individual, as they would have

25 a more holistic understanding, potentially, of that

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1 a break or if we press on?

2 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** I think a break might serve another

3 purpose.

4 **MR JAMIESON:** Yes.

5 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** We will sit again at 3 o'clock.

6 (2.46 pm)

7 (A short break)

8 (3.00 pm)

9 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** I don't think there will be anymore

10 disturbance this afternoon.

11 **MR JAMIESON:** I don't think there shall be, sir. Thank you

12 for pulling those levers. May we have on the screen,

13 please, page 5 NPDP000018_0005 of the statement, bottom

14 half, perfect.

15 So, I have asked you a couple of questions about

16 information sharing already and is the effect of your

17 paragraph 25 that there already exist ample legal powers

18 to permit the sharing of information between

19 multi-agency partners, where there is a concern that

20 a young person or adult poses a risk to others?

21 **A.** Yes.

22 **Q.** The legal powers are there. Other witnesses have told

23 us that there is often a cultural problem that can

24 prevent or inhibit information sharing. You have told

25 us, I think, about how you mitigate that or deal with

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1 that with the MASH referrals and indeed, with the
2 relationships that you have with local partners. But,
3 again, just that paragraph 27 is where I wanted to pick
4 it up.

5 You are clear that where we are talking about young
6 persons:

7 "Parental consent is not ... required where [there
8 are] safeguarding or public protection concerns [to]
9 justify information sharing."

10 If those concerns are there, information sharing can
11 happen, with or without parental consent?

12 A. It will happen, yes, that is correct.

13 Q. And that's my question. Have you encountered agencies,
14 partners, whoever it may be, who are more reticent in
15 those circumstances, where parental consent is withheld
16 and need some encouragement?

17 A. Not specifically around this particular process. But
18 generally speaking, around information sharing, where we
19 find that agencies are less willing to provide that
20 information, it's usually, I would say -- I would call
21 it a confidence gap as opposed to a cultural gap. It is
22 individuals within those agencies who are reluctant to
23 breach confidence or to breach data protection rules.
24 Health can sometimes be reluctant to share information,
25 for obvious reasons, and other agencies that are not

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1 people that had come out of -- referred to you out of
2 Prevent that were 19, 20, 21 and required that
3 multi-agency buy-in, in terms of interventions, could
4 you access those partners through the MASH the same way?

5 A. Absolutely.

6 Q. Okay. Thank you. The final topic that I wanted to ask
7 you about, please, was essentially your evaluation of
8 the current problems or difficulties that require
9 overcoming and recommendations for future change.

10 Can we go to -- I won't read all of them, but can we
11 go to page 7 NPDP000018_0007 of your statement please
12 and the very final paragraph -- we will go over the page
13 shortly -- 39, at the bottom. You are dealing with
14 a number of topics there, in general, that we have
15 looked at in some particularity, but at paragraph 39,
16 you tell us:

17 "The primary challenges or barriers to the effective
18 and appropriate identification and management of the
19 risk posed by VFIs are ..."

20 Firstly:

21 "Absence of a nationally agreed VFI definition.

22 Over the page, NPDP000018_0008:

23 "Lack of [a] standardised risk assessment [tool].

24 "Limited specialist training for practitioners.

25 "Inconsistent referral pathways nationally.

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1 used to proactively sharing information on a regular
2 basis. But generally speaking, if there is a problem,
3 then MASH is an excellent gateway to obtain that
4 information because of the fact that they are used to
5 providing information to that multi-agency partnership.

6 I personally haven't found any agency that's not
7 willing to provide information when you articulate the
8 nature of what it is that you are trying to achieve
9 through these kind of panels.

10 Q. So that's the way in which you give them the confidence
11 to provide the information, you explain what the concern
12 is and why you are asking for it?

13 A. That is correct.

14 Q. May I just ask, that MASH mechanism that you have that
15 is another important point for facilitating that. Does
16 your MASH deal just with children or does it deal with
17 adults as well?

18 A. It does deal with adults. Any safeguarding risk.

19 Q. Right, and so we have talked already about the
20 difference between your two panels and the --
21 significant difference between the under 18s and the
22 over 18s, but there is no reason in principle, whilst
23 those multi-agency -- I understand that the PDP was
24 designed to deal with something different and is dealing
25 with something different, largely. But if there were

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1 "Lack of statutory intervention powers.

2 "Reliance on voluntary engagement."

3 When you say "voluntary engagement" there, is that
4 the individual or is that the agencies?

5 A. Both.

6 Q. Okay, thank you:

7 "Limited diversionary and behavioural intervention
8 programmes.

9 "Restricted funding and resources."

10 So I have read the list. I will ask you a couple of
11 questions about it, if I may. If we just go back over
12 the page to 39 NPDP000018_0007:

13 "Absence of a nationally agreed ... definition."

14 You have put first?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Is that a deliberate choice?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Tell me why.

19 A. "VFI" wasn't a phrase that I had heard previously.

20 I think if the risk isn't defined, then you end up
21 having to try to articulate the risk that you are trying
22 to mitigate every time it comes up and I think it is
23 particularly relevant where you have low frequency, high
24 harm, because you are having to explain the nature of
25 the risk regularly because it doesn't come up very

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1 often. So with a nationally agreed definition, people
 2 understand what it is that you're -- the risk is that
 3 you are seeking to mitigate against.
 4 Q. If you are -- you or others, are trying to explain it in
 5 an ad hoc way every time it comes up, it will be
 6 explained inconsistently without a definition to refer
 7 to?
 8 A. That is correct and also, without a consistent
 9 definition, my definition of a VFI, or whatever we end
 10 up calling it, might be different to another force's or
 11 another agency's who would understand it differently.
 12 Q. Or another colleague's?
 13 A. Indeed.
 14 Q. So I really did just want to make that clear because, as
 15 we have talked about, your force deal with a variety of
 16 risks, you don't discriminate, you take -- particularly,
 17 if we are thinking about the under 18s, an individual
 18 with a variety of vulnerabilities and potential risks,
 19 and you seek to find the right agency and the right
 20 intervention for them. But even where you approach it
 21 in that way, in that global way, you are clear that the
 22 most important thing that you need is a definition so
 23 that you know what you are working to with this cohort?
 24 A. Yes, that is correct.
 25 Q. Thank you. If we look at the rest of the bulleted list.

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1 A. So taking the risk assessment tool, I think -- I believe
 2 it is important that all the agencies use the same risk
 3 assessment process because if one of the main issues is
 4 the lack of an agreed definition of the problem, then,
 5 logically, a clear understanding of the risk is also
 6 important so that you and I -- if we can agree on
 7 a definition, we also need to agree on what level of
 8 risk that individual poses and you need confidence that
 9 if another agency tells you that this is a high-risk
 10 case or that it scores 300 on a particular matrix, you
 11 know what that means and it means the same thing to
 12 everyone.
 13 I can foresee a situation where perhaps my risk
 14 assessment tool has three outcomes: low, medium and
 15 high. Another agency has one where there is six
 16 gradations. Mine ends at "high risk", your "high risk"
 17 is third way up. If I tell you it is high risk, you
 18 shrug your shoulders and say: at least it is not
 19 "extremely high" --
 20 Q. Not extreme.
 21 A. -- for example.
 22 Q. Yes. So this isn't one of the category of individuals
 23 that I'm most concerned about, whereas from your
 24 perspective, it might be the riskiest individual on your
 25 caseload?

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1 Brilliant, they are there on the page. With many of
 2 these, I could fairly observe that your pathways have
 3 developed your own solutions to them. So: lack of
 4 a standardised risk assessment tool; you have developed
 5 a risk assessment.
 6 Lack of statutory intervention powers, reliance on
 7 voluntary engagement; those are features of your panels
 8 but you have found ways to work around them?
 9 A. That is correct.
 10 Q. I can observe that. Limited diversionary and
 11 behavioural intervention programmes, similarly. Those
 12 are all features that you have been able to work around
 13 but you are clear that the procedure would be the
 14 stronger and the more consistent, if those were
 15 available?
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. That's what we are talking about really, aren't we,
 18 because you have told us about your approach that you
 19 have created in Northamptonshire but if the Chair and
 20 the Inquiry are looking at a national solution, are
 21 these the features that we should be looking at?
 22 A. In my view, yes.
 23 Q. Can you deal with that globally? Why do we need
 24 standardised risk assessment tools, specialist training,
 25 consistent referral pathways?

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1 A. Exactly.
 2 Q. Thank you. May we just crop down a little to
 3 paragraph 40 because here, you are drawing our attention
 4 in particular to a theme of this questioning about the
 5 difference between the management of adults and
 6 under 18s. You say this:
 7 "For adults in particular, intervention
 8 opportunities become limited where there is no criminal
 9 justice disposal or mental health threshold."
 10 Which are principally the disposals that would be --
 11 or the levers that might be available to you, either by
 12 yourself or your mental health colleagues:
 13 "For persons under the age of 18 there are greater
 14 than opportunities for collaborations."
 15 You have listed some of the opportunities that are
 16 there. So, where our cohort spans 18 and into the
 17 early 20s, really what we would want are similar
 18 interventions that are available past the threshold of
 19 adulthood?
 20 A. Yes. There are some interventions that end at 18 that
 21 aren't available; they are only available to young
 22 people. Likewise, there are some agencies that will
 23 only deal with people when it comes to a certain age.
 24 Albeit many now recognise that there isn't a --
 25 18 isn't -- whilst it might not meet the legal

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1 definition of a child, they will continue to support
 2 people up to 21, or older for care leavers. But
 3 generally speaking, the help and intervention that's
 4 available for young people isn't there for adults.
 5 **Q.** Yes, thank you. I will move then briefly to your
 6 options for future change. If we just scroll down the
 7 page a little.

8 Paragraph 42, you are putting your shoulder behind
 9 your recommendation behind the Big Front Door, which
 10 others have spoken about and recommended. Your
 11 preferred approach would be:

12 "... a multi-agency 'front door' arrangement
 13 incorporating existing safeguarding structures [whilst]
 14 embedding Prevent expertise within the decision making
 15 process."

16 I think I will resist asking you about precisely how
 17 that would work in this arena, but you -- a coherent
 18 single structure that diverts cases to the most
 19 appropriate risk management underneath it?

20 **A.** Yes, I think that would be best. It prevents
 21 a fragmented approach and it means that an individual
 22 and a case is looked at holistically, as opposed to
 23 trying to squeeze it down a particular pipe at the
 24 outset.

25 **Q.** Just if I look at paragraph 43, the role for Prevent in
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1 existing safeguarding or risk management structure,
 2 including YRP [and] PDP, MASH or mental health services.
 3 Clear national criteria are required to determine
 4 ownership and onward management."

5 You have come up with a local organisation to make
 6 sure that there is ownership of that risk if it is not
 7 adopted by Prevent. That needs to be consistent
 8 nationally?

9 **A.** Yes. It doesn't necessarily need to be a Youth Risk
 10 Panel or PDP, but a structure and I think clear national
 11 guidance for every individual force, that outlines what
 12 an effective structure looks like, would be useful.
 13 Then where it sits then, is best determined by the force
 14 itself as opposed to directly driven nationally
 15 because every force will be structured in a different
 16 way and have different partnerships with different
 17 agencies.

18 **Q.** Determined by the force, the police force, or determined
 19 by multi-agency partners, locally?

20 **A.** Yes, I think --

21 **Q.** It is not a right answer --

22 **A.** No, it is a fair challenge and I think I was perhaps
 23 a bit lazy with my terminology there. I think, when
 24 policing makes these decisions, it should always be with
 25 partners in mind, and these conversations must happen
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1 this structure that you foresee is the managing of
 2 individuals "who present a credible risk of serious
 3 violence or mass casualty harm," whether or not ideology
 4 is the primary driver, and we know, in your area,
 5 individuals that lack ideology, Prevent are saying: not
 6 for us and they are referring straight to you?

7 **A.** Yes.

8 **Q.** The reason why you recommend that Prevent deal with
 9 those riskiest individuals -- if I can call them that --
 10 is because of these factors: specialist expertise,
 11 assessment capability and intervention mechanisms that
 12 are not currently available to your structures?

13 **A.** Yes, that's correct.

14 **Q.** They have got the toolkit?

15 **A.** Yes, and some of the additional levers that perhaps
 16 might not be available to a PDP or YRP process. Now,
 17 whether or not they are -- they actually actively and
 18 actually manage the individual, I suppose is debatable.
 19 But they should certainly have a significant role in
 20 that management.

21 **Q.** Yes, and what you are also clear about -- you are
 22 modestly not putting any particular role for your
 23 organisation, but:

24 "Where individuals are not accepted by Prevent,
 25 responsibility should fall to the most appropriate
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1 within a multi-agency framework because it is not
 2 a police problem, it is a community safety issue and
 3 they should be -- the solutions should be a community
 4 safety solution, not just a police solution.

5 **Q.** Police play a part, but they are not the whole
 6 (unclear)?

7 **A.** Generally play a large part but I think there is always
 8 a temptation in policing to do policing on partners and
 9 that's rarely the best approach.

10 **Q.** May we just go over the page, please, to paragraphs 45
 11 and 46 NPDP000018_0009. Here is the role -- well, you
 12 say what you have just said to me. Your structures can
 13 play a role in the identification and management of VFI
 14 risk. They are not currently the most suitable, in your
 15 view, to be beefed up -- if I can use that vernacular --
 16 to undertake that role effectively they would need --
 17 and you list these factors:

18 "Dedicated funding.

19 "Specialist ... training.

20 "[The] National risk assessment tools."

21 That we talked about:

22 "Access to specialist interventions."

23 "Staffing" might be a different way of saying

24 funding, but we hear the message:

25 "Stronger multi-agency participation."
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1 Now, I'm just going to dwell on that for a moment
2 because the impression that I have taken from what you
3 have said is that you have been able to achieve strong
4 multi-agency participation but are you, there,
5 suggesting that if this is going to be factored
6 nationally, there needs to be a lever perhaps where
7 local partners are not as collaborative as where they
8 are where you are?

9 **A.** I think what I had in mind there was more the mechanism
10 to compel partners to engage in the process. We are
11 fortunate, in Northamptonshire, in that we have partners
12 who are very collaborative and want to engage in this
13 process but I can certainly foresee occasions where
14 a suitable partner is identified but there is no way to
15 bring them to the table.

16 **Q.** Thank you. Just your paragraph 46 there, where you say
17 this:

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

21 Does that mean: make Prevent bigger rather than
22 create non-ideological Prevent to sit alongside it?

23 **A.** Yes. I have reflected, since writing this, considerably
24 on this particular issue and I perhaps could have been
25 clearer on that view. I think you have put it in a more

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1 **A.** Yes.

2 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** YRP?

3 **A.** YRP, considerably less. Probably more along the lines
4 of, in a year, ten to 20, perhaps. Very low numbers.

5 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** The role you play is, in one sense,
6 quite curious, in the sense that you -- people are
7 brought to your attention. You then are determined to
8 try to make sure that they don't fall through the
9 cracks. So a meeting is called into being so that that
10 can be discussed and we have seen what happens,
11 depending on the various factors that are discussed.

12 You then, as it were, monitor what happens and then,
13 if there is a sufficiently satisfactory outcome, you
14 will wave goodbye to that particular case. Am I right
15 in thinking you don't actually do any casework, as it
16 were, yourself as a group. What you are doing is trying
17 to make sure that someone -- and it may be one of the
18 participant bodies -- does go away and do some casework?

19 **A.** Yes. Unless the individual is referred into MOSOVO,
20 because if they are referred into MOSOVO then we manage
21 them in a similar way that we would manage a sex
22 offender.

23 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** So the PDP, for instance, would do the
24 managing?

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 clear way, that having a parallel tier to Prevent for
2 matters such as this would be inefficient, is probably
3 a better way of putting it.

4 **Q.** The remainder of the document, you have set out your
5 evaluation and support of essentially a number of
6 Chair's Phase 1 recommendations and so I was not going
7 to take you through those, unless there was anything in
8 particular that you wanted to say that I haven't asked
9 you about?

10 **A.** No, thank you.

11 **MR JAMIESON:** Thank you very much. Those are all of my
12 questions. I was going to turn to the Core
13 Participants. No questions from there. Sir, do you
14 have any questions?

15 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Just a few. Thank you very much,
16 Mr Jamieson.

17 Questions by SIR ADRIAN FULFORD

18 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** You have given us some idea of numbers,
19 Mr Watkins, and I would quite like your help a bit more
20 on this. So if we look at the end of the year, how many
21 individuals do you think you will have seen pass through
22 the PDP and the YRP? Perhaps take them separately.

23 **A.** Yes. So PDP, probably maybe 50, perhaps 40, perhaps
24 more, perhaps less, but in that --

25 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** But that sort of ballpark?

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1 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Right. Okay, that's useful. But
2 otherwise, not?

3 **A.** Correct.

4 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** So, when we are talking about a Big
5 Front Door, that is actually only half, or even possibly
6 less than half, of what you do because the Big Front
7 Door would be there to triage and allocate and all the
8 rest of it. Unless I have missed something, I do not
9 think I have seen the Big Front Door as being described
10 as being a body that would keep sort of oversight during
11 the life of, as it were, the troublesome period of that
12 case and then finally signing it off at the end. So
13 that's, if I may say so, quite an interesting additional
14 feature of what you have set up in your county?

15 **A.** I think the risk of simply triaging and accepting
16 a referral and then pushing it down the pathway is that,
17 to overplay the metaphor, risks it getting caught in the
18 reeds and then being missed. By maintaining oversight,
19 doing that -- effectively an extended referral process,
20 it means that we have confidence that something is being
21 done and if not, we can then look at it again so it is
22 not missed.

23 The reason for things being brought to PDP or YRP in
24 the first place is because there is a risk that's not
25 being addressed. So what we don't -- what I certainly

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1 didn't want to do is create a process simply to feel
 2 better about the risk. We wanted to create a process
 3 that actually did something meaningful with the risk.
 4 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** So you have identified that there is
 5 a risk of falling through the cracks but you then make
 6 sure that, during the days, weeks and months that
 7 follows, that it doesn't, in fact, end up falling
 8 through the cracks?
 9 **A.** Correct.
 10 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Do you have a case management system of
 11 any kind that you use for this?
 12 **A.** So we have -- obviously there is ViSOR but that's when
 13 people get referred into our MOSOVO department. Most of
 14 this would happen on Niche, which is our record
 15 management system.
 16 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Ah, right. Yes, I know that.
 17 **A.** Which is how we document the activities and so forth.
 18 The deficiency with Niche, of course, is that it is not
 19 multi-agency; it is specific to police.
 20 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes. In a more perfect world, it would
 21 need to be multi-agency, wouldn't it? So those
 22 attending, particularly the YRP, because it is quite
 23 a wide range of people, would need to have access to it,
 24 I would have thought?
 25 **A.** Yes. I think in a perfect world, a system akin to

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1 we have a risk that's not been managed through
 2 a different process. But where there are exceptions,
 3 where there are individuals that aren't being managed
 4 through a different process, then this is almost
 5 a catch-all, to find a way to manage and reduce that
 6 risk.
 7 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes. You have told us that when
 8 a referral is made to the YRP, there is always
 9 a parallel child safeguarding referral going to the
 10 MASH, correct?
 11 **A.** That's correct.
 12 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Doesn't that frequently result in the
 13 MASH taking over?
 14 **A.** No.
 15 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** So why have I misunderstood what
 16 I would have thought would have been the result?
 17 **A.** So, generally speaking -- and again, I don't know if
 18 this is peculiar to Northamptonshire -- but MASH is very
 19 much a multi-agency hub for information sharing and for
 20 strategy meetings and so on and so forth. So it is not
 21 a team that's proactively manages cases, it is more of
 22 a means of facilitating information sharing.
 23 So if it got fed into the MASH, it may be that, for
 24 a different case, it might go into the MASH and then is
 25 referred to social services who would take on the case.

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1 ViSOR, which can be accessed by different agencies and
 2 updated by different agencies would be beneficial. But
 3 again, these are low numbers.
 4 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Yes, it wouldn't be worth the money?
 5 **A.** No.
 6 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** No. The thresholds. It has been
 7 variously described, within your witness statement in
 8 your evidence, those who are Potentially Dangerous
 9 Persons, those who present a risk to the public and
 10 then, in terms of identifying the behaviours: violence,
 11 sexual harm, exploitation and then you have also
 12 highlighted drug or gang-related crimes.
 13 So you have been able to look at quite a wide cohort
 14 of those who present a threat to the public, whereas, as
 15 you will be aware, we have been very much focused on
 16 a variant of Violence Fixated Individuals. Again, I can
 17 see from the experience of your county, that there is
 18 an argument for saying that violence fixation shouldn't
 19 be the end of it, really. There are others who pose,
 20 potentially, a risk of significant harm to the public,
 21 although it may not involve serious violence?
 22 **A.** I would agree and I think -- I mean, that is -- the
 23 purpose of the panel is to manage risk that is otherwise
 24 unmanaged and the definition for the acceptance into the
 25 panel is deliberately broad because it is unusual that

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1 But the MASH is a means by way --
 2 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** That's a better way of putting it. It
 3 is certainly for Northamptonshire. So it is
 4 complementary rather than leading to, as it were, well,
 5 conflict really, with two different organisations
 6 dealing with the same thing?
 7 **A.** Absolutely.
 8 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Civil orders. You obviously rate these
 9 quite highly, by the sounds of it?
 10 **A.** Yes.
 11 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Sexual Risk Orders, Trafficking
 12 Prevention Orders, any others?
 13 **A.** Serious Crime Prevention Orders, where there is
 14 a domestic abuse risk, which isn't really appropriate in
 15 this case, but there's various domestic abuse prevention
 16 orders. Stalking Prevention Orders, potentially. So
 17 any civil order of that nature that we can use to tailor
 18 to manage the risk of the individual.
 19 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Right. Do you know whether -- it is
 20 obviously a small force -- but do you use these orders,
 21 as it were, disproportionately in relation to other
 22 forces? Are you aware of how you fit into police
 23 practice across England and Wales?
 24 **A.** As I understand it, we do use Sexual Risk Orders, in
 25 particular, probably more than most forces do. I don't

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1 think we are the biggest user. But I am aware that we
 2 do use them a lot because they are very effective at
 3 controlling a sexual risk for an individual and
 4 predominantly where you have an investigation into
 5 an offence of, say rape, where -- or any sexual offence
 6 for that matter, where we believe there is
 7 an outstanding risk but we don't feel that pre-charge
 8 bail conditions are sufficiently robust to manage that
 9 risk, a SRO is much more effective.
 10 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** And you, presumably, have a good
 11 relation with your local court?
 12 **A.** Very much so.
 13 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Right, and this is a relatively
 14 unproblematic and relatively inexpensive process, in
 15 terms of getting the orders?
 16 **A.** I would presume so. We have a very good legal team
 17 within Northamptonshire Police for civil cases such as
 18 this. So we have an in-house legal team and they help
 19 to prepare some of these cases for court.
 20 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Right, and you can get them reasonably
 21 speedily?
 22 **A.** Yes.
 23 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Why Airforce?
 24 **A.** Well, I'm glad you asked. I was reflecting, in the
 25 waiting room, that perhaps the choice of name was a bit

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1 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** 10 o'clock on Monday?
 2 **MR JAMIESON:** 10 o'clock on Monday.
 3 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Thank you very much for your help.
 4 (3.31 pm)

(The Inquiry adjourned until 10.00 am on Monday,
 19th October 2026)

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1 premature. It is a random operation name that was
 2 assigned. It was next on the list.
 3 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** It was next on the list, right. Was
 4 this your idea?
 5 **A.** I would love to take full credit for this, but in truth,
 6 it was as a result of discussions that were had, which
 7 I was part of. It was a problem that was identified and
 8 we came up with the solution.
 9 Now, nationally, they identified PDPs as something
 10 that should be dealt with and managed, but there wasn't
 11 an agreed process by which to do that, and so we -- and
 12 I will say "we" -- wanted to come up with a mechanism by
 13 which we could formally adopt that. We didn't want to
 14 adopt it straight into MOSOVO because that wouldn't be
 15 appropriate, because there was no -- without an order to
 16 control people and compel people to engage, putting them
 17 into MOSOVO is pointless because they just don't have
 18 to. If they don't have to engage, they won't engage.
 19 So PDP was designed to be able to problem-solve how we
 20 deal with that risk and it has evolved organically over
 21 time. So, I was part of the solution.
 22 **SIR ADRIAN FULFORD:** Well, if I may say so, both you and the
 23 others who set this up, in my view, deserve to be
 24 congratulated, Mr Watkins.
 25 **A.** Thank you very much.

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