

IN THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY, PHASE TWO

OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE FAMILIES OF THE PHYSICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY INJURED CHILDREN

Introduction

1. This Opening Statement is made on behalf of 19 families of those children who were physically and psychologically injured in the Southport attack on 29th July 2024.

Moving On From Phase One

2. Phase One of this Inquiry has been an extremely important part of our clients' journey. We now know that this heinous attack was foreseeable and preventable. We recognise, commend and express sincere gratitude for the extraordinary and tireless work undertaken by the Chair and the Inquiry Legal Team. Our clients wish to acknowledge their rigorous examination of what happened, of the decisions that were made, of the information that was available and of the opportunities that existed to intervene.
3. Those we represent are especially thankful for the thoughtful and sensitive approach taken by the Chair and the Inquiry Legal Team to their practical and emotional needs throughout Phase One.
4. The Phase One report identifies five fundamental problems, four of which lie with public institutions. These are not new failings. They are recurring systemic problems, the like of which litter the reports of many

previous inquiries. To protect our society, change must happen and improvements must be made. The findings and recommendations from Phase One must serve a practical purpose. The families we represent seek confirmation not only that lessons have been learned but that those lessons are properly and fully understood and that they have been acted upon and embedded so that such a catastrophic event does not happen again. As the Chair said within his report, *'it is my sincere hope that this Inquiry will stand as a turning point'*. The families we represent respectfully agree.

5. Before turning to the detail of Phase Two, the families we represent welcome the proposal that there be time allocated at the end of this phase to revisit the recommendations made in Phase One and to track progress against them. There is a unique opportunity, whilst the Inquiry continues, to ensure that momentum is not lost and that meaningful progress can be made. The families we represent have already paid an unimaginable price. They should not have to wait indefinitely for change.

Expectations For Phase Two

6. The families we represent approach the Terms of Reference for Phase Two with an open mind. The Inquiry will have the benefit of hearing evidence from a broad range of experts as well as those with direct responsibility for protecting the public from individuals intent on acts of extreme violence. As the Inquiry embarks on its examination of the detail, the families we represent respectfully invite the Chair to keep three questions constantly in mind.
7. First: what is the problem we are trying to solve? The concept of *'violence-fixated individuals'* is fundamental to the Terms of Reference for Phase Two, but it is a group defined by what it lacks (ideology as a primary driver of violence). The Inquiry will need to strike a difficult

balance between being conceptually robust – defining a source of threat to the public which is precise enough to be practically useful – without being drawn unduly into theoretical or academic debates.

8. Second: where there are weaknesses in the existing system(s) for dealing with '*violence-fixated individuals*', are they problems of design or of execution? There is an ever-present temptation to reach for new duties, new bodies or new policies. But, as the findings of Phase One make clear, frameworks already exist in some areas which have not been used properly – be that because of thresholds, capacity, culture, or judgment calls made by individuals. Do we need a better system, or do we need to use the system better?
9. Third: what works? Upon considering all of the evidence at the end of Phase Two, the touchstone ought always to be whether a finding or recommendation is going to improve the ability of public bodies to protect society from serious violence. A recommendation that does not, ultimately, reduce the risk to the public will not be worth making. The families we represent welcome the collaborative and collegiate approach taken by the Chair in Phase One, inviting those with responsibility for policy and delivery to provide workable proposals and to comment on the practicability of recommendations under consideration. That is a model, we respectfully suggest, for testing potential recommendations in this second phase.

Conclusion: Keeping The Victims At The Centre

10. The families we represent come to this second phase with the hope and expectation that the voices and experiences of those whose lives were irrevocably changed on 29th July 2024 will remain at the centre of this Inquiry.

11. Behind this Inquiry and behind the headlines are young girls and their families facing battles they should never have had to face. The girls are maturing. They will in due course come fully to understand the gravity of the failings and how their lives could have been completely different. They deserve to know that changes will be made. They deserve to feel safe because of the changes that this Inquiry recommends.
12. The families we represent welcome the innovative approach that has been taken to gathering evidence to ensure that the widest possible range of expertise and opinion is made available to the Chair as he considers each of the topics in the Terms of Reference. They ask for honesty, candour and integrity from those giving evidence and a firm commitment that recommendations will translate into action, thereby creating a safer future for their children and their communities.

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