Witness Name: Andrew Goodall

Exhibits: AG/01-AG/18

Dated: 02 September 2026

THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ANDREW GOODALL

I, Andrew Goodall, will say as follows: -

Introduction

1. I have a law degree from Essex University and a PhD in Health Service Management from Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University.

2. I was appointed to the role of the Welsh Government's Permanent Secretary in September 2021 and took up the role in November 2021. I lead the Welsh Government Civil Service in delivering the priorities of the First Minister and his ministerial team. I am the Welsh Government's Principal Accounting Officer and principal advisor to the First Minister and Cabinet. I should emphasise this is a unified and integrated Government, rather than a department. Accordingly, I am responsible for organising civil service support to ministers across a wide range of policy, legislative and administrative areas. An equivalent range of responsibilities would be discharged by several Permanent Secretaries at UK Government level.

3. Prior to this, I served as the Welsh Government's Director General of Health and Social Services and Chief Executive NHS Wales, a position that I held between June 2014 and November 2021.

4. Before being appointed as the Director General, I was the Chief Executive of Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, a position that I held from the Health Board's inception in October 2009 until 2014.

5. This witness statement is made to assist Phase 2 of Southport Inquiry (the "Inquiry") with the matters set out in the Rule 9 Request dated 11 August 2026.

6. The Welsh Government recognises the profound impact that the events in Southport have had on the families affected, survivors and the wider community. We are committed to supporting the Inquiry in its important work to understand what happened and to identify any lessons that may strengthen the protection of children and the public.

7. The Phase 2 Terms of Reference for the Inquiry define Violence Fixated Individuals ("VFIs") as individuals at risk of extreme violence where ideology is not the primary driver. I understand the Inquiry is examining the effectiveness of arrangements for identifying, assessing and managing such risks, including the contribution of safeguarding, health, social care, education, policing and other public protection agencies, as well as the potential influence of online content and online environments.

8. The term "Violence Fixated Individual" is not currently defined in Welsh legislation and there is no dedicated VFI policy, statutory framework or service operating in Wales. Accordingly, issues relevant to VFIs are addressed through a range of existing systems and services, including safeguarding, health, education, social care, community safety and public protection arrangements.

9. References in this statement to VFIs should therefore be understood in the context of those existing arrangements rather than as references to a distinct category recognised in Welsh law or policy. The evidence set out below focuses on the extent to which devolved services and Welsh Government policy areas may contribute to the identification, support and management of individuals whose behaviours or circumstances may be relevant to the Inquiry's consideration of VFIs.

10. In preparing this statement I have relied upon information provided by senior Welsh Government colleagues including, Taryn Stephens (Deputy Chief Social Care Officer for Wales), Nicola Edwards (Deputy Director, Equity in Education), Matt Downton (Deputy Director, Mental Health, Substance Misuse and Vulnerable Groups), Mike Connolly (Deputy Director, Community Safety) and Andy Fraser (Chief Officer, National Security & Resilience) as well as relevant Welsh Government records and documents as exhibited in this statement.

Role of the Welsh Government

11. The Welsh Government has significant responsibilities for children's health, education, social care, safeguarding and community safety. These responsibilities are exercised within the framework of the devolution settlement established under the Government of Wales Act 2006. Although many of the matters relevant to Phase 2 of the Inquiry engage

devolved services and functions, certain areas, including policing, criminal law, criminal justice and youth justice, remain reserved to the UK Government. Consequently, outcomes for children and young people in these areas often depend upon close collaboration between the Welsh Government, UK Government departments and other public bodies.

12. I have set out below an overview of the role of the Welsh Government in relation to specific matters relevant to the Terms of Reference for Phase 2 of the Inquiry, including: safeguarding and child protection (including social care); children with neurodevelopmental conditions and mental health needs; violence prevention work; children's access to knives and other offensive weapons; online harms and digital safety; and youth justice and criminal exploitation. Accordingly, the Welsh Government's role varies across the areas addressed in this statement, ranging from direct responsibility for policy development, legislation and service delivery in devolved fields to working collaboratively with UK Government, criminal justice partners and other stakeholders in relation to reserved matters.

Safeguarding and Child Protection (including Social Care)

13. The Welsh Government is responsible for developing social care policy and the legislative framework for safeguarding and child protection in Wales. It sets national policy, introduces legislation, issues statutory guidance, funds and supports improvement activity, sponsors the National Independent Safeguarding Board, and works with partners across the safeguarding system to strengthen protections for children and young people. Although the Welsh Government sets social care policy, the statutory responsibility for assessing needs, providing social care and undertaking safeguarding functions rests primarily with Welsh local authorities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Part 7 of the Act establishes a statutory framework for safeguarding children in Wales through three principal mechanisms: a duty on relevant partners to report children at risk to the local authority, the establishment of Safeguarding Children Boards in designated areas across Wales, and multi-agency cooperation and information sharing arrangements. These duties apply to local authorities and their relevant partners, including police, health services, probation services and other specified bodies. Required actions include reporting suspected children at risk, establishing and participating in Safeguarding Children Boards, coordinating safeguarding activity, and complying with information requests. Multi-agency working is facilitated through mandatory cooperation arrangements and information sharing duties that apply across partner organisations. The Welsh

Government supports the operation of the safeguarding system through the publication of statutory guidance under the Act, setting out expectations for local authorities and relevant partners on the discharge of their safeguarding responsibilities and promoting a consistent approach across Wales.

Children with Neurodevelopmental Conditions and Mental Health Needs

14. Responsibility for health, education and social care is devolved to Wales. The legislative framework includes the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006, the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. Within this framework, NHS bodies, local authorities and educational institutions are responsible for the commissioning and delivery of services for children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions and mental health needs.

15. The Welsh Government is responsible for setting policy for NHS services and additional learning needs in Wales, including policy relating to support for children with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism and ADHD, and children experiencing mental health difficulties. The Neurodivergence Improvement Programme (all-age), established in 2022, aims to improve outcomes for neurodivergent people by reducing waiting times for assessment, strengthening early support, and driving consistent, person-centred services across health, education and social care. This programme is part of a suite of policy driven initiatives specific to neurodivergence including the development of an Integrated Quality Statement and Standards for children's neurodivergence services.

16. Within the Welsh Government, the Health Care and Prevention Group has strategic policy responsibility for children's mental health policy, including:
    - implementation of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
    - setting strategic direction for all-age transformation of mental health services; and
    - delivery of the NEST (Nurturing, Empowering, Safe and Trusted) Framework, including its 'No Wrong Door' principle.

17. Local health boards commission and deliver Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), including:
    - early intervention;
    - community CAMHS;
    - specialist CAMHS;

- crisis support;
- inpatient services; and
- psychological and psychiatric assessment and treatment.

18. NHS Mental Health Services for under 18s in Wales are commissioned by local health boards in response to local needs. Service provision includes Local Primary Mental Health Support Services which are a requirement under the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010, specialist CAMHS, crisis services and Community Mental Health Teams.

19. The NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee is responsible for commissioning in-patient provision for CAMHS on behalf of the seven local health boards. Two local health boards are commissioned by the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee to provide this service for Welsh residents: Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board provides 15 beds for the South at Ty Llidiard and Betsi Cadwaldr University Health Board provides 12 beds at Abergele Hospital.

20. We only have low secure services in Wales. Young people requiring medium secure services are placed out of Wales. Very few young people require medium secure services, which are only required where directed by the court or where a young person poses a serious risk to others. Only adults can be placed in high secure services.

21. Medium secure mental health in-patient services for Welsh patients are commissioned on behalf of local health boards by the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee, either from NHS England or from the independent sector via the NHS Wales National Collaborative Frameworks. The National Collaborative Frameworks (Hospitals and Care Homes) were developed to enable:

    - An approved directory of suitably qualified, financially viable providers to meet quality, service and cost criteria.
    - The establishment of bespoke care standards, standard contract terms/conditions, and a transparent pricing framework.
    - Consistent and sustainable high-quality service provision and improved patient/resident outcomes.
    - implementation of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
    - setting strategic direction for all-age transformation of mental health services;
    - delivery of the NEST (Nurturing, Empowering, Safe and Trusted) Framework, including its 'No Wrong Door' principle.

22. The National Collaborative Frameworks provide the mechanism for the commissioning of services supported by the NHS Wales Quality Assurance Improvement Service (QAIS). The Framework is a formal agreement and mechanism developed together by the National Collaborative Commissioning Unit and NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (Procurement team). These services are provided once a patient is placed through the National Collaborative Framework processes and an individual patient placement agreement is generated, and therefore a contract enacted, between the commissioner (Local Health Board or the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee) and provider.

23. CAMHS services routinely assess: risk to self; risk to others; aggression and violence; trauma; neurodevelopmental conditions; emotional dysregulation; and serious mental illness.

24. CAMHS may encounter children and young people who: exhibit violent ideation; demonstrate obsessive interests in violence; have been influenced by harmful online content; display emerging patterns of fixation; or require specialised risk assessment and intervention.

25. The witness statement of Jacqueline Totterdell, Director General Health Care and Prevention and Chief Executive NHS Wales, on behalf of NHS Wales, includes further details of the mental health services provided by the NHS in Wales.

Violence Prevention Work

26. Matters potentially arising from Phase 2 of the Inquiry relating to policing, public order, criminal justice, the prevention and detection of crime and offensive weapons are largely reserved matters under the Government of Wales Act 2006. Consequently, responsibility for the legislative framework governing these matters rests with the UK Parliament and UK Government.

27. However, as outlined above, a number of policy areas that may contribute to the prevention of violence are devolved in Wales, including health, education, social services, safeguarding and aspects of community safety. Within these areas, the Welsh Government seeks to support early intervention and prevention, address adverse childhood experiences, and strengthen protective factors for children, young people, families and communities.

28. Accordingly, while the Welsh Government does not have responsibility for the policing or criminal justice response to violence, it works with UK Government departments, policing partners and other public bodies to support a public health approach to violence prevention and to reduce the risk factors associated with violent behaviour. The Welsh Government is a key partner in the Wales Violence Prevention Unit which is a national multi-agency partnership established in 2019 through Home Office funding as part of the UK Government's violence reduction programme. Further details on the Violence Prevention Unit are provided at paragraph 92-96.

29. The Youth Justice Prevention Framework also provides a national framework to support services in preventing children from becoming involved in offending behaviour. A copy of the framework is exhibited as **AG/01-NHSW000007**. The framework promotes a coordinated, multi-agency approach involving education, health, social care and youth justice services, recognising the important role of early help and prevention in improving outcomes for children. It adopts the Youth Justice Board's "Child First" approach, emphasising children's rights, wellbeing and development, and aims to ensure that children receive appropriate support at an early stage to reduce the risk of offending and future involvement in the criminal justice system.

30. Further detail on the Welsh Government's violence prevention work is outlined in the section below, at paragraphs 38 to 48 titled: *Work undertaken by the Welsh Government concerning Non-ideological extreme violence (NIEV) and Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs).*

Children's Access to Knives and Other Offensive Weapons

31. The legal regulation of knives and offensive weapons is largely reserved to the UK Government. Offensive weapons legislation, criminal offences and policing powers are matters for Westminster, the Home Office and criminal justice agencies.

32. However, the Welsh Government has an important role through its violence prevention policies, safeguarding and child protection systems, education and awareness programmes and youth services.

Online Harms and Digital Safety

33. The regulation of internet services is the responsibility of the UK Government. In response to the evolving digital landscape and the risks associated to online safety, including findings from industry, such as the children's Media Lives research, the Welsh Government's Digital Resilience team in the Education and Public Services Group was established in 2017.

Following the recent Senedd elections in May 2026, the Group has been renamed the Learning, Communities and Culture Group which contains the Education Directorate. This Group is responsible within the Welsh Government for raising awareness and supporting digital resilience activities including online safety, cyber security and data protection with local authorities and schools in Wales.

34. Through the Education Directorate, the Welsh Government is responsible for the delivery of the national Hwb platform which is designed specifically for children and young people to use in an education context. Although, the Welsh Government guidance does not specifically address VFIs or the role of harmful online content in facilitating mass casualty attacks, existing safeguarding guidance recognises that children and young people may experience harm through online activity and digital environments. A copy of the guidance on inappropriate illegal and offensive content online is exhibited as **AG/02** **NHSW000034** The guidance supports information sharing, safeguarding assessment and multi-agency responses where online activity gives rise to concerns regarding abuse, exploitation, wellbeing or safety. The primary focus is safeguarding rather than threat assessment or counter-violence activity.

35. The Welsh Government's National Security and Resilience Division provides advice and support on national security, cyber resilience and resilience-related matters across government. As part of this role, it monitors emerging threats and risks which may affect communities in Wales. The Division is aware that an increasing number of young people and adults have become involved in online sites, known collectively as the ComNet. ComNet is a decentralised, online ecosystem with overlapping networks, subcultures, and channels. It has three broad focuses: cyber-crime, sextortion, and offline crime. Interwoven within all these elements is a glorification of cruelty in all its forms. There are no coherent ideologies and the lines are blurred between perpetrators and victims. I would suggest that any future consideration of VFIs and NIEVs should consider how this global network is influencing young people and how current support networks address it.

Youth Justice and Criminal Exploitation

36. Youth justice is not devolved and responsibility for the legal framework, sentencing, courts and most criminal justice functions remains with the UK Government. The Welsh Government does work jointly with the Youth Justice Board and the UK Government through the Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales.

37. The Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales was published in May 2019 and sets out a shared vision between Welsh Government, the Youth Justice Board and criminal justice partners for a distinct, child-centred approach to youth justice in Wales. A copy of the Blueprint is exhibited as **AG/03** **NHSW000045**. The Blueprint promotes a rights-based and trauma-informed model focused on prevention, early intervention, diversion from the criminal justice system and rehabilitation. It seeks to prevent children from entering the justice system wherever possible, minimise contact with formal justice processes, address the impact of adverse childhood experiences and support children to lead positive, healthy and crime-free lives. This blueprint sets out the links between adverse childhood experiences, offending, violence, vulnerability and early intervention. Since April 2025, the principles and approaches set out in the Blueprint have been incorporated into ongoing partnership working and service delivery arrangements across Wales, with partners continuing to embed best practice and drive improvements in youth justice outcomes for children and young people.

Work undertaken by the Welsh Government concerning Non-ideological extreme violence (NIEV) and Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs)

38. The Welsh Government has not led or commissioned a distinct devolved programme of work specifically labelled as Non-ideological Extreme Violence (NIEV) or Violence Fixated Individuals (VFIs). Counter-terrorism and national security remain reserved matters, and the Welsh Government has not adopted the UK Government's 2024 definition of extremism as a basis for devolved policy.

39. However, the Welsh Government has engaged with UK Government and policing and security partners where work on NIEV and related risks intersects with devolved responsibilities, including safeguarding, education, health, community safety, community cohesion and resilience.

40. Welsh Government officials have contributed to cross-government discussions led by the Home Office on NIEV, including consideration of governance arrangements for the UK Government's NIEV Task Force.

41. In engaging with the development of the NIEV Task Force Strategic Board's Terms of Reference, the Welsh Government emphasised the importance of strategic oversight, cross-government coordination, early intervention, operational response, law enforcement, online harms and analytical work. This engagement has been to ensure that Welsh interests

and devolved services are understood within UK-wide policy development, rather than to establish a separate Welsh NIEV programme.

42. The Welsh Government also receives and considers Home Office and Counter Terrorism Policing updates on emerging NIEV-related work, including work to develop a more nationally consistent approach to individuals who fall below Prevent and Channel thresholds but may continue to present risks. This has included awareness of proposed improvements to referral quality, information sharing, governance, multi-agency working and support pathways, and how these may inform wider policy development relating to early intervention and the management of violence-fixated or violence-fascinated individuals.

43. In parallel, Welsh Government officials have developed a Wales-specific Prevent pilot for a 12-month secondment of a senior social worker into the Counter Terrorism Policing Wales Prevent triage team. The purpose of the pilot is to help manage non-Prevent referrals more effectively, including referrals involving violence-fixated individuals or complex safeguarding concerns, while freeing specialist Prevent officers to focus on Prevent-specific cases.

44. The pilot is intended to strengthen the interface between counter-terrorism triage, safeguarding, health, education and social services; improve referral handling and decision-making; reduce operational bottlenecks; and generate evidence to inform future operating models in Wales and at UK level.

45. The pilot will be supported by a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, with indicators including referral volumes, the split between Prevent and non-Prevent referrals, non-Prevent referrals relating to violence-fixated individuals, liaison activity, timeliness of decisions, quality of documentation and case closure standards. Governance will be provided through the Welsh Government's National Security and Resilience Division oversight, Counter Terrorism Policing Wales operational leadership, safeguarding partners, and reporting to the CONTEST Cymru Prevent Strategic Board. This work is relevant to NIEV and VFIs because it seeks to improve how below-threshold and complex referrals are identified, assessed, signposted and managed across the wider safeguarding and public protection system.

46. In Wales, this work sits alongside existing devolved activity which may be relevant to understanding and mitigating vulnerability to serious violence, although it is not framed specifically as NIEV or VFI work.

47. Relevant areas include safeguarding arrangements, mental health and wider health services, community safety partnerships, education and youth services, community cohesion activity, hate crime and community tensions monitoring, violence prevention work, and the CONTEST Cymru partnership structures through which the Welsh Government, Counter Terrorism Policing Wales and other partners engage on counter-terrorism and Prevent-related matters.

48. Overall, the Welsh Government's work to date has therefore been contributory and coordinative rather than programme-owning, reflecting both the devolution settlement, Welsh ministers' functions and devolved sectors. It has focused on engaging with UK Government-led NIEV policy development, understanding implications for devolved services, maintaining links with CONTEST Cymru and Prevent partners, and considering how existing Welsh safeguarding, health, education, community safety, cohesion and violence prevention systems may support early identification, referral, information sharing and management of risk. This multi governmental, departmental, and agency response reflects the complexity of the issue, and necessity for interconnected solutions.

Data collection and information

49. The Welsh Government does not routinely collect or report statistical information on VFI as a defined category. As this term is not currently embedded within Welsh policy no centrally-held statistical dataset has been identified that quantifies the number of individuals with violence fixation where the primary motivation is not ideological.

50. The Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and other NHS bodies do, however, collect and analyse a range of information relating to safeguarding, children's mental health, forensic adolescent mental health services, violence-related health service contacts and wider violence prevention activity. Although these datasets may provide contextual information relevant to the Inquiry's consideration of VFIs, they are not designed to identify, categorise or count individuals meeting the Inquiry's definition of a VFI.

51. The Wales Violence Prevention Portal provides a national violence surveillance capability for Wales, bringing together police, ambulance and NHS data, including emergency department attendances and violence-related hospital admissions. The Portal enables partners to identify patterns, hotspots and emerging trends in violence through a shared evidence base, supporting Strategic Needs Assessments and informing targeted prevention activity. The Wales Violence Prevention Portal is managed by the Wales Violence Prevention Unit which is a national multi-agency partnership established in 2019 through

Home Office funding as part of the UK Government's violence reduction programme. Further details on the Violence Prevention Unit are provided in paragraph 92-96.

52. In addition to the above sources of data, the Wales Safeguarding Repository also provides an important source of intelligence for violence prevention by bringing together Single Unified Safeguarding Reviews, Domestic Homicide Reviews, Adult Practice Reviews, Child Practice Reviews and Mental Health Homicide Reviews. Collectively, these reviews offer rich qualitative evidence on the circumstances, vulnerabilities, risk factors and system interactions that precede serious harm and violence. The repository therefore supports violence prevention initiatives by enabling organisations to identify recurring themes, understand missed opportunities for intervention, strengthen multi-agency learning and inform evidence-based prevention strategies focused on reducing harm and improving outcomes for vulnerable individuals and communities. Guidance on how to access the repository is exhibited as **AG/04-NHSW000002**.

Identifying Risk

53. The Phase 2 Terms of Reference for the Southport Inquiry define VFI as "individuals at risk of extreme violence, where ideology is not the primary driver" and seek to examine the adequacy of existing arrangements for identifying, assessing and managing risks posed by such individuals, including the interaction between safeguarding systems, mental health services, social care, education, policing and other public protection agencies.

54. Wales does not operate a specific VFI framework. Instead, concerns are identified through existing safeguarding, mental health and multi-agency systems. These include safeguarding referrals, CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services), forensic CAMHS, urgent and emergency mental health services, primary and community care, ambulance services, Prevent and Channel processes, as well as Regional Safeguarding Boards and wider public protection arrangements. Together, these systems provide opportunities to identify children and young people exhibiting concerning behaviours, escalating risk, violent ideation, significant mental health needs or vulnerabilities associated with serious harm.

55. Accordingly, for the purposes of this Rule 9 response, references to the identification and management of VFIs should be understood within the context of the Welsh Government's existing responsibilities for safeguarding, mental health assessment and treatment, risk assessment and multi-agency risk management, rather than as a distinct operational category recognised within Welsh policy or legislation.

56. I am asked what risk assessment tools or frameworks are currently used across Wales to assess persons who may be violence fixated, including both children and adults. There is no single Wales-wide violence fixation assessment tool used across all agencies. Instead, agencies in Wales use a combination of safeguarding, counter-terrorism, public protection, mental health and youth justice frameworks, depending on the nature of the risk.

57. Many of the frameworks used to assess adults who may be violence fixated are developed within the UK Government and counter-terrorism structures, reflecting the fact that many of the powers and responsibilities related to this area are reserved. These frameworks include:

    - The Vulnerability Assessment Framework. This is the principal assessment framework used within the Prevent/Channel process to assess individuals who may be vulnerable to radicalisation or extremist violence.

    - The Extremism Risk Guidance 22+ (ERG22+). This is the principal structured professional judgement tool used across England and Wales for people convicted of terrorism or extremism-related offences.

    - Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements. Where an individual has committed serious violent offences or is subject to public protection arrangements, Wales uses the same Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) framework as England. MAPPA coordinates police, probation, prisons and other agencies in assessing and managing the risk posed by violent offenders

58. For adults where violence fixation appears linked to mental disorder, Welsh health services would use established clinical tools to assess individuals. These tools and assessments are outlined in detail in the statement provided by Jaqueline Totterdell, Director General Health Care and Prevention and Chief Executive NHS Wales, on behalf the NHS in Wales.

59. As outlined above, Part 7 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 provides the principal statutory framework for safeguarding in Wales. In relation to children, it establishes a duty on relevant partners to report children at risk to the local authority, provides for multi-agency safeguarding arrangements through Regional Safeguarding Boards, and is supported by statutory guidance and arrangements relating to cooperation and information-sharing between safeguarding partners. The local authority's duty to make child protection enquiries where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is

suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm also arises under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

60. Where concerns relate to violence fixated children, local authorities, health bodies, education services, police services and other relevant partner agencies operate under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and the Welsh Government safeguarding framework. These provide the overarching risk assessment and multi-agency safeguarding process.

61. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures, exhibited at **AG/05-WGOV000010** provide a national agreed framework for safeguarding practice across Wales. They set out the processes that agencies and relevant staff should follow when identifying, reporting, assessing and responding to concerns about abuse, neglect, harm or violence. The procedures are developed and maintained through arrangements involving the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board and Regional Safeguarding Boards and apply across local authorities, health services, education services, police services, probation and justice agencies, third sector organisation and both devolved and non-devolved agencies operating in Wales.

62. The Youth Justice Prevention Framework, exhibited above at **AG/01-NHSW000007**, also provides a national framework to support services in preventing children from becoming involved in offending behaviour. The framework promotes a coordinated, multi-agency approach involving education, health, social care and youth justice services, recognising the important role of early help and prevention in improving outcomes for children

63. The Vulnerability Assessment Framework mentioned above in paragraph 57 would also be used for children and young people who have been referred because of concerns about radicalisation, violent extremism, grievance-fuelled violence or concerning fixation behaviours. The assessment informs multi-agency safeguarding plans rather than being a criminal justice tool.

64. Where violent behaviours or fixation are associated with criminal exploitation, county lines activity or gang involvement, practitioners in Wales will also use the Child Criminal Exploitation Assessment Tool developed through the Complex Safeguarding Wales programme. It supports identification and recording of exploitation-related risks.

65. As outlined in the paragraphs above, many of the existing mechanisms for identifying fixation with violence which is not motivated primarily by ideology are UK-wide programmes and frameworks rather than Wales specific, such as the Prevent and Channel programme.

66. Processes such as the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, which apply across local authorities, health services, education services, police services, probation and justice agencies, can be effective for identifying fixation with violence which is not motivated primarily by ideology due to the multi-agency approach taken. Where an individual is already known to services and with effective information sharing across agencies it can help to build a picture of escalating risk.

67. There is currently no Welsh Government policy, framework, guidance or prescribed risk assessment process relating specifically to VFIs. Where concerns arise regarding an individual's risk to themselves or others, practitioners would be expected to act in accordance with existing professional obligations, organisational safeguarding procedures, information governance requirements, relevant statutory duties, and established multi-agency arrangements.

68. There may be potential benefits in developing a single, accessible multi-agency risk assessment framework for use across the public sector which would support consistency, shared understanding of risk, and effective multi-agency working. However, any such approach would need to recognise the differing statutory responsibilities, professional obligations and operational contexts of participating organisations.

69. A shared approach could support consistency, communication and joint working across agencies. However, there may be challenges in developing a framework that is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the differing roles, responsibilities and legal duties of organisations involved in risk assessment and management. Any shared approach would need to operate in accordance with existing legal, professional and confidentiality requirements applicable to all organisations and agencies within the public sector.

70. I am asked whether frontline workers (such as police, education professionals, those working in the justice system and social workers) receive sufficient training to identify violence fixation and indicators of escalating risk of violence towards others. I am unable to comment on the training received by police and those working in the justice system due to responsibility for those areas not being devolved.

71. Frontline education professionals, social workers and healthcare staff do currently receive training in safeguarding, mental health, Prevent, violence prevention, trauma-informed

practice and risk assessment, which helps to equip them to recognise many factors associated with violent behaviour.

72. In relation to the improvements that would be required in order to support professionals in recognising and responding to violence fixation the development of a dedicated training programme on violence fixation and escalating violence risk could be developed however, prior to this a clear definition for VFIs would need to be agreed. Having this in place could help professionals recognise and respond more consistently to emerging risks before serious harm occurs.

Information Sharing

73. Since 31 January 2023 the Serious Violence Duty in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 has required health, police, local authorities, youth offending services, probation and other partners to work together to prevent and reduce serious violence, including by sharing information and intelligence where appropriate.

74. The statutory guidance emphasises that agencies should:
    a. collaborate through existing partnership structures;
    b. share relevant information and data;
    c. undertake joint assessments of serious violence;
    d. develop and implement multi-agency violence prevention strategies.

75. The sharing of information between organisations is generally justified by reference to one or more applicable legal frameworks, including the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, the Common Law Duty of Confidentiality, Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, safeguarding legislation and associated statutory guidance, and the Serious Violence Duty. Collectively, these frameworks establish the circumstances in which information may be shared lawfully, proportionately and for legitimate purposes such as safeguarding individuals, preventing crime, protecting public safety and delivering effective public services.

76. Information sharing forms an integral part of the wider safeguarding framework in Wales. Relevant agencies are expected to work collaboratively, share information proportionately and lawfully, and ensure that concerns about abuse, neglect or harm are identified, assessed and acted upon appropriately. Information may be shared between local authorities, police forces, health bodies, education providers and other safeguarding

partners where this is necessary to support safeguarding functions and protect children or adults at risk.

77. Where safeguarding concerns arise, relevant organisations in Wales share information through a range of established multi-agency arrangements, including Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH), Child Protection Conferences, adult protection processes and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). These arrangements operate alongside the wider regional safeguarding framework provided through the Regional Safeguarding Boards.

78. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures and accompanying statutory guidance emphasise the importance of timely and appropriate information sharing between agencies where safeguarding concerns arise. The overarching principle is that concerns about information sharing should not prevent action being taken where it is necessary to safeguard a child or adult at risk and there is a lawful basis for sharing the information..

79. Where the individual is a violent or sexual offender subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), relevant services contribute information to:
    - risk assessments;
    - risk management plans;
    - public protection meetings.

80. This allows police, probation and health partners to manage the risk posed by high-risk offenders in the community.

81. A distinct Welsh feature is the strong public-health approach to violence prevention. Public Health Wales, policing bodies, criminal justice agencies and local authorities work through established partnership arrangements and memoranda of understanding to share intelligence and develop violence prevention responses. The Wales Violence Prevention Unit has also produced guidance, exhibited at **AG/06** **NHSW000032** specifically for Welsh partners implementing the Serious Violence Duty.

82. Information sharing is also key within the Prevent programme. The number of Prevent referrals has been steadily increasing but a large number fall below the counterterrorism threshold. Those that do fall below the threshold can still be a risk and should be referred onto social services to be assessed by the appropriate safeguarding practitioners. Having strong interconnected procedures is crucial for public safety.

83. Based on my experience, the current legal and policy frameworks generally provide an appropriate based for balancing privacy rights, safeguarding obligations and public protection. While I am not aware of any changes to law, policy or practice that would materially improve information sharing in relation to children who may present a significant risk of serious violence, the Welsh Government will carefully consider any findings or recommendations made by the Inquiry in this area.

Multi-Agency Working

84. The response to VFIs in Wales involves a range of organisations operating at national, regional and local levels. The Welsh Government has a strategic policy, leadership and coordination role, supported by the National Office for Care and Support and the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales in relation to social care and safeguarding matters. A number of partnership bodies and multi-agency arrangements also contribute to the identification, assessment and management of risks associated with VFIs, including where the individual is a child. The following sections describe the respective roles and responsibilities of these organisations and arrangements within the Welsh safeguarding, violence prevention and public protection landscape.

Chief Social Care Officer for Wales

85. The Chief Social Care Officer for Wales is Albert Heaney. He leads the Social Services and Integration Directorate within the Welsh Government and provides professional leadership for social care in Wales. His responsibilities include:
    - Advising Welsh Ministers on social care issues and priorities
    - Providing national leadership across the social care sector
    - Driving safeguarding arrangements and procedures to ensure the highest standards of practice
    - Supporting local authorities and providers to improve quality, sustainability and outcomes
    - Supporting efforts to reduce risks to vulnerable children and adults through effective social care and safeguarding systems.

86. Accordingly, the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales' role in relation to VFIs is strategic and professional rather than operational. He may influence policy, safeguarding guidance and cross-sector collaboration but would not normally make decisions about individual VFIs.

National Office for Care and Support

87. The National Office for Care and Support was established in April 2024 and is responsible for national leadership and improvement within the social care system. Its role includes:
    - Supporting the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales
    - Promoting national priorities, good practice and consistency across social care services in Wales
    - Supporting collaboration between local authorities and other partners involved in safeguarding and care and support services
    - Helping ensure that social care services are equipped to respond to emerging risks and complex safeguarding issues.

88. In relation to VFIs, the National Office for Care and Support's role would primarily be in ensuring that social care systems, safeguarding arrangements and multi-agency responses are effective and consistent across Wales. It would not normally have a direct role in managing individual cases.

Safer Communities Wales

89. Safer Communities Wales is a national network that supports organisations and practitioners involved in community safety across Wales. Its purpose is to connect professionals, share good practice, influence policy, and support partnership working to help create safer, stronger and more resilient communities.

90. It is overseen by the Wales Safer Communities Board, which provides leadership and strategic direction for community safety partnership working across Wales. The Board's role is to support effective multi-agency working on issues such as crime prevention, antisocial behaviour, safeguarding, violence prevention, and community resilience.

91. In relation to VFIs, Safer Communities Wales is not an operational agency and does not manage individual cases. However, it has a role in:
    - Sharing emerging practice and learning about VFIs;
    - Supporting multi-agency collaboration between safeguarding, education, health, youth justice and policing partners;
    - Promoting prevention-focused and evidence-led approaches to community safety risks; and
    - Helping practitioners understand and respond to new threats affecting communities.

Wales Violence Prevention Unit

92. The Wales Violence Prevention Unit is a national multi-agency partnership established in 2019 through Home Office funding as part of the UK Government's violence reduction programme. Its purpose is to prevent violence before it occurs by adopting a public health approach, which seeks to understand the underlying causes of violence and address those causes through evidence-based interventions rather than relying solely on enforcement or criminal justice responses.

93. The Unit collaborates across multiple sectors, including policing, health, social care, education, youth services, criminal justice and local government. Rather than focusing exclusively on individual offenders, the Violence Prevention Unit examines the broader factors that contribute to violence, such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), trauma, social exclusion, substance misuse, poor mental health, deprivation and educational disengagement. It then supports partners across Wales to develop interventions that reduce those risks and strengthen protective factors within communities

94. The Unit has played an important role in supporting Welsh partners to prepare for and implement the "Serious Violence Duty", helping organisations develop violence prevention strategies and strategic needs assessments. Key partners include:

    - Public Health Wales (which includes the National Safeguarding Service which provides national leadership, improvement support, learning and intelligence in relation to NHS safeguarding across Wales);
    - South Wales Police;
    - South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner's Office;
    - His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS);
    - Home Office;
    - Local authorities;
    - Health boards;
    - Youth justice services;
    - Third sector organisations;
    - Welsh Government; and
    - Academic institutions,

95. The Violence Prevention Unit works with a wider network of partners including safeguarding services, education providers, community safety partnerships, criminal justice agencies, social services, youth work organisations and children's services across Wales.

96. In practice, the Wales Violence Prevention Unit brings together the evidence, partnerships and public health methodologies that support a coordinated response to violence across the country. While it does not manage individual VFI cases, much of the policy, evidence and prevention infrastructure that would underpin effective VFI identification and management is connected to or influenced by its work.

Welsh Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

97. MAPPA provides the statutory framework through which police, probation and prison services, together with other duty to co-operate agencies, assess and manage the risks posed by certain sexual, violent and other serious offenders in the community. Where an individual who may be considered a VFI falls within the scope of MAPPA, relevant agencies share information and work collaboratively to assess risk, develop risk management plans and coordinate measures to protect the public.

98. A range of organisations may contribute to MAPPA arrangements, including local authorities, health bodies, youth justice services, housing providers and other relevant agencies, depending on the circumstances of the case and the nature of the risks identified. This enables a coordinated multi-agency approach to managing risk and safeguarding the public.

99. In Wales, MAPPA operates within a broader landscape of partnership working on violence prevention and public protection. Public Health Wales, policing bodies, criminal justice agencies and local authorities work through established partnership arrangements to share information, identify emerging risks and support violence prevention activity. As noted above, the Wales Violence Prevention Unit has also produced guidance for Welsh partners implementing the Serious Violence Duty.

The National Independent Safeguarding Board

100. The National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB) provides independent advice and assurance to Welsh Ministers on safeguarding arrangements in Wales. Its role is strategic rather than operational. The Board supports and advises Regional Safeguarding Boards, reports on the adequacy and effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard children

and adults at risk and makes recommendations to Welsh Ministers on how those arrangements may be improved. In undertaking this role, the Board considers information and learning from Regional Safeguarding Boards and partner agencies to inform national oversight, policy development and continuous improvement across the safeguarding system in Wales.

Regional Safeguarding Boards

101. Regional Safeguarding Boards are the statutory multi-agency bodies established under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Their role is to facilitate cooperation between safeguarding partners, oversee the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements, and support the development of policies, procedures and practice designed to protect children and adults at risk. They do not have responsibility for the management of individual safeguarding cases, which remains a matter for the relevant statutory agencies.

102. In the context of the Phase 2 Terms of Reference, Regional Safeguarding Boards provide the statutory multi-agency framework through which safeguarding partners cooperate and coordinate their safeguarding activity. Concerns relating to children and young people presenting risks of serious harm may be considered through the wider safeguarding arrangements operating within that framework, including relevant multi-agency safeguarding processes and procedures.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Hub Wales

103. The Adverse Childhood Experiences Hub Wales supports organisations and communities across Wales to understand, prevent and respond to adverse childhood experiences through the promotion of trauma-informed and evidence-based practice. The Hub was founded in 2017 and was set up to support Welsh society to help create a trauma and adverse childhood experiences informed Wales and make Wales a leader in tackling, preventing and mitigating adverse childhood experiences. The Adverse Childhood Eexperiences Hub Wales is funded by the Welsh Government and is hosted by Public Health Wales and is part of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre on Investment for Health and Well-being. The Hub supports system-wide learning, workforce development and policy implementation, helping public services to identify and address the underlying causes of violence and vulnerability. Its work forms an important part of Wales' public health approach to violence prevention and early intervention.

CONTEST

104. CONTEST is the UK Government's counter-terrorism strategy. Its overarching aim is to reduce the risk from terrorism to the UK, its citizens and interests overseas, so that people can live freely and with confidence. CONTEST is structured around four complementary workstreams, known as the "four Ps": Prevent, which aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism;

- Pursue, which aims to stop terrorist attacks;
- Protect, which aims to strengthen protection against terrorist attacks; and
- Prepare, which aims to minimise the impact of an attack should one occur.

Prevent

105. Prevent is a UK Government policy led by the Home Office. This is a reserved area and the UK Government has issued 'Prevent duty guidance: Guidance for specified authorities in England and Wales' to support the duty, a copy of which is exhibited as **AG/07-HOM000014**

Channel

106. Channel is the multi-agency safeguarding programme that sits within the Prevent framework and is designed to provide early support to individuals who may be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism or radicalisation. It is not a criminal justice process and participation is generally voluntary. The purpose of Channel is to assess the nature and extent of an individual's vulnerability and, where appropriate, develop a tailored support package to reduce risk and build resilience. This support may include mental health services, educational support, social care involvement, mentoring, family support or other interventions depending on the person's needs.

107. Within Wales, Channel panels are typically chaired by the local authority and bring together partners from health, social care, education, policing and other relevant agencies.

108. The current multi-agency structures in Wales, which are outlined throughout this statement, can be effective and sufficient to identify and respond to adults and/or children with a fixation on violence for many cases, particularly where a fixation on violence is associated with radicalisation, safeguarding concerns, serious violence, known offending or identifiable vulnerability. Prevent/Channel, Regional Safeguarding Boards and MAPPA provide established mechanisms for identifying and responding to risk.

109. However, the structures may be less effective where individuals display a fixation on violence without clear extremist motivation, criminality, mental illness or safeguarding concerns. In these cases there can be gaps where risks emerge outside traditional safeguarding, mental health or counter-extremism frameworks.

110. Also, whilst the Channel Panel, which assesses an individual's eligibility for referral to Prevent is made up of a range of local authority expert practitioners and police (including Couter Terrorism Policing Wales), the outcome of their decisions reside with the local authority, Couter Terrorism Policing Wales, and the Home Office. The Welsh Government is not part of this process so relevant policy teams within the Welsh Government can be unaware of any strategic pressures on systems in Wales. Consequently, whilst the UK Government's Prevent System Board gathers data on the number of referrals and those above and below the threshold, the impact on Wales is not disaggregated to help the Welsh Government address any safeguarding issues at a strategic level. Improved, more granular data collection would enable the Welsh Government to better prepare and respond to increases in Prevent referrals, given the majority are safeguarding concerns rather than counterterrorism.

111. It is difficult to make a definitive judgement on whether existing referral pathways and thresholds are fully appropriate for the consistent identification and management of VFIs as a distinct group. As mentioned previously, Wales does not currently operate a specific VFI framework, definition, referral pathway or risk assessment process, and concerns associated with VFIs are instead managed through a range of existing mechanisms. While these arrangements can help identify issues and support intervention, there may be circumstances where complex presentations do not fit neatly within existing thresholds, creating challenges in securing timely assessment, information sharing and coordinated multi-agency support.

112. The effectiveness of current arrangements depends not only on the thresholds themselves, but also on the consistency of their application, the quality of information sharing, professional judgement, workforce capability and the capacity of services to respond appropriately. Similarly, the absence of an agreed clinical or operational definition of a VFI creates practical difficulties in establishing consistent referral criteria, intervention thresholds and risk assessment approaches across agencies. Current systems can identify many factors associated with future risk, but may be less explicit in recognising fixation, grievance and pathway-to-violence behaviours before serious harm occurs.

113. Safeguarding, mental health and multi-agency pathways provide an important foundation for identifying and responding to risk and vulnerability. There may, however, be scope to strengthen consistency and clarity in relation to the identification and management of VFIs. Clearer definitions and a stronger evidence base would support more consistent identification, assessment and management of VFIs across services.

114. Against that background, the most effective approach to the identification, assessment and management of VFIs would be to build upon and strengthen existing multi-agency safeguarding and public protection arrangements, rather than create an entirely separate structure.

115. Existing mechanisms already bring together relevant partners from policing, safeguarding, health, education, social services and other agencies to share information, assess risk and coordinate interventions. Where appropriate, structures such as Prevent and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) provide established pathways for identifying and managing individuals whose behaviour may present concerns, while ensuring that responses remain proportionate to the level and nature of risk.

116. The Welsh Government would therefore favour an approach in which clear national guidance, consistent referral pathways and robust information-sharing arrangements are developed across existing structures, supported by clearly defined leadership and accountability. Consideration could also be given to identifying a lead agency or lead coordinating function to ensure consistency, oversight and effective multi-agency collaboration.

117. On the evidence currently available, the Welsh Government does not consider that the creation of a wholly new multi-agency structure would necessarily deliver better outcomes than strengthening existing arrangements. The priority should be ensuring that relevant agencies are able to identify concerns at an early stage, share information lawfully and effectively, undertake coordinated risk assessment, and provide appropriate interventions tailored to individual circumstances.

118. In terms of the creation of a system in which a designated professional is responsible for coordinating the management of individual VFI cases, there are potential benefits of such a model. A clearly identified lead could help ensure accountability, improve communication between agencies, support information sharing, and provide greater continuity of oversight where multiple services are involved.

119. However, any such approach would need to be proportionate, flexible and aligned with existing safeguarding and public protection arrangements. Individuals identified as VFIs may present with a wide range of needs, behaviours and risks and may come to the attention of services for very different reasons, including mental health concerns, safeguarding issues, criminal justice matters or risks associated with fixation or obsession. As a result, it may not be appropriate to prescribe a single model or require a named duty holder in every case irrespective of the level or nature of risk.

120. The Welsh Government would therefore support further consideration of a lead professional or case coordination function where this would add value, while ensuring that managing risk remains a shared responsibility across all agencies rather than resting solely with one individual or organisation.

121. Should such a model be adopted, no single agency or professional group is likely to be best placed to undertake this role. The most appropriate lead would depend upon the presenting risks, needs and circumstances of the individual concerned.

122. For example, where the primary concern relates to safeguarding or welfare, a social worker or safeguarding professional may be best placed to coordinate activity. Where mental ill health is a significant factor, a mental health practitioner may be more appropriate. Where there is a significant public protection or criminality dimension, policing or other criminal justice partners may be better placed to assume a coordinating role.

123. The principal advantages of a named lead professional model are that it provides a clear point of accountability, reduces the risk of fragmented responses, facilitates information sharing and coordination, and provides a consistent point of contact for agencies involved in managing risk.

124. However, there are also disadvantages. Assigning overall responsibility to a single professional could create unrealistic expectations regarding their ability to manage risks that sit across multiple organisations and statutory functions. There is also a risk that agencies may become overly reliant on the designated lead, potentially weakening collective responsibility for risk assessment and management. In addition, identifying an appropriate lead may be challenging where risks span several domains or evolve over time.

125. Were this approach to be implemented, the Welsh Government would favour identifying a lead professional according to the circumstances of each case, supported by clear multi-agency governance arrangements, rather than assigning responsibility permanently to a single agency.

126. A culture in which agencies take ownership of risk management is most likely to develop where expectations, roles and accountabilities are clearly defined across all agencies involved. Referrals should be understood as a mechanism for securing support, expertise and coordination, rather than for transferring ownership of risk. Clear guidance, joint training, strong leadership and robust governance arrangements can help build confidence and capability across agencies, enabling them to take appropriate action within their respective remits while contributing to the collective management of risk.

127. A number of lessons can be drawn from safeguarding arrangements in Wales that may be relevant to wider approaches to the management of risk and multi-agency working. Safeguarding practice is underpinned by a clear statutory framework that establishes shared responsibilities across agencies while recognising the distinct roles of individual professionals and organisations. This approach encourages agencies to work together to identify and manage risk, supported by effective information sharing, joint decision-making and clear accountability.

Interventions

128. Wales has a number of existing interventions that can effectively manage or reduce the risk posed by some violence-fixated individuals, but there is no single Wales-wide intervention specifically designed for violence fixation. Instead, and as outlined throughout this statement interventions are delivered through mental health services, Prevent/Channel, safeguarding systems, youth justice, education services, and family support arrangements.

129. In relation to psychological support, this is available through a number of interventions including NHS Wales Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, adult community mental health services, forensic mental health services and Channel where psychological support can be commissioned where vulnerabilities are identified.

130. Behavioural interventions are delivered through youth offending services, youth justice programmes, diversionary programmes, Prevent and Channel support plans, school-based behavioural support and community rehabilitation services for offenders.

131. Wales has well-established family support interventions which are provided through services such as children's services, family support teams, youth justice services and safeguarding partnerships. For children and young people, family members are frequently involved in safeguarding plans and support arrangements. Channel guidance also recognises the importance of involving families where appropriate as part of a wider safeguarding response.

132. Educational settings are among the principal locations where concerning behaviour is identified. Schools and colleges in Wales contribute through established safeguarding processes, additional learning support, school counselling, behaviour support services and Prevent-related referrals where concerns about radicalisation arise. The education sector is also the largest source of Prevent referrals across England and Wales, reflecting its role in early identification.

133. Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are probably a clear feature of the Welsh system, particularly where concerns span multiple domains such as education, mental health, family circumstances and offending behaviour.

134. The principal challenges and barriers to implementing effective interventions for violence-fixated individuals in Wales include resource pressures and waiting times. For children and adults whose violence fixation is linked to mental health difficulties, trauma, neurodevelopmental conditions, emotional dysregulation or obsessive thinking, intervention frequently depends on access to psychological or psychiatric services. In practice, support may be delayed by demand pressures, workforce shortages and waiting lists across health and specialist services. Delayed access can reduce opportunities for early intervention and allow concerning behaviours to become further entrenched before treatment begins.

135. Similar pressures can affect social care, family support services and youth services. While multi-agency safeguarding structures exist, their effectiveness depends on the availability of practitioners and interventions capable of responding once a risk has been identified. A referral pathway is of limited value if the services required to support the individual are unavailable or operating at capacity.

136. A challenge can also be linked to professional confidence and capability in recognising violence fixation and distinguishing it from other forms of risk. Most frontline professionals are trained to identify safeguarding concerns, mental health difficulties, criminality, radicalisation or extremism. However, violence fixation does not always fit neatly

within any of these categories. Individuals may present with an intense fascination with violence, mass casualty events, weapons or violent offenders without exhibiting clear ideological motivations or meeting mental health thresholds. In such cases, practitioners may be uncertain whether the behaviour represents a safeguarding concern, a mental health issue, normal adolescent behaviour, or a genuine precursor to violence.

137. A key difficulty can arise when an individual does not clearly meet the threshold for intervention by any one agency. In such circumstances, agencies may each hold part of the picture while no single organisation assumes lead responsibility. This can create uncertainty regarding who should coordinate assessment and intervention

138. Legal barriers generally arise from the need to balance public protection against individual rights. Professionals must operate within legal frameworks however, where an individual has not committed an offence and does not meet statutory safeguarding or mental health thresholds, agencies may have limited powers to compel assessment or participation in support.

139. Even where interventions are available, their effectiveness often depends on voluntary engagement and some VFIs may distrust professionals, reject concerns about their behaviour, be socially withdrawn or actively avoid intervention. Where engagement is poor, the ability of agencies to reduce risk is significantly diminished.

140. For children and young people, parental involvement is often a critical component of effective intervention. Professionals must balance parental involvement with their safeguarding duties and the rights of the child. In some circumstances, agencies may need to proceed without full parental agreement where safeguarding concerns are sufficiently serious. Welsh safeguarding arrangements place the welfare of the child at the centre of decision-making.

141. While Wales does not have a dedicated VFI framework or policy there are some examples of positive innovative or specialist practice which could be adopted nationally. Regional Safeguarding Boards bring together local authorities, health boards, police, education and other partners with statutory responsibilities for protecting vulnerable children and adults. This emphasis on partnership working reflects an important lesson from case reviews internationally: concerning behaviours are often visible across multiple settings long before a serious incident occurs. No single agency is likely to hold the complete picture. Any future national model for VFIs is likely to be most effective if built around existing multi-agency safeguarding structures rather than creating entirely separate systems.

142. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures contain dedicated guidance on safeguarding children from radicalisation and emphasise that responses should be child-centred, multi-agency and integrated within existing safeguarding arrangements. Agencies are expected to work collaboratively and share information in the same way they would for other safeguarding concerns. Rather than creating entirely separate structures, Wales has largely embedded violence and radicalisation concerns within established safeguarding systems.

143. A more recent innovation in Wales is the introduction of the Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR) process, which brings together learning from multiple review mechanisms under a single framework. The approach seeks to reduce duplication, improve multi-agency learning, identify systemic weaknesses and disseminate lessons more effectively. SUSR provides a mechanism for examining those systemic factors and translating lessons into operational improvements.

144. The Welsh Government remains open to learning from innovative and specialist practice developed in other jurisdictions and disciplines and considers relevant evidence as it emerges. However, I am not aware of any specific examples that have been identified by the Welsh Government for national adoption in Wales in relation to the issues considered in this statement.

Education

145. The Welsh Government's role in supporting schools and colleges to identify and respond to children and young people who may present a risk of serious violence is principally to set the national statutory and policy framework for safeguarding in education, promote consistency of practice across Wales, and work with local authorities, education settings and wider safeguarding partners to strengthen arrangements.

146. Responsibility for operational decisions relating to individual children and young people rests with schools, colleges, local authorities, children's services, police, health services and other safeguarding agencies. The Welsh Government does not have a direct role in assessing or managing individual cases.

147. Within the framework set by the Welsh Government, schools and colleges are expected to maintain robust safeguarding arrangements, including the appointment of designated safeguarding persons, clear procedures for recording and escalating concerns, and effective links with local authority and multi-agency safeguarding processes. Education

settings are often well placed to identify emerging concerns through changes in behaviour, attendance, wellbeing, relationships or online activity, and to contribute this information to a wider safeguarding assessment.

148. Education professionals are not expected to diagnose violent intent or undertake specialist threat assessments. Rather, their role is to recognise, record and report concerns, seek advice where appropriate, and make timely referrals through safeguarding, behaviour, wellbeing, Prevent, police or other relevant pathways according to the nature and immediacy of the risk.

149. To support education settings in carrying out these responsibilities, statutory guidance and resources are provided by the Welsh Government, including Keeping Learners Safe, exhibited at **AG/08-WGOV000011**, alongside guidance on behaviour management for both primary schools and secondary schools, exhibited at **AG/09-WGOV000005** and **AG/10- WGOV000006**, exclusions from schools and pupil referral units exhibited at **AG/11-WGOV000001**, and attendance guidance, exhibited at **AG/12-WGOV000004**. These documents help schools and colleges develop effective safeguarding cultures and respond appropriately to concerns about learners.

150. The Welsh Government also provides strategic oversight, policy guidance and advice to help ensure online safety and digital resilience are embedded throughout schools in Wales. This work supports the whole school community, including learners, practitioners, governors, parents and carers.

151. 'Keeping safe online' is an area of Hwb (the Welsh Government's digital learning platform) which provides bilingual online safety information, guidance, classroom activities and training for the whole school community. This content aims to support children and young people to:

- manage their online experience safely and responsibly
- identify and mitigate risks to stay safe from harm online
- understand the importance of using reliable sources and employing critical thinking skills
- seek help when they need it
- thrive and benefit from the opportunities the online world offers.

152. Tailored content on 'Keeping safe online' includes:

- A dedicated area of advice and support for children and young people

- App guides for parents and carers on the most popular social media, gaming and AI platforms children and young people are using
- Articles on online safety topics from expert organisations
- Information about specific online safety topics, including online radicalisation and extremism, online hate, online influencers, online grooming, misinformation and social media
- Classroom activities aligned to the Digital Competence Framework produced by partner organisations such as Common Sense Education
- Online safety and cyber security opportunities for schools to get involved with
- Online training for education practitioners
- Information about support services to report online harm and get advice

153. Where concerns relate to the risk of a child or young person being drawn into extremism or extremist ideologies, schools and colleges in Wales are subject to the UK Government's Prevent duty under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. Education settings are expected to follow the Prevent Duty Guidance: England and Wales, as exhibited at **AG/07- HOM000014** alongside Welsh Government guidance such as Keeping Learners Safe exhibited above and Respect and Resilience: Developing Community Cohesion (2016), exhibited at **AG/13- WGOV000008**, which supports schools in meeting their legal responsibilities. Given the changes that have occurred over the past decade, Respect and Resilience requires updating to ensure it remains relevant and effective and reflects the current safeguarding landscape.

154. To support this work, the Wales Prevent in Education Advisory Group has been established to guide a national programme of work supporting schools, colleges and higher education institutions to take a proactive approach to understanding, preventing and responding to Prevent-related concerns. This work includes updating the 2016 guidance, improving strategic oversight of Prevent-related provision, strengthening partnership working across the education sector, improving understanding of the evidence base and identifying research gaps, and considering the suitability of resources, training and practical tools for the Welsh context.

155. Education professionals are expected to identify fixation with violence, escalating concerning behaviour, potential pre-attack indicators and online risk factors through their existing safeguarding, wellbeing, pastoral care and behaviour management arrangements. Staff are expected to notice and act on concerning changes in a learner's behaviour, wellbeing or circumstances, consider whether individual incidents form part of a wider

pattern, record concerns appropriately and escalate them through established safeguarding procedures.

156. Indicators may include a persistent interest in violence, weapons or violent themes; escalating aggression or harmful behaviour; threats, intimidation or language suggesting planning or rehearsal; significant changes in behaviour, attendance, social interaction or wellbeing; possession of, or attempts to access, weapons; and concerns raised by peers, parents or staff. Online risk factors may include engagement with harmful, violent, extremist or misogynistic content, online grooming, coercion, harassment or other activity that may increase risk to the learner or others.

157. Education practitioners are not expected to make specialist judgements about whether a learner is displaying "pre-attack indicators". Rather, staff are expected to identify and report behaviours or circumstances that give rise to concern. Any indication of planning, direct threats, targeted hostility, access to weapons, escalating risk, or serious online harm should be treated as a safeguarding and public protection concern and referred promptly to the designated safeguarding person and, where appropriate, to children's services, the police or other relevant agencies.

158. Schools are further supported through their Prevent duties. Estyn's 2020 thematic review, exhibited at **AG/14- WGOV000007**, highlighted the importance of ensuring that policies, staff training, online safety arrangements and the curriculum address risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, and that learners have opportunities to raise concerns. The All Wales Prevent Referral Form, exhibited at **AG/15- WGOV000012**, provides a consistent referral route across Wales, while the Wales Prevent in Education Advisory Group continues to review arrangements and consider what further support may be required by the education sector.

159. The principal guidance available to education staff is *Keeping Learners Safe*, exhibited above which should be read alongside the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, also exhibited above at **AG/05-WGOV000010**, local safeguarding arrangements and relevant statutory guidance. Staff are also supported through safeguarding and Prevent training, online safety resources on Hwb which includes a dedicated page on the Keeping Safe Online area for radicalisation and extremism, behaviour and wellbeing guidance exhibited above, and guidance on safe and effective interventions, exhibited at **AG/16-WGOV000009**, including responding to weapons-related incidents.

160. These frameworks support staff to identify, record, escalate and respond to concerns relating to fixation with violence, escalating behaviour, online risks and potential vulnerability to radicalisation, exploitation or other harms.

161. A Pan-Wales Weapons in School and Education Settings Protocol is currently being developed and is focused on responding to incidents involving weapons. It will also support schools and partners to better understand the wider safeguarding needs and vulnerabilities that may contribute to such behaviours. This includes identifying and responding to young people who may be displaying an unhealthy interest in violence, normalisation of weapon carrying, involvement in harmful peer groups, exposure to violent online content, or other risk factors that require early intervention and support.

162. Support is further strengthened through Community Focused Schools guidance, which promotes early identification and prevention through partnership working with families and other services. For example, *Developing Family Engagement in Community Focused Schools,* exhibited at **AG/17- WGOV000002** highlights the role of Family Engagement Officers in building relationships with families, identifying emerging concerns and signposting families to specialist support at an early stage. *Developing Multi-Agency Engagement in Community Focused Schools,* exhibited at **AG/18- WGOV000003** supports schools to work with services such as social care, health, youth justice and safeguarding partners, and includes reference to the Prevent duty and mechanisms for early intervention and information sharing.

163. While current guidance and training, including those outlined above, support the identification and management of safeguarding risks, there is no single specialist framework specifically focused on identifying violence fixation, non-ideological extreme violence or pre-attack behaviours. Instead, these resources are designed to help practitioners recognise concerning behaviours and vulnerabilities, respond appropriately, and access support through established safeguarding, public protection and multi-agency referral pathways where concerns arise.

The Effectiveness of Current Laws and Systems

164. The Welsh statutory framework as outlined in this statement provides comprehensive mechanisms for protecting children who are at risk of being harmed. Under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 the duty to report children at risk, the requirement for risk assessments in family proceedings, the establishment of Safeguarding Children Boards with prevention objectives, and the provision of preventative services all

contribute to a system designed to safeguard vulnerable children. Multi-agency working is embedded throughout the framework, with cooperation required between local authorities, police, health boards, education providers, and other relevant partners.

165. However, when considering the specific question of whether the framework adequately supports the identification, monitoring and management of VFIs, several observations can be made.

a. First, the definition of children "at risk" in the 2014 Act refers to children who are experiencing or at risk of abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm. This formulation is focused on children as potential victims rather than potential perpetrators of harm.
b. Second, although preventative services must include purposes such as encouraging children not to commit criminal offences and reducing the need for criminal proceedings against children, the statutory provisions do not specifically address how children who may present a risk of serious violence are to be identified before any offending behaviour has occurred.
c. Third, the risk assessment provisions under section 16A of the Children Act 1989 apply when an officer is given cause to suspect that a child is at risk of harm, with the assessment being of the risk of harm being suffered by the child. This again reflects a focus on the child as potential victim rather than as potential source of risk to others.

166. The objectives of Regional Safeguarding Boards as set out in statute do include both protecting children who are at risk and preventing children from becoming at risk. This preventative objective could encompass efforts to prevent children from developing behaviours that pose risks to others. Similarly, the broader preventative services framework, with its emphasis on not waiting until crisis point and on encouraging children not to commit criminal offences, provides a potential foundation for early intervention with children who may be at risk of violent behaviour. However, the statutory provisions do not establish specific mechanisms or criteria for identifying such children in advance of harmful conduct.

167. More broadly, the existing legislative and service framework in Wales has been developed principally around the identification and protection of children who are vulnerable, at risk of harm, or in need of care and support. Whilst elements of that framework may be utilised where a child or young person presents concerning behaviours or risks to others, there is no equivalent, clearly defined statutory or operational framework focused specifically on the identification, assessment and management of children who may present a serious risk of violence prior to the commission of an offence. Existing arrangements

therefore rely on the ability of agencies to recognise risk through safeguarding, education, health, social care, youth offending or policing pathways and to respond through established multi-agency mechanisms.

168. A further consideration is that responsibility for the services most likely to identify early indicators of concern in children and young people, including health, mental health, social care, education and safeguarding, is largely devolved in Wales. By contrast, responsibility for policing, criminal justice, youth justice, counter-terrorism and wider public protection frameworks remains largely reserved to the UK Government. While there are established arrangements for partnership working and information sharing across these sectors, the division of responsibilities can create practical challenges where concerns do not fit neatly within either a welfare-based safeguarding response or a criminal justice/public protection response. This may be particularly relevant in circumstances where a child or young person displays behaviours suggestive of escalating risks of serious violence but has not committed a criminal offence, does not meet statutory thresholds for compulsory intervention, and does not present with a diagnosable mental disorder requiring specialist treatment.

169. In that respect, the Inquiry may wish to consider whether existing legislation, policy and operational arrangements across England and Wales provide sufficient clarity regarding the identification, assessment and management of children and young people who may present a risk of serious violence before harm occurs, and whether additional guidance, assessment frameworks, multi-agency pathways or information-sharing arrangements would assist public services in responding consistently and proportionately to such concerns.

Improvements

170. I have reviewed the recommendations set out in the statement of Jacqueline Totterdell, Director General Health Care and Prevention and Chief Executive NHS Wales. In my capacity as Permanent Secretary, with overall responsibility for ensuring the effective development, implementation and governance of Welsh Government policy across all portfolios, including health and social care, I support and endorse those recommendations.

171. In particular, I support the need to strengthen prevention and early intervention; enhance multi-agency safeguarding and risk-management arrangements; improve the identification and management of emerging violence-related risks, particularly among

children and young people; ensure that responses are evidence-based and avoid unnecessary stigma; and develop a stronger understanding of individuals who may be fixated on violence and the risks they may pose.

Other Matters

172. These issues cut across a range of policy areas, including health, social care, safeguarding, education, community safety and children's services. Effective prevention and risk reduction will therefore depend on strong partnership working and information sharing across agencies and sectors.

173. A proportionate and evidence-based approach to identifying and responding to risks of serious violence remains essential. While the early identification of risk factors is important, care must be taken to avoid stigmatising individuals experiencing mental ill health, neurodevelopmental conditions, trauma or other vulnerabilities, recognising that serious violence is often influenced by a complex interplay of factors.

174. The Inquiry may wish to consider how its recommendations can build on and strengthen existing multi-agency arrangements for identifying vulnerability, managing risk, and supporting individuals and families, while maintaining a strong focus on prevention, early intervention and safeguarding.

175. The Welsh Government remains committed to working with partners across Wales and the UK to consider the Inquiry's findings and any lessons arising from them, with the shared objective of strengthening the protection of children, young people and communities. In doing so, I recognise the profound and lasting impact of the Southport tragedy on the families of those who lost their lives, those who were injured, and the wider community. The Welsh Government welcomes the important work of the Inquiry and is committed to reflecting carefully on its findings and any relevant lessons for policy and practice in Wales.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings many brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed:

SIGNATURE

Dated: 2nd September 2026

ANNEX 1: Index to the Witness Statement of Andrew Goodall

Exhibit No.	Inquiry reference No.	Document description
1	NHSW000007	Youth Justice Prevention Framework
2	**NHSW000034**	Guidance on inappropriate illegal and offensive content online
3	**NHSW000045**	Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales
4	NHSW000002	Guidance on accessing the Wales Safeguarding Repository
5	WGOV000010	Wales Safeguarding Procedures
6	**NHSW000032**	Wales Violence Prevention Unit guidance on implementing the Serious Violence Duty
7	**HOM000014**	Prevent duty guidance
8	WGOV000011	Keeping Learners Safe
9	WGOV000005	Behaviour Management guidance for primary schools
10	WGOV000006	Behaviour Management guidance for secondary schools
11	WGOV000001	Guidance on exclusion from schools and pupil referral units
12	WGOV000004	Attendance guidance
13	WGOV000008	Respect and Resilience: Developing Community Cohesion (2016)
14	WGOV000007	Estyn's 2020 thematic review
15	WGOV000012	All Wales Prevent Referral Form
16	WGOV000009	Safe and effective intervention and use of reasonable force and searching for weapons.
17	WGOV000002	Developing Family Engagement in Community Focused Schools
18	WGOV000003	Developing Multi-Agency Engagement in Community Focused Schools