

<p>1 Monday, 28 September 2020 2 (10.30 am) 3 THE CHAIR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Day 6 of 4 this public hearing. Ms Benfield? 5 MS BENFIELD: Chair, thank you, good morning. Chair, we 6 will hear now from Vikki McKenna of Catch22. 7 MS VIKKI McKENNA (affirmed) 8 Examination by MS BENFIELD 9 MS BENFIELD: Ms McKenna, you have provided a five-page 10 witness statement to the inquiry, INQ004924. Is that 11 statement true, to the best of your knowledge and 12 belief? 13 A. It is, yes. 14 Q. Thank you. Chair, I would like to formally adduce the 15 entirety of the witness's statement so that the 16 statement is published in full. 17 Ms McKenna, the chair and panel have a copy of your 18 statement. It will be published on the inquiry's 19 website. I don't intend to go through it line by line, 20 but I will take you to particular topics and ask some 21 questions related to those topics. 22 I propose broadly to follow the order of the topics 23 list that you have been provided, but I may not touch on 24 every issue. 25 You have been provided with a hearing bundle.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 1</p>	<p>1 Please, if at any time you wish to refer to it, do feel 2 free. If you have any difficulties seeing or hearing me 3 or anyone else, please just let us know. 4 Ms McKenna, you have been informed about the 5 restriction order that's in place, in relation to the 6 child-specific material in particular, and I just ask 7 you to bear that in mind if we come on to any of 8 the child-specific cases in question. 9 I intend to go from now until about 11.30 am, but if 10 you need a break before that time, please just let us 11 know. 12 Could I ask you to confirm your professional title 13 at Catch22? 14 A. Yes. I'm senior service coordinator. 15 Q. How long have you been in that role? 16 A. I've been in this particular role for about five years. 17 Q. Before that, can you briefly summarise for the chair and 18 panel your professional experience? 19 A. Yes. I've been employed with Catch22 now for the past 20 12 years, working with children and families in all of 21 that time. I hold relevant qualifications to enable me 22 to do this role. 23 Q. Thank you very much. As we understand it, Catch22 is 24 a registered charity and runs a pan-Merseyside child 25 exploitation service with local services in St Helens</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 2</p>
<p>1 and Wirral and Knowsley; is that correct? 2 A. It is, yes. 3 Q. If I could just bring up your statement, please, Danny, 4 INQ004924_001. If I could ask you to scroll in to 5 paragraph 2 specifically. I will just summarise what's 6 said there in your statement, firstly, that Catch22 has 7 been commissioned in St Helens since October 2015, 8 delivering missing from home and care and also child 9 exploitation services to young people. 10 You go on, within that paragraph, to explain that 11 caseworkers will often complete Return Home Interviews 12 to every child who's reported missing to 13 Merseyside Police, and that includes children who are 14 looked after or living at home. 15 Just to summarise, at the end of that paragraph you 16 say Catch22 receives referrals from MACE and for young 17 people who are at risk or involved in child exploitation 18 and, in addition, delivers training to multi-agency 19 professionals throughout the year. Is that correct? 20 A. Yes, it is, yes. 21 Q. Thank you very much. I won't bring it up on the screen, 22 but you have provided the inquiry with Catch22's annual 23 report for 2018/19, which is at STH001215_003. In that, 24 there is a table that provides the structure for the 25 St Helens Missing and Exploitation Service, which states</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 3</p>	<p>1 that there is a senior services coordinator -- I assume 2 yourself -- a missing from home case worker, two 3 part-time child exploitation case workers and 4 a pan-Merseyside service administrator. Is that still 5 a correct reflection of the staffing of your service? 6 A. No. There's been a slight change. There's myself, 7 that's still in post, and I now have underneath me 8 a service coordinator, that solely manages staff within 9 St Helens and Knowsley. 10 Q. Do you still have a single missing from home case worker 11 or is there an additional post? 12 A. No, just the one. 13 Q. From your annual report -- again, no need to bring it 14 up, but the same reference, STH001215_010-011 -- it is 15 recorded that Catch22, in addition, conducts group work 16 with children, including in schools and with parents, 17 around child sexual exploitation. Is that correct? 18 A. Yes, it is, yes. 19 Q. Can you tell us anything more about this area of 20 Catch22's work or why you think such group work is 21 important? 22 A. In terms of us doing group work, we may go in to 23 alternative education providers and deliver some 24 awareness-raising sessions to young people. Sometimes 25 young people don't like to be singled out and do work on</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 4</p>

<p>1 a one-to-one basis, they may prefer to do it in a group. 2 So we will do that. 3 It could be, if a school contacts us and asks us to 4 do an awareness-raising assembly, then we will go in and 5 deliver that as well. 6 Q. Thank you. Finally, in relation to the services you 7 provide in St Helens, you say in your statement -- 8 INQ004924_002, paragraph 5(a) -- that you also provide 9 support both pre and post court hearings. Can 10 I clarify, is that a service available only to children 11 or also to adults who were victims of sexual 12 exploitation when they were children? 13 A. We have not been providing support for adults who have 14 been victims of exploitation. We do provide support for 15 young people and their families if they are going 16 through an investigation, it goes to court and post 17 court as well. 18 Q. Are you able to give the chair and panel an idea, for 19 example, in the last three years, of how many children 20 you've supported in relation to court or investigation? 21 A. Off the top of my head, I couldn't give a specific 22 number. The majority of our cases have police 23 investigations running alongside. Some do get to court, 24 some don't. I can think of one particular case where 25 we've supported the young person in taking them to</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 5</p>	<p>1 court, showing them around the courtroom. We have taken 2 young people shopping to get clothes for the particular 3 day so they feel confident in themselves. And we have 4 supported family members as well. I think during the 5 court case and the verdict, I think after as well, 6 parents quite often sit back and think, "Wow", and it 7 kind of hits them then, so we will offer that support. 8 Q. Can you help us with any issues, either in relation to 9 St Helens or in your experience more generally, that you 10 have observed as being particularly relevant to children 11 going through court hearings, what kind of issues in 12 particular do they encounter? 13 A. I've been on a case not specifically related to 14 St Helens, but another local authority area, where we 15 supported a number of children in giving evidence in 16 court. I think, you know, the cross-referencing of 17 the witness, the victim, isn't always great for them. 18 It's just supporting them and telling them step by step 19 what is going to happen. Timescales. You know, we've 20 supported young people where they have been scheduled to 21 give evidence at a specific date and time, but actually 22 things have overrun and they have been waiting around 23 all day. And they're called back again, and that's not 24 always helpful for a victim. 25 Q. I understand. Thank you. Ms McKenna, the first theme</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 6</p>
<p>1 that you were asked to comment on that's being 2 considered by the inquiry is that of disruption. You 3 say in your statement -- again, _002 and 4 paragraph 5(b) -- that Catch22 is located with St Helens 5 MASH alongside officers from Merseyside Police. You go 6 on to say that, after conducting Return Home Interviews, 7 relevant intelligence is submitted to the police. 8 There are, of course, a number of reasons why 9 collecting data on CSE is important. Firstly, to inform 10 profiling of the nature and scale of the problem; and 11 also collecting intelligence to disrupt and protect 12 children. 13 Would it be fair to say, from the material before 14 the inquiry, that there is a potential issue in relation 15 to the consistency, maybe, of data recording in 16 St Helens? 17 A. In terms of -- do you mean for missing data or for data 18 for perpetrators? 19 Q. Generally. I think missing as a facet, but also 20 a general system of how data is collected and shared 21 within the area. Do you think (overspeaking) -- 22 A. Part of my role across Merseyside is working with local 23 authorities to ensure that our data is starting to match 24 in particular with missing, and that's to ensure that 25 the local authority and ourselves match so that we can</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 7</p>	<p>1 be confident that every child is getting a Return Home 2 Interview, what they're entitled to. Our data will 3 probably never match police because they record all 4 missings and adults as well, obviously -- we only go up 5 to the age of 18 -- but we have started that within 6 St Helens, and it's working well. 7 Q. You have provided us with some recent contact management 8 meeting notes. I won't bring them up, but for the 9 record the reference is STH001233, dated 10 13 February 2020. Within that, at page _003 it is noted 11 that valuable intelligence gained from Return Home 12 Interviews had led to several arrests. Is that 13 something that you can provide us with any more 14 information on? 15 A. Yes. That was in particular linked to a young person 16 who had been reported missing within St Helens and had 17 been assaulted and suffered a stab wound. The young 18 person, when we went up to see him, gave us information 19 that we were able to submit, which led the police to 20 investigate further and make an arrest. 21 Q. Do you think, in general, that, where intelligence is 22 provided by you to the police, it's appropriately acted 23 on? 24 A. Yes. Certainly it's -- every morning, we have a morning 25 briefing, which consists of all the agencies within the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 8</p>

<p>1 MASH, so we have ourselves, police, social care, 2 et cetera, and we know that intelligence has come 3 through because it can be mentioned, it's already 4 possibly -- we may not necessarily know what they have 5 done with that intelligence, but we know that it's come 6 through the correct systems. 7 Q. Our second theme is empathy and concern for child 8 victims, and I wanted to again bring up your statement, 9 please, INQ004924_002, which is your paragraph 5(c). 10 You note at the bottom of that paragraph, starting "In 11 terms of poor practice": 12 "... victim-blaming language continues to be used on 13 the referrals as they are referring to young people as 14 'putting themselves at risk' ..." 15 You go on to say: 16 "Professionals are dismissing signs and indicators 17 of child sexual exploitation as 'just normal teenage 18 behaviour'. 19 You say in that paragraph that this language 20 continues to be used. I wondered, are these recent 21 examples you have seen of victim-blaming language? 22 A. This was around the time that I completed this witness 23 statement. This is not just St Helens, this is across 24 the board, and something that Catch22 will challenge 25 professionals on. It certainly doesn't help the young</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 9</p>	<p>1 person if the case does get to court. You know, it's 2 very much we need to recognise them as victims and we 3 need to clearly identify the risk that is posed to them. 4 Where it says "girlfriend/boyfriend", what we need to be 5 saying is "adult of concern". It's the way it's 6 written, really. "Normal teenage behaviour" -- well, 7 it's not. We need to identify the risks that are posed 8 to that young person and the adults around. 9 Q. Are you able to help us with how often you see 10 victim-blaming language used in St Helens specifically? 11 I appreciate it may be difficult to distinguish from the 12 other Merseyside services that you support. 13 A. I couldn't off the top of my head, no, because obviously 14 I don't -- I have a service coordinator who sits every 15 morning within briefings, et cetera, and takes the 16 referrals, so I couldn't answer that, sorry. 17 Q. Just finally on this point, are you aware of what 18 policies or procedures are in place in St Helens to deal 19 with victim-blaming language when it occurs? 20 A. Yes. Catch22 will often, first and foremost, speak to 21 that professional to challenge accordingly and, if that 22 continues, then we will link in with the relevant 23 manager of that professional, and we also link in with 24 our commissioner as well. 25 Q. Just finally on concern for victims, if I could again</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 10</p>
<p>1 bring up your statement, Danny, INQ004924_002, within 2 your paragraph 5(d) at the bottom you start by saying, 3 just a few lines up from the end: 4 "Young people who are 16-17 tend to be overlooked, 5 plans are put in place but there seems to be an apathy 6 that intervention is too late." 7 Could I ask you firstly just to explain to us, 8 apathy by whom? Who are you referring to there, when 9 you refer to "apathy"? 10 A. I think in terms of various agencies. There is no 11 particular one agency. But I think, you know, 16- to 12 17-year-olds, 16- to 18-year-olds across the country, 13 they're deemed to be legal to engage in sexual 14 intercourse, they're deemed legal -- they can live on 15 their own. You know, so it's -- they're probably our 16 most riskiest cohort of young people that we are working 17 with. So it's just about making sure that, from 18 Catch22, all agencies are aware that they need support 19 as well, in terms of supporting our 16- to 18-year-olds. 20 Q. Do you have any observations from your experiences as to 21 how that group, so 16- to 18-year-olds, can be better 22 supported? What could local authorities be doing better 23 within that age group? 24 A. In terms of -- we -- this is more of a national -- we 25 have discussed it in the pan-Merseyside strategic MACE,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 11</p>	<p>1 so in terms of our semi-independent providers, they're 2 not Ofsted governed, so more often than not, they're not 3 reported as missing. So we don't know if they're out of 4 borough, what risks are being posed. So it's working 5 with the other local authorities across Merseyside and 6 with police to ensure that, you know, our 7 semi-Independent placements have more stringent, 8 I suppose, guidance put around them in terms of getting 9 them supported to live on their own and they have got 10 the relevant skills and knowledge to go -- you know, to 11 go into adulthood, really. But, more often than not, we 12 don't know because they're never reported missing 13 because technically they're not. They're not a care 14 home. 15 Q. I understand. Thank you very much. I want to move now 16 to look at our third theme, which is risk assessments 17 and protection from harm. Could I just clarify, within 18 St Helens, is it the local authority social workers who 19 conduct risk assessments that are then communicated to 20 you, or do your staff risk assess? 21 A. We will risk assess as well once we receive that 22 referral. More often than not, social workers, when 23 they refer in to us, the child has a child exploitation 24 tool, which was previously called a risk assessment, so 25 we have all the areas of risk identified, that's</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 12</p>

1 a multi-agency tool. So that's there to give us a full
 2 background of the risks that's posed to that young
 3 person. But we do our own as well, in terms of, we will
 4 start doing, like, what we call an Outcomes Star and we
 5 will assess where that child is.

6 Q. Would you be provided with local authority risk
 7 assessments whether someone was coming to you for
 8 a Return Home Interview or on one-to-one CSE support?

9 A. We receive them for one-to-one direct work for
 10 exploitation work. In terms of missing incidents, we
 11 receive them straight from the police, from their
 12 COMPACT system and any risk that's been identified,
 13 either through the caller making the call to the police,
 14 to any police information they may have on their system,
 15 not necessarily a risk assessment.

16 Q. I understand, thank you. Generally, in terms of
 17 the risk assessments that you have seen from St Helens,
 18 do you consider that they're accurate and comprehensive?

19 A. I don't see an awful lot of risk assessments, due to the
 20 nature of my role; I'm right across. But, yes,
 21 I suppose -- I couldn't really answer that question,
 22 because I don't see them.

23 Q. Within your annual report -- and, again, there is no
 24 need to bring it up, it is just to flag it for the
 25 transcript -- it's at STH001215_009, it records that

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1 that direct work.

2 In terms of the preventative work, yes, we would
 3 love to do more of the preventative work because then
 4 that would obviously stop them from being medium and
 5 high risk.

6 What happens now is, within morning briefings, all
 7 relevant child exploitation referrals that come in are
 8 discussed, and it might be that, you know, there's
 9 a learning mentor in school who's got a trusted
 10 relationship with that child, so it may be that we may
 11 be actioned then to provide some resources to that
 12 learning mentor so they could do that work with that
 13 child.

14 But we currently work with medium- and high-risk
 15 cases and, more often than not, we have that engagement
 16 with young people as well.

17 Q. You go on, in relation to risk assessment, in your
 18 statement at paragraph 5(d) to say that Catch22 attends
 19 four-weekly reviews for young people who are involved
 20 in, or at risk of, child sexual exploitation. You go on
 21 to say that some cases are being downgraded in terms of
 22 risk due to there not being enough information.

23 Do I understand that correctly, that you mean that
 24 there is, on occasion, insufficient information to
 25 inform risk assessments?

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1 there were 46 young people who were supported over the
 2 2018-19 period by your one-to-one direct work. Do you
 3 know how many in the 2019-20 period you have been
 4 supporting in one-to-one work specifically?

5 A. Currently, we have 28 open cases. That's with our
 6 staff -- our two part-time case workers. We also take
 7 on social work students and offer them 70- or 100-day
 8 placements, so they take on a caseload as well.

9 Another part of our contract is we are commissioned
 10 by the Police and Crime Commissioner of Merseyside, so
 11 that enables us to have an additional part-time case
 12 worker for St Helens, so currently we have 28 open
 13 cases. It will have been more, but we will have closed
 14 some of those.

15 Q. You say in your statement at INQ004924_001, paragraph 3,
 16 in relation to one-to-one work, that you are only able
 17 to accept referrals who have been deemed medium or high
 18 risk so that young people who need preventative work are
 19 potentially being missed. Could you describe that in
 20 a bit more detail to the chair and panel?

21 A. Yes. So quite a number of years ago when MACE was being
 22 set up across Merseyside, it was agreed by commissioners
 23 that we would accept referrals only from MACE, or if
 24 a high-risk case has gone straight into social care
 25 (interference) accept it would be fair of them to start

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1 A. There are at times, yes, and that's across the board.
 2 I think if Catch22 believe that the risk is still there,
 3 then they would challenge, whether that be at a child
 4 exploitation risk assessment meeting, whether that be
 5 a child protection conference, a core group meeting, you
 6 know, we will challenge that, really, if we believe
 7 agencies should still be involved.

8 Q. Can you think of an occasion where you have felt the
 9 need to challenge that, and describe to us what the
 10 response was from the local authority to a challenge?

11 A. Yes. So going into my statement, item number 4, we
 12 received a referral for two siblings where there were
 13 significant concerns around sexual exploitation. The
 14 family and young people were not engaging with Catch22
 15 at all. There was a number of adult males and there was
 16 an ongoing police investigation for a serious assault,
 17 and the males lived in close proximity to the young
 18 people.

19 We had to escalate this case via the escalation
 20 process within St Helens because we were hugely
 21 concerned, and once we'd done that, the case did
 22 progress to child protection and there was a different
 23 social worker allocated and, since then, the family have
 24 been engaging. Whilst the young people are not engaging
 25 with us, we are supporting one professional in terms of

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1 **resources and advice and guidance on what work to do**
 2 **with that young person because that's who they have the**
 3 **trusted relationship with.**
 4 Q. Just within that same paragraph, so, again,
 5 paragraph 5(d), you say that there isn't enough time for
 6 professionals to build a trusted relationship and, as
 7 I read it, that's in relation to the four-week periodic
 8 reviews. Can you explain that to us in a bit more
 9 detail in terms of the issues that present in forming
 10 a trusted relationship?
 11 **A. Yes. So we get a referral. I think Catch22 -- because**
 12 **we are a voluntary organisation, we have that time to**
 13 **invest in young people. So if a young person has been**
 14 **groomed, that groomer has done quite a good job, so we**
 15 **go out on one visit, or professionals go out, and say,**
 16 **"We have got these concerns", they are not going to**
 17 **listen to us after one visit. There are times when we**
 18 **go back and go back and we go back, and we build up that**
 19 **trusted relationship. So it might be that we don't do**
 20 **any work around exploitation for three/four months, but**
 21 **actually we have done work around self-esteem,**
 22 **confidence of that young person, building up that trust.**
 23 **We could do our work with mum/dad before so -- you know,**
 24 **I know one particular case, it's taken a young person**
 25 **six months to actually speak to the Catch22 worker. And**

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1 missing children more specifically, which is STH000843.
 2 It is minutes of a CARE operational group meeting from
 3 30 January 2018. Danny, if we could bring that up on
 4 screen at page_003. It is noted that the local
 5 authority's response to children going missing was
 6 reactive and not proactive.
 7 I wonder if you could help us with this -- sorry,
 8 Danny, if you could scroll in, it's the paragraph
 9 starting "JG asked the group to identify the key
 10 challenges", just a couple down under the heading
 11 "Action". Exactly. Thank you.
 12 Ms McKenna, sorry, just to summarise this, it was an
 13 observation that the response to children going missing
 14 is reactive rather than proactive and recorded that it
 15 was felt -- I think, "RH", referring to the meeting
 16 minutes notes, was the safeguarding coordinator, felt
 17 this was inevitable, given the workload pressures on
 18 Catch22 staff. I appreciate these are minute meeting
 19 notes from January 2018, but I just wanted to ask
 20 generally if you feel that is still the approach,
 21 namely, one that's reactive and not proactive, or
 22 whether things have changed?
 23 **A. In terms of that meeting, obviously I wasn't present at**
 24 **that meeting. I think, you know, in terms of**
 25 **the missing service, we receive a significant number of**

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1 **then, once they have got that trust, they start doing**
 2 **that work, they then start -- they start to recognise**
 3 **the signs of exploitation and the grooming signs.**
 4 Q. Can you help us, potentially in a general sense, as to
 5 what advantages you think there are in having
 6 independent CSE workers as opposed to that service being
 7 provided by the local authority? I suppose at least one
 8 option -- making it one option that's available to
 9 children who may be less trusting of local authority
 10 staff?
 11 **A. Yes, we do have that option. I suppose we can work**
 12 **outside of the box. We take young people out and about,**
 13 **we engage them in positive activities. We just have**
 14 **that time to invest. We understand we are not social**
 15 **care, so we don't have that statutory intervention. We**
 16 **are not the police, we don't have that uniform.**
 17 **I think the beauty with us conducting Return Home**
 18 **Interviews is, more often than not, once we get that**
 19 **police missing report, the young person will not speak**
 20 **to the police. But we can go out and we will get**
 21 **a wealth of information. So it's about making them**
 22 **realise it is not their fault, we are there to help them**
 23 **and guide them.**
 24 Q. Thank you very much. I wanted to just cite one document
 25 before going on to look at Return Home Interviews and

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1 **missing incidents throughout the year. I think working**
 2 **with commissioners as well, we have -- we have been**
 3 **instructed, I suppose, not to complete Return Home**
 4 **Interviews for young people who belong to another local**
 5 **authority. You know, so if we have got a child being**
 6 **placed in St Helens and they are reported missing, then**
 7 **Catch22 won't complete Return Home Interviews for that**
 8 **young person.**
 9 **In terms of that, we have been able to be able to**
 10 **pick up more direct work for our missing case worker.**
 11 **Obviously we have a timescale and we need -- government**
 12 **guidelines suggest we need to do the Return Home**
 13 **Interview within 72 hours, so it is a very, very**
 14 **fast-moving service, but we have the capacity to pick up**
 15 **some one-to-one work now to try to reduce those missing**
 16 **incidents.**
 17 Q. I understand. Thank you. Moving on to look at Return
 18 Home Interviews and missing from home generally, of
 19 course Catch22 has a specific role in conducting Return
 20 Home Interviews as you explain, and for all young people
 21 who are reported missing to Merseyside Police, and
 22 I think, as you have just said, and if I understand it
 23 correctly, it's for all children who reside in
 24 St Helens, whether looked after or missing from home,
 25 and also those placed within a 30-mile radius of

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1 St Helens. I think, Ms McKenna, as you just alluded to,
 2 as a general rule, children who are placed in St Helens
 3 by another local authority won't have a Return Home
 4 Interview unless that -- only the local authority, as it
 5 were, the managing local authority, pays for that
 6 service directly. Is that right?
 7 **A. Yes, that's correct.**
 8 Q. You have provided us with your annual report and also
 9 some quarterly statistics. Just for the transcript,
 10 STH001208. That gives us a sense of the scale of
 11 missing episodes in St Helens. In your experience, is
 12 there a fluctuation in missing episodes year on year, or
 13 is it reasonably stable in St Helens?
 14 **A. I think the last two years it's been fairly stable.**
 15 **Obviously with COVID, we did have a dip. When we were**
 16 **in lockdown, we did have a dip of missing incidents.**
 17 **But that is slowly increasing now. Off the top of my**
 18 **head, I can't -- without looking at the annual report,**
 19 **I think it's around about approximately 700 missing**
 20 **incidents a year.**
 21 Q. Can you help us with reasons why Return Home Interviews
 22 might not be completed or may be declined by children
 23 and young people? Are there particular themes that you
 24 see on why they might not be completed or accepted?
 25 **A. Yes. So for our quarterly reports and for our**

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1 **A. It may be that they're not happy with their care plan,**
 2 **it may be that they don't see themselves as missing. If**
 3 **you've got a 16-/17-year-old whose curfew is 10.00/10.30**
 4 **at night, they might not want to come in until 12.00,**
 5 **but, actually, that's the rules. So we would work with**
 6 **care home, with the social worker, to look at changing**
 7 **that care plan.**
 8 **I think that's mainly what it is. Sometimes they**
 9 **don't see themselves as missing. They just want to be**
 10 **like any other teenager.**
 11 Q. As you have alluded to, I think it was in 2018 that the
 12 procedure changed in St Helens, whereby local
 13 authorities placing the St Helens area were charged for
 14 Return Home Interviews. What has been the impact of
 15 that charging requirement on the number of Return Home
 16 Interviews completed?
 17 **A. In terms of impact to Catch22, obviously we don't**
 18 **conduct those Return Home Interviews for those children,**
 19 **so it has allowed us to concentrate on St Helens' young**
 20 **people and seeing them within 72 hours.**
 21 **I think responsible authorities, there's been a few**
 22 **cases where that authority has opted in to pay and we**
 23 **have conducted those. I think there's a number of care**
 24 **homes within the St Helens area, quite a large amount,**
 25 **so a lot of other local authorities will place their**

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1 **commissioners now, we have to provide a rationale as to**
 2 **why return interviews have been declined. It could be**
 3 **for -- more often than not, it is the young person**
 4 **declining or the parent and carer saying they weren't**
 5 **really missing, it was a misunderstanding. It could be**
 6 **that that child, if there are significant mental health**
 7 **concerns, they have been sectioned or they're actually**
 8 **in custody, then obviously we can't do those Return Home**
 9 **Interviews. And sometimes the young person is missing**
 10 **again. So it is about us catching up with them to do**
 11 **that Return Home Interview.**
 12 Q. Thank you. Have you identified, in relation to
 13 St Helens specifically, any particular issues around
 14 looked-after children going missing? Are there any
 15 patterns that you have identified?
 16 **A. The children looked after in St Helens I think mentioned**
 17 **within my report, there's a number of looked-after**
 18 **children who have repeat missing episodes, so one young**
 19 **person, for example, may create 70 missing incidents**
 20 **over the year and it's just trying to get out and engage**
 21 **that young person, really, or finding the best person to**
 22 **do that.**
 23 Q. Are there particular barriers? What is it about
 24 looked-after children specifically that's challenging,
 25 in terms of dealing with repeat missing episodes?

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1 **children there.**
 2 Q. Does it lead to a gap, potentially, in intelligence
 3 gathering if there is a cohort of children who are going
 4 missing but that information isn't being then processed
 5 through either your organisation or the police?
 6 **A. Yes, certainly, because, more often than not, a child is**
 7 **placed outside of their own local authority area because**
 8 **the risk posed to them is significant. So we don't know**
 9 **of that risk.**
 10 **They're mixing, obviously, with young people who**
 11 **live in St Helens, so we are missing a huge intelligence**
 12 **gap, in terms of protecting that young person and also,**
 13 **you know, St Helens' young people as well.**
 14 Q. What can better be done to remedy that? As you say,
 15 it's quite a large intelligence gap that potentially is
 16 quite significant.
 17 **A. I mean, I think in order for us to go back to that way**
 18 **of working, we couldn't do it with one case worker. The**
 19 **volume is just too great. So, ideally, in an ideal**
 20 **world, yes, we would need another worker to then be able**
 21 **to complete all of those, to link in with that then**
 22 **responsible authority, to identify that risks -- those**
 23 **risks. So, yeah, we could potentially do them, but in**
 24 **terms of capacity, we just haven't got the capacity to**
 25 **do it.**

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<p>1 Q. Just before moving on from looked-after children, again, 2 your CARE operational group minutes that I referred to 3 a moment ago from January 2018, which, for the 4 transcript, are STH000843. At internal page _005, it's 5 recorded that Catch22 have concerns about the selection 6 of placements for young people in St Helens and the 7 meeting minutes record that it was agreed to continue to 8 alert social workers to these concerns. I wonder, is 9 the suitability of placement an ongoing concern for 10 Catch22?</p> <p>11 A. I think it's a concern across the board. You know, if 12 we have got a child that's a victim of exploitation, the 13 concerns are quite high risk. Then we need to know and 14 fully understand the profile in and around that 15 particular setting. We need to understand what other 16 young people are placed there. Are the risks going to 17 be posed back and forth between the young person? 18 I think that's ongoing across, really. But where we do 19 know if they are looking to place a child and we do know 20 of another child in that care home setting, then we will 21 alert professionals. But I understand, you know, 22 it's -- commissioning have a difficult job in 23 identifying suitable placements.</p> <p>24 Q. Just to clarify, as a matter of course, if you were, as 25 Catch22, conducting direct work with a child or young</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 25</p>	<p>1 person, would you be consulted on placement?</p> <p>2 A. No.</p> <p>3 Q. Thank you. I want to move on to our final theme, which 4 is that of partnership working. In your view, what are 5 the main challenges or successes of partnership working 6 in St Helens?</p> <p>7 A. Currently, we have got a really good multi-agency 8 working agreement in place. We are all co-located. We 9 are able to share that information as and when it's 10 needed. We are able to do joint visits. You know, we 11 are able to broach with young people, you know, if they 12 would like to speak to the police, you know, they're not 13 going to come out in uniform. So we are able to broach 14 those bridges, really.</p> <p>15 We have a really good working relationship with 16 social work, with the newly formed complex and 17 contextual safeguarding team, and we have regular 18 catch-ups, we discuss cases. So I think for me it can 19 only get better. It wasn't always like that a few years 20 ago, but times change and things evolve. We have 21 obviously got the pan-Merseyside Child Exploitation 22 Protocol in place and we have got the Missing Protocol 23 in place as well, so that allows us to sort of embed 24 those good practices.</p> <p>25 Q. At the time you drafted your statement, you said at</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 26</p>
<p>1 internal page _003 that it was the very early days of 2 the complex safeguarding team. You mentioned the team 3 a moment ago. I just wondered if you had any additional 4 comments on the operation of the team, what's worked 5 well or where improvements could be identified?</p> <p>6 A. It is a newly formed team. It's since got a new team 7 manager who has only been in post I think about three 8 months. So it's very much working together. We discuss 9 lots of cases. My staff have been able to go out on 10 joint visits on certain cases, which has worked really 11 well. I have completely lost my train of thought.</p> <p>12 Q. My question was a long one. Dealing firstly with what's 13 worked and what could be improved, I think you've 14 probably dealt with the former, unless you have anything 15 to add, but are there any improvements that you could 16 identify moving forward?</p> <p>17 A. Not moving forward. I think obviously we have been hit 18 by COVID, so, you know, we are all placed virtually, 19 which does, I suppose, put a strain because we're not 20 able to just say to so and so sitting across the desk, 21 "Can you help me with this? What do you think about 22 this?", but we are starting to audit cases together. We 23 are auditing Return Home Interviews to ensure Catch22 24 have captured all of that information and intelligence 25 and risk, and then also what the local authority are</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 27</p>	<p>1 doing with that Return Home Interview information: is 2 the social worker incorporating that into their plan, 3 the child's plan? So it's working quite well currently.</p> <p>4 Q. In your statement at paragraph 3, but no need to bring 5 it up for the moment, within the St Helens area both 6 Barnardo's and CAMHS offer support around mental health 7 and counselling. We have been provided with a statement 8 from Amanda Naylor, whom the inquiry will hear from 9 later in the week, from Barnardo's. At BRD000275_008, 10 paragraph 28, she notes that there is a lack of access 11 to CAMHS. I wonder if this is something that you see in 12 St Helens? Is that an issue that you have encountered, 13 about a lack of access?</p> <p>14 A. Yes, certainly. There is lack of access. The waiting 15 list is approximately three/four months, and that could 16 be for the child just to be assessed. It doesn't 17 necessarily mean the child will be accepted for CAMHS 18 support. That's not just St Helens, that is across the 19 board.</p> <p>20 Q. How, in your experience, is that dealt with in terms of 21 supplementary services? Are Barnardo's able to assist 22 cases -- children who are particularly at risk that need 23 mental health support, or are there other organisations 24 that can assist in the shorter term while CAMHS are 25 pending?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 28</p>

<p>1 A. We link in with a lot of other organisations for mental 2 health. Childline do online support. We will signpost 3 them to certain agencies, we will print out leaflets. 4 Some link in with those local services. 5 Q. How important do you think it is to have a good working 6 relationship as a CSE service with health providers? 7 A. Extremely key. Children need that one-to-one support, 8 sometimes parents/carers do as well. I think for 9 a child that's been exploited, more often than not they 10 will self-harm. They very much see it is their fault, 11 their mental health declines, and they need that support 12 there and then to try and understand. 13 Q. In a similar way, what about education services? What 14 role do they play or how important is their role in 15 assisting children who are victims or at risk of CSE? 16 A. Again, really significant. Education settings, that's 17 the one constant for that child. It's the most stable 18 place they can be where they should feel safe. We have, 19 in the past, across Merseyside, challenged education 20 providers, where maybe they have excluded the child and 21 it is about looking at the bigger picture and what's 22 actually going on for that child if they are going 23 through exploitation. 24 Q. How effectively do you think that works in St Helens, to 25 bring together, for example, your service, the police,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 29</p>	<p>1 the council, education and health? Is it a good 2 partnership working arrangement? 3 A. Yes. We obviously -- in St Helens, they have 4 a multi-agency child exploitation group once a month, so 5 panel members within that all come together, and it 6 should be those panel members that are able to make 7 decisions for that child, so police, education, health, 8 probation, hospitals. There's various forms of health. 9 So it's about providing the best care for that 10 child. 11 Q. Is there anything that you can identify that could 12 improve partnership working in St Helens? 13 A. I can't think of anything off the top of -- no. I think 14 we just need to really work hard to maintain what we 15 have started at the beginning of the year. You know, 16 obviously we are all virtually linking in with one 17 another currently whilst we are working in the home, so 18 we need to try and get back together as a multi-agency 19 team. It's about understanding, as well, how police 20 work, how social care work, and ourselves, and 21 understanding each other's roles. 22 Q. Thank you very much. Ms McKenna, I haven't gone 23 specifically to any of the children's cases that were 24 identified in the topics list. Are there any comments 25 that you want to make on any of those children just</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 30</p>
<p>1 briefly to the chair and panel, either in terms of 2 the work that Catch22 has done to support or any 3 particular issues that those cases presented? 4 A. No, not at this -- no, sorry. 5 Q. That's fine. Are there any matters that I haven't 6 touched upon that you would like to draw to the chair 7 and panel's attention? 8 A. I can't think of anything, no. 9 MS BENFIELD: Thank you very much. Those are all of my 10 questions. The chair and panel may have some questions 11 for you. Thank you, chair. 12 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Benfield. I have a couple of 13 questions and then I will ask my colleagues, Ms McKenna, 14 if you don't mind. 15 Questions from THE PANEL 16 THE CHAIR: Following Return Home Interviews, possibly 17 plural, of course, if you were in a position to know 18 where a child or young person has been, who they were 19 with and what they were doing, and indeed, of course, 20 that child sexual exploitation could be present, what 21 would the police and Social Services do with that 22 information? 23 A. So we would obviously follow the normal safeguarding 24 procedures in referring that information through. If 25 the child wasn't open to social care, then we would</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 31</p>	<p>1 refer in. We would speak to the MASH team, relay our 2 concerns around exploitation and, once they have done 3 their MASH checks, then they may well call a strategy 4 meeting, if the risk was significant, or they will 5 incorporate our concerns within that child's plan. 6 THE CHAIR: Would that all happen quickly? 7 A. Yes. I mean, if we've got any concerns in relation -- 8 that's come from a Return Home Interview -- we have 9 daily briefings every morning, so we would share our 10 concerns there, and then the team manager sets tasks for 11 professionals throughout the day and then they're 12 followed up the morning after. 13 THE CHAIR: Thank you. My next question concerns your 14 comment about professionals being dismissive of 15 girlfriend/boyfriend relationships as being just normal 16 teenage behaviour. If that has come up in discussion, 17 do you find the professionals are willing to be explicit 18 in discussing the forms of abuse where this has been 19 reported which has a CSE element? I'm thinking, of 20 course, of sexual violence. It is surely not the case 21 that that would be dismissed as just normal teenage 22 behaviour? 23 A. No, no, it wouldn't. And, you know, we will challenge 24 professionals and we will point out the risks that are 25 posed and relay our concerns.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 32</p>

1 THE CHAIR: Could you give us any examples of what kind of
 2 attitude -- not by named persons, but professionals
 3 convey is just normal teenage behaviour? What kind of
 4 things?
 5 **A. So we've had cases not specifically to St Helens, but**
 6 **across Merseyside. We will have professionals referring**
 7 **to young people as "They're streetwise". Yes, "It's**
 8 **just normal teenage behaviour". "The child was dressing**
 9 **provocatively". So it's challenging those. Within our**
 10 **training, we do quite a big section on victim-blaming**
 11 **language, so we will share with professionals YouTube**
 12 **videos, we give them a case scenario, a poor**
 13 **description, case file recordings of a professional, how**
 14 **they have described a child, and then how it should be**
 15 **written, and give professionals examples of what to use**
 16 **instead.**
 17 THE CHAIR: That's helpful, but, really, the point surely is
 18 what underlies language such as they're commenting on
 19 the child's form of dress? It's not just about the
 20 words.
 21 **A. Yes. So, you know, if that's come from a carer or**
 22 **a professional, we will link in with their supervising**
 23 **social worker and relay our concerns, really.**
 24 THE CHAIR: Do you think there is any tendency to underplay
 25 violence within possible CSE?

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1 **they're just referring to as "just normal teenage**
 2 **behaviour". I mean, that was an example that we have**
 3 **seen in the past.**
 4 THE CHAIR: Yes, indeed. It is a familiar one. Thank you
 5 very much. Ms Sharpling?
 6 MS SHARPLING: Thank you, chair. Can I touch on a question
 7 that you asked about sexual violence.
 8 Ms McKenna, you mentioned a young person that your
 9 organisation helped who had suffered a stab wound and
 10 you were able to inform the police. Are you able to say
 11 how much violence features in your Return to Home
 12 Interviews with children and young people?
 13 **A. I think now, with criminal exploitation, it's quite**
 14 **significant, the level of threats that young people, if**
 15 **they are being exploited and (inaudible), the level of**
 16 **threat is quite high. So obviously they find it**
 17 **difficult to come away from that.**
 18 MS SHARPLING: Are you able to say, albeit roughly, how many
 19 Return to Home Interviews in the last year, for example,
 20 featured violence, when discussing where the child had
 21 been and what the child had done?
 22 **A. I think, over the last year, we've seen an increase in**
 23 **violence towards parents of children who are being**
 24 **exploited. That's a theme we have seen across all of**
 25 **our missing from home services.**

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1 **A. No. I think, you know, Catch22 is certainly aware of**
 2 **the possible risks of the threats posed to that young**
 3 **person and the family, and we will always take that into**
 4 **consideration. We will relay any concerns that we have.**
 5 **If we have had any disclosures of threat, violence,**
 6 **et cetera, then we will share that with police and**
 7 **social care.**
 8 THE CHAIR: I wasn't thinking of yourself. I was thinking
 9 of the comments made by professionals, when you say that
 10 they're dismissive of certain forms of behaviour. Where
 11 is the threshold?
 12 **A. Sorry, can you explain? Sorry, I'm not understanding.**
 13 THE CHAIR: What would be the thresholds that professionals
 14 would apply to describe some things as just normal
 15 teenage behaviour and others as posing a very serious
 16 threat?
 17 **A. I would imagine that the correct agency would understand**
 18 **the level of threat and would take the necessary action.**
 19 THE CHAIR: I'm really concerned about the use of the words
 20 "just normal teenage behaviour" and whether that masks
 21 real threat.
 22 **A. I don't think I could answer that. Obviously, if the**
 23 **child is open to us for exploitation, then we would**
 24 **challenge those words so the concerns for the child were**
 25 **made known, but I couldn't comment on other cases, if**

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1 MS SHARPLING: What sort of violence towards parents are we
 2 talking about here?
 3 **A. Verbal abuse, physical abuse, and that sort of -- that**
 4 **violence.**
 5 MS SHARPLING: Is that reported to the police immediately
 6 when you hear such an account?
 7 **A. We advise parents to report. More often than not, we**
 8 **will get the police information before we have seen the**
 9 **child. That may come from the morning brief**
 10 **discussions. But, yes, professionals are aware. But**
 11 **more often than not, parents will not want to involve**
 12 **the police.**
 13 MS SHARPLING: Do you have any personal experience of
 14 parents not wanting to involve the police; experiences
 15 of staff who have reported that to you?
 16 **A. Yes, yes. It's -- I think, over the last year, it's**
 17 **probably increasing, yes.**
 18 MS SHARPLING: Thank you. One final question: presumably,
 19 a number of Return Home Interviews are done in relation
 20 to the same children. You have a number of repeat young
 21 people who regularly go missing from home. When sexual
 22 exploitation is involved, do you get any feedback from
 23 the police or other agencies when the second interview
 24 takes place or the third interview takes place, of what
 25 they have done and what is going on?

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1 **A. If we have concerns, more often than not we would link**
 2 **in anyway with the agencies that are involved. We**
 3 **share, obviously, our information with the allocated**
 4 **social worker and the police anyway. We discuss it in**
 5 **briefings. If there are any actions set, then they**
 6 **would be followed up the following morning to make sure**
 7 **that --**
 8 MS SHARPLING: What I'm concerned to understand better is
 9 whether the actions taken by the other agencies, when
 10 the matter is first reported to them, whether anything
 11 has been done by the time you conduct the second
 12 interview or the third interview or the fourth
 13 interview, or are you on a cycle of repeat interviews
 14 and missing from home where the child is left, as it
 15 were, in limbo?
 16 **A. We wouldn't necessarily get daily updates, I suppose,**
 17 **from police because that's not -- they're busy enough,**
 18 **but we do have a good understanding, I suppose, of what**
 19 **school are doing, what social care are doing, and they**
 20 **will also link in with us as well, either before we have**
 21 **seen that child or after.**
 22 MS SHARPLING: Thank you very much.
 23 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Frank?
 24 MR FRANK: No, thank you.
 25 THE CHAIR: Sir Malcolm?

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1 **terms of our young people who are being groomed, it's**
 2 **quite an issue, I suppose, for our young people. So in**
 3 **terms of sexual violence and criminal exploitation, yes,**
 4 **you know, we are seeing that with young people.**
 5 **Within our -- when we report on themes, trends,**
 6 **et cetera, we have meetings with senior managers quite**
 7 **regularly, so any actions are set. It may not be for us**
 8 **to deliver any disruption or intervention, it could be**
 9 **for other agencies, but that will happen.**
 10 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: What form of -- you mention this is
 11 networks based around criminal activity. Are there any
 12 other sort of networks which seem to be involved in
 13 exploiting or is it all based on criminal organisations
 14 or criminal activities? Is it organised? Is it ad hoc?
 15 Is it local? You mentioned county lines. All of them?
 16 **A. It's probably all of them. It incorporates online**
 17 **exploitation, it incorporates sexual exploitation. It**
 18 **covers them all. We'll not just get one on their own.**
 19 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: My final question, then: to what
 20 extent, then, does that form part of -- where does that
 21 element of this sit in terms of the institutional
 22 response? Is it centred on the criminal behaviour, is
 23 it centred on the victim, is it centred on the fact that
 24 this is sexual exploitation or exploitation in general?
 25 **A. I think, within St Helens local authority, obviously we**

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1 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: Yes, if I may just ask a general
 2 question. Based on your experience through your work,
 3 to what extent has the indicators of child sexual abuse
 4 that you may have encountered been linked to organised
 5 networks, which of course is one of the focuses of this
 6 investigation, and what forms might such networks take?
 7 **A. In terms of the forms, we are looking at -- are you**
 8 **specifically asking for models of exploitation?**
 9 **Criminal?**
 10 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: I'm asking for your experience,
 11 because networks will come in many different forms, and
 12 a little insight into your experience of the different
 13 forms you have run into in your work and, indeed,
 14 whether those different forms have been responded to in
 15 your experience in appropriate ways, given the
 16 differences between them? That's where we were going,
 17 so it's all on the table now.
 18 **A. So in terms of criminal exploitation, yes, obviously the**
 19 **network by organised crime groups is significant, and**
 20 **that's up and down the country. Certainly within our --**
 21 **if we identify --**
 22 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: Could I just say, what do you mean
 23 by "significant" here?
 24 **A. Merseyside, obviously, is quite a big exporter of county**
 25 **lines, along with Manchester, the Met, Birmingham, so in**

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1 **have our police colleagues who sit with us and alongside**
 2 **social care, so their main focus is safeguarding that**
 3 **child. There are other, obviously, departments within**
 4 **Merseyside Police that will look at tackling offenders,**
 5 **so the intelligence service, you know, there are lots of**
 6 **days of activity that the police will put on and they'll**
 7 **target transport networks, and they've obviously**
 8 **received extra funding from the Home Office.**
 9 **So they will go to certain train stations, they will**
 10 **stop vehicles coming in and out on the motorways, so**
 11 **they're very much focused on targeting the perpetrators.**
 12 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: Thanks very much indeed.
 13 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms McKenna. We have no further
 14 questions.
 15 We will now take a break and return at 11.55 am.
 16 Thank you.
 17 (The witness withdrew)
 18 (11.38 am)
 19 (A short break)
 20 (11.55 am)
 21 MS HILL: Good morning, chair. Our next witness, please, is
 22 Jim Leivers.
 23 MR JIM LEIVERS (affirmed)
 24
 25

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1 Examination by MS HILL
 2 MS HILL: Thank you very much, indeed, Mr Leivers. You are
 3 Jim Leivers. Is that right? Your current position is
 4 interim Director of Children's Services for St Helens
 5 Borough Council; is that correct?
 6 **A. Yes.**
 7 Q. You were appointed in March 2020 with responsibility for
 8 delivering children's social care, integrated
 9 safeguarding and education services; is that right?
 10 **A. That's correct.**
 11 Q. Just give us a little bit of information, please, about
 12 your background?
 13 **A. I have worked in social care all of my career. For the**
 14 **last 25 years, I have been either a director of**
 15 **children's services, a director of Social Services or**
 16 **a chief executive of the local authority. My previous**
 17 **authorities, for the purposes of this inquiry, which are**
 18 **relevant would be Oxfordshire.**
 19 Q. Thank you. I should have indicated at the beginning,
 20 Mr Leivers, if you can't see or hear me, please let me
 21 know. If you don't follow the question, again, please
 22 ask. I should also have reminded you of the need to
 23 respect the restriction orders you know are in place for
 24 the witnesses and for the children, in particular, as
 25 well.

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1 Q. Can you tell us, then, how your role and her role now
 2 fit together?
 3 **A. Those roles are very different. When Sarah O'Brien was**
 4 **actually responsible for children's services, she was**
 5 **a strategic director responsible for the whole of**
 6 **people's services, which would include adult social care**
 7 **and would also include public health.**
 8 **A decision was taken in December 2019 that that role**
 9 **needed to be split, so that we could afford greater**
 10 **emphasis and opportunity within children's services.**
 11 **She is my peer and colleague within St Helens at the**
 12 **moment. She continues to manage adult services. I have**
 13 **responsibility for children's services in all of its**
 14 **regards across the council's duties and**
 15 **responsibilities.**
 16 Q. Can you help us with when she took up the position in
 17 relation to the Safeguarding Children's Partnership?
 18 **A. No, I can't. I don't know that. I think it was 2018,**
 19 **actually.**
 20 Q. If it helps you, we can perhaps just bring up, please,
 21 INQ004944_001 and scroll in, please, on the first
 22 substantive paragraph. It says, "My current position".
 23 It looks there, Mr Leivers, as if, when
 24 Professor O'Brien gave this witness statement to the
 25 inquiry, which was 5 February of this year, she was at

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1 Can I ask, also, for you to confirm this: you are
 2 providing evidence to effectively give quite a bit of
 3 recent information, but you are also adopting the
 4 evidence provided by a colleague of yours,
 5 Professor Sarah O'Brien, and giving some evidence that
 6 is otherwise found in her witness statements; is that
 7 right?
 8 **A. That's correct.**
 9 Q. Can I formally, chair, with your permission, please
 10 adduce Professor O'Brien's statement, which is to be
 11 found at STH000818. Her second statement at SHT001202.
 12 Her third statement, at STH001203. Then, Mr Leivers,
 13 I think your statement is STH001220. Chair, with your
 14 permission, can I adduce those in full?
 15 Can I turn, please, first, Mr Leivers, to the topic
 16 of the roles that Professor O'Brien has held, just so
 17 that we can understand the positions that she's been in.
 18 Is this right, that when she provided the statements to
 19 the inquiry, or certainly her first statement, she was
 20 strategic director of people's services. She was also,
 21 I think, the clinical accountable officer of the CCG and
 22 the chair of the SCP; is that right?
 23 **A. That's correct.**
 24 Q. In all those roles?
 25 **A. In all of those roles, yes.**

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1 that point strategic director of people's services for
 2 the borough. If you go to the end of that paragraph,
 3 she was also speaking on behalf of the Safeguarding
 4 Children Partnership. I'm just trying to understand the
 5 separation of those different roles. Do you understand
 6 what I'm trying to ask you about?
 7 **A. I do, yes. It may help the inquiry to understand that**
 8 **the role in relation to being chair of the safeguarding**
 9 **arrangements would be a normal position for a director**
 10 **of children's services. Safeguarding boards were**
 11 **replaced by children's safeguarding partnerships as**
 12 **a consequence of the Wood Review, and that was brought**
 13 **into effect in St Helens I think in 2019, and as**
 14 **a consequence of that, Sarah O'Brien was actually not**
 15 **only the relevant director for children's services at**
 16 **the time, but she was also the chief officer within**
 17 **health, so that it was sensible that she was the chair**
 18 **of that group because she was responsible for all of**
 19 **those other than the police, of course.**
 20 **That was a role which was given to her as her**
 21 **responsibility as a director within St Helens.**
 22 Q. Do you have any concerns about whether or not holding
 23 those different roles would make it difficult to
 24 exercise any scrutiny on behalf of the Safeguarding
 25 Children Partnership?

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<p>1 A. No, I don't. I previously have been a chair of 2 a safeguarding board and also a director of children's 3 services. There has been considerable conversations and 4 discussions about that, because, of course, prior to the 5 introduction of that, safeguarding boards were chaired 6 by pretty well entirely independent chairs, but it was 7 the decision by government to replace safeguarding 8 boards by the current arrangements, which are 9 essentially the three major players -- police, health 10 and social care -- that would form the core basis of 11 the new partnership arrangements. So, to that extent. 12 What we have in St Helens is independence through 13 a scrutiny function so we appoint an independent person 14 to actually undertake those scrutiny functions and they 15 would have reported to the partnership in that regard. 16 Q. Move on to our first theme on the topics list for you, 17 Mr Leivers, which is that of empathy and concern for 18 child victims. Can I bring up, please, Danny, three 19 pages of the witness statement STH000818 and go to 20 internal page _010 through to internal page _012. This 21 is the statement given by Professor O'Brien, Mr Leivers, 22 where she sets out some of the generic evidence that the 23 council had given on this theme. 24 She explains -- perhaps we can scroll in at 2.1 to 25 2.2 -- that one example of victim-blaming language or</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 45</p>	<p>1 attitude had been located in the paperwork reviewed by 2 the council, and that was where a child's -- minutes 3 about a child had used the word "promiscuous". Can you 4 help us a little bit in understanding the context of 5 that? 6 A. I will try. This is information which was provided to 7 the inquiry in relation to matters which went back, 8 I think, into 2017/18, and, as such, it would be my 9 view, and I think it would be the view of most, that 10 that sort of language is not appropriate to be used when 11 you're dealing with essentially vulnerable children and 12 young people. 13 Q. You indicate, I think Professor O'Brien indicates, in 14 these two paragraphs that the investigation indicated it 15 was the taker of the minutes who had used that language 16 and there were conversations had with others in that 17 position. But at 2.1 it says this: 18 "We do not currently have a specific procedure in 19 place to challenge victim blaming or use of 20 stereotypes." 21 Is that now the place or is there something more 22 formal in place? 23 A. I think we need to scroll back to 2.1. 24 Q. The two points here was that the minute taker, I think, 25 was spoken to about this particular incident; yes?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 46</p>
<p>1 A. Yes, I understand that. 2 Q. 2.1, there is evidence given that there is not currently 3 a specific procedure in place to challenge victim 4 blaming or stereotypes. Is that still the case? 5 A. No, it isn't. What we now have is regular audits of our 6 cases, particularly child exploitation cases, which 7 would, among other things, look for language which was 8 factually appropriate and nonjudgmental. I think over 9 the last six months certainly, probably a little longer, 10 probably nine months, we have actively sought to ensure 11 that language which you would judge to be victim blaming 12 is not used by any of the organisations that are 13 responsible for investigating and caring for these 14 particular circumstances. 15 Q. Just a couple of further points from your colleague's 16 witness evidence, if we can scroll in on 2.4 through to 17 2.7, please, you reference there -- she does, 18 in January 2019, a conference that was held, entitled, 19 "Risk rights, resilience and relationship, redesigning 20 our approach to safeguarding young people". Victim 21 blaming you explain, or your colleague does, was 22 considered as part of that conference. For 23 completeness, there is reference in the pan-Merseyside 24 multi-agency CE Protocol to this issue and Catch22 have 25 also delivered some training on this issue; is that</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 47</p>	<p>1 right? 2 A. Yes, that's right. One of the things that was apparent 3 to not only the local authority but to others was that 4 we needed to get St Helens in the round into a position 5 where it fully understood the consequences and impact of 6 using inappropriate language in describing the 7 engagement and involvement of young people. To that 8 extent, I think what St Helens did was it brought in 9 Research in Practice, which is a national organisation 10 with an outstandingly good reputation I have used 11 elsewhere, to actually put together a day for all of 12 the relevant players within that. My understanding was 13 that was well attended, but also that we made use of one 14 of our key partners in Catch22 of putting into place 15 training arrangements and familiarisation arrangements 16 for staff working in social care. 17 Q. Just further on this issue, please, can I bring up 18 STH001203_003, paragraph 5.1, with the heading at 5.0. 19 You were asked here to talk about procedures in place to 20 challenge language and I think you reference here the 21 commitment of the council to ensuring that inappropriate 22 language is challenged. Just help us with the figure 23 that's given at the end of that paragraph, that the most 24 recent audit did find 16 per cent of cases had some 25 evidence of unacceptable language being recorded. Just</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 48</p>

1 help us with that, please, Mr Leivers?

2 **A. Basically, what we tried to do is to audit the work**

3 **that's been undertaken within the service to ascertain**

4 **whether inappropriate language, ie victim-blaming**

5 **language, is being used. I think more recently to that,**

6 **certainly over the last six months, we have been fairly,**

7 **or very, energetic in auditing work in relation to child**

8 **sexual exploitation to make sure that that 16 per cent**

9 **is reduced down to nil. I think certainly over the last**

10 **three months, in the audits we completed we found one**

11 **example of inappropriate language out of all of**

12 **the cases that we have been involved in.**

13 Q. Just for completeness, that paragraph 5.1 is taken from

14 the statement that is dated, I think, February of this

15 year?

16 **A. Yes.**

17 Q. I think that's right?

18 **A. That's correct. I think one of the things I would say**

19 **in order to assist the inquiry is that, this is very**

20 **much a sort of moving position for not just this local**

21 **authority, but a lot of local authorities in trying to**

22 **get better engagement around the agenda of exploitation**

23 **and actually being able to use some of**

24 **the recommendations that we have seen from national**

25 **inquiries and some of the learning that we have had from**

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1 Q. You heard that she was asked questions about the

2 evidence she's given -- I will give the reference for

3 the note, her witness statement at INQ004924_002,

4 paragraph 5.6. She indicated in the statement

5 dated January of this year that victim-blaming language

6 continues to be used on referrals, referring to young

7 people as "putting themselves as risk" and

8 "girlfriend/boyfriend" or dismissing signs and

9 indicators of CSE as "normal teenage behaviour". You

10 heard, I think, the chair's questions about that topic.

11 Is there anything you would like to say to respond to

12 the evidence of Ms McKenna this morning?

13 **A. No. I thought the -- I was going to call it an**

14 **interview. The evidence that was given by Ms McKenna**

15 **actually was pretty comprehensive, and it did touch on**

16 **these issues that clearly were a matter of concern, they**

17 **were a matter of concern for Catch22 at the beginning of**

18 **this year, they were with us. We've worked not just**

19 **within ourselves but also with organisations such as**

20 **Catch22 to make sure that we are approaching this in**

21 **a much more sensitive way.**

22 **I think there's been -- it's not been a definitive**

23 **sort of change point in the way in which St Helens or**

24 **others have actually acted, but I think you have seen,**

25 **or I have certainly seen, in the work that I have done**

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1 **local authorities that have been extensively involved in**

2 **this.**

3 **I think certainly over the last, probably, 12 months**

4 **St Helens has worked very hard at getting itself into**

5 **a position where that learning can be then translated**

6 **into action on the ground.**

7 Q. I think, for completeness, can I bring up INQ004944_003,

8 please, paragraph 2.3, which I think indicates that the

9 date of that audit with the 16 per cent figure was

10 17 December last year; is that right?

11 **A. That's very helpful, yes. That would have been my**

12 **understanding, that it was some months ago, and I do**

13 **think all of the work we have done as an organisation**

14 **and as partners to try and deal with this so that you're**

15 **dealing with children very much as victims has been**

16 **better embedded into the organisation than it has been**

17 **in the past. That's about learning and that's about**

18 **actually ensuring that what we have seen, whether that**

19 **happens to be in Rochdale or Oxfordshire or Rotherham,**

20 **that we don't have those sorts of things being done**

21 **currently within St Helens.**

22 Q. I don't know, Mr Leivers, if you listened to the

23 evidence from Ms McKenna this morning. Did you listen

24 to that evidence?

25 **A. I did, yes.**

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1 **to prepare for this a considerable difference in the way**

2 **in which young victims were supported and dealt with**

3 **prior to the end of 2019 and into 2020 compared to where**

4 **we were even as near as 2016/2017, really.**

5 Q. For completeness on this issue, you referred to the

6 pan-Merseyside Multi-agency Child Exploitation Protocol.

7 It is STH001169_001. Perhaps just have page_002

8 alongside it. To orientate the panel, this is a large

9 document that I think sets out, as we see with other

10 areas -- if we scroll in on the second page, we can see

11 that the overall protocol sets out the roles of

12 different agencies; is that right?

13 **A. Yes, it does.**

14 Q. It includes within it a series of flowcharts, I think,

15 at the end, and one can see that if you look, please, at

16 internal page_028 through to_029, embedded within your

17 protocol is specific guidance on appropriate and

18 inappropriate language. Is that right?

19 **A. It is, yes.**

20 Q. You have provided us with some of the training materials

21 from the "Risks, rights, resilience and relationships"

22 course, but I'm not sure we need to bring that up. Is

23 there anything in particular you would like to draw out

24 from that?

25 **A. No, I don't think so. I think the panel has sufficient**

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<p>1 information in terms of the written submissions that 2 were made in that regard. 3 Q. Can I go back, please, to the related issue of services 4 provided for diverse groups of children and young 5 people. Can I ask you to look back, please, at 6 STH000818_011. Your colleague was asked some questions 7 about specific services, this is at internal page _011, 8 paragraphs 2.8 to 2.10. Your colleague was asked some 9 specific questions about services for children from BME 10 or LGBTQ communities. Is this right, that at 2.8 the 11 evidence was that, through the period about which the 12 inquiry asked questions, April 2017 to March 2019, "We 13 have not completed specific work to improve the 14 accessibility and sensitivity of child sexual 15 exploitation services to children and young people from 16 BME communities"? Is there anything that you can 17 provide by way of an update on that? 18 A. Well, the update that I would give the review is that we 19 are in the same position today as we were in writing 20 this for 2017-19. It is not an area that we have yet 21 addressed but it is an area that we need to do so. 22 Q. Tell us a little bit, please, about the specific 23 services, though, that are available to children from 24 LGBTQ groups? 25 A. Yes. Basically, within the document, if you could put</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 53</p>	<p>1 it back up, please -- 2 Q. It continues, actually, over the page. It is 210 3 through to 211. 4 A. One is, it's actually -- it's about signposting 5 youngsters who would benefit from engagement with things 6 like Over The Rainbow, things like the Proud Trust -- 7 Q. Sorry, Danny, 2.9 has the evidence about the Over The 8 Rainbow group. 9 A. So young people from within the LGBTQ community would 10 actually be signposted to these groups, these support 11 groups, which is exactly what they are. They are there 12 to actually provide help and support to young people who 13 would want to be engaged with and talk about the sorts 14 of issues that are worrying them. So it is referencing 15 to that, rather than a direct service that we provide 16 ourselves. 17 Q. I think, in due course, the panel does have some 18 evidence direct from the Ariel Trust that we will adduce 19 at the end of the day, chair. 20 A related topic to the issue of empathy and concern 21 is the evidence that's been given about Voice of 22 the Child. Can I ask, Danny, please to bring up 23 STH001203_007, and scroll in on 13.6 through to 13.9, 24 please. 25 Just to put this into context, I think what this</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 54</p>
<p>1 data refers to is, as is explained earlier in the 2 statement, an audit that took place in October 2019, 3 Mr Leivers, of some CE2 forms, which we will come to 4 hear about. I think what is said here is that 19 CE2s 5 were audited, of which 8 were CSE cases. The findings 6 below relate purely to CSE cases. 13.6 indicates that 7 Voice of the Child was present in 87.5 per cent of cases 8 but was not always reflective of CSE concerns, offering 9 a wider picture of lived experience and feelings but 10 without a focus on CSE. What do you draw from that, 11 Mr Leivers? 12 A. I think, firstly, it's really important to try to put 13 some numbers against those percentages. So the Voice of 14 the Child, in terms of present, was not present in one 15 case, as I understand it, from those numbers, but was 16 present in whatever the rest was. 17 Q. It's a very small sample. I think it is eight cases. 18 A. A very small sample size, absolutely, Ms Hill. 19 Q. Do you want to comment on the latter part of it, though? 20 I think what is being said here is, even if Voice of 21 the Child was formally, if you like, or technically 22 present on the face of the CE2, it wasn't always 23 reflective of CSE concerns. What do you draw from that? 24 A. I think I would draw from that principally that what we 25 are looking at and what we are trying to deliver in</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 55</p>	<p>1 terms of children's social care was engagements so the 2 young person's voice could be heard, but it didn't 3 concentrate maybe in the way in which it should 4 specifically on the issue of exploitation and 5 specifically on the issues of risk in relation to child 6 sexual abuse, and probably something that the council 7 needs to think about and put more of a focus on. 8 Q. Just scroll down to 13.9. You can see then that -- 13.8 9 actually notes that sexual identity was completed in 10 25 per cent of cases, so that would be, I think, two of 11 the eight, with six not recording it. 12 A. Yes. 13 Q. Has there been any action taken to address that or focus 14 the need to record sexual orientation in cases of young 15 people in particular? 16 A. Yes, we have, in relation to that. That is now 17 recorded. The issue around the use of negative language 18 is something that we have tried to be quite assiduous in 19 addressing. So cases -- wherever that now arises and is 20 brought up with either our organisation or elsewhere, 21 those matters are challenged and we are actively trying 22 to ensure that we put ourselves into the position of 23 seeing children very much as victims and victims of 24 abuse or victims of exploitation rather than actually 25 seeing themselves as mature individuals who can take</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 56</p>

1 **good and informed decisions.**
 2 Q. This October 2019 audit, though, if you look at 13.9,
 3 did indicate that negative language was found in
 4 25 per cent of the cases. Even though that's a small
 5 sample, it was still -- a quarter of the cases found
 6 language like "putting herself in dangerous situations".
 7 Do you want to comment on that, Mr Leivers?
 8 **A. I would repeat what I said earlier, that this is a very**
 9 **small sample size. Despite that, I think any sample**
 10 **size that shows that you continue to have concerns on**
 11 **the use of language is something one should take**
 12 **seriously, and clearly it is something that the council**
 13 **is continuing to try to address to ensure that we do not**
 14 **have that.**
 15 **Again, I would go back to that sort of evidential**
 16 **line of, the audits that we are now conducting are**
 17 **telling us that there is little, if any, evidence that**
 18 **we are using language which is not appropriate and isn't**
 19 **victim sensitive and victim orientated.**
 20 Q. Can I pull up some of the statistics that you have
 21 provided, please: STH001086_001, please, just to bring
 22 it up. Perhaps we can have alongside that page 2. This
 23 was evidence from, I think, 2018 to 2019, and it was an
 24 attempt to distil down, I think, in July 2018, a broad
 25 pattern of the mix by gender and other issues around

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1 **interesting to look at what proportion of the males and**
 2 **females are in CSE group or in CCE group, and I don't**
 3 **think we have got that, have we?**
 4 Q. Can I ask this: what is the practical significance of
 5 changing the category for a child from CSE to CCE?
 6 **A. In this particular case, I'm not familiar with the case,**
 7 **but if this child is a victim of child criminal**
 8 **exploitation, or indeed is a child who is -- has found**
 9 **themselves in being a child who is criminally exploiting**
 10 **others, that would then involve the engagement of our**
 11 **youth offending service and support of that -- for that**
 12 **young person via that particular service.**
 13 Q. Does that child then receive any different support, if,
 14 in fact, child sexual exploitation is also happening to
 15 that child?
 16 **A. No, not at all.**
 17 Q. Can I ask you to turn over the page, please, to look at
 18 the data that's been provided around mental health
 19 issues. If we can scroll in on the middle of internal
 20 page _002, where we see, "Of the 18" and scroll down to
 21 the heading "Parental push/pull factors". You can see
 22 there, of the 18 children -- forgive me, this is
 23 18 young people, I think, in this particular group. Ten
 24 of them had issues with school education, one was
 25 diagnosed with dyslexia, one had learning difficulties,

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1 disabilities and so on.
 2 If we scroll in, please, on gender mix and age in
 3 the middle of the page:
 4 "Of the current 20 young people open to MACE, 13 are
 5 females and we have 7 males ..."; is that right?
 6 **A. Yes.**
 7 Q. 12 were recorded in the category of CSE and 8 under the
 8 category of CCE, child criminal exploitation. One young
 9 person changing category midway through from CSE to CCE.
 10 Can you tell us about that categorisation and that
 11 change?
 12 **A. I can't tell you anything about the change or why it**
 13 **changed other than that was probably a matter of**
 14 **reassessment and recognising that you are dealing with**
 15 **a child who is a victim but also a child who actually**
 16 **can -- will move into a situation of exploiting as well**
 17 **as being exploited. It is something that is not unique**
 18 **or really -- or terribly rare, quite honestly. What you**
 19 **have here are children and young people open to the**
 20 **multi-agency child exploitation group where you would**
 21 **expect to see the sorts of stuff that you have got up**
 22 **here, in terms of 12 are actually CSE youngsters that we**
 23 **are concerned about, and eight are in terms of crime.**
 24 Q. How --
 25 **A. I don't quite know how it breaks down. It will be**

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1 50 per cent had mental health issues, five of the 18
 2 there were concerns about self-harm, five had
 3 a diagnosis of ADHD.
 4 Can you provide any further comment or context on
 5 these statistics, please, Mr Leivers?
 6 **A. I don't think that the -- what we see here is in any way**
 7 **unusual. Children who are -- find themselves as victims**
 8 **of child exploitation, it is hugely traumatic to people,**
 9 **to youngsters, and I would not be -- it doesn't surprise**
 10 **me that 50 per cent of that group actually has mental**
 11 **health difficulties and challenges.**
 12 **The issue, of course, then becomes, so what do you**
 13 **do about it? I think that's really where we would be**
 14 **wanting to look at. It's okay identifying that the**
 15 **problem -- that the child has a problem. Well, what can**
 16 **you do to get you there? As, again, you heard this**
 17 **morning from my colleague from Catch22, accessing mental**
 18 **health services for youngsters in these sorts of**
 19 **categories is a real challenge. We put into place**
 20 **support via organisations like Barnardo's to provide**
 21 **some ongoing therapeutic support and engagement with**
 22 **young people in that regard. But it's an issue that we**
 23 **need to recognise needs to be dealt with.**
 24 **Similarly, the issue of self-harm. Again, it's not**
 25 **something that you would say, "Gosh, this is really**

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<p>1 unusual", but it is something that is worrying, and that 2 lack of self-esteem -- it's the vulnerability of 3 exploitation, I think, that stands off the page to this 4 extent, and it is clearly a worry. How you then support 5 and what you do with that and how you engage with that 6 I think is an ongoing and complex issue. 7 Q. I think, for completeness, we can establish -- we don't 8 need to turn it up -- from STH001086, although there 9 were 20 young people open to MACE at the time of these 10 statistics, two were children in the care of another 11 local authority. So the 18 were the children in care of 12 this council. Just for completeness, we have got some 13 slightly more updated figures, please, just briefly at 14 STH001067_001, perhaps just to be alongside _002, and 15 that confirms at internal page _001, if we scroll in on 16 the heading "Gender mix and ages", I think this is 17 a later quarter, so these figures were provided at the 18 end of 2018, October 2018. There were 28 young people 19 open to the MACE process at that time, 17 were female, 20 11 were male, 16 under the CSE category and 12 under the 21 CCE category; is that correct? 22 A. That's what it says, yes. 23 Q. Over the page, the breakdown under the heading when 24 looking at the cohort known to St Helens, you can see 25 a little table with reference to mental health needs,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 61</p>	<p>1 ADHD, ASD, education issues and first language not 2 English of the children there. The panel can see the 3 figures. Ten with self-harm/self-esteem issues of 4 the 24 children in this group, 15 with education issues, 5 seven with CAMHS issues, ten respectively relating to 6 alcohol and drug use. Is there anything else about 7 those statistics you would like to give evidence about, 8 Mr Leivers? 9 A. No. I think they stand, really. These are really 10 issues that do worry and they do point to the complexity 11 of working with youngsters who have been exploited. And 12 that in working with young people, and that multifaceted 13 sets of issues that they present is something that one 14 needs to deal with and try to deal with as well as one 15 can, really. 16 Q. You touched on the issue of disability, which, as you 17 know, is one of our specific themes, so I will just pick 18 that up with you now, Mr Leivers, if I may. Can I bring 19 up STH000818_031 to _032, please, which is section 7 of 20 your colleague's statement. 21 Reference is made there to a series of answers to 22 questions put by the inquiry around children with 23 disabilities. There is comment made in there about 24 staff within the children with disabilities team have 25 received training in relation to the signs and</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 62</p>
<p>1 indicators of CSE, so there is a process by which any 2 child is referred into the CE process as soon as 3 concerns in relation to CE are identified. And two 4 children open to the children with disability team at 5 that time had a CSE flag. Is that right? 6 A. It is, yes. 7 Q. Then just tell us how the -- we will come to look at 8 this in more detail, but the risk assessment process is, 9 and I put it quite simply, a two-stage process: a CE1 10 form and a CE2 form. Is that right? 11 A. It is. Part of the Merseyside Protocols, yes. 12 Q. CE1 is a referral form and CE2 is the risk assessment 13 form. Is that correct? 14 A. It is, yes. 15 Q. Help us with how that process identifies and responds 16 appropriately to a child's disability, please? 17 A. Sorry, I'm pausing because I'm just trying to think my 18 way through -- the best way to describe that. Any child 19 that would come to the attention of the local authority 20 as being at risk of sexual exploitation or actually 21 taking part would actually follow two routes: one would 22 be in relation to the assessment of the child and the 23 urgency of it and we'd deal with that through the normal 24 route of a section 47 joint investigation with the 25 police, if that's urgent; but then would also be</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 63</p>	<p>1 referred into the child exploitation route for a risk 2 assessment in relation to that. 3 Dealing with the issue of disability and the 4 definitions that the inquiry are using, which are quite 5 wide ranging, one would want to actually recognise that, 6 with disability comes vulnerability, and the levels of 7 sensitivities and the way in which you deal with that 8 seem to me to be something that one would wish to 9 concentrate on. 10 Q. Perhaps just a little more specifically, if I may, at 11 paragraph 7.2 your colleague has explained that the CE1 12 referral form has a "yes" or "no" question around 13 disability but doesn't really give space to comment on 14 the nature of the difficulty or the effect it has, and 15 then the CE2 form similarly has a section in relation to 16 health concerns, including mental health concerns, but 17 there seems to be, on the evidence here, limited scope 18 to identify learning disabilities. The effect can only 19 be recorded by a free text. 20 Is there scope, do you think, for amending these 21 forms to allow practitioners more capacity to respond to 22 apparent disability or difficulties and the effect of 23 those on a child? 24 A. It's a very useful suggestion. I think one of 25 the issues here is that, as you're identifying it in</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 64</p>

<p>1 free text, there's absolute discretion for the person 2 responsible for filling that form in to make any comment 3 in relation to it. If it was more specific and was 4 asking more -- or prompting more searching questions 5 about that, I think you're right, you would probably get 6 a better response and that's a very helpful suggestion. 7 Q. You indicate, I think, at 7.4, that there isn't 8 currently specific guidance given to staff about how to 9 assess and record disability for children at risk of 10 sexual exploitation. There are obviously some children 11 who will be recognised as formally disabled under the 12 Equality Act and some who will have a mental health 13 condition that doesn't render them disabled in that 14 legal sense but renders them such that they have special 15 needs because of that. What level of confidence do you 16 have that staff will understand the distinctions between 17 those two groups, or do you think there isn't that 18 distinction that's understood or does it not matter if 19 there isn't? 20 A. I don't think the difference between the two would be 21 something that staff would be fully cognisant about. 22 What I do think is that any child who presents with 23 a disability inevitably comes with, I think, a tag of 24 vulnerability, and therefore I think that, when one is 25 dealing with youngsters who are disabled, one needs to</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 65</p>	<p>1 give regard to the level of vulnerability that you're 2 dealing with there, and that's of course going to be 3 more exacerbated than in children who don't. 4 ADHD is a good example of it, really. But is ADHD 5 a disability? I think it's a really good question. 6 I think if you were to ask a number of parents about 7 their child who has ADHD, "Is your child disabled?", 8 I think you'd get a pretty wide range of answers, and 9 I think you'd get from some parents a reticence to 10 describe their child as disabled. But, actually, that 11 particular group of youngsters -- and like groups of 12 youngsters, I think -- come with a vulnerability that 13 you really need to have more regard for and to have 14 greater sensitivity about the way in which you deal with 15 that. That's very relevant for not just the local 16 authority, but for organisations such as the police as 17 well. 18 Q. You indicate that one of the methods that you use to try 19 and ensure that children's disabilities, by which I mean 20 both of those groups, if you like, are taken into 21 account is that other professionals with involvement 22 with such a child would be invited to the CE2 meeting. 23 Just tell us a little bit about that, please? 24 A. Well, the CE2 meeting is a multi-disciplinary meeting. 25 It has in it -- remember, this is not just a St Helens</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 66</p>
<p>1 arrangement or protocol, it is across the whole of 2 Merseyside. So you have the local authorities and 3 children's social care, you have the police, you have 4 health, you have other professionals, such as Catch22, 5 who are at that meeting, and they would come to that 6 meeting with whatever background information they have 7 about that young person. So it may be that health would 8 actually have specific information regarding the 9 engagement of that young person with, for example, their 10 CAMHS service. That would be used to actually make 11 judgments about risk and make judgments in terms of 12 assessment of what organisations would need to do to 13 actually put a protective wrap-around environment in 14 relation to that young person. 15 Q. You indicate in the remainder, or your colleague does, 16 of this part of her evidence that MACE was in the 17 process of looking at implementing, or implementing, 18 a quality assurance by scrutinising CE2s to see the 19 extent to which disabilities had been recorded and taken 20 into account. I think she has provided some further 21 evidence about this. But just before we go to that, if 22 you just please go over the page to 7.7 in this 23 statement, there is then evidence given about ADHD needs 24 and similar needs being recorded under "Educational 25 needs". Do you want to just help us with how that fits</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 67</p>	<p>1 with the evidence we have just heard? 2 A. Give me a moment just to read it. (Pause). 3 Q. Is there anything you'd like to say about that? 4 A. It's a really good question. I'm just trying to think 5 my way through it, that's all. 6 Issues such as ADHD are not simply educational 7 issues. You know, whilst, when we put together an 8 education, health and care plan for a youngster who has 9 ADHD, that captures a range of issues, ie, education, 10 health and care needs, really. 11 Therefore, this feels a bit short-sighted and misses 12 an opportunity, I think, to actually ensure that you're 13 capturing these issues more widely. 14 But my reticence is, I'm not entirely certain that 15 because it's recorded under "Education" means that it's 16 then excluded from the decisions around risk and 17 assessment, and I think I would need to talk to others 18 about that, because it poses some very interesting 19 questions about, what do you do with children with 20 additional learning needs and how you use that to make 21 decisions about your assessment and the protective 22 environment in which you're going to operate in. 23 Q. Can I bring up, please, the last witness statement on 24 this particular issue, STH001203_018-019, please. Your 25 colleague was asked to comment further on this issue in</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 68</p>

<p>1 a follow-up statement, and she was asked specifically to 2 explain the statement: 3 "Child protection plans do take into account the 4 individual needs of children and we are more confident 5 recently that any disability is reflected and the impact 6 on the child understood." 7 This was in her February 2020 statement. I think at 8 32.1 she referred to the fact that, prior to July 2019, 9 "I could not say with confidence that previous chairs 10 will have considered the impact of the presenting risks 11 on the child's disability. Prior to November 2018, the 12 planning format did not prompt practitioners to consider 13 the individual needs of the child. As a result, some 14 child protection plans have focused on parents rather 15 than considering both children and parents." 16 That indicates that a change in the conference 17 process and the planning document mean that the needs of 18 the child is now more of a focus. She talks about a dip 19 sample audit and, therefore, overall, having more 20 confidence that disability would be included in these 21 conferences and plans. Do you want to add anything to 22 that? 23 A. Other than I think what is said there by Sarah O'Brien 24 more or less reflects what I said earlier, which I'm 25 pleased that I'm not contradicting Sarah in terms of</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 69</p>	<p>1 that analysis. That feels absolutely right. But 2 I think I would like to actually take away from here the 3 issues that are raised by this, because I think they are 4 something that one would want to give some real thought 5 to, around how you actually identify what actions you 6 need to take because of the disability, I think. So, 7 no, I wouldn't want to add to it, other than that feels 8 absolutely right. 9 Q. For completeness, we don't need to go through it in any 10 detail, at 33, Professor O'Brien talks about the 11 appointment of an experienced service lead into the 12 team. Over the page, she talks about different 13 communication methods being available within the team. 14 Let's just scroll in, please, on 33.6, the Ofsted 15 inspection in September 2019 was complimentary about the 16 work of the council in this area. Is that correct? 17 A. Yes, it is. This was a review, yes. 18 Q. It talks about some disabled children being held in 19 the permanence service by an experienced worker from the 20 children with disabilities team? 21 A. That's correct. Though what I would say is, if you go 22 back two or three years, this sort of -- these sorts of 23 arrangements were not in place. So, again, what you are 24 seeing, as we move forward around the work that's been 25 done over the last 12 months, is better arrangements,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 70</p>
<p>1 more protective arrangements, around children who are at 2 risk of exploitation, and that includes children who you 3 would define as disabled. 4 Q. In 35.1, she gives some more up-to-date statistics, 5 132 CE2 meetings that took place between 1 April 2018 6 and 31 March 2019. Of those, 30 had an identified or 7 suspected learning need or disability which equated to 8 23 per cent. Then the nature of the exploitation 9 identified within those 30 cases was detailed below. 10 A. Yes. 11 Q. Finally on this part of her statement, she references at 12 36, please, section 36, that the CE1 and CE2 form 13 I think were under review. A launch of that was 14 proposed in March 2020. It talks, at 36.2, about 15 requiring -- well, about the requirement for a separate 16 CE1 document to be removed and the CE2 document becoming 17 the referral document: 18 "This will include recording of disability. 19 Training guidance will be provided to insure correct 20 assessment and documentation to support any additional 21 needs." 22 As from March of this year, can you provide us with 23 an update on that, please, Mr Leivers? 24 A. Yes. St Helens is sort of making a pitch to try and 25 simplify the CE process. It's currently subject to</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 71</p>	<p>1 pilot in other local authorities within Merseyside area. 2 We are due for revision in October 2020, which hopefully 3 will then accept a lot of the issues we have raised here 4 about simplification and about addressing the issues of 5 disability more explicitly. So hopefully, by the end of 6 next month, we will have something in place that will 7 begin to address that and we will need then to put into 8 place the training and support for staff to ensure that 9 we get it. 10 Q. You have indicated, I think, in your own statement -- we 11 will perhaps bring that up, STH001220_002, 12 paragraph 2.1, please. You have confirmed to the chair 13 and panel that the pan-Merseyside CE Protocol was 14 relaunched in March of this year at an event including 15 presentations from two young people and which 16 specifically involved workshops on the impact of 17 victim-blaming language. Is that correct? 18 A. It is, yes. What I'm talking about is then, subsequent 19 to that, in the work that's been done over the summer 20 across the Merseyside region to review what we have got 21 and to put into place changes that would make the system 22 better than what it is at the moment. 23 Q. Can I ask you some questions then now, please, about 24 missing children -- in fact, no, I won't, forgive me. 25 I'm going to ask you some questions about the risk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 72</p>

1 assessment process. I'm going to go back to where I was
 2 on the topics list. Can I have STH000818_012. There is
 3 quite a long section in Professor O'Brien's statement.
 4 I will just formally record the paragraph numbers, it is
 5 3.1 through to 3.20. Just very broadly, Mr Leivers, can
 6 you give us just an overview of how the risk assessment
 7 process operates beyond what you have already said about
 8 the process?
 9 **A. The assessment process in relation to CSE, if we go
 10 through from the initial concerns, or concern with
 11 coming to the organisation, it would be picked up within
 12 social care within the MASH. Where you have got an
 13 identified concern regarding child exploitation, that
 14 would then be looked at. The form CE1 would be
 15 completed, and that form would then be passed on to an
 16 assessment group, a multi-disciplinary assessment group.**
 17 Q. Sorry to interject, but broadly, is this right, the CE1
 18 form is an initial description of the --
 19 **A. The CE2 is an assessment, yes.**
 20 Q. And a CE2 is a much more comprehensive analysis of
 21 the issues, and it has -- sorry to cut across you. Is
 22 this just a broad summary: it has a numerical scoring
 23 system within it, but it can be adjusted, allowing for
 24 professional judgment. Is that fair?
 25 **A. Yes, that's right. One thing I was trying -- I was**

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1 **immediacy to it. You co-locate and, in the case of
 2 St Helens, we have co-located in the MASH, as you heard
 3 this morning, organisations such as Catch22 and health
 4 support as well. That's very much about making
 5 a decision around how you're going to assess, how you're
 6 going to move forward and how you're going to deliver
 7 that, which would range from no further action through
 8 to a full-blown 47 investigation.**
 9 Q. I think, is this right, that the council does use the
 10 Signs of Safety approach that I think we have heard
 11 about already?
 12 **A. Across the whole of its social care provision, yes, not
 13 just in the MASH, and we can talk about that.**
 14 **The MACE process, the multi-agency child
 15 exploitation process, again is a group of the relevant
 16 organisations meeting to actually try and examine trends
 17 and hotspots and concerns so that you can actually plan
 18 what you are going to do. It is not just around
 19 protecting and supporting the child that's exploited,
 20 but also trying to deal with matters of perpetrators and
 21 how you can identify those and how you can bring those
 22 things together.**
 23 **So it's an overarching process which sits outside of
 24 day-to-day operational management.**
 25 Q. Just finally, can I just refer to some evidence that the

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1 **going to try to say in relation to that was that this
 2 assessment, this review and the child exploitation
 3 arrangements, would not override our assessment
 4 processes where there is immediate concern regarding the
 5 welfare of the young person.**
 6 **We have an assessment process through our
 7 multi-agency safeguarding hub and our assessment
 8 arrangements whereby, if those concerns are immediate
 9 and are judged to be likely to have a negative impact on
 10 the young person, then that would be subject to a normal
 11 investigation in our ordinary way through a section 47
 12 investigation, and the child exploitation process would
 13 actually run alongside that.**
 14 Q. Just help the chair and panel with the MACE and the MASH
 15 processes just briefly, please?
 16 **A. Sorry, could you just repeat that again, Ms Hill?**
 17 Q. Just as a final question perhaps before the lunch break,
 18 just help the chair and panel understand the MACE and
 19 the MASH processes. You have referred to them both.
 20 **A. They are entirely different. The MASH process is
 21 a process which has been now adopted for most local
 22 authorities whereby you bring the relevant agencies
 23 together -- the police, the local authority and others,
 24 but principally the police and the local authority --
 25 which is about information sharing, which gives you an**

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1 witness for this afternoon from the police force has
 2 given about the new CE2 assessment tool. Just for the
 3 note, it's MSP000322_005, paragraph 20. The evidence
 4 from the police is that, following the launch of
 5 the reviewed pan-Merseyside Multi-agency Protocol, the
 6 new CE assessment tool is currently being rolled out
 7 across the force. This now incorporates contextual
 8 safeguarding and the risks posed to the child outside
 9 the home. The new CE2 assessment tool incorporates the
 10 view of the family and the child as well as
 11 professionals. It also looks at risks outside the
 12 family and provides a fuller picture of the risks posed
 13 to the child.
 14 Is that a fair summary, do you think, Mr Leivers, of
 15 it?
 16 **A. It is, yes.**
 17 MS HILL: Chair, I see the time. Those are all my generic
 18 questions, if you like, on those themes. Perhaps it is
 19 appropriate to take our lunch break?
 20 THE CHAIR: Yes. We will return at 1.50 pm.
 21 (12.53 pm)
 22 (The short adjournment)
 23 (1.50 pm)
 24 MS HILL: Mr Leivers, just a few more general questions, if
 25 I may, on the issue of risk assessment. Can I bring up,

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<p>1 please, the most recent multi-agency protocol that we 2 discussed before the break. I hope this is the right 3 reference. It's STH001228. I'm hoping that, Danny, you 4 have that. This is the 2020 document that was launched, 5 I think, relatively recently. Just to assist the chair 6 and panel, if we can go to internal page 2, we can see 7 the table of contents.</p> <p>8 We can scroll in there and we can see that, again, 9 this includes in the appendices various documents that 10 the panel may wish to look at in due course.</p> <p>11 Principally, there is some guidance around language and 12 then there is also a document at appendix A, which is 13 the quite lengthy checklist that indicates certain signs 14 of child sexual exploitation. I don't know if we can 15 just bring up the internal appendix A, Danny, which 16 begins at internal page 24, just to give the chair and 17 panel a feel for it.</p> <p>18 Do we see, if we just scroll through a few of these 19 pages, that this appendix runs to quite a number of 20 pages, and includes within it several indicators that 21 practitioners have regard to in assessing whether or not 22 a child is experiencing or at risk of child 23 exploitation. Is that right?</p> <p>24 A. Yes, it does.</p> <p>25 Q. Then for completeness, the panel can see there is the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 77</p>	<p>1 new assessment form, I think, the CE2 form, appended 2 beginning at internal page 42, please, Danny. This does 3 include reference to disability on internal page 43, 4 Mr Leivers, if you look in the top right. We can see 5 there is a box there for disability. Help us with how 6 that can be completed by practitioners? Is it giving 7 them any free text space or is it simply a "yes" or "no" 8 or can you help us with how that's completed?</p> <p>9 A. I'm afraid I can't. I don't know the detail in relation 10 to this. From what I can see, the only way people would 11 add to that is a tick and maybe use some free text, but 12 I'm not familiar with the details of this, Ms Hill.</p> <p>13 Q. In section 7, internal page 46, please, Danny, there is 14 a heading of "Mental health and physical health 15 conditions". If I have understood it correctly, the way 16 that each of these factors operates is that there are 17 Ls, Ms and Hs on the left-hand side, and those indicate 18 low, medium and high; is that right?</p> <p>19 A. Yes.</p> <p>20 Q. Does the practitioner complete the right-hand box in 21 free text?</p> <p>22 A. That's correct.</p> <p>23 Q. How does it work?</p> <p>24 A. My understanding is that, in terms of completing this, 25 the person responsible for it would actually give --</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 78</p>
<p>1 would identify the evidence of self-harm or mental 2 health and would actually write into that in free text 3 what service is actually being offered at the moment.</p> <p>4 Q. Just scroll back out, please, Danny, to look at both 5 6 and 7 together, if we could. "Ability to identify 6 exploitative behaviour" under section 6 and section 7, 7 "Mental health/physical health concerns", is the 8 expectation that practitioners would record issues such 9 as ADHD and that impacting on a child's ability to 10 understand what was happening and so on in both of those 11 sections, or you're not sure?</p> <p>12 A. I'm not sure. It would be -- I would be making a guess, 13 and that would not be right.</p> <p>14 Q. I can't see any other heading that might be appropriate 15 for that, but if I have got that wrong, please let me 16 know.</p> <p>17 Then, in terms of another document on this topic, 18 can I go, please, to an audit that took place in January 19 of this year of the CE1 forms, and if I have understood 20 this correctly, this is STH001229_001, please. This, 21 Mr Leivers, is a report from within the partnership, but 22 it is a report that did a sample, if I have understood 23 it properly, of CE1s that had been closed and had not 24 been progressed to CE2s to assess whether or not they 25 were being responded to properly, I think. So, broadly,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 79</p>	<p>1 whether or not the assessment was correct and whether or 2 not the decision not to progress to the CE2 was 3 appropriate. Is that what you understand this audit 4 did?</p> <p>5 A. That's my understanding of this document, yes.</p> <p>6 Q. If we look, please, scrolling in on the findings, Danny, 7 just for convenience, these were randomly selected, 8 I think, 12 forms selected in November and December of 9 last year. The overall grades as reflected in the pie 10 chart and in the narrative underneath were this, that 11 42 per cent of the audits were "requires improvement" 12 and a further 42 per cent were graded "inadequate". The 13 remaining 16 per cent were graded "good". Albeit that 14 that was a small sample, do you want to respond to that 15 evidence?</p> <p>16 A. I don't think I can, really. It stands as said. It's 17 not a good picture.</p> <p>18 Q. The next steps, at the end of page 3, please, of that 19 document, just help us understand this: 20 "The safeguarding partnership board are to determine 21 whether these findings satisfy the action raised in the 22 amalgamated review of child ECW." 23 So I think this is some learning from a previous 24 review of a child's case: 25 "The CARE group to consider the findings in the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 80</p>

1 context of the CE process ..."

2 Help us with that?

3 **A. Those are identified next steps, but I am not -- I don't**

4 **know whether they were actually followed out. This**

5 **was January, wasn't it?**

6 Q. These are the CE1 forms and the -- this is part of

7 the process that the practitioners are involved in, the

8 CE1 and the CE2 process. How is it that you're not sure

9 what's happened? I'm sorry if I'm putting that

10 clumsily. How is it that you cannot help us with

11 whether this has been implemented?

12 **A. Well, it says:**

13 **"The safeguarding partnership board to determine**

14 **whether these findings satisfy the action raised ..."**

15 **I don't know whether the Safeguarding Partnership**

16 **Board gave consideration to this --**

17 Q. I see.

18 **A. -- in actually -- and then making the necessary**

19 **amendments to that. What I do know, of course, is, this**

20 **is now all subject to review as part of**

21 **the pan-Merseyside pilot of the new protocol**

22 **arrangements.**

23 Q. Thank you.

24 **A. It may well have been picked up and addressed within**

25 **that.**

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1 from February of this year. Does that sound about

2 right?

3 **A. I would have to see it to be certain, but I thought it**

4 **was later in the year, but maybe I'm wrong.**

5 Q. I don't think I need to bring this document up

6 necessarily, but, broadly, we have a document that is

7 some meeting notes that refer to different figures for

8 both the Knowsley, Wirral and St Helens services. Does

9 that sound right? The figures, broadly, are in one

10 area. Knowsley, 98 per cent of children offered

11 a Return Home Interview. In the Wirral area, 238 offers

12 of Return Home Interviews against 260 incidents and

13 St Helens, 202 offered an RHI against 207. Do those

14 figures sound broadly right?

15 **A. Yes, they do.**

16 Q. Has there therefore been an increase in the offer of

17 Return Home Interviews within St Helens overall?

18 **A. I think there's been not just an increase in offer, but**

19 **actually a higher level of takeup more recently than the**

20 **data that you saw for 2017-18.**

21 Q. Before one gets to the Return Home Interview, obviously

22 there is an incident in which a child has gone missing.

23 Overall, does St Helens think there are sufficient

24 resources to prevent children going missing repeatedly?

25 **A. That's a very wide question. The large majority of**

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1 Q. Can I ask you some more general questions, please, now,

2 about a different theme, about missing children and

3 Return Home Interviews. Can I bring up, please, part of

4 Professor O'Brien's evidence, STH000818_004. In that

5 paragraph, if we go to paragraph 1.15, she gives some

6 initial evidence about Return Home Interviews. She's

7 given some statistics there about them. I don't need to

8 adduce them all, I don't think. But at various points

9 throughout the evidence, is this right, there is

10 a monitoring of a number of missing incidents that occur

11 and, very broadly, the number of Return Home Interviews

12 that take place relative to those incidents?

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

14 Q. I think that figure that we see there reflects a period

15 of time up to March 2019, indicating that 96 per cent of

16 the children were offered Return Home Interviews,

17 Catch22 completed approximately 56 per cent of the total

18 required. Is that accurate for that period of time?

19 **A. You may be going on to this, but my understanding is**

20 **that a more recent analysis of this shows a much**

21 **improved position of the numbers of return interviews**

22 **completed.**

23 Q. Yes. I was going to take you to that, in fairness.

24 Perhaps we could look at some of the more recent

25 statistics. I think the most recent document we have is

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1 **youngsters that we have greatest concern about who go**

2 **missing are children who are within our looked-after**

3 **system who go missing, and very often go missing**

4 **repeatedly. I don't think St Helens is a particular**

5 **standout in comparison to some of the other local**

6 **authorities that I've been responsible for. You do have**

7 **relatively high incidence of youngsters going missing.**

8 **I think there are two elements to that. One is the**

9 **overall lack of resource to actually provide appropriate**

10 **care for looked-after children nationally, and you can**

11 **see that in St Helens.**

12 **In St Helens, we are in the process at the moment of**

13 **looking to open a number of additional children's homes**

14 **simply because we haven't got the resources internally.**

15 **We are, therefore, in a position where we are using**

16 **third-party, private-sector establishments to do that.**

17 **A number of our youngsters go missing from those**

18 **establishments. The difficulty and challenge you then**

19 **have is what you do when they go missing. You can up**

20 **the stakes and move them further away from home, which**

21 **you then always run the risk of that child going missing**

22 **and trying to make their way back into St Helens and**

23 **placing themselves at considerable additional risk. Or**

24 **you can look towards depriving that young person of**

25 **their liberty.**

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<p>1 I think one of the things you have got to really 2 think about and think about very hard is, when you bring 3 a child into care because they are at risk of harm or 4 exploitation, and that young person then runs, one of 5 the things you've got to try to avoid is that young 6 person believing that they're being punished and that 7 they are being moved further from their home because 8 they have behaved badly, and the reality is that what 9 you want is an establishment or a foster care placement 10 that can actually provide good wrap-around care for that 11 youngster. 12 You're very often in a position as a local 13 authority, and St Helens is no different to the vast 14 majority of other local authorities, where you haven't 15 got a list of half a dozen key establishments all who 16 are offering good quality care that you can pick and 17 choose from. You're very often faced with a situation 18 where the only vacancy that you can find is vacancy X, 19 and inevitably that isn't always going to meet the needs 20 of that young person. Therefore, that young person is 21 always exposed to the difficulties and challenges of 22 disappearing, of leaving, of what we called in time gone 23 by absconding, and placing themselves at risk when they 24 do so. 25 So I do think it's a problem and an issue that's</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 85</p>	<p>1 complicated and difficult by the lack of resources that 2 local authorities are currently facing. 3 Q. We have heard some evidence about the 4 Philomena Protocol. Is that something that St Helens 5 has considered? 6 A. Might have, but I may know it under a different name. 7 No, I can't help with that. 8 Q. There has been some further evidence about other local 9 authorities that are within this case study having 10 adopted it. Perhaps you can reflect on that. 11 Turning, then, to the issue of children who are 12 placed out of borough, can I just bring up, please, 13 STH000818_021 and scroll in on paragraph 4.9, going over 14 the page to internal page 22. Just so the chair and 15 panel can understand, your children who are placed out 16 of borough, the process I think has been set out within 17 this witness statement for what happens when a child who 18 is placed out of borough goes missing, and if we scroll 19 in on 4.19 into 4.20, just to summarise it, is this 20 right, that there is a series of trigger points for 21 certain actions depending on either, if you look at 22 4.19, a certain number of missing episodes within 23 a period of 30 days or a certain length of time, that 24 triggers certain sorts of meetings; is that broadly 25 right?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 86</p>
<p>1 A. That's right, yes. 2 Q. Just going over the page, please, we can see that in 3 that latter part of the witness statement 4 Professor O'Brien gives quite a bit of detail about 5 St Helens out-of-borough placements. Is there anything 6 in particular that you would like to draw out around 7 that? 8 A. No. I think that's a comprehensive picture of where we 9 are at. 10 Q. Is it correct, just to make sure we have understood it, 11 than St Helens' MACE monitors the CSE threat to children 12 from other areas who are placed in St Helens; is that 13 right? 14 A. MACE has some engagement with that. We are talking here 15 of our children in the care of other local authorities, 16 I'm assuming, are we? 17 Q. Yes. 18 A. If you go back a couple of years, there was very much 19 a sort of "these are not our children, they have been 20 placed in our area into an independent provider, 21 therefore it is nothing to do with us" and to actually 22 shut down all engagements and involvement and saying 23 it's a matter for the parent authority. 24 In reality, over the last 12 months, really, we have 25 looked at that and we have actually taken a view that we</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 87</p>	<p>1 have a duty of care where, if these youngsters are going 2 missing, they should be in our CE process. 3 We would very much want to involve the placing 4 authority, and we would do all that we can to engage in 5 that process. But we would act in a representational 6 role for them in relation to actually ensuring that that 7 youngster is safe. 8 Q. Are you finding that that works successfully as 9 a process, in terms of being able to assist those 10 children who are at risk of CSE that are within 11 St Helens but are children in the care of another local 12 authority? Are you finding that that works? 13 A. I don't think it works as well as one would want it to. 14 There's a couple of problems with it. One, we are -- 15 the placing authority is required by regulation to 16 inform, say, St Helens that they have placed a child in 17 our area. But the level of engagement that you would 18 get with the local authority, the placing authority, 19 with ourselves, is very variable. 20 There are some local authorities who have very 21 minimal involvement with that young person other than 22 the statutory minimum that they're required to do so, 23 and there are others who are actually actively engaged. 24 Remember, an authority -- a child in care of another 25 local authority may be our next-door neighbour, it may</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 88</p>

1 **be Wigan, or it might be Cornwall or wherever, so,**
 2 **again, it is dependent upon the level of engagement you**
 3 **get and the ability and the capacity of that person to**
 4 **be on the ground involved with making decisions and**
 5 **supporting those decisions.**
 6 Q. Insofar as children who are placed out of borough by
 7 St Helens, can I bring up, please, STH001203_009 and
 8 scroll in on section 18, please. In that witness
 9 evidence, I think Professor O'Brien identifies
 10 a recognition, at the time of her statement, at least,
 11 of some gap in service for those children placed more
 12 than 30 miles away, particularly in the context of
 13 Return Home Interviews. Can you assist with whether
 14 that gap in provision that she described there has now
 15 been narrowed or removed? Do you recollect this part of
 16 the evidence?
 17 **A. Yes, I'm just refamiliarising myself with it. Our**
 18 **position, as of today, is that we only have -- we have**
 19 **a number of children placed outside of our borough or,**
 20 **indeed, placed inside the borough but in a private**
 21 **children's home. Of the children that we are having,**
 22 **and that would probably be 50-ish, at any one time,**
 23 **there are only four or five that are now placed more**
 24 **than 30 miles away. So we have made an active decision**
 25 **to try to find placements as near as we possibly can to**

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1 **who are placed, many of whom will be inside that 30-mile**
 2 **limit.**
 3 Q. We can look at this a little more specifically, in fact.
 4 STH001203_009, please. Paragraph 17, I think, gives
 5 some figures there. The number of children placed more
 6 than 30 miles away, up to the end of December 2020,
 7 looks as if it was 33. Is that about right?
 8 **A. Yes.**
 9 Q. That's 30 miles away from their home address, I think.
 10 **A. I'm much more comfortable with those figures, and of**
 11 **course they have now dropped, and dropped considerably.**
 12 **As I say, today there was only four. Again, that's an**
 13 **active decision by the local authority to ensure that we**
 14 **actually try and accommodate children as near as we can**
 15 **to their home address.**
 16 Q. You've been asked, I think, to reflect on some evidence
 17 provided by Pebbles Care, Mr Leivers. Do you recollect
 18 being asked to look at that evidence?
 19 **A. No, I didn't -- I'm aware of the Pebbles Care situation,**
 20 **but I've not seen any statement from Pebbles Care. That**
 21 **wasn't sent to us I asked about that earlier today.**
 22 Q. I thought that was placed on the topics list for you,
 23 but if it wasn't, I'm sorry about that. I will just
 24 read out -- there is just one paragraph -- for you, and
 25 if you can't answer it, perhaps you can revert later.

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1 **that young person's home address, unless there are very**
 2 **specific reasons why you would wish to place that young**
 3 **person a considerable distance away. That would**
 4 **inevitably be about, particularly where you're dealing**
 5 **with exploitation situations, that child being at risk**
 6 **of being found out or being actively pursued. But they**
 7 **are very small in number now, and we are particularly**
 8 **keen to ensure that that happens.**
 9 **So whilst we have some, there are very few.**
 10 Q. Just to put that into context, STH001203_013, please,
 11 and scroll in on paragraph 23. This is evidence,
 12 I think, where the inquiry asked how many looked-after
 13 children were placed out of area between March 2017
 14 and March 2019, and the numbers given for each financial
 15 year were 288 and 287 respectively. But is it your
 16 evidence, Mr Leivers, that the number of those within
 17 that cohort that are placed more than 30 miles away is
 18 small?
 19 **A. Yes, that has fallen away. This actually is not about**
 20 **30 miles, though; this is about just being placed out of**
 21 **area. So they could be placed in Wigan or they could be**
 22 **placed in -- I'm sorry, my geography of St Helens is not**
 23 **as good as it should be -- Warrington, for example. So**
 24 **they may well be in the neighbouring authority. So**
 25 **those figures of 288 and 287 relate to all youngsters**

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1 This is from the statement of Pebbles Care INQ006220:
 2 "Areas for improvement are, when a child is reported
 3 absent but the home is aware of where they may be. We
 4 have experience in St Helens ..."
 5 I don't know if you can comment on this or not:
 6 "... of the police refusing to attend addresses
 7 given and putting the responsibility back on to care
 8 staff. This is not always safe and police support is
 9 not particularly forthcoming."
 10 Is that something that you're aware of from the
 11 council's perspective or not?
 12 **A. No, I'm afraid it's not. I'm not saying it's not the**
 13 **case or it is the case, I'm just not aware of it.**
 14 **Actually, I don't even know where Pebbles Care is, you**
 15 **see. It may be it's quite local or it might be it is**
 16 **a long way away. I do know the young person that it**
 17 **refers to, but that's about as much as I know.**
 18 Q. I'm going to turn then, just briefly, please -- we have
 19 already dealt in general terms with the issue of
 20 children with a disability. As far as male victims are
 21 concerned, can I bring up briefly STH000818_030-031,
 22 paragraphs 6.1 to 6.7, where I think your colleague has
 23 given some evidence in response to the questions asked
 24 by the inquiry on that topic. So it is internal
 25 page _030 to _031, please. She had said she felt

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<p>1 confident that male victims were properly reflected and 2 represented in MACE meetings -- that's at 6.3. There is 3 a consistent approach across the CE screening process, 4 so the threshold is consistent whether the victim is 5 male or female, and the standard risk assessment tool 6 applies equally to both genders. Is that still correct? 7 A. It is, yes. 8 Q. Then she mentioned training for staff, and at the foot 9 of that page, at 6.6, various resources that are 10 available specific to boys and young men and that goes 11 over the page to 6.7 -- 6.6. Is there anything else on 12 that topic that you would like to add? 13 A. No. 14 Q. Then, in terms of the themes that we are looking at, the 15 final two themes before I ask you some questions about 16 the children are around partnership working and around 17 audit and review and performance improvement. 18 Generally, in terms of partnership working, what impact 19 has the Safeguarding Children's Partnership had on the 20 identification and management of CSE risks in St Helens? 21 A. I think if we talk about where we are today, I think 22 there are very good close working relationships between 23 the local authority and our agency colleagues and police 24 and health, and I think they work well and they're 25 effective in what they do.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 93</p>	<p>1 I think, if you go back to the principal study 2 period that this review is about, I just think that 3 St Helens, like an awful lot of authorities, did not see 4 this as a major issue, did not see CSE as something 5 that -- it was clearly happening somewhere else, but you 6 were not getting any evidence coming through that it was 7 a major issue for the authority. 8 In reality, when you look at the hard data, that was 9 probably the case. But it was more about that sort of 10 lack of understanding around what exploitation means and 11 what it means to be a victim and how you deal with 12 victims that I think put St Helens very much behind the 13 line, and I think, over the last couple of years, and in 14 particular over the last 12 months, there's been a lot 15 of work done in terms of trying to catch up. 16 Now, that's reinforced by Ofsted inspection, which 17 judged the authority to be "inadequate", and I think 18 that was a real wake-up call for the authority. But in 19 terms of actually trying to put into place services that 20 would deal with children who were at risk of 21 exploitation, the authority has worked very hard in 22 terms of not just the professional engagement and 23 judgment in relation to that, but also about financial 24 investment in relation to it. So that's the first 25 thing.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 94</p>
<p>1 The second thing I would say is that, when you look 2 at the workforce of children's social care, and I did 3 this as an exercise earlier in the year, over 4 80 per cent of my front-line managers and more senior 5 managers have been here for less than a year. So the 6 vast majority of our team managers are relatively new 7 and have been brought into place actually in order to 8 address the deficits that were seen previously, and 9 a lot work has been done around the recruitment of a new 10 workforce that can actually deal with that. 11 The third bit around that is, we have, over the last 12 couple of years, really struggled to get social workers 13 to come to work in St Helens. Part of our improvement 14 programme is actually investing in front-line social 15 workers, and we have now absolutely bucked the trend not 16 just of north-west, but across the country, where we are 17 now recruiting more social workers into St Helens than 18 we ever have done before and we are making very limited 19 use of our agency workers, which is, I think, a real 20 plus and a real positive bid around partnership working 21 between ourselves and others. 22 Relationships with schools has improved and improved 23 considerably. I know you want me to move on, so I will. 24 Q. To what extent are health partners, both in sexual 25 health services, CAMHS, GPs, school nurses, A&E, those</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 95</p>	<p>1 sort of professionals, to what extent are they important 2 in alerting your staff and other agencies to the signs 3 of (overspeaking) -- 4 A. I think they are hugely important. I think health play 5 a very important role. One of the things that we have 6 done and we have done really well in St Helens is to get 7 organisations to work together. I think the joint 8 appointment of my predecessor made real inroads into 9 actually bringing those two together. So we have 10 people -- one of my current assistant directors is 11 a health service employee but actually works within our 12 area. We have a number of staff direct employees of 13 health that are working on delivering the sorts of 14 agenda that you're talking about. It's very different 15 now to where it was two years ago. 16 Q. The same question, really, in relation to schools more 17 generally and education services? 18 A. Schools more generally, there is always a tension 19 between schools and social care around schools wanting 20 more and better engagement with the local authority, 21 social care department and Social Services feeling 22 they're really stretched. I think we have gone some way 23 to try to deal with that -- it still exists as an 24 issue -- but of course COVID has absolutely compounded 25 our position. So since March all the way up</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 96</p>

1 to September, schools, to all intents and purposes, were
 2 only dealing with vulnerable children and we were in
 3 a lockdown situation.
 4 So the work to actually improve and deliver on that
 5 was going to be influenced by COVID.
 6 That said, COVID, in a way, was a positive for joint
 7 working with schools because it required much closer
 8 attention between children's social care and schools
 9 around working with particular vulnerable young people.
 10 Q. Can I just draw up, please, MSP000400 and perhaps at the
 11 same time, if that's possible, MSP000447. Just briefly,
 12 Mr Leivers, we have got here some documentation that
 13 indicates the attendance at the morning meeting,
 14 I think, which is intended to be multi-disciplinary,
 15 from, respectively, May through to June and then June
 16 through to July of this year. We can see here that
 17 health attended zero of 24 meetings here on the first
 18 document and zero of 20 meetings on the second document.
 19 Do you want to comment on just these two lists that we
 20 have?
 21 A. Yes, that is absolutely about capacity, I think. It is
 22 something that we need to address.
 23 By not attending these meetings, it does not mean
 24 that you have a poor relationship with health and health
 25 has not got engagement; it's that they do not attend

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1 CSE/CCE agenda. As a consequence of that, a proposal
 2 was put to council about funding this and that was
 3 agreed in July of last year. It's run into major
 4 problems with COVID around recruitment and the
 5 development of this. I think we are probably beginning
 6 to get to the other side of that, but there was, in its
 7 early time -- well, just talk through the timescale. We
 8 agreed in July -- we took a decision at that time that
 9 we wouldn't go to advert for these posts over the summer
 10 period, but then we went into a period of recruitment
 11 in September and October. We got overtaken,
 12 regrettably, again, by a major Ofsted inspection. When
 13 you have major Ofsted inspections, the world stops, so
 14 all of your ability to do these sorts of things becomes
 15 very limited because everybody that could possibly be
 16 involved in that is then involved in preparing for your
 17 Ofsted inspection, and that took us to the turn of
 18 the year.
 19 Shortly after the turn of year, ie, March, we got
 20 hit by COVID, and, again, that delayed the appointment
 21 of that team.
 22 We are now in a position where we have a permanent
 23 team manager and the majority of those posts are now
 24 filled, but it's been a real difficulty.
 25 This is not a service that does direct work, ie, it

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1 these meetings.
 2 Q. Just help the chair and panel understand what this
 3 morning meeting is? How does it fit within the
 4 processes that you have described?
 5 A. (Overspeaking) child exploitation CE1 meeting where
 6 you're sharing information.
 7 Q. So you're looking at referral --
 8 A. Referral, yes.
 9 Q. Finally, from your own evidence, please, can I bring up
 10 STH001220_004 where you give some information about the
 11 new complex safeguarding team, which I think was funding
 12 approved in July, interim lead was appointed in August
 13 last year, and in July of this year I think you've
 14 appointed a permanent service lead.
 15 You describe in your witness statement the practice
 16 model at 7.3 and then at 7.4 I think there are some
 17 specific areas of focus set out in bullet points, of
 18 which child sexual exploitation is one, serious
 19 organised crime and criminal exploitation, OCG, is
 20 another. Is there anything else you would like to tell
 21 us about this team and the impact it's had on either
 22 risk assessment or partnership working?
 23 A. Thank you. That's a helpful question. We decided
 24 probably 12 months/18 months ago that we needed to
 25 actually have a specialist team that would deal with the

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1 doesn't do assessments in relation to children, and it
 2 doesn't manage cases, unlike a number of other teams.
 3 In my previous authority, Oxfordshire, we had a team of
 4 I think it was about 12, a team called Kingfisher, which
 5 managed all of this, so it carried caseloads and it
 6 managed the beginning to the end of the process. This
 7 is a very different model. It is much smaller, it is
 8 advisory in nature rather than doing, and the doing is
 9 left to your front-line workers.
 10 Q. So it's intended to offer some particular expertise
 11 around child sexual exploitation in one way or another?
 12 A. So that it can work with the operational staff to
 13 actually deliver on those things, that's right. It's
 14 not an operational team as such.
 15 Q. Just more generally, to bring the panel right up to
 16 date, we have got a letter, I think, from the Department
 17 for Education from September of this year. Broadly, is
 18 this a summary that there's been engagement with the
 19 Department for Education since the Ofsted report and the
 20 letter of 14 September, STH001238, I don't need to bring
 21 it up, was of the view that there had been clear
 22 progress made by St Helens since the Ofsted report
 23 in November 2019. Is that the thrust of that letter?
 24 A. Yes, that is the gist of the letter. Similarly, it's
 25 the gist of the first monitoring inspection by Ofsted.

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<p>1 They pretty much say the same things, which is that the 2 authorities made considerable progress in delivering an 3 improved service. It still has some way to go. I would 4 absolutely totally agree with all of that. 5 Q. Having asked you those questions about the themes in 6 general, I would like to ask you some questions about 7 the specific children whose cases you were asked to look 8 at. I think you know there's been some documents 9 provided about particular children and then there's been 10 some witness evidence also provided about those 11 children. 12 Can I ask you, first of all, about CS-A27, who -- 13 just to put this into some context for the panel, 14 CS-A27, as the panel will hear, was a child about whom 15 there were concerns I think about the child originally 16 in Manchester and then he was placed in St Helens. 17 There were concerns about him having been contacted by 18 different men, having met those men through Grindr and 19 then met them in person, and there was a concern about 20 him being sexually exploited by two of those and I think 21 made a complaint of rape against one of them. 22 In relation to that child, have you had the 23 opportunity to look back at the records from 2017 for 24 that child? 25 A. I have. I'm also really concerned about the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 101</p>	<p>1 identification of these children, not only in terms of 2 the potential for jigsaw, but also the potential that 3 the children themselves may identify them. They are 4 actually being mentioned in a national inquiry and they 5 have no knowledge that they are being mentioned at this 6 stage. 7 I think you know we have had some concern in 8 relation to that. We have had very limited time to 9 decide what we would do with the decision of the panel 10 in relation to these matters. So I am really 11 struggling. I want to help the inquiry because I think 12 it is doing an invaluable job, but I want to -- 13 Q. Can I just ask, perhaps -- 14 A. -- (overspeaking) to these young people and I worry 15 about it. 16 Q. We appreciate that. Can I put a specific question to 17 you about that child? Are you able to help us if I ask 18 you whether, having looked back at the documents about 19 that child, which date back to 2017, where the 20 description is given of that child of prostituting 21 himself, for example, that is something that you have 22 reviewed and recognised and wish to comment on? Are you 23 willing to answer those questions? 24 A. Well, there's no way that I would refuse to answer 25 a question of an inquiry, because that would be quite</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 102</p>
<p>1 improper. I've got to say, I am really concerned about 2 it. 3 That said, yes, I have reviewed the case. I think 4 the way in which it was managed, the decisions which 5 were taken in relation to the support that was offered 6 to this young man by the placing authority -- and 7 remember that it was not -- this is not a St Helens 8 child, and I'm not prepared to say where the child is -- 9 actually should have been managed very differently. 10 Q. Is that because of the nature of the placement for that 11 child or do you also accept that some of the language 12 used about that child was inappropriate? 13 A. There's a number of issues in relation to it. It's the 14 suitability of the placement; the language which was 15 used, which is very much about victim-blaming language; 16 but also decisions which were taken to support that 17 young person in their meeting of individuals in relation 18 to pursuing his sexuality and his ambitions, really. 19 That's as much as I think I can say without being too 20 explicit. 21 Q. This child's case was also put on your topics list, 22 I think, back in May also because the panel wished to 23 ask questions about the extent to which the risks to 24 this child were properly managed. Do you want to 25 respond to the way in which that was put on the topics</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 103</p>	<p>1 list for you? 2 A. Well, I don't think the risks were properly managed. 3 I don't think that what happened in this particular case 4 is a good example of good social work practice. I think 5 things should have been dealt with very differently. 6 Q. Can you expand a little on why you say that, Mr Leivers? 7 A. Of course I can. I think the way in which the placement 8 was supervised and overseen; I think the way in which -- 9 and, again, part of the problem I have with this is that 10 there has not been discussions in any detail in 11 St Helens about why decisions were taken to actually -- 12 members of staff to accompany this young person to 13 a meeting that was arranged on a website known as 14 Grindr -- 15 Q. Just pausing there, sorry, Mr Leivers, just to be clear, 16 we also understand from the paperwork that staff were 17 escorting this child to the homes of people that were 18 not known to the child, that had been -- 19 A. That's exactly what I'm -- 20 Q. (Overspeaking) the child on Grindr? 21 A. -- talking about, exactly the same thing, yes. 22 Q. You were saying, I think, you don't understand what risk 23 assessment was done around that or why that was done; is 24 that right? 25 A. Not at all. Again, you see, this is a child in the care</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 104</p>

<p>1 of another local authority. So what's being brought to 2 our attention are deficits and shortcomings that not 3 only we would identify but the panel has identified, 4 and, really, the commentary in relation to the 5 management of this case and the way in which it was 6 dealt with should actually be -- should be made towards 7 the placing authority because, as you know, the 8 arrangements of children in the care of other local 9 authorities have a clear set of regulatory requirements 10 and that does not include the authority in which the 11 child is placed managing the case management in the 12 case. 13 Q. In fairness, is this child's case, having looked back on 14 it, an example of St Helens' MACE assuming 15 responsibility for monitoring the CSE risks once he was 16 placed in your area? 17 A. Sorry? 18 Q. Is it your understanding that, once this child was 19 placed within St Helens, that St Helens' MACE did assume 20 responsibility for monitoring the CSE risks to him? 21 A. No, it did not, but it did bring to the attention of 22 the placing authority, which, remember, is very close to 23 St Helens, certainly within commutable distance to 24 St Helens, the management of the case -- and, again, I'm 25 only working third hand. What I'm saying here, the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 105</p>	<p>1 placing authority may have an entirely different view. 2 Without discussing it with them, I feel I'm in 3 a difficult position to expand in any detail in relation 4 to that. 5 Q. Just two further questions, then, if you can comment. 6 In addition to the issues around language, did it appear 7 to you that the child's disabilities had been taken into 8 account in language that seemed to suggest him having 9 responsibility for his choices, and things like that? 10 A. No. Some of the evidence that I've seen tells you that 11 the level of reasoning and ability and the level of 12 understanding of this young man was -- it was difficult 13 to understand how you could reach a view that what was 14 happening here was consensual. This was a victim. 15 Q. Finally in relation to this child, you mentioned the 16 evidence about staff escorting the boy to the homes of 17 strangers. Was it your understanding that any 18 intelligence from those addresses, for example, had been 19 collated and used and passed to the police or not? 20 A. (Interference) my knowledge. 21 Q. Forgive me, not to your knowledge? 22 A. Not to my knowledge, no. 23 Q. Can I ask you some questions, please, around a different 24 child, around CS-A71. Do you remember looking at the 25 issues in relation to that child as set out in the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 106</p>
<p>1 topics list? 2 A. Yes, I do. 3 Q. Is it fair to say that, in relation to that child, there 4 were also examples of language that are concerning 5 from December 2018; is that right? 6 A. It is. Again, I would revert to the position of, things 7 like the use of language, the ways in which a number of 8 these cases were managed three or four years ago, were 9 issues of the time. 10 Q. Just to be clear, the document in question, we don't 11 need to bring it up, STH001020, is from 6 December 2018. 12 It appears that that document again talks about 13 risk-taking behaviour, unresponsive to rules and 14 boundaries, and things of that nature. So, again, 15 doesn't necessarily seem to be appropriate language 16 because it refers to risk-taking behaviour and also 17 doesn't seem to take on board the fact that this child 18 also had ADHD. Is that fair? 19 A. I think that is fair, yes. 20 Q. Did you have a chance to review the risk assessments in 21 this child's case and form a view about that? 22 A. Yes, I did. 23 Q. Do you want to comment on the risk assessments -- the 24 quality of the risk assessments and the location of that 25 child?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 107</p>	<p>1 A. Yes, clearly, I will. I think I'd like to try to put it 2 into a wider context, and that is that, when you look 3 back at these cases, and we have got half a dozen within 4 St Helens that have been brought to our attention, the 5 practice three years ago was very different to the 6 practice that you see today and the -- 7 Q. Forgive me, Mr Leivers, I'm sorry to interrupt you, the 8 documents we have collated for CS-A71 as per your topics 9 list span the dates of 14 September 2018 to 10 30 January 2019. Those are the documents that we have 11 put on the topics list, under the heading of "Risk 12 assessment" for this child. Do you want to refocus your 13 answer in that context? 14 A. You'd have to give me some better clarity, I'm afraid. 15 Q. You were asked to look back at the risk assessments for 16 CS-A71 from September 2018 to January 2019. That was 17 the cluster of papers you were asked to look at. Do you 18 have a view on that, having now done that exercise? 19 A. My view would be that the risk assessment which was 20 undertaken at that time was not appropriate to safeguard 21 the best interests of that young person. 22 Q. Is that partly because it appears that risk assessments 23 had not factored in things like the child was apparently 24 staying with a new boyfriend at the mother's home and it 25 was therefore thought that the risk could -- the</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 108</p>

1 boyfriend's mother's home, forgive me, and it was
 2 therefore thought the risks to her were reduced. Is
 3 that one of the reasons why you think the risk
 4 assessment wasn't --
 5 **A. I think that's certainly a real issue that was not taken**
 6 **into consideration at the time. But, again, what I'm**
 7 **trying to say is that the social work practice, even if**
 8 **you go back to 18 months/two years ago, is different to**
 9 **the social work practice that you see today. The issue**
 10 **around victim blaming of a young person and the**
 11 **ineffectiveness of the assessments which were being**
 12 **undertaken at that time is actually reflected not just**
 13 **in this child but in others as well when you compare it**
 14 **to the level of practice that you've got now today.**
 15 **I'm not in dispute with you and I'm not doing**
 16 **anything other than conceding with you that what you're**
 17 **saying is accurate. Yes, this was not an acceptable**
 18 **risk assessment.**
 19 Q. This child was a child who was placed in several
 20 different locations, including some placements outside
 21 St Helens; is that right?
 22 **A. It was, yes.**
 23 Q. I think there were three out-of-area placements.
 24 Looking at that aspect of this case, are you confident
 25 that the risks to her when she was out of area were

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1 Q. In what sense, Mr Leivers?
 2 **A. You would have a more comprehensive approach to actually**
 3 **looking at the way in which that young man had engaged**
 4 **with others. I'm struggling with the language here**
 5 **because I'm particularly keen not to identify.**
 6 Q. Of course. Was there, though, good evidence of
 7 partnership working in terms of referral to --
 8 **A. No, not at all. This was really a quick assessment, in**
 9 **and out.**
 10 Q. Then you were asked, I think, in the context of the
 11 missing children theme, Return Home Interviews and
 12 looked-after children theme, to look at the case of
 13 CS-A26. Do you remember being asked to look at that?
 14 **A. Yes, I do. This is the siblings, yes.**
 15 Q. This was a child who --
 16 **A. Sorry, yes. Sorry, no.**
 17 Q. Forgive me, a child who was age 11 when concerns first
 18 came to light.
 19 **A. Yes.**
 20 Q. You're quite right, there were some wider issues around
 21 siblings. You were asked to look at this case partly
 22 because there were concerns that, after the child became
 23 looked after, the risks seemed to increase and only
 24 decreased after she was placed in a specialist care home
 25 with therapeutic care. I think the child had multiple

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1 properly monitored? It doesn't appear, for example,
 2 there were multi-agency meetings in the other areas?
 3 **A. I think that's probably fair, yes.**
 4 Q. Can I ask you some questions, please, about CS-A213.
 5 Just to orientate the panel in relation to this child's
 6 case, 213 is a male victim. Again, there were concerns
 7 around online grooming through dating apps and things of
 8 that nature. When you reviewed this young man's case,
 9 how responsive did you feel Social Services had been in
 10 the March 2019 period? You were asked specifically to
 11 look at that in the context of empathy and concern. Did
 12 you feel that that was positive or not? If it helps
 13 you, it looks as if, at around that time, the school
 14 staff and the social worker did outline his wishes and
 15 did deal with his case and looked at issues around why
 16 he felt shame and blame. Did you read that part of
 17 the paperwork?
 18 **A. I did, yes. I think, reflecting on this case, because**
 19 **this case clearly was not one that, in a major way, was**
 20 **within our looked-after system. It was a child where**
 21 **there were concerns that were being expressed regarding**
 22 **his engagement, and I think the assessment that was**
 23 **completed there was peremptory rather than**
 24 **comprehensive. I think that, on reflection of that,**
 25 **what happened there then would not happen now.**

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1 missing episodes and ultimately was considered very high
 2 risk and intervention was brought in, but I think there
 3 were questions about the timing of that. So, having
 4 looked at CS-A26's case, you were asked to consider the
 5 risks associated with the initial care placement for
 6 this child. Do you want to respond to that?
 7 **A. Yes, I think the risks here were very much exaggerated**
 8 **by the fact that the young person concerned went missing**
 9 **on a large number of occasions and was placing**
 10 **themselves in situations of vulnerability, really. As**
 11 **a consequence of that, I think, the initial placement --**
 12 **I just want to revert back to where I was earlier. Very**
 13 **often, placements are not -- the child is not placed in**
 14 **an ideal situation; they are placed in what's available.**
 15 **And in this case that's probably an example of that.**
 16 Q. Do you think, on reflection, looking back on this case,
 17 that the initial care placements did in fact increase
 18 the risks to the child?
 19 **A. It did. But again I think what I would say is, what**
 20 **you're talking about here is three years ago, probably,**
 21 **that first initial placement being made.**
 22 Q. I think the child was assessed as high risk
 23 in June 2016, in fairness.
 24 **A. Yes. Some years ago, yes.**
 25 Q. What were the concerns -- sorry, carry on?

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1 **A. No, I was just going to say, practice in 2016 is very**
 2 **different to practice you've got today.**
 3 Q. It looks, from the paperwork we have, as if the child
 4 was assessed as high risk in June 2016 but removed from
 5 the MACE process in October 2016 because of
 6 professionals determining that the behaviour was "just
 7 risky behaviour". Do you want to comment on that?
 8 I think the child was on a child protection plan by then
 9 but removing the child from the MACE process because it
 10 was "just risky behaviour". Do you want to comment on
 11 that?
 12 **A. What I would say about it is, that was not an**
 13 **appropriate decision. That was not a reasonable**
 14 **decision.**
 15 MS HILL: Those are all the questions I have for you,
 16 Mr Leivers. Just let me double-check one other
 17 document, please. I think those are all the questions
 18 I have for you, Mr Leivers. Chair and panel, unless you
 19 have any questions?
 20 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Hill.
 21 Questions from THE PANEL
 22 THE CHAIR: Mr Leivers, earlier on in your questioning
 23 I think you referred to levels of resources. Could
 24 I just clarify, are you saying that children's social
 25 care resources have not kept pace with demand in recent

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1 **So you've not seen what you would expect, in some**
 2 **ways, with lockdown and COVID, any explosion in demand**
 3 **although I'm not saying that isn't something that we**
 4 **anticipate in the future.**
 5 **But what you have done is, you've had within**
 6 **St Helens a period of time where there were concerns**
 7 **that were being expressed by our regulators regarding**
 8 **the quality of service that existed in St Helens. There**
 9 **was a significant input into the authority services in**
 10 **the previous financial year, and as a new director I've**
 11 **benefited hugely from that. So we have now got**
 12 **caseloads that are sitting more or less sort of 15 to**
 13 **18, which is a bloody good caseload for a social worker**
 14 **compared to other areas, and we have seen a reducing use**
 15 **of our statutory intervention, but alongside that, we**
 16 **have introduced, for example, specialist safeguarding**
 17 **team, we have introduced a new assessment team, we have**
 18 **introduced a whole load of services that actually have**
 19 **been a real advantage to us of trying to fix what was**
 20 **seen as serious shortcomings by Ofsted and others.**
 21 THE CHAIR: Thank you. So you're confirming there's been no
 22 detriment to your service in the last --
 23 **A. Not at all, no, absolutely not. It's been quite**
 24 **remarkable the level of increase in the resources that**
 25 **are made available for children and young people in**

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1 times, particularly with reference, of course, for you
 2 to comment on child protection including child sexual
 3 abuse and child sexual exploitation?
 4 **A. I cannot think of a local authority in either England or**
 5 **Wales -- although I don't know anything about Wales --**
 6 **in England where resources have kept pace with demand.**
 7 **It's been a very, very stretching issue. In St Helens,**
 8 **you have seen a 28 per cent increase in resources over**
 9 **the last 12 months which puts it at odds with**
 10 **practically any other local authority that I have been**
 11 **involved with. So there has been considerable**
 12 **additional investment by the council in services.**
 13 **You're still left with big gaps. Part of those gaps are**
 14 **about your inability to recruit and keep staff.**
 15 THE CHAIR: What's been the level of increased demand, if
 16 you have had a 28 per cent increase in funding?
 17 **A. It is really quite interesting what COVID has done.**
 18 **What we have seen in the first six months of this year**
 19 **is a real falling away of demand. So during that whole**
 20 **period of lockdown, the numbers of children we have in**
 21 **our looked-after system have gone down, the numbers of**
 22 **children we have within our child protection system has**
 23 **gone down slightly but remain remarkably static and our**
 24 **child in need population is pretty much where it was**
 25 **a year ago as well.**

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1 **St Helens compared to other areas.**
 2 **Now, one of the big problems that you've got as**
 3 **a local authority is that the impact of COVID and the**
 4 **level of funding that you've got from central government**
 5 **to support COVID is leaving this authority with**
 6 **a deficit in excess of £20 million.**
 7 THE CHAIR: Yes, I understand that. Thank you.
 8 I understand that very well. Thank you.
 9 The other question here is, you talked about the
 10 role of health. I wonder if you would know the answer
 11 to this: if an under-18-year-old, a child, and
 12 especially one who may be known to the authorities,
 13 attended a sexual health clinic, would that information
 14 be communicated to children's social care or indeed the
 15 police?
 16 **A. I don't know the answer to that.**
 17 THE CHAIR: Could you find out, please, whether that would
 18 be relevant. Depending on their age, it may not be the
 19 case, but also depending on their history --
 20 **A. I understand the question entirely, yes.**
 21 THE CHAIR: The third question from me is about whether your
 22 council uses its full range of statutory powers, for
 23 example, in licensing of premises or licensing of taxi
 24 drivers or requiring them to undertake training on child
 25 sexual exploitation, for example? Does your council do

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1 that?

2 **A. Yes, it does, and it does it well. We have got -- we**

3 **are very active in ensuring that our taxi drivers are,**

4 **one, trained, made familiar and we have the appropriate**

5 **level of DPS clearance.**

6 THE CHAIR: Are disciplinary processes used as and when

7 appropriate, if necessary?

8 **A. Yes, they are.**

9 THE CHAIR: Via the licensing laws?

10 **A. Yes, it's my understanding, yes -- well, it's more than**

11 **my understanding. I know that we do.**

12 THE CHAIR: Do you have any idea of numbers?

13 **A. No, I don't, but I certainly can get those for you if**

14 **the panel would require them.**

15 THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Ms Sharpling?

16 MS SHARPLING: Thank you, chair. Just a couple of questions

17 from me. We heard from Ms McKenna this morning, in

18 answer to some questions, about the increase in violence

19 that she had come across in the last 12 months, and she

20 mentioned specifically threats to parents of violence

21 from perpetrators of sexual abuse and other abuses, no

22 doubt. What she said was that many of the parents

23 didn't want to report these matters to the police, and

24 I'm sure you will understand that, on occasions, not

25 reporting a matter to the police, however good that

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1 terminology, in fact they have already suffered a great

2 deal of harm before they reach that stage. Would that

3 alter your answer? They are not so much at risk, but

4 it's already happened and may happen again. Can I press

5 you on this?

6 **A. I'm trying to think my way through it, because I think**

7 **they're good questions. I don't think they have simple**

8 **answers to them. I think it is dependent upon the**

9 **individual circumstances of the child and the situation**

10 **that it's in.**

11 **As a general rule, I think we would always want to**

12 **deliver what support is in the best interests of that**

13 **child, but I think sometimes you need to take a wider**

14 **view, very much like what you said earlier.**

15 MS SHARPLING: Thank you very much.

16 THE CHAIR: Mr Frank?

17 MR FRANK: No, thank you.

18 THE CHAIR: Sir Malcolm?

19 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: Yes, thank you, just one question

20 from me.

21 I was struck at several points in the documentation

22 in the statements before us by the number of statements

23 that suggest that there was no evidence of child sexual

24 abuse by gangs or organised networks, either being

25 currently investigated or indeed being known to be

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1 reason is from a parent's perspective, may encourage

2 a perpetrator to continue carrying on the way she or he

3 has.

4 I was wonder whether, and if you could clarify this,

5 if a parent was anxious not to take the matter further,

6 what would be the reaction of the social worker or the

7 worker working with the child and the parent to put that

8 wrap-around service in child sexual abuse cases?

9 **A. That's a good question, isn't it? Our first approach or**

10 **line in relation to this is, what's in the best**

11 **interests of the child.**

12 MS SHARPLING: Of course.

13 **A. We would always want to pursue what is the best way to**

14 **deal with the situation that would actually support that**

15 **young person.**

16 **The second thing that I would say is that, when**

17 **you're faced with those sorts of dilemmas, it's**

18 **exceptionally difficult, and sometimes they're very fine**

19 **judgments of actively pursuing and persuading parents or**

20 **actually doing it anyway when you feel a child is at**

21 **risk, and if you feel a child is at risk from harm, then**

22 **you must, as a social worker, pursue that.**

23 MS SHARPLING: So, for instance, we have heard quite a bit

24 of evidence during the course of this investigation that

25 by the time the children are at risk, to use the same

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1 prevalent.

2 Although I did get the sense from comments made by

3 our first witness this morning that there was a belief

4 that this possibly was not the case.

5 What is your understanding about the possible

6 prevalence or lack of evidence concerning

7 gangs/organised networks in relation to sexual abuse of

8 children, or is it, indeed, just not a phenomenon in

9 St Helens?

10 **A. I think I'd like to try to contextualise that. I was,**

11 **for seven years, the director of children's services in**

12 **Oxfordshire, and in Oxfordshire we dealt with major**

13 **child sexual exploitation, which resulted in seven life**

14 **sentences of men who committed some of the most awful**

15 **crimes against children.**

16 **One of the things that struck me was, for years,**

17 **Oxfordshire did not see it had a problem. It only began**

18 **to see it had a problem when it actively sought out and**

19 **went looking for it. That was, in many ways, police**

20 **driven and it was a lot to do with having a hugely**

21 **proactive chief constable at Thames Valley.**

22 **Putting that against St Helens, I have no evidence**

23 **whatsoever from any of my social workers -- you know,**

24 **when you're dealing with these things on a day-to-day**

25 **basis, it is often those informal worries or whispers or**

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1 concerns -- certainly that's how it happened in
 2 Oxfordshire with me -- that leads to you actually
 3 putting some of those things together and saying, "We
 4 have a problem". But I haven't had any of that in
 5 St Helens and, indeed, I'm not aware of any prosecution
 6 of perpetrators in St Helens, which is -- that in itself
 7 isn't necessarily, because you haven't prosecuted
 8 anybody then everything is okay, but I haven't got any
 9 overriding evidence that we have got gangs that are
 10 there engaged in it.

11 You've got to remember that what you're dealing with
 12 here very often is sophisticated, fear-driven situations
 13 where kids -- youngsters, boys or girls, are not going
 14 to come along and say it's happening to them because it
 15 has a whole range of implications for them of shame, of
 16 being taken away from their family home. There's big
 17 consequences.

18 So I don't know of anything, but that doesn't mean
 19 it's not there. But I would suspect that, if it was, we
 20 would have a pretty good idea. So there is no evidence
 21 as such.

22 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: Thank you very much.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Leivers. We have no
 24 further questions.

25 (The witness withdrew)

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1 are in place, as you know. I have a series of questions
 2 for you and I will follow the topics list as best I can.

3 Can I begin, first of all, by asking you some
 4 general questions about the problem profiling of child
 5 sexual exploitation in your area, perhaps by bringing
 6 up, please, first of all, the evidence that you gave
 7 generally in the first witness statement at
 8 MSP000218_001. Can I bring up, please, Danny,
 9 paragraphs 5 to 6. These were asking you for some
 10 general information, Mr Critchley, about the problem
 11 profiling in your area. Help us with what is said at
 12 paragraph 6 about the sources of the profile?

13 **A. Yes, it explains that the last profile we did in
 14 relation to specifically for St Helens in relation to
 15 the question that was asked was completed
 16 in December 2018. There was an intention to complete
 17 that further in 2019, December. That wasn't done for
 18 a number of reasons. One was because of work we are
 19 carrying out now online, in terms of our profiling,
 20 called our Delphi tool, which I can explain further as
 21 required.**

22 **Two, there was a concentration in other areas of
 23 Merseyside at that time.**

24 **And, three, a concentration in relation to reduction
 25 that was made in staffing across the board that were**

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1 THE CHAIR: Ms Hill, we will take our mid-afternoon break
 2 now and return at 3.15 pm.

3 MS HILL: Thank you, chair.

4 (2.59 pm)

5 (A short break)

6 (3.15 pm)

7 MS HILL: Can I call, please, Ian David Critchley, please.

8 MR IAN DAVID CRITCHLEY (sworn)

9 Examination by MS HILL

10 MS HILL: You are Ian David Critchley; is that right?

11 **A. I am, yes.**

12 Q. You have provided the inquiry with a series of witness
 13 statements. Can you just give the inquiry, please, your
 14 rank and current position?

15 **A. Yes, I'm Assistant Chief Constable at Merseyside Police.**

16 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Critchley. You have provided
 17 witness statements I think with the following INQ
 18 numbers: MSP000218, MSP000316 MSP000223 and MSP000322.
 19 Chair, with your permission, I formally adduce those
 20 statements in full.

21 Mr Critchley, are those statements true, to the best
 22 of your knowledge and belief?

23 **A. Yes, they are.**

24 Q. If you can't see or hear me, please let me know and
 25 please make sure you respect the restriction orders that

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1 **needed to concentrate very much on the tactical
 2 operation analysis to make sure that was joined up.
 3 So they were the main reasons that are explained in
 4 paragraph 6.**

5 Q. You have given some further evidence and I don't need to
 6 bring it up about what you have just described. Help us
 7 with what is the most recent date on the profile for
 8 St Helens in terms of CSE?

9 **A. The latest serious organised crime local policing
 10 profile was December 2018.**

11 Q. That is, if I have got it correctly, MSP000224. Can we
 12 just have a look at that briefly. Is that the document
 13 that you are referring to?

14 **A. It is.**

15 Q. Just for the chair and panel, they can perhaps look at
 16 the table of contents on the next page. The main
 17 vulnerabilities were described as child sexual
 18 exploitation abuse, human trafficking and modern
 19 slavery. Is that correct?

20 **A. That's correct.**

21 Q. Within that document, is there anything in particular
 22 that you feel the chair and panel need to understand?

23 **A. No. I think it explains there the levels of referral,
 24 in terms of victims and perpetrators. It clearly covers
 25 the widest range of areas that cover serious organised**

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<p>1 crime. You will see a section within there on organised 2 criminality. I'm very conscious that this is a key 3 focus for the panel here, and it didn't identify that 4 there was any organised crime groups that mapped across 5 into CSE. 6 Q. Let's just a look, please, at internal page 12, Danny, 7 and page 13, where I think within the profile document 8 there is discussion of -- we see active St Helens OCGs; 9 is that right? 10 A. That's correct. 11 Q. And you can see within the pie chart different elements 12 of criminality that are described. Is what you are 13 reflecting here that there isn't, within the profile, an 14 understanding that OCGs and CSE are necessarily linked. 15 Is that a fair summary? 16 A. That's correct. 17 Q. Can I ask you to look, please, at some of 18 the information you have collated for the inquiry about 19 the profile of victims of CSE and also the profile of 20 perpetrators. So could I look, please, at 21 MSP000218_004, paragraph 26. Just draw out for the 22 panel from that, please, Mr Critchley, the key issues 23 that you think emerge from these statistics on 24 perpetrators? 25 A. It's identifying that obviously a total of 217</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 125</p>	<p>1 perpetrators, the vast majority were men, with lesser so 2 females, and the age groups particularly broad around 3 the greatest numbers being between 16 and 51. 4 Q. Then, just over the page -- sorry, carry on. 5 A. I was going to explain there's some obviously further 6 ethnicity data, which largely reflects the makeup of 7 the St Helens Borough, which, on the last census my 8 understanding was around 98 per cent white British male. 9 There are some data quality issues we recognise are in 10 the process of being developed since this was submitted. 11 Q. Paragraph 27 has a table around data for victims of CSE. 12 Can you just draw out the key findings from that for the 13 panel, please? 14 A. Yes, I can. Similarly, there's the total of victims 15 with the highest proportion, probably over 16 three-quarters, being recorded as female victims. 17 Again, the highest being recorded as 298 being between 18 nought and 17, and, again, we have provided some further 19 information around ethnicity which, again, is subject to 20 some data quality issues. 21 Q. You have. Just for completeness, the ethnicity data for 22 victims is at 29 of this page. So of the 435 child 23 victims, 246 had self-identified as white British, ie, 24 56.5 per cent. 104 had not answered the question. Then 25 there are some further statistics given. Is that right?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 126</p>
<p>1 A. It is. 2 Q. Over the page, there's the similar analysis for 3 perpetrators. So of the 217 perpetrators -- this is 4 paragraph 30 -- 147 had self-defined as white British 5 and 37 had not answered the question. Then there are 6 the further figures given. Is it partly because of 7 the non -- the nil returns on some of these that you 8 think the data is problematic? 9 A. I do. I think there's some of that. I think there's 10 some work for our officers in terms of how that is 11 addressed. I think, though, thereby the issue that's 12 reflected in perpetrators and victims largely reflects 13 the census data in 2011 in terms of the low number of 14 BAME victims and perpetrators. 15 Q. Can I bring up, please, MSP000218_014, please, where you 16 were asked about the extent to which the force is 17 engaged in regular mapping of gang-associated sexual 18 violence and exploitation. I think you confirmed that 19 that is not recorded in isolation from an SOC 20 perspective, but there is "absolutely a mechanism as per 21 guidance where we are required to make a review of all 22 OCGs on PND on a regular basis". Just help us with 23 understanding that part of your witness evidence, 24 please? 25 A. First of all, there is national guidance in relation to</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 127</p>	<p>1 the police's approach to organised crime group mapping, 2 as explained there. There's different tiers in terms of 3 how we treat organised crime groups, whether that's at 3 4 and 4, where we will look at a local policing response, 5 or tier 1 and 2 where we look at either national, 6 regional or force active targeting approach. We will 7 also map against different types of crime as well, which 8 includes CSE, and I have staff, intelligence staff, and 9 serious organised crime staff, who, on a daily basis, 10 see intelligence that comes in both for perpetrators and 11 victims to determine whether that should be mapped 12 within this. 13 We do that at a regional level as well, and my 14 understanding from the last regional profile 15 in September, there was 11 mapped organised crime groups 16 for the region that had child sex exploitation either as 17 a primary or a secondary crime type. 18 Q. Just tell us a little bit more then about how that 19 evidence fits with the profile that we looked at? 20 A. Well, that fits within the evidence that we would draw 21 out here, that there is no evidence to indicate -- I'm 22 careful with my language here because there's 23 a difference between not having it against being 24 absolutely certain that it doesn't exist, and that's 25 part of my job, absolutely, to make sure that our</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 128</p>

1 systems, our processes, our cultures, our partnerships
 2 are all able to identify and draw out organised
 3 criminality if it is occurring in relation to child sex
 4 exploitation.
 5 **What I do know is that the last mapped OCG in**
 6 **relation to CSE in St Helens was pre 2017, and at this**
 7 **moment in time, in relation to St Helens specifically,**
 8 **there is not an organised crime group that is mapped in**
 9 **terms of targeting children.**
 10 **What I can say, though, and this process has allowed**
 11 **me to reflect on our processes, is that there is some**
 12 **evidence of organised criminality in other areas of**
 13 **Merseyside that hasn't necessarily featured in the**
 14 **mapping process, and that is currently being subject to**
 15 **further development.**
 16 Q. I think quite separately, Mr Critchley, from the OCG
 17 question, you were asked to consider the inquiry's
 18 definition of a network. Can I ask you, please, to look
 19 at MSP000322_001, paragraphs 2 and 3, please. You were
 20 asked to consider whether applying the inquiry's
 21 definition of a network, which is rather different to
 22 the definition of an OCG, whether or not there were any
 23 open investigations in relation to child sexual
 24 exploitation by organised networks in St Helens, and
 25 your answer at paragraph 3 was essentially, no. Is that

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1 a police or a partnership system, where there is an
 2 organised level of crime taking place.
 3 Q. Finally by way of general evidence on this topic,
 4 I think we know from documentation provided that
 5 in September 2019 the complex safeguarding profile was
 6 updated. Is there anything in particular about that
 7 document you'd like to draw out for the panel?
 8 **A. I think what I would, if I may, ma'am, draw out, is that**
 9 **still reflects the previous profile that we have put in**
 10 **place in St Helens. But I would seek to draw attention,**
 11 **if I may, to the Delphi tool that I now have in place --**
 12 Q. Do you want us to bring up the document?
 13 **A. It would help, please.**
 14 Q. MSP000467. Just help us with what it is you wish to
 15 draw out from this document. Is this the correct
 16 document for you? Have I given you the right reference?
 17 **A. That's a current position -- unless you're going to go**
 18 **on to the next pages. I was going to --**
 19 Q. If you wish. But talk about the Delphi thing?
 20 **A. The Delphi is an online tool. I suppose that allows me**
 21 **to both operationally, tactically but strategically**
 22 **understand in relation to specifically in St Helens**
 23 **where CSE perpetrators are, where CSE victims are, where**
 24 **our repeat premises are, where children may be going**
 25 **missing from who have CSE flags. It allows me to**

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1 right?
 2 **A. That's correct.**
 3 Q. To what extent is the grooming of a child, for example,
 4 by more than one individual on social media considered
 5 or classified as a network?
 6 **A. I think that's where -- I think one of the key aspects**
 7 **of this inquiry and work that we are doing is how you**
 8 **relate the definition that the inquiry has taken in**
 9 **relation to a network, which I am absolutely confident**
 10 **is drawn out through our processes, our threat, harm and**
 11 **risk that takes place daily, as you have heard, in**
 12 **St Helens, as a partnership in a team through to**
 13 **force-level meetings, some of which I chair, which will**
 14 **draw out where there is a network against our duty to**
 15 **map an organised crime group, the definition of which is**
 16 **different.**
 17 **Children, of course, don't care about definitions in**
 18 **terms of us being able to protect them, and I think the**
 19 **key here is that we seek to simplify it as much as**
 20 **possible to be able to identify where there is an**
 21 **organised level of exploitation of children.**
 22 **I believe Chief Constable Bailey is assisting**
 23 **nationally the work that we are doing locally around**
 24 **joining up the different systems that we have, because**
 25 **we must be able to draw out, wherever that is within**

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1 understand how many child abduction warning notices are,
 2 and that allows us, on a daily basis, to share that
 3 information with our local policing colleagues, for
 4 example, right through to strategic meetings to
 5 understand year on year what is the difference in terms
 6 of trends and demand, which obviously then tells us
 7 where the risk is for children and allows us to put
 8 a response in place.
 9 Q. Overall, does the data suggest a greater intelligence on
 10 CSE, including by gangs and groups, than is reflected in
 11 the profile?
 12 **A. I don't think it does. I think our processes**
 13 **demonstrate real rigour on a daily basis to scrutinise**
 14 **every single piece of information. You've heard the**
 15 **information from return interviews, for example, how**
 16 **that comes into our system, the work that we do with our**
 17 **missing persons coordinators, the fact that we have**
 18 **PCSOs now attached to each care home. The MACE process,**
 19 **which we are very proud of, an ability to both**
 20 **dynamically and operationally but also strategically**
 21 **share information. Can I be categorical: I think my job**
 22 **is to make sure that there absolutely isn't anything in**
 23 **there that demonstrates criminality and that's**
 24 **a continual process. Again, we take any learning from**
 25 **the inquiry as we move forward.**

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<p>1 Q. We have been provided with some evidence, I think, about 2 the input of the HMICFRS and the review that took place 3 I think in April/May 2019. Do you want to draw anything 4 out from that review and help us with how the force has 5 responded to that? In fact, forgive me. I think the 6 inspection was 2018 and it was a post-inspection review 7 in 2019. That's right, I think.</p> <p>8 A. It is. It was a very helpful review. The initial 9 inspection identified a number of recommendations for 10 us, particularly in relation to, for example, the 11 "absent" category in relation to missing children that 12 we felt was being inappropriately and unhelpfully used. 13 It also --</p> <p>14 Q. Sorry, Mr Critchley, I can perhaps help you if I bring 15 up INQ005332_006. It summarises, I think, the findings 16 in response to each of the recommendations. Just taking 17 them briefly, the first recommendation was around 18 recording the observations of a child's behaviour and 19 demeanour in records of domestic abuse incidents so that 20 better assessments of the child's needs are made, and we 21 can see there the response to that, which was to record 22 the efforts the force had made in that regard. Is that 23 correct?</p> <p>24 A. Yes, I think you've put on the post-inspection review 25 findings. I'm happy to summarise. The inspection</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 133</p>	<p>1 identified -- it looked through case audits and 2 identified there were a number of files undertaken where 3 we didn't necessarily see the voice of the child within 4 that, ie, look at it from the child's perspective. As 5 I said, there were missing issues in relation to that. 6 There was also a particular focus on domestic abuse. We 7 took real importance from that inspection. We worked 8 very closely, myself, my superintendent in charge of 9 public protection, but public protection only works well 10 if it works across a force in every aspect of it and it 11 works across in a partnership. So the Voice of 12 the Child initiative which we undertook, we removed the 13 absent category in relation to that.</p> <p>14 The inspection is subject to monthly reviews at 15 a public protection strategic meeting that we take place 16 in force to make sure those actions weren't just 17 remedied at a point in time but continued to influence 18 force and partnership responses to protect children.</p> <p>19 Q. Just taking it briefly, if I may, over the next page, 20 please, on to page 7, because this does touch on several 21 of the issues. I think when the 2018 inspection took 22 place, the recommendation was that there was a need for 23 Merseyside to improve practice in relation to children 24 going missing from home. At a minimum, improve staff 25 awareness of their responsibilities and improve staff</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 134</p>
<p>1 awareness of the significance of drawing together the 2 information from police systems.</p> <p>3 Overall, the summary of the post-inspection review 4 findings was that, in 2018, some cases involved children 5 who were wrongly classified as being at no apparent 6 risk. The conclusion of the review was that the force 7 had put in place a range of initiatives to address that 8 and had significantly reduced the number of those 9 assessed as being at no apparent risk. We can see from 10 the next paragraph the number had gone down from 240 to 11 8 which the inspector said was positive. Is that right?</p> <p>12 A. It is, and that's something that's monitored every month 13 at the public protection strategic meeting. Since then, 14 of course, we have developed further from there. We 15 have now a dedicated missing persons unit. We have 16 dedicated missing persons coordinators. As I said, we 17 have a PCSO for each care home in relation to making 18 sure that we go -- as the inspection identified, not 19 just looking at the numbers, but going much deeper in 20 terms of understanding risk where a child has gone 21 missing. All the return interview information is fed 22 into the CE team, the child exploitation team, but also 23 into my force intelligence and washed through on a daily 24 basis to make sure that we understand exactly what we 25 know about the child, about any offender or network of</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 135</p>	<p>1 offenders and, indeed, the premises, in order to seek to 2 problem solve and reduce the level of risk.</p> <p>3 Q. Can we go over to internal page_008, please. Sorry for 4 taking that down. It is INQ005332_008. The bullet 5 points on the top of that page indicate the areas where 6 the inspectors concluded that there was more work still 7 to be done by the force. It said risks still tended to 8 be under-recognised, some language minimising the risk, 9 for example, "They're a regular". Available 10 intelligence and information about risk and 11 vulnerability wasn't used in the supporting rationale 12 for determining the risk level. The quality of 13 supervisor and inspector reviews was mixed. Activity to 14 find missing children is too often desk-based. To what 15 extent have those action points been addressed by the 16 force?</p> <p>17 A. I'll answer the last one first, if I may, just alluding 18 to what I've just talked about in terms of our 19 investment in terms of the missing persons unit which is 20 now within a prevent and problem-solving strand -- and 21 you may be aware, obviously, not only of the people 22 involved, but the process that will take place in action 23 plans around children that go missing (inaudible) as 24 a partnership, so there's real rigour around that 25 process.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 136</p>

1 **Quality of supervisor and inspector reviews. We**
 2 **took the HMI methodology in terms of our own audit**
 3 **scrutiny. That takes place every month under the head**
 4 **of crime and reports in to the public protection**
 5 **strategic meetings who are looking at the quality of**
 6 **investigation. We have a level of supervisory reviews,**
 7 **so, for example, every month, a review needs to be done**
 8 **by a sergeant followed by, I think, three-monthly by an**
 9 **inspector followed by a chief inspector and**
 10 **superintendent. So there is real rigour around those**
 11 **investigations.**

12 **Intelligence and information I have talked about.**
 13 **There is so much more I think we can still do around**
 14 **this area, but I'm confident in the investment that we**
 15 **have made, and also the passion of the people involved**
 16 **that every single piece of intelligence or information**
 17 **that comes to us via our partnership or internally from**
 18 **police staff recognising the first risk is often seen by**
 19 **a response officer, local policing officer, a health**
 20 **visitor, that that comes into the system and through the**
 21 **MACE process that we have had, that you have seen, that**
 22 **we are able to understand, and if I may, and I'm**
 23 **conscious of your time, our contact centre, as soon as**
 24 **somebody rings up and talks about a child, our system --**
 25 **we have something called Bluestar. That will tell that**

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1 the post-inspection review were positive to the extent
 2 that, as we see in the bold in the middle of this page,
 3 investigations are being allocated to investigators with
 4 suitable specialist skills. But then, over the page,
 5 also officers are investing time in understanding the
 6 views of the child to better understand risk, but
 7 questions about whether the recording of joint working
 8 was always being recorded effectively on police systems.
 9 So I think that's saying it wasn't always being
 10 recorded effectively. Do you think that has been
 11 addressed further since then?

12 **A. Yes, I think it's the level of information that we**
 13 **record, for example, and as long as it's recorded**
 14 **it's -- we are happy that the information intelligence**
 15 **as I've described is fed into police systems. Will**
 16 **every piece of information from a strategy meeting, for**
 17 **example, be fed in? No. And neither do I think it**
 18 **needs to be, as long as the key information intelligence**
 19 **that allows us to best protect that child from further,**
 20 **but preferably from any, exploitation takes place.**

21 Q. You've given several witness statements that address, to
 22 some degree, the issue of disruption of offenders.
 23 I think you've given some evidence very recently about
 24 the CAWNs issue. Can I perhaps just bring that up.
 25 Just for the note, your evidence around disruption is at

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1 **call handler exactly what our system has about that**
 2 **child already.**

3 **Our victim persons referral unit, which we have just**
 4 **invested in, which I'm very proud about, if a child is**
 5 **referred in there by a response officer, they will look**
 6 **at that within 24 hours. That will be the CE1 process,**
 7 **as such, from the policing perspective.**

8 **We now have Liquidlogic, which is this intel in the**
 9 **system of child social care. So my officers can see**
 10 **whether that child is already open, for example, to**
 11 **a children's social worker. Again, so the issues that**
 12 **you have talked about, whether they have got**
 13 **a disability, what their ethnicity is, will all be**
 14 **within that rich picture to be able to then forward it**
 15 **through to the MACE process and, within five days, have**
 16 **a full wrap-around around that child.**

17 Q. A couple more points, please, on investigation as found
 18 by the inspectors, because that does feed into
 19 disruption to some degree, one of our themes.
 20 INQ005332_008. The previous inspector's review had
 21 directed the force, or recommended that the force,
 22 improve its child exploitation investigations in
 23 a series of ways set out at the bottom of that page and
 24 just to take this quite quickly, if I may, if we scroll
 25 through the next few pages, the findings of

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1 your MSP000218 internal paragraphs 13, 15, 17 to 24, 44
 2 to 48 and 82 to 89, and your MSP000223 statement at
 3 paragraphs 7 to 19, 25 and 29 to 30. But most recently,
 4 you have given some evidence about the use of CAWNs as
 5 a disruption tool. Can I bring up, please,
 6 MSP000322_001 through to _003, if possible. You have
 7 done some further analysis of the use of CAWNs. Help us
 8 with that, please, Mr Critchley?

9 **A. Yes, I think you're obviously showing the same page as**
 10 **on there. I think, first of all, what we did do was**
 11 **a review of all missing children that were found with**
 12 **adults --**

13 Q. The table. We can scroll in on the table, I think,
 14 can't we?

15 **A. We can. So there is the number specifically there, and**
 16 **East 2 is in relation to the St Helens area. That tells**
 17 **us that, in relation to those that were found in company**
 18 **with an adult, we issued six CAWNs. What we also did**
 19 **was review all missing children found with adults**
 20 **through the missing persons coordinators and there was**
 21 **a number of CAWNs issued.**

22 **If I may, can I give a general view? I think there**
 23 **is work for to us do.**

24 Q. Just help us understand the data. The bottom table has
 25 children found in company of an adult. Which of these

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1 areas did you say were St Helens?
 2 **A. East 2.**
 3 Q. East 2 looks to have 68 children found missing. Is that
 4 right? In December 2019?
 5 **A. Yes.**
 6 Q. 45 found December 19. Is that found in company of an
 7 adult?
 8 **A. That's as described there, yes -- sorry, no, it's not,**
 9 **that's found. What we haven't been able to do, and**
 10 **I think it explains that in the statement, is be able to**
 11 **identify -- but what you have seen within, I think,**
 12 **paragraph 6 was a trail through of those found with**
 13 **adults and identification where there was missed**
 14 **opportunities and further CAWNs issued as a result.**
 15 Q. So the figure that we see in the right-hand column of 2,
 16 what does that tell us?
 17 **A. Well, for me it says that there's a very limited number**
 18 **of CAWNs issued. If I may, it is work that we have**
 19 **identified at our public protection strategic meeting,**
 20 **it is work that we have specifically actioned. I think**
 21 **CAWNs are a valuable tool if used right. I think**
 22 **sometimes they replace the need for positive action.**
 23 **I think sometimes we will issue a CAWN and I think some**
 24 **of the examples -- again, I'm careful with my language,**
 25 **I think some of the examples that you may or may not go**

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1 **to which a child is receiving a return interview,**
 2 **recognising the importance of this in terms of their own**
 3 **safeguarding and exploitation, so obviously the**
 4 **numbers I think speak for themselves. I suppose the key**
 5 **bit for me is the percentage of return interviews**
 6 **completed against numbers of missing episodes. I think**
 7 **there is some explanation for that in relation to**
 8 **whether there might be a series of missing episodes**
 9 **prior to repeat -- a return interview taking place.**
 10 **There may be a decline in terms of the child declining**
 11 **taking that into view, and I think you've also obviously**
 12 **heard evidence around return interviews in relation to**
 13 **children that may be from other areas.**
 14 **I think the other point to raise on this is that,**
 15 **clearly, there is usually two stages to this. The first**
 16 **one is an officer seeing that child. What used to be**
 17 **called a safe and well check, it's now a preventative**
 18 **interview. Clearly the statutory requirement is for the**
 19 **local authority to get an independent return interview,**
 20 **but for myself, it is a two-stage process and the**
 21 **important piece is that the police officer attending**
 22 **also, as best as they can, but not only from the child**
 23 **but whether that's from a parent, from a care home,**
 24 **identifies further information to see -- because, as we**
 25 **know, this is one of, if not the main indicator of child**

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1 **into where we consider whether a CAWN is issued actually**
 2 **my first step is, do we need to arrest here by seeking**
 3 **an evidence-led prosecution. Sometimes we will issue**
 4 **a CAWN instead of seeking to identify substantive**
 5 **offences that are taking place. So there is work**
 6 **ongoing. Some of that is evidenced in my statement, to**
 7 **say how we use this as part of an overall tool. But**
 8 **absolutely use the legislation in the right way to seek**
 9 **to prosecute where offences are made out if they are in**
 10 **the best interests of the child.**
 11 Q. You have also, I think, in this statement helpfully
 12 given some updated information on missing and Return
 13 Home Interviews. Can I ask, Danny, that you scroll in
 14 on paragraphs 11 through to 14, and just while you're
 15 bringing that up, just to note that you have given some
 16 evidence at your statement MSP00218, paragraphs 155
 17 through to 212 which in due course the panel can
 18 consider in slower time. But this just brings up to
 19 date, does it, some information around missing episodes
 20 and return home data?
 21 **A. Yes, it does.**
 22 Q. Just tell us the key points, please, Mr Critchley, from
 23 that evidence?
 24 **A. I think you've heard from both the authority today and**
 25 **Catch22 the key aspects there are, I suppose, the extent**

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1 **exploitation.**
 2 Q. A few other details, please, in relation to this. Can
 3 we bring up MSP000168. Before that is brought up, just
 4 bear with me a second. I think we can probably agree
 5 this basic proposition: is part of the protocol --
 6 I don't need to bring up the letter -- part of
 7 the multi-agency protocol that if there is a child
 8 reported missing in Merseyside nine times in a 90-day
 9 period, a report is made to the local authority?
 10 **A. That's correct.**
 11 Q. We have got an example of that letter. Then we have
 12 also been provided with some correspondence between
 13 Ann Coffey MP and the police from March and April last
 14 year. Can you just summarise what information was
 15 provided in response to that letter? I can bring up
 16 your force's response, if you wish. It is
 17 MSP000259_001-003.
 18 I think, essentially, the MP was, as the chair of
 19 the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and
 20 Missing Children and Adults, asking certain questions
 21 that the force then replied to. Is that right?
 22 **A. It is, ma'am. If I may say, I suppose it is, in one**
 23 **sense, disappointing that this matter still is there.**
 24 **I was head of public protection in Lancashire in 2010 to**
 25 **2014. I had the privilege to work with the right**

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1 honourable member in relation to this very same issue in
 2 relation to an All Parliamentary Group, as well as
 3 working with the Children's Commissioner considering
 4 this as a matter. It seems that the issue of children,
 5 particularly being placed in areas outside our area,
 6 clearly causes an issue in relation to when they go
 7 missing and the responsibility to undertake return
 8 interviews, recognising the level of vulnerability when
 9 someone is further away from their home as well.
 10 We reiterated as a force, I suppose, the response
 11 that Chief Constable Simon Bailey had made to the right
 12 honourable member in relation to that matter.
 13 Q. The particular issues, the chair and panel can read,
 14 were around difficulties in safeguarding children placed
 15 out of borough from other local authorities, around the
 16 vulnerability caused by being placed out of borough,
 17 and, essentially, I think, you adopted what
 18 Chief Constable Bailey was saying on some of those
 19 issues. Is that right?
 20 A. We did. The issue is, of course, one of risk, not
 21 pushing demand someone else. I think historically,
 22 culturally, I've seen that partnerships, for example,
 23 have sought to -- where there is repeat, sought to
 24 perhaps move the demand rather than considering the
 25 level of risk. We try and best take an approach that --

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1 a pictogram, picture representation, I'm not sure quite
 2 what to call it. That indicates, does it, the way in
 3 which the children's partnership board is structured and
 4 the ways in which, therefore, different groups can feed
 5 into that partnership?
 6 A. That's correct.
 7 Q. If we just go over the page to internal page 15, there
 8 is a list of all of the relevant agencies that feature
 9 within the partnership. Are there any particular
 10 strengths, do you think, of joint partnership working
 11 within St Helens that you would like to draw out for the
 12 panel?
 13 A. I think one of the key aspects, and it is still
 14 developing, it's been impacted on by the COVID response,
 15 is, first of all, co-location and co-working. So the
 16 ambition has always been to have a co-located team that
 17 sits at a very operational daily level, as you have
 18 already heard today, the safeguarding team, working with
 19 Catch22, working with the police. I think the MACE
 20 process that you have had lots of documents about but
 21 also been able to see how that relates to specific
 22 examples of children is very rigorous in terms of
 23 seeking to understand risk of every single child. Then
 24 that leads up into the safeguard partnership board that
 25 you have discussed there.

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1 you know, my CE coordinator, my child exploitation
 2 coordinator, if involved in any partnership discussions
 3 about a child that's been placed out of the area will
 4 make contact with the relevant police force to make sure
 5 the information and intelligence we have in relation to
 6 that child being exploited is passed on.
 7 I suggest that this is still inconsistent over the
 8 partnership and across the country.
 9 Q. One of our themes, Mr Critchley, is partnership working
 10 on child sexual exploitation. You have given some
 11 evidence around partnership working in Merseyside at
 12 your MSP000218, paragraphs 253 to 300, and MSP000223,
 13 paragraph 21. The chair and panel have got the child
 14 sexual exploitation policy and procedure from June 2019.
 15 I don't know if I need to bring that up, but it is
 16 MSP000191. Perhaps we can look though, at the
 17 multi-agency arrangements to safeguard children with the
 18 new St Helens Safeguarding Children's Partnership,
 19 MSP000277, please.
 20 I think this is from February of last year, so
 21 reasonably up-to-date partnership working arrangements.
 22 Is that fair?
 23 A. It is, yes.
 24 Q. I think the most straightforward way of doing this,
 25 perhaps, is to bring up internal page _014 that has

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1 That links into a meeting that I chair with the
 2 director of children's services to make sure the new
 3 MASA arrangements are in place and working. That's
 4 a helpful meeting to share information at St Helens
 5 across to the director of children's public services.
 6 My head of public protection also chairs a strategic
 7 MACE meeting which you have also had and I am in the
 8 process of working with the Children's Commissioner
 9 around seeking to bring that meeting together with other
 10 meetings, domestic abuse meetings, harmful practice
 11 meetings, hate crime, where we can actually look at some
 12 of the wider issues, such as commissioning, such as end
 13 to end processes for children to continue to improve our
 14 strategic response as well as at a very local level.
 15 Q. Are there any particular challenges you face in respect
 16 of partnership working?
 17 A. I think one of the biggest challenges, particularly in
 18 this area, of course, the key element of this is that
 19 you prevent a child being abused in the first place.
 20 I think we must acknowledge that a lot of diversionary
 21 activity for young people has been removed and taken
 22 from the system. We are working very hard around that.
 23 Particularly in this area, and particularly around
 24 the, I suppose, growing phenomenon of child criminal
 25 exploitation and county lines work, for example, that we

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<p>1 do with our sports clubs -- Liverpool, Everton, 2 St Helens, the schools work, the investment that we have 3 now got to seek to divert children away from being in 4 the position where they become exploited and abused by 5 offenders, because, clearly, they then have that 6 lifelong harm to deal with, which is appalling. 7 So I think the challenge for us is to make sure we 8 have as much diversionary activity in place, because 9 a lot of our focus is often at the other end where 10 a child has already been exploited and abused. 11 Q. Thank you, Mr Critchley. Chair, my final group of 12 questions, as with the previous witness, is around some 13 specific children. I would just like to ask 14 Mr Critchley a few questions. In fact, there were four 15 children on page 3 of the topics list. I'm not going to 16 ask you about the final one on page 5. 17 Mr Critchley, I think you were asked to review the 18 efficacy of the disruption response in relation to these 19 children, in particular I think the children were 20 CS-A26, 27, 212 and 71. CS-A26 is a child in relation 21 to whom there appear to have been a series of events in 22 2015, and it's not clear what police disruption there 23 was before the police involvement started in 2016. Can 24 you help with that? Sorry, I should have been a bit 25 more specific. It is understood that there was a series</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 149</p>	<p>1 of occasions when the child was missing in 2015 while 2 very young, aged 11 to 12. Do you want to help with 3 what police action took place before 2016? 4 A. Yes. It's difficult from the records to obviously 5 identify the level of tasking that took place in 6 relation to both this child and locations around, but 7 clearly there was a series of incidents that were 8 recorded down in terms of missing responses. 9 What I would raise with the panel is that there 10 were, I believe, a couple of opportunities and you were 11 asking about my reflections, recognising that we have 12 professionals at the time making the best interest 13 decisions, and I suppose it is right to reflect whether 14 we missed opportunities in relation to that. 15 I think there was at least, with this child, two 16 opportunities where the child was found with older 17 adults, and we spoke to the child, they took the child's 18 interests into account, but sometimes we have to make 19 the decisions that are right for that child, and 20 I believe that there is potentially opportunities where 21 we should have taken more positive action. When we talk 22 about being evidence led, where we find an adult with 23 a child in a premises, for me, there are -- potentially, 24 what we should always be considering is the substantive 25 offences. If we then fall back on issuing an abduction</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 150</p>
<p>1 warning notice to stop further offence -- and I think, 2 particularly in relation to this child, there was at 3 least two occurrences where that could have been done. 4 Q. There seem to have been at least -- there's certainly 5 one occasion where the child was found in a park 6 intoxicated with older males, another occasion of 7 a similar nature, in the context of a child -- of 8 the child having a significant number of missing 9 episodes. So those are at least two occasions. There 10 seems to be a further occasion when the child is found 11 in premises with older people on at least one occasion? 12 A. That's correct. 13 Q. Looking at the totality of the events, there are even 14 more dates on which there are -- there is occasion when 15 the police find the child in company with older people, 16 either in premises or in a park or somewhere of that 17 nature. 18 Overall, what's your view on the quality of 19 the police disruption in this case? 20 A. I've read some documents, I've read crime reports in 21 relation to this. There appears a level of empathy from 22 the staff who go and revisit the child, they take into 23 account the views of the child. But I suppose 24 I reiterate my point that I've made already. Looking 25 back at this in totality, there are opportunities, both</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 151</p>	<p>1 in terms of the police response and the partnership 2 response, that could have been more considered, more 3 rigorous and more positive, particularly in relation to 4 adults that were found in relation to this child. 5 Q. CS-A27, as we have heard, is a male child. Concerns 6 around exploitation of this child, in particular from 7 those individuals who contacted the child on Grindr. 8 Did you have a view on the level of disruption in this 9 case, CS-A27. Forgive me, I should have anchored the 10 dates for CS-A26, which I think span 2015 to 2018. The 11 documents on CS-A27 that we asked you to look at were 12 from November 2017 to January 2018. But what was your 13 overall view on the disruption in the case of CS-A27? 14 A. Well, my overarching impression -- it is a very 15 difficult read when you look at it from the context of 16 the child and the exploitation and abuse that took 17 place, as you've already heard, particularly from the 18 DCS, from the local authority, around his views. 19 You have seen what took place in relation to this. 20 The child made a report. Police attended. They 21 reattended. The child would not disclose an offence, 22 a criminal offence, although that was recorded down. It 23 doesn't appear that, thereby, any telephony was able to 24 be seized to be able to look at that app, and of course 25 that app and some other apps don't necessarily record</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 152</p>

1 because they delete straight away the contact that was
 2 made. There was thereby no forensic evidence, there was
 3 thereby no sort of seen in relation to that and the
 4 child was seen twice.
 5 That is no way of me saying that all that was and
 6 could have been done should have been done. It puts in
 7 the challenges that took place in relation to
 8 investigating that specific crime in relation to that
 9 child, and obviously you have gone through a lot of
 10 the partnership discussions that took place in seeking
 11 to protect or, indeed, missed opportunities in relation
 12 to that child with the last respondent.
 13 Q. The police documentation does suggest at least -- well,
 14 one occasion when there's a suggestion that the child
 15 might have been subjected to a date rape drug. Is that
 16 what you'd understood from some of the material?
 17 Because the suggestion that the police were not aware of
 18 any drugs issues doesn't seem to chime necessarily with
 19 that evidence. Can you help with that?
 20 A. I think that is in relation to evidence that was given
 21 to the first person that the complaint was made about.
 22 The officers went, on at least two occasions, to seek to
 23 elicit that information, in the most empathetic way
 24 possible, clearly seek to get the child to undertake an
 25 ABE interview with a specially trained officer, and

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1 any view on the level of supervision of that offender
 2 from the paperwork you have seen? That may not have
 3 been within Merseyside?
 4 A. No, I believe that was (overspeaking).
 5 Q. Can you help with that?
 6 A. I can. I believe that was through another force, but
 7 I suppose I rehearse my previous comment that the final
 8 outcome in relation to the issuing of child abduction
 9 warning notices, where these two males, one of whom is
 10 a registered sex offender, are found with the victim,
 11 for me, should -- and I recognise I'm giving my
 12 reflections and you're asking me for my professional
 13 reflections now -- have led to substantive action being
 14 taken and considered by the Crown Prosecution Service
 15 before we moved straight to a CAWN. That decision was
 16 obviously taken by staff both from different forces at
 17 the time in the interests of the child. My reflection
 18 is that two males, one who is a registered sex offender,
 19 and the child -- a missing child with CSE should be
 20 a positive action arrested and further investigated.
 21 Q. Finally, did the case of CS-A71 raise similar issues
 22 about a child being taken or travelling, I think, with
 23 younger children, even, to different locations around
 24 the geographical area of Merseyside Police? Did that
 25 raise similar issues?

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1 obviously, sadly, that wasn't able to take place, so
 2 clearly it was difficult thereby to further enhance that
 3 information.
 4 Q. A212 is a female child, a looked-after child, there were
 5 concerns about the child going missing on numerous
 6 occasions and, indeed, going into locations or being
 7 taken into locations outside of your force area. It is
 8 our understanding that any disruption activity would
 9 have required collaboration between Merseyside Police
 10 and perhaps two other police forces.
 11 Looking back on the papers in CS-A212's case, are
 12 you confident that there was sufficient
 13 interpolice-force working to disrupt the criminality
 14 against this child?
 15 A. There was collaboration between forces. There was an
 16 operation that was undertaken in relation to this child.
 17 There was sharing of information both in relation to the
 18 child and offenders. Whilst that was led by another
 19 force, my officers did share information, did undertake
 20 activity at the request of that other force in relation
 21 to the disruption of at least two males who, on one
 22 occasion, were found with that child.
 23 Q. It is our understanding from the paperwork that there
 24 was one individual who was a registered sex offender who
 25 appeared to have had access to this child. Do you have

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1 A. Yes, I think it's a common theme within these. It is
 2 something we work very hard -- our Voice of the Child,
 3 our positive action, our reviews by investigators,
 4 having a dedicated child exploitation team. But it's
 5 not just down -- good public protection is not just down
 6 to having a specialist team. It needs to flow through
 7 response officers, local policing officers, through
 8 a partnership, that we take the right action right at
 9 the beginning when we deal with it. I think this again
 10 shows there is good empathy demonstrated, there is
 11 recording of rationale of decisions made. Would I have
 12 liked to have seen more positive action taken? As
 13 I have described in some of the other cases, absolutely.
 14 Q. When a child is moved or trafficked out of your
 15 geographical jurisdiction, does that pose particular
 16 challenges for keeping that child safe?
 17 A. I think the challenges are mostly for the child, of
 18 course, in being in a different area and being subject
 19 to exploitation. Our markers, and we use the Police
 20 National Database to allow us to be able to share
 21 information, so any information we hold can be seen. As
 22 I've described before, we take our responsibilities very
 23 seriously in relation to this, that the child
 24 exploitation coordinator will make contact. Whenever we
 25 are alerted to that placement and involved in a strategy

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1 discussion to move the child with a CSE flag, we will
 2 make immediate contact. We are working together, not
 3 just pushing that child or pushing that demand away. It
 4 is about managing the risk and reducing exploitation of
 5 that child or the opportunities where they go, hopefully
 6 to make them safer.

7 Q. I'm very sorry, I have one question I should have put to
 8 you earlier, Mr Critchley, and that's in relation to the
 9 statement from Pebbles Care. Have you had a chance to
 10 look at that statement?

11 A. I have.

12 Q. There is a paragraph in there about particular
 13 experience of difficulties with police attending at care
 14 homes. Do you want to respond to that?

15 A. I suppose it relates to some of the narrative that
 16 I have given you today in relation to, this isn't just
 17 about pushing demand away, it is about managing risk of
 18 children. I think you've seen in the statements that
 19 I made that ten care homes across our area are
 20 responsible for over 1,000 missing persons reports in
 21 a year. That clearly is high demand, demand we would
 22 like to use elsewhere to be able to protect. We also
 23 consider, and I think there is a duty on care homes to
 24 take their parental responsibility, and that balance
 25 between, I suppose, when somebody should be reported

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1 and of course the work that we did following the HMI
 2 inspection that we are very intimate with and the Voice
 3 of the Child work, we did explain this isn't just about
 4 hearing the voice of the child, it is taking a step
 5 back, looking at the rounded circumstances, the risk
 6 involved and making the best decision for their own
 7 protection from exploitation. So I absolutely think
 8 there is some of that in there.

9 MS SHARPLING: To put it bluntly, if the child had been much
 10 younger, there may not have been such hesitation. Would
 11 you agree with me?

12 A. Yes, I would.

13 MS SHARPLING: In relation to intelligence gathering in
 14 relation to child sexual exploitation, we have heard
 15 throughout this investigation that children obviously,
 16 to use the vernacular, hang out in places -- in bus
 17 stations, outside take-aways, public houses, for
 18 example. How do you brief or are your local police
 19 officers and PCSOs effectively briefed to keep an eye on
 20 children and young people congregating in such places?

21 A. Yes, they are. It's done in a number of different ways.
 22 At a very local level, there is a daily meeting, as you
 23 have heard, within the partnership. There is a weekly
 24 meeting in St Helens, a police meeting. The partners
 25 come and within that -- I have the evidence, I have gone

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1 missing against the duty of care home staff who may well
 2 take on that parental responsibility to do some basic
 3 checks prior to recording to police, that's a very -- it
 4 is an important line that we are not pushing and
 5 abdicating our responsibility and, for that reason, we
 6 have a care home group chaired by a chief inspector. At
 7 the MACE meetings we will identify where premises are.
 8 We have invested in police and crime support officers to
 9 be attached to children's homes to develop the
 10 relationships that we are working together not working
 11 against, because this is about working together to best
 12 protect children of course.

13 MS HILL: Thank you very much, Mr Critchley. Chair, those
 14 are all my questions.

15 THE CHAIR: Thank you. I have no questions. Ms Sharpling?

16 Questions from THE PANEL

17 MS SHARPLING: Thank you, chair. Just a couple of questions
 18 from me, if I may. Mr Critchley, do you think, in the
 19 case examples that have been put before the inquiry
 20 today, that police officers have mistakenly given
 21 paramount importance to the wishes of the child rather
 22 than the best interests of the child?

23 A. I think there is very much some of that within there,
 24 seeking the views of the child, being empathetic to the
 25 child's views, but then being able to take a step back,

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1 through it in detail to see there is taskings to
 2 locations, as you have described there, two local
 3 policing officers. They then put on the intelligence
 4 board for our response officers to go there. Through
 5 the Delphi system that I've described we are able to
 6 identify, potentially, locations, but also care homes
 7 where we might be getting levels of repeats. I can see
 8 on a cluster map of St Helens where we may have
 9 a cluster of perpetrators living or victims living, and
 10 that is used by the local policing superintendent with
 11 the partnership to make sure we task that out on our
 12 CORVUS briefing to officers because, as I said, this is
 13 about prevention, it is also about identification. That
 14 intelligence is then flagged up by officers, put onto
 15 the system and washed through the whole system. So as
 16 soon as we see a precursor, a car, details of an
 17 offender, we take details of the victim, whether that's
 18 from a partnership or police officers, that's washed
 19 through to understand, right, what do we know about that
 20 child and thereby what intervention needs to take place
 21 and that then potentially leads to the MACE process.

22 MS SHARPLING: Thank you. Just a final question, if I may,
 23 in relation to disruption. You have talked about
 24 positive evidential-led disruption techniques, in
 25 a best-case scenario, being a prosecution of an offender

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1 for no doubt sexually offending against the child, but
 2 are there other positive actions that amount to
 3 a prosecution which are not related to sexual offences?
 4 I'm thinking, for example, drugs operations which the
 5 perpetrator might be operating, even something as --
 6 like giving alcohol to a minor, which is a very ancient
 7 offence, I think. Has any consideration been given to
 8 those sorts of issues as well as the ones I have just
 9 mentioned about sexual offences?
 10 **A. Absolutely. It is a really important point in our**
 11 **disruption toolkit that's evidenced within the protocol**
 12 **that links in to the national disruption toolkit. It**
 13 **looks at a range of different methods, as you have**
 14 **described, not just the Sexual Offence Act. It looks at**
 15 **a range of civil orders. We have a very active force**
 16 **solicitor and department that will look at a number of**
 17 **different Sexual Harm Reduction Orders, gang inductions,**
 18 **which we are very successful at recognising a potential**
 19 **link between CSE and something that is very rife in**
 20 **Merseyside is county lines dealing, to protect children**
 21 **from the most harm as well. Our work online, and we do**
 22 **a lot of work nationally, and Chief Constable Bailey has**
 23 **allowed us to invest a lot of money at a national level**
 24 **and local level to identify those people who are**
 25 **grooming children online as well. So a whole range. As**

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1 MS HILL: Thank you, Mr Critchley.
 2 (The witness withdrew)
 3 MS HILL: Chair, Mr Critchley is the final in-person witness
 4 today. As before, I would like to adduce a few
 5 statements to complete the evidence in relation to
 6 St Helens. We have evidence from
 7 Professor Sarah O'Brien, whose name you have already
 8 heard, in her capacity as chair of the St Helens
 9 Safeguarding Children Partnership, which we will provide
 10 to you and the panel.
 11 There is evidence in addition from Sally Carr MBE
 12 from the Proud Trust, which is based in north-west
 13 England, has a base in Manchester and in Cheshire, about
 14 which you've heard.
 15 From Paul Ainsworth from the Ariel Trust, which you
 16 have also heard about.
 17 We have evidence from Greater Manchester Police in
 18 relation to CS-A27 and evidence from Wigan Council in
 19 relation to CS-A212.
 20 Chair, with your permission, I will formally adduce,
 21 please, all of that evidence and invite you and the
 22 panel to read it and take it into account in light of
 23 all of the other evidence you have heard.
 24 Chair, that concludes the evidence that we propose
 25 to place before you in relation to St Helens.

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1 **you said, whether it is drug dealing, whether it is work**
 2 **with taxi and licensing department, a whole range of**
 3 **measures, because this is about making sure we focus**
 4 **very much on stopping the exploitation of children.**
 5 MS SHARPLING: Do you know how many Civil Orders were
 6 successfully applied for by the Merseyside Police in
 7 relation to St Helens or generally throughout the whole
 8 police area over the last two years?
 9 **A. I can get -- I submitted some of that within the**
 10 **statement across a range of different orders. I would**
 11 **need to go away and bring that detail back to you.**
 12 **I would say -- I have a very, very successful force**
 13 **solicitor who works very closely with local policing and**
 14 **we always seek to use those orders to prevent further**
 15 **crime, particularly around gang injunctions as well.**
 16 **I'm more than happy, if you would want, to provide that**
 17 **information to the inquiry.**
 18 MS SHARPLING: Yes, please. Thank you very much,
 19 Mr Critchley. That's all I ask.
 20 THE CHAIR: Mr Frank?
 21 MR FRANK: No, thank you.
 22 THE CHAIR: Sir Malcolm?
 23 PROF SIR MALCOLM EVANS: No, thank you, chair.
 24 THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Critchley.
 25 **A. Thank you, chair.**

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1 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Hill. We will reconvene tomorrow.
 2 (4.13 pm)
 3 (The hearing was adjourned to
 4 Tuesday, 29 September 2020 at 10.30 am)
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