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UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

CORPORATE WITNESS STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL POLICE CHIEFS' COUNCIL

I, Assistant Chief Constable Owen Weatherill, will say as follows:

Introduction

1. This is a corporate witness statement made on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council (**NPCC**). This document has been drafted in response to a Rule 9 request for Module 1 dated 4 January 2023 (**the Rule 9 request**), in order to assist the Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry (**the Inquiry**).
2. The information in this statement is (a) drawn from my own knowledge and experience; and (b) taken from material provided by staff within the NPCC, as well as documentary records.
3. I am currently the portfolio lead for Civil Contingencies within the NPCC. I have been a member of the Hertfordshire Constabulary for more than 30 years. In that time, I have led a range of portfolios at superintending and Chief Officer ranks. I was seconded to the NPCC in July 2019 since when I have acted as National Mobilisation Coordinator (**NMC**) and leader of the National Police Coordination Centre (**NPoCC**).
4. In preparing this statement, I have taken into account that Module 1 is directed to preparedness and resilience in the period before the direct effects of Covid-19 began to be felt in the UK, whereas later modules will examine issues relating to the

subsequent pandemic response. In accordance with the Rule 9 request, Module 1 is primarily concerned with the period from 11 June 2009 (when the World Health Organization (**WHO**) announced that the scientific criteria for an influenza pandemic had been met for what came to be known as the 2009-2010 Swine Flu Pandemic) to 21 January 2020 (the date on which the WHO published its 'Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Report – 1') (**the Relevant Period**).

5. Sections of this statement have been drawn from the information provided in the NPCC Corporate Statement for Module 2, as there is overlap between the respective Rule 9 requests.
6. Through the Relevant Period, there have been a large number of changes in the leadership structure of policing and in its approach to preparation for civil contingencies. As a corporate entity, the NPCC did not come into existence until 2015. I have sought to obtain detailed information wherever possible in order to assist the Inquiry and respond to the Rule 9 request, but this statement is necessarily limited by the scope of records retained and the institutional memory of current employees and officers.

NPCC's role, function and responsibilities

7. I attach three annexes to this statement to cover the position specifically in relation to policing in Scotland (Annex A), Wales (Annex B) and Northern Ireland (Annex C).
8. The NPCC is a national coordinating body which represents all UK police forces. It serves to drive best practice in policing and to act as one voice for policing into central government. It replaced the Association of Chief Police Officers (**ACPO**) on 1 April 2015.
9. The NPCC represents all UK police forces, including territorial forces in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, some British overseas territories, British Transport Police (**BTP**), the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (**CNC**), and the Ministry of Defence Police (**MDP**).
10. The NPCC is underpinned by a legal agreement under section 22A of the Police Act 1996 (**the Agreement**). The Agreement, which is signed by Chief Constables, Police and Crime Commissioners (**PCCs**) and non-Home Office Force equivalents (being

representatives of forces other than the territorial forces of England and Wales), declares that the parties will collaborate in the running and funding of the NPCC. The 2017 version of the Agreement [OW/1 - INQ000099935], which applied during the Covid-19 pandemic, sets out the specific functions of the NPCC at section 7.1:

- i. “The coordination of national operations, including defining, monitoring and testing force contributions to the Strategic Policing Requirement working with the National Crime Agency where appropriate;
- ii. The command of counter terrorism operations and delivery of counter terrorist policing through the national network as set out in the Counter Terrorism Collaboration Agreement;
- iii. The coordination of the national police response to national emergencies and the coordination of the mobilisation of resources across force borders and internationally;
- iv. The national operational implementation of standards and policy as set by the College of Policing and government;
- v. To work with the College of Policing, to develop national approaches on criminal justice, value for money, service transformation, information management, performance management and technology; and
- vi. Where appropriate, to work with the College of Policing in order to develop joint national approaches to staff and human resource issues, including misconduct and discipline, in line with the Chief Officers’ responsibilities as employers.”

11. The NPCC has no operational directive powers in relation to forces in the UK. It cannot instruct a force or an individual police officer to take any action or to refrain from acting. Guidance, policy and briefings issued by the NPCC are implemented on a voluntary basis by cooperation and engagement. Operational policing decisions remain the responsibility of force leads and individual officers, including in the context of a national emergency.

12. The NPCC is funded by police forces in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, Crown Dependencies, as well as some British overseas territories, and from other NPCC member organisations.

13. The NPCC is a national coordinating body with representative obligations in respect of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Policing is a fully devolved matter in both

Scotland and Northern Ireland, where responsibility for criminal justice sits with Police Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice in the Scottish Government, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (**PSNI**) and Minister of Justice for Northern Ireland respectively.

14. In Wales, responsibility for criminal justice and policing remains with the UK Government. The four Welsh police forces are funded by both the Welsh Government and the UK Government through the Home Office. The Welsh Government has the power to legislate for offences in relation to devolved matters in Wales, such as public health Regulations.

NPoCC

15. NPoCC is an operational arm of the NPCC which acts as the central point for mobilisation of mutual aid in policing. NPoCC was formed in April 2013 and replaced the Police National Information Coordination Centre (**PNICC**). It was created with a wider remit: to ensure that policing is better prepared for wide scale disorder.
16. As set out above, I have led NPoCC in the role of NMC since 1 July 2019. The names of previous NMCs can be provided to the Inquiry upon request.
17. The NMC is appointed by and reports directly to the Chair of the NPCC. I am supported by a Staff Officer, an operations team, a planning team, an intelligence team and a communications team. A Chief Superintendent leads the daily activity of NPoCC and also acts as Deputy NMC. This position directly reports to me in my role as NMC.
18. Aside from coordinating the provision of police mutual aid, NPoCC plays a role in facilitating the policing response to pre-planned and dynamic events where a response from multiple forces is required. NPoCC provides a national intelligence function through the Strategic Intelligence and Briefing team (**SIB**). NPoCC also provides a central coordination function for UK policing, supports Chief Officers at Cabinet Office Briefing Room (**COBR**) meetings, and regularly represents UK policing at official meetings and meetings at ministerial level related to national events, crises, disorder and civil emergencies.
19. Like the NPCC, NPoCC has no compulsory powers and is not able to direct any officer or force in relation to operational policing. NPoCC has the power to communicate and

facilitate the sharing of resources, but it does not have any enforcement mandate. Its work is undertaken through voluntary cooperation and engagement.

20. The role of NPoCC in planning for civil emergencies expanded as a result of the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU. Previously, planning had revolved around specific events, which were local or regional in nature. The scale and breadth of issues presented by planning for EU exit emphasised the need for a national coordination function, encompassing the work of NPoCC and the NPCC's Civil Contingencies portfolio.

The College of Policing

21. The College of Policing (**the College**) is a separate organisation which works closely with the NPCC. It was established as the professional body for policing in England and Wales on 1 December 2012, replacing the National Policing Improvement Agency. The College is represented as a stakeholder at NPCC Civil Contingency portfolio meetings, and delivers the Multi-agency Gold Incident Command (**MAGIC**) course, which provides training for officers in relation to civil contingencies.

Leadership and composition of the NPCC

22. The NPCC is led by a full-time Chair who is chosen by the organisation's membership. Martin Hewitt chaired the NPCC from 2019 until April 2023. He succeeded Sara Thornton, who was the inaugural NPCC Chair. Chief Constable Gavin Stephenson succeeded Martin Hewitt in April 2023.
23. The Chair is supported by two part-time elected Vice Chairs (currently Chief Constables Michelle Skeer and Rachel Swann) and a team of staff within what is called the NPCC's 'strategic hub', being the core staff undertaking practical and administrative functions. The hub, which was first created after the Covid-19 pandemic, has five different areas of work: organisational development and change, strategic planning and performance, business support, communications, and providing coordinators for its 12 principal coordination committees.
24. The primary decision-making forum for the NPCC is the Chief Constables' Council (**the Council**). The Council is made up of Chief Constables (or Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police) of the territorial forces of

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including BTP, the MDP Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Crown Dependencies, the National Crime Agency (**NCA**) and the Chief Executive of the College.

25. The Council meets at least quarterly to discuss high-level strategic policing issues, such as the implementation of national standards. The Council acts as a representative body for forces to communicate with the NPCC, to raise issues and shape the work of the organisation. It also allows forces to reach agreement on issues of national application to ensure best practice and the adoption of a joined-up approach.
26. The Agreement which establishes the governance and structure of the NPCC incorporates the broad commitment of signatories to comply with collective decisions of the Council. The Agreement states that signatories will (at clause 8.1.4-5): "... comply with and assist with any operational requirements or responsibilities of the NPCC in the manner agreed by the Chief Constables' Council [and] subject to clause 8.2 comply with the decisions of the Chief Constables' Council in relation to the NPCC matters..."
27. However, this is not an absolute requirement. As Chief Constables retain operational policing power and responsibility, they are entitled to diverge from the collective decisions of the Council. The NPCC has no enforcement powers to take action where forces deviate from Council decisions, but it works to ensure compliance by cooperation and engagement with individual forces. This is reflected in clause 8.2 of the Agreement: "In the event that a Chief Officer determines that it would not be reasonably practicable to comply with a decision of the Chief Constables' Council, he/she shall be entitled to derogate from that decision at their own risk. In such circumstances, the relevant Chief Officer shall notify the Chair in writing of the relevant derogation and the reasons for that derogation. This Agreement does not supersede or vary the legal requirements of the office of constable. It is recognised that a Chief Officer remains operationally independent."
28. The NPCC has twelve Co-ordination Committees, each of which is led by a Chief Constable (subject to occasional portfolio vacancies) and supported by a full-time Committee Co-ordinator. Each committee covers a thematic area and within each committee there are portfolio leads for specific areas of policing. The current Co-ordination Committees are:

- (i) Crime Operations;
- (ii) Criminal Justice;
- (iii) Diversity, Equality and Inclusion;
- (iv) Finance;
- (v) Digital, Data and Technology;
- (vi) International;
- (vii) Local Policing;
- (viii) Performance Management;
- (ix) Counter Terrorism;
- (x) Prevention;
- (xi) Operations; and
- (xii) Workforce.

29. The portfolio for Civil Contingencies is within the Operations Co-ordinating Committee.

The responsibility of this portfolio is to coordinate the national police structure in relation to civil contingencies and national emergencies. The portfolio might, for example, share national guidance with individual police forces via ChiefsNet (an intranet-based method of information-sharing between Chief Officers and their team). Where issues arise that cannot be resolved at a portfolio level, they are raised at committee level and, if necessary, with the Council.

30. I have held the portfolio since March 2021. Previous portfolio leads include Deputy Chief Constable Paul Netherton (2018-2021) and Chief Constable Charlie Hall QPM (2012-2018). Chief Constable Hall is the current Chair of the NPCC Operations Coordinating Committee, having served two terms. He was preceded by Lynne Owens.

31. The portfolio is currently made up of nine working groups:

- (i) Flooding/Severe Weather & Climate Change;
- (ii) Local Resilience Forums (**LRFs**);
- (iii) Disaster Victim Identification;
- (iv) Casualty Bureau;
- (v) Business Continuity;
- (vi) Search and Rescue;
- (vii) MAGIC Training;
- (viii) Nuclear Emergencies; and

(ix) Animal Diseases.

32. The LRFs group sits within my role as part of the civil contingencies portfolio; the remaining eight working groups have their own lead. This reflects the fact that the work of LRFs is not a specific policing function.
33. The Business Continuity group is concerned with ensuring that police forces fulfil their statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (**the CCA**) and associated Regulations. As part of this work, the NPCC has a National Policing Business Continuity Strategy, which is periodically updated.
34. Working groups maintain contact points as appropriate with individual police forces.
35. Meetings take place on a quarterly basis between working group leads and stakeholders. The wider stakeholders include: the Home Office; the Resilience Directorate (formerly the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (**CCS**)); the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (**DLUHC**); DEFRA; National Fire Resilience; the College; PSNI; Police Scotland; the military; British Transport Police; Counter Terrorism Policing; and the Defence Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear Centre.

Prior to the NPCC

36. Prior to the formation of the NPCC, ACPO had twelve National Policing Business Areas, each of which was led by a Chief Constable. Like the NPCC's coordination committees, each National Policing Business Area covered a thematic area. Some business areas included National Policing Portfolios which in turn had their own working groups focussed on more specific topics. Where relevant, Heads of National Policing Business Areas were also responsible for overseeing the work of ACPO National Units which fell within their remit. The National Policing Business Areas were subject to minor changes in the relevant period.
37. During the relevant period, the national policing portfolio for civil contingencies sat within the Uniformed Operations Business Area. Chief Constable Charlie Hall QPM held this portfolio from between 2012 and 2018, taking it on from Simon Parr.

38. The reporting structure in relation to civil contingencies operated in a similar way in ACPO as it does within the NPCC: working groups reported into portfolios, portfolios reported into committees, and committees reported into ACPO.

Civil contingencies: legislative and policy framework

39. The CCA and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) Regulations 2005 (**the Regulations**) apply to the whole of the UK.
40. "Emergency" is defined in the CCA as including an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the UK. This is an event or situation which, amongst other things, involves, causes or may cause loss of human life, human illness or injury or disruption of services relating to health.
41. Part 1 of the CCA establishes the statutory framework for local civil protection arrangements in the UK and the roles and responsibilities of local responders, and sets out the circumstances in which those duties arise.
42. The Act divides local responders into two categories and imposes specific duties on each category.
43. Category 1 responders are the organisations considered to be at the core of the response to most emergencies, for example emergency services, local authorities and NHS bodies. Home Office police forces in England and Wales, PSNI, Police Scotland and BTP are all Category 1 responders. The NPCC is not itself a Category 1 or Category 2 responder under the CCA, but it has strong established stakeholder links, in particular to Category 1 emergency services responders, and support forces in their roles within the LRFs.
44. Where the CCA applies, Category 1 responders which are also police forces are required to undertake the following:
- (i) Risk assessment: assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning.
 - (ii) Emergency planning: put in place plans to respond to an emergency, exercise them to ensure they are effective and offer training to staff who may become involved in emergency response.

- (iii) Business continuity management: put in place business continuity plans to ensure they can continue to exercise critical functions in the event of an emergency.
- (iv) Communicating with the public: put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency.
- (v) Information sharing: share information with other local responders to enhance coordination.
- (vi) Cooperation: cooperate with other local responders to enhance coordination and efficiency.

45. Category 2 responders are ‘cooperating bodies’ which are less likely to work at the heart of planning but will be involved in incidents that affect their sector, for example utility companies, transport companies and the Health and Safety Executive (**HSE**). No police body is a Category 2 responder. Whilst Category 2 responders are subject to a lesser set of duties under the CCA, they must cooperate and share relevant information with other Category 1 and 2 responders to ensure integration within the wider emergency planning framework.

46. The Regulations establish the scope of the duties imposed under the Act and specify the manner in which they are to be performed. For example, the Regulations establish LRFs in England and Wales, and Local Resilience Partnerships (**LRPs**) in Scotland.

47. The legislative framework is supported by guidance on part 1 of the CCA which was published by the Cabinet Office (**the Emergency Preparedness Guidance**).

48. In addition to the legislative and related policy framework, the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Programme (**JESIP**) Joint Doctrine provides responders with guidance and principles on actions to be taken when responding to multi-agency incidents. The stated aim of the Doctrine is “to provide a framework of common models and principles which when applied consistently will improve interoperability between organisations across all levels of command”.

48. JESIP evolved from the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme which was established in 2012. The work of the programme was consolidated during 2015 across first line responder organisations, retaining the same acronym. JESIP can be applied to any type of multi-agency incident and forms an element of MAGIC training.

A Joint Interoperability Board meets quarterly. The Board, which is currently chaired by the NPCC lead for JESIP, seeks to ensure that blue light agencies work effectively together. JESIP materials, documents, and guidance are accessible via an APP to both first responders and the public as part of a driver towards wider delivery and accessibility.

49. JESIP sets out the following joint working principles which should inform multi-agency response:

- (i) co-location;
- (ii) communication;
- (iii) coordination;
- (iv) joint understanding of risk; and
- (v) shared situational awareness.

49. JESIP did not introduce any new duties on responders, but set out the expectations of good practice which build on and complement statutory duties under the CCA and associated regulations and guidance.

Duties on the police under the CCA framework

50. Each police force must have the capability to discharge its duties under the CCA. Further, the Strategic Policing Requirement (**SPR**), which applies to police forces in England and Wales, includes civil emergencies as a threat which requires a national policing response. The National Policing Requirement (**NPR**), the police service's response to the SPR, includes a requirement for forces to plan and prepare for civil emergencies to fulfil their force's contribution to the national capacity in response, to have the capability of meeting the NPR, to be able to deliver an integrated response consistent across all forces and partners and connect resources effectively across force boundaries through national and regional arrangements and with key partners, particularly when planning for and responding to civil emergencies.

51. Accordingly, all police forces have emergency planning departments (sometimes referred to as 'contingency' planning departments) which normally sit within the operations department and will have a relationship with the LRF secretariat and with counterparts within other Category 1 responders. The departments are responsible for contingency planning, business continuity and events planning. Whilst each force's

emergency planning department is structured differently, depending on the priority functions in the relevant area, the functions within the department incorporate those set out in the CCA and the Emergency Planning Guidance.

52. Category 1 responders are under a duty to cooperate with each other to maintain a Community Risk Register (**CRR**). The CRR provides an agreed position on the risks affecting a local area and on the planning and resourcing priorities required to prepare for those risks. Amongst other things, it enables each Category 1 responder to be fully informed of the risks of emergency in its area and identify collectively the local plans and capabilities required. The CRR also enables LRFs and relevant Category 1 responders to undertake proportionate planning to support preparedness according to the priorities identified in their area. CRRs are shared between LRFs with whom a boundary is shared and with DLUHC's Resilience and Emergencies Division (**RED**).

53. Relevant sources underpinning local planning include:

- (i) The National Security Risk Assessment (**NSRA**) (formerly known as the National Risk Assessment). This is a detailed cross-government assessment of the risks facing the UK as a whole, based on the likelihood and impact of reasonable worst-case scenarios. It is produced by the Cabinet Office. Previously, the NSRA was a classified document which was shared with police forces, and LRF access to the risks came through its local force. Whilst the NSRA is now marked 'official sensitive' and so is more widely available within LRFs, it is still not made available to the public. LRFs use the information in the NSRA to identify risks that may be relevant to their local area;
- (ii) The National Risk Register (**NRR**). This was first published in 2008 as part of the National Security Strategy. It is the public-facing version of the NSRA, which sets out the government's assessment of the likelihood and potential impact of the risks facing the UK as a whole;
- (iii) The Local Risk Assessment Guidance (**LRA**), produced by the Cabinet Office, which provides central guidance on the likelihood of some potential disruptive risks;
- (iv) The National Resilience Planning Assumptions (**NRPA**s). The NRPA's are also produced by the Cabinet Office. They are founded on reasonable worst case scenarios and provide information on generic consequences common to most risk scenarios and their maximum plausible scale, duration and magnitude, without disclosing the sensitive information on the causes of such consequences. The information provided through the NRPA's are critical to informing LRFs. NRPA's

give national and sometimes multi-LRF planning figures. LRFs will use or adapt the information and figures to assess the impact of each risk on their local area.

- 54.** For police forces, there are two primary aspects to contingency planning:
- a. planning for civil emergencies as required by the CCA, which is generally done through LRFs. Where a multi-agency response is required, then, notwithstanding the overarching LRF plan, the police (as is the case with other relevant agencies) will usually also develop their own plan which supports the LRF plan;
 - b. planning in relation to events or locations which is unlikely to involve a multi-agency approach and which is generally undertaken by forces alone.
- 55.** All of the policing regions in the UK currently have a Regional Business Continuity forum which is attended by the respective force's Business Continuity Coordinator. Regional Forums aim to hold meetings every three to four months and ideally prior to the National Business Continuity Forum meetings. The Chair or representative of each Regional Forum attends the National Forum meetings and provide updates to the group. Regional Forums report to the NPCC lead for Business Continuity, who chairs the National Forum.
- 56.** Police forces discharge the cooperation and information-sharing duties imposed by the CCA and the Regulations in three ways:
- i. within their own organisation, by ensuring that all divisions with functions to be employed in an emergency are prepared to cooperate and share information with one other internally, as well as with external stakeholders;
 - ii. directly with other organisations, through meetings, visits, phone calls, correspondence, e-mails and exercises. Such contact takes place on a day-to-day basis and often takes the form of one-on-one liaison work; and
 - iii. through managed arrangements with other organisations, which include the LRFs as the principal form of multi-agency cooperation. LRF meetings at a strategic level are required to take place at least once every 6 months. Each LRF has a single point of contact, such as a police communications duty officer, who is able to contact all core LRF members to establish a Strategic Coordinating Group (**SCG**) to respond

to an emergency within one hour during office hours and within two hours outside of office hours.

- 57.** In turn, LRFs have mechanisms and processes in place for cross-boundary working and relationship building. Until the abolition of the regional government offices in 2011, Regional Resilience Forums provided a uniform system for LRF collaboration within regions. These regional forums have been replaced with more flexible structures for multi-LRF working, which are not mandated under civil protection legislation or guidance. Current multi-LRF groupings may cover certain geographical areas and/or be thematic. Examples include LRF Chair Conferences, which took place twice a year until March 2019 and were hosted jointly by the Resilience Directorate and DLUHC (under its previous departmental name). Further, RED has allocated Resilience Advisers to each LRF, whose role is to facilitate cross-locality working and the co-operation and sharing of information between organisations, the central government and LRFs.
- 58.** Calls between LRF Chairs take place on a regular (usually monthly) basis. The format is now remote meetings held using an online platform. The calls are hosted by DLUHC.
- 59.** In addition, police forces have access to ResilienceDirect, which is a private, secure, web-based and user-driven platform delivered by the Cabinet Office's Resilience Directorate. to which all LRFs and Government Departments have varying degrees of access. The platform allows real-time information sharing and thereby facilitates multi-agency planning and collaboration during the preparation, response and recovery phases of an event or emergency. ResilienceDirect was introduced in approximately 2016 to replace its predecessor, Resilience Extranet.
- 60.** Each Government Department (including DLUHC, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Cabinet Office) and each LRF has its own dedicated area on the ResilienceDirect platform. Typically, this is a 'landing page' which contains folders or links to subpages or areas organised by subject matter.
- 61.** There are some limitations on the use of the platform. For example, organisations, including the police, do not access the material on ResilienceDirect through a single corporate account. Instead, there are individuals within each organisation with an account who can access material relevant to their own activities. As a result, not every

individual with access to ResilienceDirect has access to every area or folder/page on the platform. To gain access, users would need to apply to the Government Department or LRF with ownership of that area of the platform. Further, documents can only be uploaded by those with the requisite permissions and cannot be edited via the platform.

The role and structure of police involvement in emergency planning and response

62. The UK's approach to emergency response and recovery is based on a bottom-up model referred to as "subsidiarity", where operations are managed and decisions made at the lowest appropriate level. In all cases, local agencies are the building blocks of response and recovery operations. Many emergencies are dealt with at a local level with little or no input from the national or sub-national level. The role of central government and the devolved administrations is to support and supplement the efforts of local responders through the provision of resources and coordination. They will only become involved in emergency response and recovery where it is necessary or helpful to do so.
63. When an emergency occurs, it is necessary to establish a dedicated command structure. The structure for civil contingencies is based on the gold, silver and bronze tiered command structure used by the police and other responder organisations, and which is also established in the JESIP Joint Doctrine. The structure is scaleable and can be applied across different levels from national to local and in a multi-agency setting. It is role- rather than rank- specific and allows for flexibility.
64. The purpose of control at a national level is to manage coordination across government departments and local SCGs. Where a national response is required, the strategic aspects of the response and recovery phases will be coordinated by a COBR committee. COBR comprises ministers and senior officials from relevant departments and agencies together with representatives from other organisations as necessary, including the police. It is chaired by the designated lead department minister or senior official from that department.
65. Depending on the incident, the police will be represented at COBR by the NPCC Chair, NPoCC Commander, National Policing Lead for the cause of the incident or local SCG Chair and/or police strategic commander. The SCG Chair provides an update on behalf of each of the agencies they are representing. The police strategic commander

provides an update specifically about the police response. The local SCG Chair and police strategic commander may be the same person, albeit with two distinct roles.

- 66.** At the local level, an SCG, under the umbrella of the LRF, will be established by the lead coordinating authority, which is often the relevant police force. The purpose of the SCG is to take overall responsibility for the multi-agency management of the emergency and to establish the policy and strategic framework within which lower levels of command will operate. The Chair of the SCG will ensure the incident is reviewed from a strategic perspective and provide leadership for the duration of the incident. Generally, membership of the SCG is made up of Category 1 and 2 responders in the local area. The SCG at a local level may request support from regional or national resources, if necessary, even if the emergency is not a national incident.
- 67.** Depending on the nature of the emergency, a Strategic Coordination Centre (**SCC**) may be established. The SCC's role is to provide a location and infrastructure to enable the SCG to coordinate the strategic response. Police forces usually provide the physical location and resources for SCGs, even where they are not the lead service or organisation.
- 68.** Alongside the LRF SCG structure, the police will establish their own single agency command structure, comprising:
- (i) Gold (strategic) commander: they assume and retain overall command and control for the emergency and have ultimate responsibility and accountability for the police response. They have overall responsibility for the gold strategy and any tactical parameters that silver or bronze commanders should follow. The strategic commander may also chair the SCG;
 - (ii) Silver (tactical) commander: they command and coordinate the overall tactical response in compliance with the strategy. Generally, there is one tactical commander, but it may be practical or desirable in large-scale incidents to have more than one. They will liaise with bronze commanders when developing the tactical plans and ensure they understand the strategic intentions, the wider tactical plan and the tactical objectives which relate to operations. A Tactical Coordinating Group (**TCG**) may be established to determine the coordinated response at a tactical level, comprising any tactical commanders from other

agencies or organisations, supported by officers from the force basic command unit and led by the tactical commander; and

- (iii) Bronze (operational) commander: they are responsible for the command of resources and carrying out functional or geographical responsibilities related to the tactical plan as identified by the silver commander. The number of operational commanders and their roles or specialisms will depend on the scale and nature of the incident.

69. The police response may escalate from the local level to regional and/or national level, depending on the scenario and the level of resources required. A key component of interoperability is that resources from different forces can work together during a mobilisation event. Resources deployed to an affected force may be organised into larger teams. The advantage of this is that individuals form part of a team, which makes it easier for them to identify with colleagues and be linked to a chain of command. It also allows for more efficient briefing and debriefing.

70. The JESIP interoperability framework outlines key steps to deliver an effective multi-agency response, utilising the METHANE acronym (Major Incident Declared; Exact location; Type of incident; Hazards; Access; Number and type of casualties; Emergency services present and required). The steps are identifying hazards; dynamic risk assessment; identifying the tasks; applying control measures; integrated multi-agency operational response plan; and recording of decisions.

71. The Joint Decision Model is used in an emergency involving more than one of the emergency services. It is used to help stakeholders to assemble available information, reconcile objectives and make effective decisions together. When involved in a joint situation, the three emergency services apply the model collectively.

72. METHANE is used when passing information between emergency responders and control rooms, to enable the establishment of shared situational awareness. Information sharing forms the basis of the principles outlined by JESIP.

Local Resilience Forums

73. I have set out above the statutory framework within which LRFs operate. LRFs provide a vital local forum for key partners, creating a group which understands the local dynamic and is able to adapt civil contingency plans to suit the relevant issues and

challenges. At the same time, LRFs are large enough to coordinate an effective response.

74. LRF members know one another well, having worked, trained and exercised together, which develops mutual trust. During Brexit, LRFs also created multi-agency intelligence cells (**MAICs**) to support the decision-making of the SCGs, which were considered to be a success. LRFs have an essential role to play in the ongoing resilience of the UK, although there are inevitably variations in the quality and capability of LRFs across the country as a result of inconsistent funding arrangements and differences in individual personnel.

75. With the exception of London (where a single LRF covers both the Metropolitan and City of London police areas), the boundaries of the LRFs correspond to those of the police areas in England and Wales. A total of 42 LRFs have been established in England and Wales.

The role and function of LRFs

76. The role of an LRF is to act as a coordinating group for responder organisations engaged in preparedness for emergencies at the police force area level. In practice, this translates as:

- (i) Providing a local forum for local issues;
- (ii) Helping coordinate risk assessment by producing a CRR, which allows the development of a consistent understanding of the hazards and threats across the LRF area;
- (iii) Facilitating Category 1 and 2 responders in the delivery of their duties under the CCA; and
- (iv) Determining a procedure for the formation of a SCG.

77. LRFs do not have powers to direct members to act in a particular way or to represent them legally. LRFs are not themselves operational bodies as they have no functional responsibilities or resources to deliver during an emergency. Instead, the Category 1 and 2 responders which are members of the LRF hold principal responsibility for delivery.

LRF structure

- 78.** LRFs are led by a Chair. The role of the Chair extends to representing the LRF at meetings with other levels, including with the devolved nations and the central government. They cannot require members to take any action and do not have directive powers over participating organisations. Chairs are chosen by the local membership, changing regularly depending on the individual circumstances of the LRF. LRFs are regularly chaired by a senior police officer, partly because LRF and police area boundaries are largely identical. Senior fire officers and local authority officials are also regular Chairs. The criteria include the need for the Chair to be able to speak with authority about the LRF area and strategic civil protection issues.
- 79.** The work of the LRFs is supported by DLUHC RED in England, and the emergencies branch of the Welsh Government in Wales. In addition, there are Lead Government Departments (**LGDs**) for each of the Category 1 and 2 responders which represent them in the UK and issue guidance in relation to their functions. The Welsh Government acts as an LGD for Welsh LRFs.
- 80.** The Resilience Directorate is responsible for the CCA and local resilience policy and in that capacity it coordinates the resilience work of LGDs. The Resilience Directorate and LGDs report to a Cabinet sub-committee on Threats, Hazards and Resilience and Contingencies, which itself reports to a Cabinet committee, the National Security Council.
- 81.** A typical LRF comprises a Chief Officer Group, a General Working Group, Task and Finish Groups and various Sub-Groups.
- 82.** The Chief Officer Group conducts strategic discussions and is composed of senior representatives from Category 1 responder organisations (for example, a (deputy) chief executive from the local authority or a (deputy) chief constable from the local police force). The Chief Officer Group meets at least once every six months and all papers for discussion are copied to all Category 1 and 2 responders in the relevant LRF area and any standing members which are not Category 1 or 2 responders, such as voluntary sector and military representatives. Local responders are also invited to submit agenda items in advance of the Chief Officer Group meetings.

83. The General Working Group is a permanent group that supports the Chief Officer Group by bringing issues to its attention and ensuring its decisions are implemented, such as training and exercise programmes. It is composed of officers from the organisations represented on the Chief Officer Group and/or additional responder organisations. Meetings are held regularly to prepare for meetings of the Chief Officer Group and implement its decisions.
84. Below the General Working Group in the LRF structure are Task and Finish Groups and Sub-Groups, which are established as needed with the approval of the Chief Officer Group by reference to the priorities set out in the CRR to support the General Working Group and provide an opportunity for organisations which do not attend the main LRF meetings to make a contribution.
85. Some of the groups are permanent, such as the Risk Sub-Group (which coordinates the production of the CRR). Others are temporary, such as the Task and Finish Groups, which are tasked with delivering a defined outcome.

The LRF Secretariat

86. Each LRF has a secretariat responsible for ensuring that the LRF performs effectively. It includes a secretary and, where possible, a coordinator or manager. Any member can fulfil these roles. The secretariat's tasks depend on the level of funding available to them. Funding is provided by LRF members, on a voluntary basis. Historically there has been no central funding, reflecting the pre-pandemic expectation of LRFs: namely, to deal with local, occasionally regional, issues on a short term basis. Some additional funding was made available by the government during the preparations for a no-deal Brexit and during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the NPCC understands some additional funding is to be made available in the near future.
87. Key tasks of the secretariat include:
- (i) Fixing the date of the Chief Officer Group meetings;
 - (ii) Agreeing the agenda and attendance with the LRF members;
 - (iii) Organising the production of papers and presentations;
 - (iv) Circulating papers to all Category 1 and 2 responders in the LRF area;
 - (v) Briefing the chair;
 - (vi) Taking the minutes and following up the matters arising and action points;

- (vii) Disseminating the minutes to all Category 1 and 2 responders in the LRF area and other LRF members; and
- (viii) Ensuring that meetings of the General Working Group, Sub-Groups and Task and Finish Groups are effectively organised and recorded, and that relevant issues from these groups are brought to the attention of the Chief Officer Group.

88. The following additional tasks may be undertaken by the secretariat where there is a coordinator or manager (and in the absence of one, these are undertaken by the LRF Chief Officer Group and the General Working Group):

- (i) Tracking progress in carrying out the LRF's decisions, including competent delivery of its programme, which may include the CRR, developing multi-agency plans and running multi-agency exercises;
- (ii) Preparing and delivering from time to time a strategic assessment on the capability and readiness of local responders, acting together, to respond; and
- (iii) Acting as a focal point for the dissemination of documents containing policy initiatives and requests from other levels of government.

LRF meetings and methods of communication

89. The Chief Officer Group of the LRF meets at least once every six months and more frequently by agreement. The frequency of the meetings of the General Working Group and the Sub-Groups is set by the LRF.

90. So far as reasonably practicable, each Category 1 responder and each Category 2 responder invited must attend all Chief Officer Group meetings or be effectively represented at them by a representative from the same sector. The police do not ask other organisations to represent them at the LRF.

91. LRF meetings are typically attended by local government and central government representatives. Local government is represented by the local authorities, which are Category 1 responders, while the central government is represented by DLUHC RED in England and the Welsh Government in Wales.

92. As LGDs, DLUHC RED and the Welsh Government are expected to be standing members of the LRFs in their area. This representative function is carried out by Government Liaison Officers (**GLOs**), employees of DLUHC, whose role is to attend

LRF meetings, provide a two-way conduit between government and the LRFs, offer advice, and encourage cross-boundary working and the sharing of good practice. GLOs have often covered multiple LRFs, though more typically each LRF is now assigned a GLO, drawn from employees of DLUHC. The NPCC does not have direct links to the GLO network; it communicates with DLUHC through its representative attendance at civil contingencies portfolio meetings.

93. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were a number of additional points of communication between government departments and the framework of LRFs. These enabled the government to engage with and provide support to LRFs in the context of resilience and emergency preparedness. They included:

- (i) LRF Chairs' conferences. These were hosted biannually by Resilience Directorate and DLUHC (under its previous departmental names). The last conference was held in March 2019. The civil contingencies portfolio lead from the NPCC was usually represented. The conferences provided a valuable opportunity for key issues affecting LRF participants to be raised at a national level, and the hosts were able to connect directly with LRF Chairs and gain insight into the state of LRF preparedness. These conferences were discontinued due to Covid-19 restrictions; and
- (ii) The National Capabilities Survey (**NCS**), later (from 2014) the Resilience Capabilities Survey (**RCS**). This was a voluntary survey conducted by Resilience Directorate on a biennial basis from 2006 onwards to obtain an overview of the national resilience picture in England and Wales. It collected data on planning, response and recovery plans and responders' experiences of emergencies. Survey responses were collated and summary information disseminated in the form of 'Highlight Reports' or 'Gateway Bulletins'. The survey was conducted at LRF level, with responses invited from individual responders. The NPCC itself was not a participant in this work.

Involvement of the NHS and other health organisations in LRFs

94. There are a range of organisations in the health sector which are Category 1 responders and LRF members, who are subject to the same duties and obligations in respect of risk assessments, emergency planning, cooperation and maintaining public awareness as all Category 1 responders and whose role is particularly significant where a health issue arises. These include: Primary Care Trusts (**PCTs**), Local Health Boards, the Public Health Wales NHS Trust, Trusts (Foundation and Non-Foundation), and Ambulance Trusts.

95. Some LRFs have a health Sub-Group. In England, the local NHS is normally represented at the LRF by the lead PCT (apart from the ambulance service, which will be separately represented). In Wales, Health Boards, the Public Health Wales NHS Trust and the Welsh Ambulance Services Trust will normally be represented. The Health Protection Agency is represented separately from the above organisations.

Involvement of voluntary organisations in LRFs and civil contingencies

96. The Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (**VCSEP**) is a partnership of voluntary and community sector organisations working with statutory partners to provide additional support and resources in response to an emergency. It is hosted by the British Red Cross and was formed in 2018/2019 in response to learning from events in 2017, including the Grenfell Tower fire, the London Bridge attack and the Manchester Arena bombing. The organisation replaced the Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Forum (**VSCPF**).
97. Until very recently, the NPCC maintained contact with the BRC in relation to civil contingencies through Simon Lewis MBE, who was the charity's Head of Crisis Response. He is a former Chief Superintendent and former head of emergency preparedness at the Metropolitan Police Service. As a result of the contact and relationship with Simon Lewis, the NPCC had a good relationship with the BRC and positive engagement with VSCPF. The civil contingencies portfolio Lead, then Paul Netherton, was represented at VSCPF meetings. Simon Lewis also attended civil contingencies portfolio stakeholder meetings and provided voluntary sector representation at those meetings.
98. Whilst the NPCC is considered a core member of the VCSEP, in practice the organisation has had a relatively limited role. Unlike VSCPF, the NPCC does not routinely attend VCSEP meetings. During the Covid-19 response, further difficulty arose as the VCSEP moved their meetings to Zoom which is not accessible through police computer systems. The NPCC's contact with the BRC also reduced during the Covid-19 period as Simon Lewis stopped attending civil contingencies portfolio meetings, although he remained in touch and continued to receive the minutes of meetings.

99. Volunteering within the VCSEP structure is primarily focussed on community support, coordinated within local authorities through LRFs. Police forces have a limited role in this area of work, as they do not coordinate volunteering for civil emergencies (although they do work internally with volunteer organisations for policing operations such as search and rescue). LRF engagement with the voluntary sector varies across the country. There is no one size fits all approach, as the requirements of each community are different and relationships between LRFs and the voluntary sector in each area may face different challenges.

Exercising

100. The Regulations require that emergency plans include provision for carrying out exercises to ensure the plan is effective. The statutory framework does not mandate any particular frequency of exercises. When an emergency plan is created, the exercise regime will be written into the plan. Operational imperatives may impinge on planned exercising as a result of additional demands placed on LRFs to respond to ongoing civil emergencies, and this was true during both the EU exit period and the pandemic. Generally speaking, LRF Chairs are not able to dictate how often exercises should take place. The decision to conduct an exercise is a joint decision reached by cooperation between the responder organisations in relation to both subject matter and frequency, unless the work is part of a national exercise. This reflects the flexibility accorded to LRFs to focus effort and resource on those risks most relevant to the specific local community.

101. Three types of exercises are used in practice: discussion based, table-top and live exercises. These may be used for single agency or multi-agency plans. The aspects of an emergency plan most frequently tested are the contact list, the activation process, communications equipment, premises selected for the activity, setting up procedures and information management. Other aspects may be tested, depending on the circumstances and the exercise objectives put forward by participants in advance. For example, if a new plan has been introduced, an existing plan has been updated or a group of people are new in a role.

102. Each LRF should have an exercise protocol. After an exercise, there will be a form of debrief. Usually this is a hot debrief immediately after the exercise to capture any learning that needs to be incorporated urgently into the plan, which would be followed by a structured debrief to capture the broader learning points. A review of the

plan would then take place and any updates implemented. Some emergency planning exercises may overlap with business continuity testing. For example, testing emergency plans for pandemic flu would inevitably concern the business continuity matter of staff absences.

- 103.** Exercise Cygnus took place over three days in October 2016. It was a national level (or 'Tier 1') exercise designed to assess the UK's preparedness and response to an influenza pandemic. Participants included government departments, responders in LRFs, and the NHS and Public Health England at national, regional, and local levels. Participation was not mandatory. Public Health England produced its report into Exercise Cygnus on 13 July 2017. A series of workshops was set up in January 2018 by DLUHC/ Resilience Directorate on local authorities' pandemic flu preparations. The purpose of the workshops was to "give an update on the cross-government work which builds on lessons identified during Exercise Cygnus" and to "share good practice and to provide feedback on some of the material from this work before it is published", and provided an opportunity to share learning between LRF members.

Protected characteristics and equality considerations

- 104.** As set out above, emergency planning is highly dependent on the demographic and geographic context of the local area. Each LRF is required as part of its duties to consider that local context when making and reviewing risk assessments which underpin emergency planning, in accordance with the Emergency Preparedness Guidance. For the majority of areas, the relevant local context includes matters related to specific groups and their needs or particular risk factors.
- 105.** In addition, all police officers and the NPCC as an organisation have specific duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the equivalent legislative provisions in the devolved nations. Those duties must be taken into account when exercising any policing powers and apply to officers participating in civil contingencies work and emergency planning as part of business as usual arrangements.
- 106.** The NPCC is not able to comment on the extent to which matters related to the needs of specific groups were taken into consideration in discussions about emergency planning and risk assessments within particular LRFs.

The NPCC's views as to preparedness for the pandemic

- 107.** The NPCC's views as to the state of readiness of LRFs, police forces, and UK government prior to and as at 21 January 2020 are of necessity tempered and informed by hindsight and by the experience of the pandemic. They are also shaped and limited by the functions of the NPCC as set out earlier in this statement.
- 108.** LRFs have a vital role to play in the coordination of the local level response to any emergency. They are the entities best placed to liaise with and inform the local community, to keep it safe. In the context of Covid-19, where the whole country was subject to the same emergency, that role was still more critical. The ability of LRFs to operate effectively is inextricably linked to the adequacy of information they receive.
- 109.** Information and guidance from central government was provided to LRFs via DLUHC and the Resilience Directorate, with GLOs used for more dynamic information sharing. ResilienceDirect was the principal mechanism for disseminating information and guidance. Most stakeholders have access to this database. The NPCC was not aware of any serious concerns expressed about the efficacy of this system prior to the pandemic.
- 110.** There was a range in the extent to which the preparedness of LRFs had been tested during the relevant period. This range was very largely attributable to EU exit planning, which spanned a number of years and which engaged some LRFs to a very considerable degree (for example, any LRF with a significant freight port). These LRFs, as a result, were well used to being operational. In this way, EU exit planning was beneficial, in that it allowed LRFs to test their response structures for a significant national event in advance of the Covid-19 pandemic and to rehearse lines of communication.
- 111.** The extended period of debate and planning generated by the decision to leave the EU and the revision of effective dates for that departure did, though, absorb a very significant proportion of the capacity of both government and at least a proportion of LRFs in the arena of preparation. This resulted in reduced capacity to devote to other areas of concern, which had direct and relevant ramifications. The NPCC understands, for example, that this was a factor leading to the cancellation of the pandemic simulation exercise and a LRF Chairs' Conference which were due to take place during 2019.

112. As previously indicated, LRF funding was very largely derived from its local membership, and was not mandated. Funding and resourcing accordingly varied as between LRFs, and expectations placed on LRFs could sometimes strain their relatively limited resources.

113. The NPCC is not generally able to comment on the extent to which local risk assessments, emergency plans and forecasts accounted for the possibility of a pandemic like Covid-19 during the proposed date range, or whether the requirements in respect of business continuity, public awareness and information sharing had been generally met, or whether this varied between LRFs (or equivalents in the devolved nations). Neither is the NPCC aware of any formal national assurance process to ensure pandemic plans were in place in accordance with requirements or to monitor consistency or suitability across LRFs in different areas. Responses to the RCS and NCS and accompanying high-level reports from the relevant period may provide an indication of whether local emergency plans in place on 21 January 2020 across the UK were adequate to deal with a pandemic like Covid-19. Within the LRF structure, the local risk assessments, emergency plans and forecasts drawn up by health agencies as lead responders in preparation for the possibility of a pandemic like Covid-19 would be particularly important.

114. The NPCC is also unable to comment on the extent to which specific LRFs and their equivalents in the devolved nations were involved in ensuring local emergency plans relevant to a pandemic were exercised during the relevant period. This data is likely to be held by the Local Government Association and/or DLUHC. The exercising of plans by LRFs would respond to matters other than a national risk, and would be entirely at the behest of an individual LRF. Exercising in respect of a national risk, such as an influenza pandemic, is generally led by government, as was the case with Exercise Cygnus. Similarly, in response to the Ebola outbreak of 2013-2016, there was a national drive to ensure that all LRFs reviewed their plans and ran workshops and guidance was circulated to all forces on dealing with infected persons and on Personal Protective Equipment (**PPE**).

115. At the outset of the pandemic there were existing established lines of information-sharing within police forces and between LRFs, and regular contact both with the lead for Resilience, Emergency Planning and Risk Management (at that time) and the Home Office. As a consequence of the pandemic, the number and frequency

of these were increased, reflecting a growing sense within NPCC that the pandemic was more likely to become a national emergency which may require a more structured response from policing.

116. There was no national policing plan at as 21 January 2020 for a pandemic. Every police force is an operationally independent entity with distinct working practices, policies and operational context. It would be difficult to provide an assessment of the general state of readiness within policing, in part because civil contingency planning is typically multi-agency. It is likely that this is why His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services does not ordinarily assess preparedness for civil contingencies.

117. I make one specific observation relating to the provision of PPE. A key aspect of preparedness for the Covid-19 pandemic was the availability of PPE. Inadequate supply of PPE of sufficient quality was capable of seriously impacting the provision of essential services, including the police service. In the very early stages of the pandemic, some police forces were receiving disparate advice as to the standards of PPE required and how it should be deployed. The context for this inconsistency was a degree of disparity in the public health messaging and in the interpretation of health and safety legislation as to these requirements.

118. It was not until the end of August 2020 that the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) began to supply items of PPE free-of-charge to Operation Talla for processing through its Covid-19 PPE Temporary Distribution Hub and onward transmission to Home Office Police forces, so that sourcing and procuring by the NPCC became unnecessary. "Talla" was the name given to the Operation formed by NPCC to provide a national coordination function for policing activity during the pandemic. It was not until September 2021 that the DHSC developed a supply chain and logistic partner capable of delivering PPE from a central point to public sector bodies. This was made available to policing throughout the UK, and would meet the level of service previously afforded to police forces from the Covid-19 PPE Temporary Distribution Hub. The gaps in this timeline were filled by the NPCC, which sourced, procured, and quality assured all PPE items moved in to policing until August 2020 and distributed those items until September 2021. I give this as an important example of the extent to which the UK government was in a state of readiness as at January 2020, despite the statutory provisions and structures designed and intended to ensure readiness.

119. The CCA and associated requirements provides a framework for a way of working which fosters a collective approach amongst key stakeholders. Whether the balance has yet been struck correctly as between central and local responsibility, accountability, and management remains to be and should be established.
120. The CCA framework was not used by government so as to establish the framework for the application of sanctions at short notice to the population as a whole through regulation and enforcement. The NPCC was not involved in consultation or discussions prior to January 2020 as to how such a framework might best be put in place.
121. The NPCC was likewise not involved in consultation or discussion prior to January 2020 in respect of government planning for the prospective need to develop national capability for the collection and the dissemination of data. Non-provision of such data timeously during the pandemic to police was capable of hampering police efficacy, and on occasion did so. For example, the absence of data in respect of the decision to impose a local lockdown in Leicester meant that police were unable to contextualise or understand the nature and scope of the risk and thus made community engagement harder.

Future planning and lesson learning

122. The need to identify, capture, and reflect on both short- and longer-term learning and implications of the policing of Covid-19 was initiated by Operation Talla in the early stages of the pandemic under the rubric of the Recovery Learning and Reform Programme. Separately, a C-19 Foresight Group was established within the Civil Contingencies Portfolio. This early recognition reflected the NPCC's awareness that, regardless of the progress of the pandemic, it would be necessary to harvest as much by way of data, information, understanding, and learning as possible, and that the sources of such understanding would be manifold, both internal to the police service and external.

C-19 Foresight Group

123. The work of the C-19 Foresight Group included the commissioning of a series of Interim Operational Reviews during the Covid-19 Pandemic. These were intended

to provide a real-time reflection from frontline strategic leaders in the midst of the Covid-19 response. The reviews were carried out by Nottingham Trent University and the Hydra Foundation, and published on the University website: [C19 National Foresight Group Outputs | Nottingham Trent University](#):

- i. C19 National Foresight Group: Report – First Interim Operational Review, 11 May 2020 (date of review: 22nd April 2020)
- ii. C19 National Foresight Group: Report – Second Interim Operational Review, 21 July 2020 (date of review: 17th June 2020)
- iii. C19 National Foresight Group: Report – Third Interim Operational Review, 27 October 2020 (date of review: 16th September 2020)

Each review identified a series of themes and resulted in a number of recommendations directed at UK Government, at LRFs, and others. The third interim operational review “engaged over 160 delegates from a range of different organisations. ...[it] had participation from all but one LRF, Government Departments and supporting agencies and third sector bodies.”

- 123.** In addition, a focussed review of one LRF was carried out on 9th November 2020. This review resulted in a detailed Interim Operational Review (18th January 2021) and a summary report, “LRF Learning: Sharing ideas from a local Interim Operational Review (21st January 2021)”. The Executive Summary explains that “[t]he Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the value of LRFs whilst exposing gaps in capabilities. This review has captured the learning from one LRFs experiences and provides 22 recommendations that will support all LRFs. ... We hope the themes and recommendations laid out in this short summary help all LRFs at this time.”

Recovery Learning and Reform Programme

- 124.** A Board was established to support, direct and review the delivery of the programme, with core members drawn from the NPCC, the Home Office, the College, the NCA, the Independent Office of Police Conduct, the Association of PCCs, HMICFRS, and Counter Terrorism Policing. The first meeting was held on 7th July 2020.
- 125.** The expressed aim of this programme was two-fold:

- i. “Supporting the identification and sharing of learning and knowledge in near real-time to inform ongoing decision making and planning.
- ii. To develop an objective, evidence based understanding of the long-term impact and implications of Covid-19 on and for policing.”

126. In August 2021, a cross-policing system group was established by Operation Talla and NPoCC. The purpose of this group is to draw together the specific and thematic learning points identified through the work of the programme and increasingly available through published academic studies, and begin the process of formulating recommendations. That work is ongoing and will incorporate any recommendations made by the Inquiry. The implementation and assurance in respect of recommendations will be allocated to the relevant portfolio leads within NPCC structures.

Knowledge Sharing Events

127. A key new process established in respect of the identification and sharing of knowledge was the holding of Knowledge Sharing Events (**KSEs**). These were online events, held from 5th May 2020, generally twice a week, and from then throughout the relevant period. These were established and hosted for the most part by the College and otherwise by the NPCC. Each session dealt with a discrete topic and was supported by a written summary and reference material. Topics and practice were presented by officers, practitioners and specialists, and included an all-force question and answer session. Following each session a summary report with supporting materials was made available. Topics included both Covid-specific and wider policing matters, reflective of the impact of the disruption across the whole of policing. The success of KSEs in providing a forum for rapid centralised sharing of information and experience was recognised in 2020 by the College and the NPCC. KSEs are now permanent.

128. During 2020 and 2021 focussed learning and consultation events were held and independent reports commissioned, intended to extract wider organisational learning themes and priorities. These included:

Events

- i. In August 2020, an exercise carried out by the College, working with the NPCC and with individual forces, to identify the top 10 organisational learning priorities

in respect of the Covid-19 response, resulting in a final report of 18 November 2020 identifying strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement.

- ii. In April 2021, an online debriefing event held by the Hydra foundation using 10Kv – cloud methodology, designed to extract from participants their view on what went well, what solutions had been developed, and what messages they wished to send to senior leaders.

Commissioned reports

- iii. ‘Covid-19 and Future Threats: a Law Enforcement Delphi Study’, November 2022. UCL was commissioned by the NPCC to complete this study with the following key aims:

- Systematically assess learned experiences of policing during the disruption to inform future policy;
- Contribute towards the readiness of Law Enforcement Agencies to police future disruptions and operate under ‘normal’ conditions;
- Anticipate future crime trends; and
- Inform policing strategy and policy

The report resulted in a series of recommendations including in relation to themes of foresight activity and community engagement.

129. The Inquiry’s attention is also drawn to the work of the Police Foundation, an independent policing think tank which, in conjunction with Crest Advisory, carried out a significant research project on UK policing and the Covid-19 pandemic. This project examined “the strengths and weakness of the current policing model in England and Wales, with a particular focus on policing structures, use of technology, strategic planning and public consent.” The project’s initial report was circulated to all programme stakeholders through the Board and Regional Recovery Group. The final report was published on 10th January 2022. The Recovery Programme has reviewed the recommendations; those relating to policing directly considered within the relevant NPCC portfolios with a view to identifying and progressing any further response.

- 130.** Of note is the recognition of the importance of the strong strategic core provided through the NPCC:

“In areas such as the procurement of PPE, working in partnership with government and issuing consistent guidance to forces around enforcing complex and changing laws, having central coordination through the NPCC and the College of Policing proved extremely valuable. In fact the service would not have been able to operate effectively without it.

This raises the question as to why such central coordination is not more routine in other dimensions of policing ... a lack of national workforce planning means that forces have allowed significant skills gaps to develop particularly in the investigation of more complex types of crime ... a lack of centrally collected and analysed individual data poses a risk to a service that does not adequately understand the demand it faces.”

- 131.** Whilst the work of the NPCC Programme is ongoing, as set out above, the NPCC agrees that the Covid-19 pandemic underlined the utility of a central lead holding a national portfolio for civil contingencies. The NPCC's intention is that future NPoCC NMCs will also hold the Civil Contingencies Portfolio.
- 132.** It is likely, generally, that there is scope for improvement in systems and processes both for assuring the ongoing preparedness of the country for future analogous emergencies, the adequacy of funding to serve that purpose, and for information sharing as between key operational stakeholders.

Statement of Truth

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

Personal Data

Signed: _____

Assistant Chief Constable Owen Weatherill

Dated: 14th April 2023