

Witness Name: Major General Phillip Prosser

Statement Number: 2

Exhibits: 15

Dated: 21 January 2025

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COVID INQUIRY**

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**SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF  
MAJOR GENERAL PHILLIP PROSSER**

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I, Major General Phillip Prosser, of Defence Support, Strategic Command, Ministry of Defence, Abbey Wood, Bristol, BS34 8JH, will say as follows –

**A. Introduction**

1. I am Major General Phillip Prosser. During the Covid-19 pandemic (the “**pandemic**”), whilst holding the rank of Brigadier, as Commander of the 101 Logistic Brigade, I was deployed to the personal protective equipment (“**PPE**”) Team within NHS England (“**NHSE**”) headquarters to assist NHSE in the distribution of healthcare equipment from 19 March 2020 to 23 July 2020. During my period of secondment to the PPE Team, a company named Clipper Logistics (“**Clipper**”) was engaged to provide PPE warehousing and distribution services.
2. This statement has been prepared at the request of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry (the “**Inquiry**”) dated 30 October 2024 bearing the reference M5/MOD/02 and requesting details about the MOD’s involvement with Clipper (the “**Module 5 Request**”). It has been produced with the assistance of individuals within the Ministry of Defence (the “**MOD**” or the “**Department**”) with specific responsibilities for areas covered by the Module 5 Request and legal advisors and draws from a range of documents which are exhibited.

3. I have previously produced a first witness statement dated 12 December 2024, which addresses my role at NHSE. At points below I refer to matters contained in my first witness statement.
4. The MOD would like clarify to at the outset that it has limited knowledge of the matters contained in the Module 5 Request. A substantial proportion of those matters relate to commercial negotiations, performance evaluation, and decision-making in relation to the Clipper contract. The MOD's role in the PPE Team was a purely operational one; MOD personnel had been seconded to NHSE to provide planning and logistical expertise and support, but all decision-making responsibility and authority remained with NHSE and NHSE alone. Accordingly, the MOD has limited knowledge of matters relating to the Clipper contract. This statement explains the extent of that knowledge and notes the matters which are outside the MOD's knowledge.
5. This statement is structured as follows:
  - a. Section B: Background.
  - b. Section C: The MOD's involvement in the engagement of Clipper.
  - c. Section D: The MOD's operational involvement with Clipper.
  - d. Section E: Reflections on Clipper's performance.

## **B. Background**

6. On 19 March 2020, the MOD received a request from NHSE for the provision of planning and logistical support to the PPE Team through the Military Aid to the Civil Authorities ("**MACA**") mechanism. NHSE explained that it required assistance with the "*[u]rgent distribution of Personal Protective Equipment ... to NHS England primary and secondary care facilities*" as "*NHS E lacks the necessary planning and logistic task at this scale in the time frame available*" and the "*[e]xtant supply chain is under significant pressure*". The requested support was limited to "*[l]ogistic expertise and support*".
7. After I received my initial orders, I was copied into an email chain in which there were references to the MOD providing 25 trucks for the delivery of PPE and to the MOD "*establish[ing] a full end-to-end supply chain*".<sup>1</sup> Shortly after I received this email, I had an oral discussion about my deployment, in which neither of these points were mentioned and I was instead told that I was to go to Skipton House and figure out what

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<sup>1</sup> [PP/1 - INQ000534264]

needed to be done myself. I believe that call was either with Brigadier Charles Ginn, who wrote the email I refer to above, or with [redacted] **Chief of Staff** my Chief of Staff. As such, I did not place weight on the matters referred to in that email; I took it as an email which was written in the confusion of the moment which had been superseded by my updated instructions. Indeed, that assessment was borne out, as upon my arrival at Skipton House neither of those matters were identified as being the reason for my deployment. Regarding the provision of trucks, once I was at Skipton House it was clear that the 25 trucks mentioned in the email were not required: a lack of trucks was not the cause of the supply chain issues, and, as I explain further below, there were commercial options available that could provide supply chain support at short notice. However, my recollection is that MOD provided two trucks for an emergency delivery that week, which was reported in newspapers. Regarding the MOD establishing a full end-to-end supply chain, at Skipton House that was not mentioned to me save that, as I discuss further below, Jin Sahota of SCCL suggested that the MOD establish a parallel supply chain, but in my view that was his own idea rather than one discussed with NHSE, the MOD, or other stakeholders.

8. The MOD immediately deployed a planning team of three personnel,<sup>2</sup> who arrived at NHSE on the afternoon of 19 March 2020. I arrived the following day. Pursuant to the MACA request, 15 personnel were initially generated, although a further 35 personnel were generated through a later MACA request. We were initially deployed for three weeks, although that was later extended to four months, ending on 23 July 2020.
9. Where personnel are deployed under a MACA request, they fall under the operational command of the civil authority. As explained in *Joint Doctrine Publication 02, UK Operations: The Defence Contribution to Resilience (4<sup>th</sup> edition)* ("**JDP02**"), "[a]ny contribution by Defence responders should be seen in a supporting role to the civil responders, who will have primacy throughout". Accordingly, the MOD acted in a supporting role to NHSE decision-makers. By way of example, I acted in a role akin to a Chief of Staff; I would facilitate the flow of information to the Senior Responsible Officers ("**SROs**") through daily meetings and briefings to ensure that the SROs were appraised of the information necessary to make informed and effective decisions in relation to the distribution of PPE (but I did not make any such decisions myself).
10. Broadly, I saw our role as bringing rigour, tempo, and discipline to NHSE's processes through our logistical and planning expertise. It is important to emphasise that our role did not include (1) activities relating to commercial negotiations or relationship-

<sup>2</sup> Being: [redacted] **Name Redacted** [redacted] **Name Redacted** and [redacted] **Name Redacted**

management or (2) decision-making in relation to the distribution of PPE, which was for the SROs.

**C. The MOD's involvement in the engagement of Clipper**

11. I was involved in the engagement of Clipper as follows. During the days following my deployment, it became clear that the existing PPE distribution system, under which the NHS Supply Chain entity, Supply Chain Coordination Limited or "SCCL", subcontracted with Unipart, a logistics company, to deliver PPE to 226 NHS Trusts, was inadequate.
12. On Saturday 21 March, my team<sup>3</sup> and I attended a briefing by Jin Sahota, the CEO of SCCL. This was an in person briefing and to my knowledge no notes were taken. I have what I believe to be a clear recollection of the briefing, because it was at such an early stage of my deployment, the information he conveyed was significant at the time, and I was required to act on it urgently. During the briefing my recollection is that Mr Sahota informed us that the present system – under which SCCL had contracted with Unipart, a logistics company, to provide warehousing and distribution services to the 226 NHS Trusts – was incapable of meeting the distribution challenge facing it. I recall being informed during this briefing that the information systems utilised by the existing supply chain were incapable of handling any more procurement contracts, that the distribution systems were operating at capacity, and that there was no unified portal for ordering which could handle the increased orders from NHS Trusts and, over time, the requests from the 58,000 settings for which NHSE became responsible. It is my understanding that against this backdrop Mr Sahota had imposed demand management restrictions on NHS Trusts to avoid PPE over-ordering. I considered that to be an extreme step demonstrating significant supply chain disruption. Having explained this, he made it clear to me that he was of the view that, in short, the MOD would have to step in and solve the problem.
13. It did not seem to me at that time that Mr Sahota had in mind any particular mechanism by which the MOD should provide the necessary distribution service. He did not elaborate on 'how' this issue was to be resolved, only that his view was that the MOD needed to solve the problem because he was unable to do so. He did not say that the proposal of the MOD solving the problem was a position which he had agreed or

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<sup>3</sup> Chief of Staff Name Redacted

discussed with anyone in NHSE, the MOD, or other stakeholders. My impression is that this was an idea that he had come up with himself and proposed in the moment.

14. I do not recall much further discussion during that briefing and I left without a clear view as to next steps; I knew only that I had been tasked with identifying and potentially implementing a solution to a pressing and urgent situation. This new request was not within what I understood to be the scope of the MACA assistance which I had been deployed to provide. I had been deployed to provide planning support to the existing supply chain, rather than establishing a new, bespoke, end-to-end supply chain. However, in view of the urgency of the situation, and the limited options that were apparently available, I was determined to assist if it was possible for me to do so.

15. I first considered whether the MOD itself could provide the necessary supply chain. However, this was not an obviously viable option, for the following reasons:

- a. **First**, in accordance with the principles set out in JDP 02, the MOD should only provide MACA support where there is no other available option. The task before me was for the provision of warehousing and distribution services, which in my view were tasks which could be performed by civilian commercial contractors, as ultimately was the case.
- b. **Secondly**, 101 Brigade's expertise was in deployed logistics (i.e. logistic operations during warfighting), whereas the task facing me was the establishment of a new domestic supply chain. Accordingly, I considered that 101 Brigade, or the MOD, did not have particular expertise which made it more suited to the task than a civilian commercial contractor.
- c. **Thirdly**, the scale of the task was enormous. If the MOD were to be solely responsible for establishing this secondary supply chain, in my view, around 5,000 to 10,000 personnel would have been required to provide support for a potentially indeterminate period. By way of comparison, I understand that the Defence Secretary established a Covid Support Force ("**CSF**") on 18 March 2020 to assist public services with the pandemic response through MACA requests. The CSF was comprised of 20,000 personnel held at graduated readiness, with up to 4,000 committed on most days. As such, were the MOD to provide the supply chain service, that would tie up a substantial proportion of MOD capacity and prevent the MOD from responding to other MACA requests which were received from time to time.

d. **Fourthly**, I was concerned to avoid the MOD becoming tied-in on a task to the detriment of its other primary function of maintaining a state of military readiness. I had received a direction from my commanding officer, Lieutenant General Michael Elviss (then Major General), who was the General Officer commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> (UK) Division, that I should not remain at Skipton House longer than necessary, as it was imperative for the MOD to return to its usual warfighting function as soon as reasonably possible. This direction was made through an email<sup>4</sup> and an oral discussion which took place around the same time. The early pandemic was a time of substantial geopolitical uncertainty. In particular, the situation regarding Russia was becoming more concerning to the MOD. Committing myself and a substantial number of MOD personnel for a substantial time period would potentially prevent the MOD from fulfilling its core warfighting function.

16. Given the above, it was my strong view at the time that other options, beyond simply the MOD 'doing it' needed to be explored urgently. I reached out to contacts with logistics expertise in order to gather information about potential solutions. I contacted Neil Ashworth, who was a member of the Engineer and Logistic Staff Corps ("**ELSC**"), which is a voluntary corps of individuals with engineering and logistics backgrounds, largely in the civilian sector. Mr Ashworth had significant experience in the commercial logistics field as he had previously acted as the Chief Commercial Officer of the logistics company Yodel. The ELSC provides mentors to Army personnel in order to allow the Army to take advantage of that experience. Mr Ashworth had been assigned as my mentor during mid-2019. I had spoken to him on two occasions before this, during which we had discussions about modern-day logistics. These discussions related entirely to logistics. I am not aware of Mr Ashworth having any political affiliation or links to any political party.

17. I had a phone call with Mr Ashworth on (I believe) Sunday 22 March 2020. His view was that a commercial third party could be able to provide the solution that I was looking for. Particularly, I recall that he noted that many logistics companies would have spare capacity; routine operations such as deliveries to non-essential shops would have ceased. He mentioned Clipper Logistics ("**Clipper**") to me, as Clipper had a substantial distribution network available to it and would have ceased a substantial proportion of its routine operations as, I understand, Clipper's usual business included the distribution of clothing to high street fashion brands including John Lewis. Mr

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<sup>4</sup> [PP/1 -INQ000534264]

Ashworth offered to reach out to Clipper, as I believe he had contacts in Clipper's senior leadership. I can confirm that prior to this point, I had never heard of Clipper; nor had I had any contact with senior personnel at Clipper.

18. I believe that at this point I would have informed Ms Lawson – who was the Senior Responsible Owner (“**SRO**”) on the PPE Team – that I had reached out to Mr Ashworth and that Mr Ashworth had offered to reach out to Clipper. As Ms Lawson was the SRO, I kept her informed of my actions at all times so far as possible. I have no doubt given the significance of this work, that I would have been keeping her informed of my progress. However, I do not specifically recall when I informed her of the above matters.
19. On Monday 23 March 2020, the day that the national ‘lockdown’ was announced, a meeting was held between myself, Jim Spittle and Mr Sahota of SCCL, Frank Burns of Unipart, Ms Lawson of NHSE, and a representative from Clipper. I have referred to LinkedIn, and believe that the Clipper representative was Tony Mannix, who I understand was the Clipper CEO at the time. I did not set up this meeting. I believe that it is likely that what happened was that Mr Ashworth had reached out to Clipper as he had said he would, and then put Clipper in contact with Mr Spittle of SCCL or Mr Burns of Unipart, with whom Mr Ashworth also had a professional relationship. My impression during this meeting was that discussions had already taken place between Clipper, SCCL and Unipart. I am not aware of the content of those discussions. However, during the meeting on 23 March 2020 the representatives from Clipper, SCCL and Unipart presented to Ms Lawson a plan for working together to provide the necessary distribution services. I presume that the content of that presentation arose from those previous discussions.
20. My recollection is that there were some outstanding issues to be ironed out, so Clipper, SCCL and Unipart agreed to have a further meeting to resolve those matters. I recall that I asked them to report promptly. In preparing this statement I have reviewed an email from Mr Sahota dated 24 March 2020, in which he states that I “*instructed the parties to meet again and report back at 11am today on a solution for how this dedicated channel could be achieved*”. I do not believe that this accurately reflects matters. I do not believe it is at all likely that I would have directed the parties to meet again; it would not have been my role to give such a direction. My recollection is that it was something they agreed of their own volition.
21. I do recall that I impressed the urgency of the situation upon them: although given the context, I doubt they were unaware, and I expect that I would have asked that they

report back on their discussions promptly. I do not recall explicitly 'instructing' them to report back by a particular time; however, it is likely that I would have used language which reflected the urgency, and language which was clear and precise about expectations, in line with my military background, in which clear action points are imperative (and thus tend towards the use of forceful language) and the urgency of the situation. In any event, even if it is the case that the language of one of 'instruction' to report back, I was not the decision-maker on whether to engage Clipper. I was concerned solely to ensure that a decision was made rapidly. My impression when I arrived at NHSE was that decisions on logistics were not being made quickly enough, and that some of the PPE Team had not yet adopted the 'wartime mindset' necessary to respond to the unprecedented situation facing the country. Accordingly, I encouraged the parties to speed up their decision-making process, although the decision remained theirs to make.

22. In Mr Sahota's email of 24 March 2020, he informed me that the parties had agreed that the most effective way to engage Clipper's services would be through a direct contract between Unipart and Clipper. Unipart already had a contract for the provision of distribution services with SCCL, and so rather than creating a new and bespoke contract between SCCL and Clipper it was agreed between those parties that it would be more effective for Unipart to sub-contract with Clipper, with the arrangement ultimately managed by NHSE directly.<sup>5</sup> I understand that daily management of the parallel supply chain would be undertaken by a Joint Control Tower staffed by SCCL and Clipper.<sup>6</sup> I do not believe that it had been decided by NHSE at this point to bring Clipper on board. Indeed, in that email Mr Sahota referred to discussions he had had with DHL, the logistics company, and to the possibility of engaging DHL to perform the role which was ultimately performed by Clipper. My recollection is that this email is the first time that DHL was mentioned, as Mr Sahota had not mentioned those discussions with DHL to me before that point.

23. I am unaware of subsequent discussions and negotiations between SCCL, Unipart, NHSE and/or Clipper, as my role was purely operational rather than commercial. Accordingly, I am unable to answer the questions put to me by the Inquiry relating to:

- a. the process by which any contract with Clipper was made, save for the matters mentioned above;

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<sup>5</sup> [PP/2 -INQ000534273]

<sup>6</sup> [PP/3 -INQ000534265]



- b. how, why, and by whom Clipper was selected to provide services;
- c. whether it was considered that Clipper had the requisite experience in working with the NHS, local government and social care sectors in order to fulfil the purposes of the contract;
- d. the total amount spent on any contracts with Clipper during the pandemic;
- e. who had oversight for any contract with Clipper during the pandemic, including in relation to due diligence, conflicts of interest, responsibility for sign-off, and performance of or compliance with any contract; and
- f. the key officials at the MOD who had responsibility for any contract with Clipper, although I believe that there were no such individuals.

24. I was later informed that Clipper had been selected to provide the required distribution services. I was not part of that decision and nor am I privy to the reasons why Clipper was selected over DHL (or, indeed, any other company which may have been under consideration, although I am not aware if any other companies were considered). I would presume that that decision was made by NHSE, although I am not aware of the identity of the ultimate decision-maker. I do not believe that any MOD personnel were involved in that decision. I infer that the decision was made between 24 and 26 March 2020, before the first goods arrived at Clipper's facilities on 27 March.

25. Whilst I understand that Clipper was responsible for the distribution of substantial volumes of PPE, Clipper was not the exclusive provider of such services. I understand that DHL was at some point engaged to provide distribution services, although I am not aware of the process leading to that contract nor the details of the contract.

26. The Inquiry has asked me to address specific questions about any involvement in the engagement of Clipper by Steve Parkin, who I understand to be the founder and executive chairman of Clipper. I can confirm:

- a. Mr Parkin was not known to me at the time of the above events (and, therefore, nor was I aware that he was a donor to the Conservative Party);
- b. I was not aware of any involvement by Mr Parkin in the events leading up to Clipper's engagement;
- c. I am not aware of any impact Mr Parkin may have had on Clipper's engagement; and

- d. I am not aware which processes were followed in relation to potential declarations of interest and/or conflicts of interest. As I have stated, I was not involved in commercial matters as my role was purely operational.

#### **D. The MOD's operational involvement with Clipper**

27. In this section I address the MOD's involvement in (1) onboarding Clipper; (2) the transition between the existing supply chain and the parallel supply chain; and (3) providing operational assistance to Clipper in the storage and distribution of PPE. I did not personally have responsibilities in relation to such matters, as my role was to support decision-making by the PPE Team in Skipton House. The following information has largely been obtained through discussion with relevant MOD personnel including Major Eb Mukhtar and Lieutenant Colonel Ed Dutton (who was at that time a Major). Major Mukhtar was a reservist with logistics and supply chain expertise who was deployed to Skipton House as a member of my team. Lt Col Dutton was a full time reservist who was deployed to Clipper's Daventry facility as a military liaison officer.
28. By way of background, in order to meet the increased PPE demand Clipper established a centralised national distribution centre of 260,000 square feet in Daventry. I believe that this was an existing facility owned by Clipper, which was previously used mainly for the distribution of household products including bikes and clothes. Clipper decided to use this facility as its main site for the storage and distribution of PPE during the pandemic, although it also opened other PPE storage and distribution facilities over time. I understand that Clipper was not required to implement any substantial changes to the structure, racking, or layout of the Daventry facility. The facility was set up for receiving and shipping simple items, and there was no substantive difference between receiving and shipping bikes and clothes versus PPE items.

#### **1. Onboarding**

29. I understand that the onboarding process was led by Chris Holmes, Direction of Supply Chain at SCCL, and Alan Wain, Chief Operating Officer of SCCL and Gareth Uden, Operations Director NHS Supply Chain at Unipart. SCCL had also engaged Hatmill, a Logistic and Supply Chain consultancy, to provide additional expertise and local assurance. MOD personnel were present during parts of the onboarding process; however, as was the case with the MOD's involvement in the PPE Team generally, such personnel were there in a supporting capacity and did not make any substantive

decisions. For example, Major Mukhtar attended an onboarding meeting in Daventry led by Mr Holmes and Gareth Uden of Unipart, in an observational capacity in order to understand where military support could be provided if required. One area in which the military provided support was in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making processes, in an effort to ensure that the parallel supply chain was set up at a sufficient pace to meet the challenge facing the country.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Transition

30. The MOD's involvement in the transition phase was limited. The military had no presence in Clipper facilities during the initial days of operation, when I would assume that the majority of transition-related activities took place. I understand that there were some operational problems caused by the transition from the existing supply chain mechanism to the Clipper mechanism. For example, stakeholders had to transition from the ordering process used by SCCL to new channels in the parallel supply chain. I am also aware that there were some issues surrounding Clipper's capacity as they expanded to meet the needs of inbound stock. However, such matters were managed by SCCL and Clipper jointly through the Joint Control Tower mentioned at paragraph 21 above.

## 3. Operational delivery

31. I understand that commercial or performance-based issues would be resolved between SCCL and Clipper, and that if higher-level direction was required then matters would be escalated to the SROs at Skipton House or delegated representatives thereof. Accordingly, the MOD did not have substantial operational involvement with Clipper. However, Lt Col Dutton was deployed to Daventry in early April where he acted as a military liaison to Skipton House.

32. Around late March 2020, I had a discussion with Major Mukhtar about Clipper's Daventry facility. That facility was a core part of the parallel supply chain, but, at that time, the MOD had limited visibility of the situation on the ground there. We discussed deploying a military liaison to Daventry in order to gain full situational awareness of the

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, [PP/4 - INQ000534280], which is a document produced by Major Mukhtar providing an overview of the Clipper arrangement and detailing action points which Unipart was to complete in order to activate the Clipper supply chain. No action points were for the MOD to complete, as the MOD's role was confined solely to improving the operational processes of other parties.

operational arrangements in place. Major Mukhtar suggested that Lt Col Dutton would be a good fit, as he had a background in commercial logistics at Amazon. I reached out to Lt Col Dutton's commanding officer, [Name Redacted] and it was agreed that he would be deployed to Daventry for a couple of weeks. My understanding was that this deployment would fall under an extant MACA, but I am not aware of the specific MACA. Due to the extreme urgency of the situation, it was necessary to get boots on the ground as soon as possible.

33. Lt Col Dutton arrived at Daventry during the first week of April 2020. At that time, Clipper had been in operation for some days. I am informed that upon Lt Col Dutton's arrival products were coming into the warehouse and being shipped out and that a warehouse management system had been set up to record this.

34. Lt Col Dutton's role was to be the 'eyes on the ground' for decision-makers at Skipton House. He would be given tasks by Skipton House in order to facilitate decision-making. I understand that he would not receive tasks directly from Clipper. Nor was he integrated into Clipper; I understand that he received regular emails containing snapshots of inventory held, but that he did not have access to their systems.

35. I understand based on my conversations with Lt Col Dutton that his activities during the early part of his deployment were as follows:

a. **First**, providing information transparency to decision-makers at Skipton House. The PPE Team SROs made decisions about the distribution of PPE in the daily meetings I have described in my first witness statement, but during the early days of the operation there were occasionally gaps in the information they had available to them to make that decision. They needed to know what stock had arrived at the Daventry facility and what stock was available for distribution. Lt Col Dutton helped provide this information. I attach, as examples of the kind of work undertaken by Lt Col Dutton, several emails between him and Skipton House as follows:

i. An email of 26 April providing a daily gown sitrep.<sup>8</sup> The Inquiry will note that Lt Col Dutton explained that the numbers provided were based on "*known stock categorised by me*", which led to greater numbers of stock than as detailed on automated reports. This was due to delays in the automated system. The Inquiry will also note that the Lt Col provided further information contextualising the stock holdings, including: (1) that

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<sup>8</sup> [PP/5 -INQ000534274]

there were no picks pending; (2) the number of gowns which were quarantined and non-quarantined; and (3) that a number of gowns were awaiting categorisation (in terms of the kinds of activities they were suitable for), but that categorisation was being chased up on. The granularity and contextualisation of information that Lt Col Dutton could provide far exceeded any automated report, and thus significantly assisted Skipton House decision-makers to make distribution decisions.

- ii. An email of 4 May from Colonel [Name Redacted] at Skipton House to Lt Col Dutton requesting clarification on a gown delivery.<sup>9</sup> The recipient had received fewer gowns than expected, and so Col Smith asked Lt Col Dutton to confirm which gowns had been delivered, in order to improve information transparency and thus assist subsequent decision-making.
- iii. An email of 6 May from myself to Lt Col Dutton regarding a potential capacity issue at Daventry.<sup>10</sup> I had been asked by someone (I cannot remember who) if there was a capacity issue at Daventry insofar as they could not accept the full stock in-load due to a lack of trucks. I did not want a rumour like this spreading, so I directly reached out to Lt Col Dutton to clarify matters. Lt Col Dutton clarified that Daventry had sufficient trucks, but that there was a bottle-neck in their ability to move in-load stock off the dock due to the time it took to identify stock and complete initial problem solving actions before stowing. In my view, this issue was caused by the absence of a data trail for stock before it arrived into the supply chain. We had in the early days relatively little visibility on the location of stock between it being ordered and arriving into the supply chain. Accordingly, there were peaks and troughs in the amount of stock arriving on any given day. Thanks to Lt Col Dutton's clarification of the matter, I was able to understand that resolution lay in improving the in-bound data trail.

- b. **Secondly**, Lt Col Dutton generally assisted in the resolution of issues at the Daventry facility. If an issue arose, Lt Col Dutton could provide assistance by working to connect the decision-maker with the right person to resolve that issue. His role was one of facilitation. For example, early on the Clipper IT team had issues with installing a phone line into the warehouse. I understand that Lt

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<sup>9</sup> [PP/6 - INQ000534276]

<sup>10</sup> [PP/7 - INQ000534277]

Col Dutton offered to assist with this task by phoning the relevant company to request expedition of the installation. He also wrote an email to be provided to the company confirming that the site was “*a piece of critical national infrastructure in its role supplying PPE to the NHS*”, in order to support the request for expedition.<sup>11</sup> However, he was acting solely to facilitate actions by others, and did not himself make any decisions on operational matters at Daventry. To give another example, Lt Col Dutton reached out to the Northamptonshire Police to flag the Daventry site as critical national infrastructure, so that any 999 calls could be treated as ‘urgent’, and to request that local officers visited the site to improve their understanding of the location and significance for the PPE supply operation.<sup>12</sup>

- c. **Thirdly**, Lt Col Dutton assisted with improving the speed of the quality assurance processes at Daventry. Quality assurance was an important issue during the early part of the pandemic; NHSE had begun to use products from new suppliers, and so the quality of those products was not known. It was necessary to quarantine those products pending quality assurance processes taking place. As such, it was important to get those quality assurance processes completed as soon as possible so that the PPE could become available for distribution. However, Clipper was a logistics company, and had little experience with medical quality assurance processes. Further, undertaking those processes was complicated by the national lockdown and ‘work from home’ directive in place at the time. Accordingly, Lt Col Dutton worked to facilitate the relevant regulatory bodies (which I understand to be the Health and Safety Executive and the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency) performing the necessary inspections. He would provide assistance in the coordination of those inspections: scheduling inspections and ensuring that the inspectors could speak to the right people at Daventry. In my view, he did an excellent job on this issue, and I understand that the quality assurance system become quicker and more efficient over time, leading to greater PPE availability for distribution.

- 36. During April, it became apparent that Lt Col Dutton would benefit from further MOD personnel to assist him. He was spending large amounts of time on the warehouse floor (e.g. checking pallets to ensure that they were in the right places and contained

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<sup>11</sup> [PP/8 -INQ000534275]

<sup>12</sup> [PP/9 -INQ000534266] [PP/10 -INQ000534268] [PP/11 -INQ000534267]

the right quantity of PPE), and so requested additional resource. Through a MACA of 11 April 2020<sup>13</sup> a Captain<sup>14</sup> and two Junior Non-Commissioned Officers (“NCOs”) were deployed to Daventry. The NCOs would perform tasks on the warehouse floor, including providing support with inventory control and tracking and managing the tracking of items where stock levels were at critical levels. The Captain was to provide Lt Col Dutton with support with data analysis, with responding to requests for information from Skipton House, and with liaison with partner agencies. This MACA was then updated on 24 April 2020 to formalise Lt Col Dutton’s deployment to Daventry.

37. I understand that this arrangement proved effective. Lt Col Dutton was able to focus on his primary task of liaising with decision-makers at Skipton House, with the additional personnel assisting him in doing so. For example, if Skipton House suspected that there was a gap or a discrepancy in the information on stock levels available to them, Lt Col Dutton would be able to send one of the NCOs to the warehouse floor to confirm stock levels and report back.
38. I understand that after the initial phase of the pandemic in March and April, the Clipper operation and data-management systems matured and Lt Col Dutton’s team settled into more of a ‘day-to-day routine’. They would assist in providing information to decision-makers for the daily morning and evening meetings I describe in my first witness statement, and, between those periods, they would work on analysing stock.<sup>15</sup>
39. I believe that the PPE stock holdings began to grow from around June, such that the focus switched from a short-term distribution model to a return to normality. Lt Col Dutton worked to provide analysis of the stock holdings of various PPE items, their usage patterns, and make recommendations on how such stock could be distributed more effectively.
40. I understand that the deployment to Daventry wound down in or around July. Lt Col Dutton finished his deployment in early July, in advance of returning to his civilian role at Amazon. Other personnel stayed on for a few weeks thereafter, and I understand that Captain Ardley took over Lt Col Dutton’s duties, but I believe that the MACA deployment came to an end around late July and the tasks which had been performed by the MOD were transitioned to civilian personnel as the MOD stepped away.

<sup>13</sup> [PP/12 -INQ000534269] [PP/13 -INQ000534270]

<sup>14</sup> [Name Redacted] was initially deployed under the MACA, although he was replaced by Captain Ardley after a couple of weeks.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, PP/14 - INQ000534279, in which [Name Redacted] at Skipton House asked Lt Col Dutton to provide an analysis “*showing the split of gowns and coveralls we’re holding*” for the purposes of the daily 6pm meeting.

**E. Reflections on Clipper's performance**

41. The Inquiry has asked me to provide reflections on Clipper's overall performance. I was not privy to contractual negotiations nor have I had sight of Clipper's contract, so I cannot comment on whether they have met any key performance indicators contained therein. Commercial matters would have been managed by SCCL. As such, all I can comment on is my 'by-eye' appraisal of their performance. I consider that Clipper did an excellent job. They were required to set up a substantial logistics operation under extreme time pressure in the most difficult of circumstances, and I believe that they delivered. As I discuss above, Clipper was contacted on (I believe) 22 March, and the first stock arrived at their warehouse on 27 March with the first delivery the following day on 28 March.

42. There were, of course, some issues with the operation, but in my view such issues were 'par for the course'. For example, I am aware that Lt Col Dutton spotted health and safety issues in the Daventry warehouse and reported such issues to Clipper personnel to be resolved; however, this was a high-volume, fast-paced environment and occasional slip-ups are not surprising.

43. To answer the specific questions posed by the Inquiry:

a. **Delays:** The Inquiry has asked if there were any delays with the Clipper system becoming available to NHS, local government, and social care sectors. As stated above, Clipper became operational mere days after the initial discussions with NHSE. As such, I do not believe there were any delays in the system becoming available. The Inquiry has also asked if there were any delays in the distribution of PPE to end users. There were occasionally misplaced pallets and delayed deliveries, but, in my view, such issues were not out of the norm for a high-volume, fast-paced distribution operation. It is inevitable in an operation of that size that there would be occasional issues. I am not aware of any substantial negative consequences resulting from such delays.

b. **The online portal and hotline:**

i. By 'hotline' I take the Inquiry to be referring to the National Supply Disruption Hotline. As explained in my first witness statement, this was a hotline whereby PPE end users could urgently request additional supplies if they became critically short of PPE. I was not involved in this



hotline, as it had been established before my arrival at Skipton House, and I know little about its operation. I believe, however, that any requests which came through the hotline were addressed during the 6pm daily meetings and then distribution decisions were actioned by Clipper in the same way as distribution decisions generally. As such, I am not aware that Clipper had any specific involvement in the design or running of the hotline.

- ii. By 'online portal' I take the Inquiry to be referring to the portal for ordering PPE which was launched in or after April 2020. The portal was set up because the existing supply chain operated by SCCL and Unipart was designed only to serve 226 NHS Trusts, and NHSE now needed to serve settings including care homes, hospices, and community care organisations, among others. The portal was set up by DHSC, with the MOD providing project management-type support to assist its development and launch, although, as was the case with the MOD's involvement generally, any decisions were made by DHSC.<sup>16</sup> The portal was initially launched in pilot locations across the country. I am not aware of any issues or concerns related to the use of those pilot locations. When the portal was initially launched, it served around 5,000 different settings, which increased over time to some 58,000 different settings. DHSC decided which end users were on-boarded and how much PPE they could order at any one time. Once orders were placed through the portal, I believe they were fulfilled by Clipper in the same way it provided distribution services generally. As such, I am not aware that Clipper had any specific involvement in the design or running of the portal.
- c. **Concerns regarding communication of the Clipper system to end users:** I am not aware of any such communication issues.
- d. **Complaints from end users about the distribution of PPE:** I am aware that there were at times quality complaints from end users. Such complaints came through NHSE and were investigated by the regulatory bodies I have mentioned above. The MOD were involved in organising recalls of products, but the recalls themselves were performed by Clipper. The MOD did not make

<sup>16</sup> As an example, I have exhibited PP/15 - INQ000534278. This is an email in which [Name Redacted] MOD, sent recommendations from NHSX and the Government Digital Service about the portal to Jenny Oldroyd of the PPE Policy Team, in order for Ms Oldroyd to make a decision on whether to approve those recommendations.

the decision on whether to recall items. Other than quality assurance issues, I am not aware of any complaints about the amount or quality of PPE.

- e. **Concerns regarding communication of data requirements from orders of PPE:** I am not aware of any concerns.
- f. **Concerns about the availability of the Clipper system to providers who were not registered with the Care Quality Commission:** I am not aware of any concerns. I understand this to be a question about the pool of end users who were permitted to order PPE through the portal. As stated above, this was a decision for DHSC. I did not have any involvement in such decisions and the MOD would not have had any involvement.
- g. **Concerns about any requirement on providers to prove they had less than 72 hours of stock in order to obtain further stock:** I am not aware of any such requirements and so I cannot comment. If such a requirement existed, it is likely that it would have been a requirement imposed by NHSE.

#### 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.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ **Personal Data** \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_ 21 January 2025 \_\_\_\_\_

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COVID INQUIRY**


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**EXHIBITS TO THE WITNESS STATEMENT OF  
MAJOR GENERAL PHILLIP PROSSER**

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| <b><u>Exhibit</u></b> | <b><u>Document</u></b>                       | <b><u>Author</u></b>           | <b><u>Date</u></b> |
|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>PP/</b>            | FW:20200319-NHS-MACA Request.                | MOD                            | 19 Mar 2020        |
| <b>PP/</b>            | Model for dedicated PPE Channel              | MOD                            | 24 Mar 2020        |
| <b>PP/</b>            | Email RE: Update requested dated 27 Mar 2020 | MOD                            | 27 Mar 2020.       |
| <b>PP/</b>            | PPE Overview and Key Actions                 | MOD                            |                    |
| <b>PP/</b>            | 20200426-Gown sitrep.msg.                    | MOD                            | 26 April 2020      |
| <b>PP/</b>            | Missing gowns.msg.                           | MOD                            | 4 May 2020         |
| <b>PP/</b>            | Re 20200406 Capacity.                        | MOD                            | 6 May 2020         |
| <b>PP/</b>            | 20200428-Critical_site_Clipper_Daentry.msg.  | MOD                            | 28 April 2020      |
| <b>PP/</b>            | Critical Site Security – Covid-19.msg.       | Counter<br>Terrorism<br>Police | 8 April 2020       |
| <b>PP/</b>            | 20200411 RESCRIPT Daentry MACA Request Form  | MOD                            | 11 April 2020      |
| <b>PP/</b>            | Re_20200514-NHSX_Review_Recommendations      | DHSC                           | 14 May 2020        |
| <b>PP/11</b>          | 20200527-Gowns and Coveralls Split.msg,      | NHSE                           | 27 May 2020        |