

Witness Name: Martin Hewitt

Statement No.: 3

Exhibits:

Dated: 14 July 2025

## UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

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

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I, Martin Hewitt, will say as follows: -

#### Introduction

1. This is a corporate witness statement on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council (**NPCC**). This document has been drafted in response to a Rule 9 request for Module 8 dated 3 March 2025, in order to assist the Chair of the UK Covid-19 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, the National Police Coordination Centre (**NPoCC**), the College of Policing, and ACRO, as well as documentary records.
3. I was the Chair of the NPCC between March 2019 and April 2023, when I was succeeded by Chief Constable Gavin Stephens. I joined Kent Police in 1993 and subsequently moved to the Metropolitan Police Service in 2005. My previous roles include Assistant Commissioner (Professionalism) and Assistant Commissioner (Frontline Policing). From 2015 – 2019 I was Vice Chair of the NPCC.

4. I have previously provided two witness statements to the Inquiry on behalf of the NPCC in response to a Rule 9 request for Module 2 and Rule 9 request for Module 7. The statements are dated 29 June 2023; Exhibit **MH/01** [INQ000216925] and 9 April 2025. I have reproduced the relevant sections of my previous statement in this document.
5. A number of my policing colleagues have also provided witness statements on behalf of the NPCC in response to Rule 9 requests issued in other modules of this Inquiry, including:
  - i. Module 1: Witness Statement of Owen Weatherill dated 14 April 2023; ; Exhibit **MH/02** [INQ000148415]
  - ii. Module 2A: Witness Statement of Alan Speirs dated 31 August 2023 Exhibit **MH/03** [INQ000257360];
  - iii. Module 2C: Witness Statement of Alan Todd dated 31 October 2023 Exhibit **MH/04** [INQ000339575].
6. The above statements are of general application and the matters which they address have direct relevance to issues within the scope of Module 8, including the impact of the pandemic on children and young people in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. For the avoidance of doubt, those matters are within the direct knowledge and remit of the original statement makers rather than myself and have been reproduced herein for ease of reference.
7. 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**) in 2015.
8. 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**).

9. The NPCC is underpinned by a legal agreement under Section 22A of the Police Act 1996. The agreement, which is signed by Chief Constables, 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; Exhibit **MH/05** [INQ000086562], 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.'
10. 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.

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. The NPCC is led by a full-time Chair who is chosen by the organisation's membership. I chaired the NPCC between March 2019 and April 2023.
15. The Chair is supported by two part-time elected Vice Chairs (currently Chief Constables Jeremy Vaughan of South Wales Police, and Rachel Swann from Derbyshire Police) and a team of staff within what is called the NPCC '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 (as to which see paragraph 20 below).
16. The primary decision-making forum for the NPCC is the Chief Constables' 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 the British Transport Police, the

MDP Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, Crown Dependencies, the National Crime Agency (**NCA**) and the Chief Executive of the College of Policing.

17. 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.
18. The s22A agreement which establishes the governance and structure of the NPCC incorporates the broad commitment of signatories to comply with collective decisions of the Chief Constables' Council. The agreement states that signatories will (at section 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...'

19. 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 section 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.’

20. The NPCC has twelve coordination committees, each of which is led by a Chief Constable (subject to occasional portfolio vacancies) and supported by a full-time Committee Coordinator. Each committee covers a thematic area and within each committee there are portfolio leads for specific areas of policing. The current coordination 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;
- xii. Workforce.

21. The committee work with key stakeholders, including: the National Crime Agency; all police forces in England and Wales, in addition to Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland; the College of Policing; His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services; the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners; the Home Office and government; and other key partners.

22. Within each coordination committee there are a number of portfolio leads who are responsible for specific subject areas within policing. For example, within Criminal Justice, the committee includes lead representatives from across the criminal justice system, for example custody, pre-charge bail, disclosure, charging, courts, and prisons. This is undertaken with effective collaboration with partner and third-party organisations including Prisons in England and Wales, the Crown Prosecutions

Service, the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, the Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, the Youth Justice Board and Youth Offending Teams/Youth Justice Services; and the College of Policing.

23. The Children and Young Persons portfolio sits within Local Policing. Deputy Chief Constable Jo Shiner took over the NPCC Lead for Children and Young People in January 2020 from DCC Olivia Pinkney. In August 2021, CC Catherine Roper took over the role from DCC Jo Shiner.
24. Within the Crime Operations committee there are portfolios related to cyber-crime and domestic abuse. The Vulnerability Knowledge Practice Programme (VKPP) also sits within the Crime Operations committee. The VKPP works within the College of Policing to deliver projects that develop the evidence base for vulnerability and related serious crime, across police forces in England and Wales, driving practice improvement. The programme works with the leads from the NPCC Violence and Public Protection and Violence against Women and Girls portfolios to improve policing's overall response, reducing threat and harm and improving outcomes for victims. The VKPP is largely funded by the Home Office with the child safeguarding practice review panel work supported by the Department for Education.
25. The Policing Chief Scientific Advisor (**CSA**) for the NPCC is Professor Paul Taylor. He was selected in January 2021 and started in his role in May 2021, with a direct report to the Chair of the NPCC. There was no Scientific Advisor in place prior to January 2021. It is an advisory role which involves providing independent scientific advice and challenge to the Chair of the NPCC in relation to strategic decision-making, policy and operational decisions.
26. The NPCC is hosted by the Metropolitan Police Service (**MPS**) and based at offices in London, but it is a wholly independent organisation. As part of the hosting arrangement with the MPS, the NPCC has access to financial, HR and legal support.
27. Quality assurance of the NPCC is undertaken by an independent Assurance Board and the Performance Sub-Committee.

**NPoCC**

28. The National Police Coordination Centre (**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, replacing 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.
29. NPoCC was led by Assistant Chief Constable Owen Weatherill as National Mobilisation Coordinator (**NMC**) between 1 July 2019 and September 2023. The NMC is appointed by and reports directly to the Chair of the NPCC. He is 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 the NMC. ACC Weatherill was also the portfolio lead for Civil Contingencies which sits within the NPCC Coordination Committee, between March 2021 and September 2023. ACC Mark Williams took over both the roles in September 2023.
30. 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 COBR, and regularly represents UK policing at official meetings and meetings at ministerial level related to national events, crises, disorder and civil emergencies.
31. 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.
32. 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.

### *College of Policing*

33. The College of Policing (**the College**) is a separate organisation which works closely with the NPCC. The College 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 a company limited by guarantee which is owned by the Secretary of State for the Home Department but operates at arms-length from the Home Office.
34. The College is currently led by CEO Andy Marsh, the former Chief Constable of Hampshire and Avon and Somerset, who took over from the interim CEO Deputy Chief Constable (**DCC**) Bernie O'Reilly in September 2021. DCC O'Reilly had taken over from the former CEO, Chief Constable Mike Cunningham.
35. The purpose of the College is to support the fight against crime and protect the public by ensuring professionalism in policing. It has no operational policing role and its areas of responsibility are set out in the Explanatory Notes to the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014:

‘First, the College will have the responsibility for setting standards and developing guidance and policy for policing. Second, it will build and develop the research evidence base for policing. Third, it will support the professional development of police officers and staff. Fourth, it will support the police, other law enforcement agencies and those involved in crime reduction to work together. Fifth, it will identify and develop the ethics and values of the police...’

36. The College's remit is limited to police officers and staff, other police force employees, and volunteers, such as Special Constables in England and Wales. It

works alongside experts from other agencies to develop specialist knowledge to ensure College publications, such as Authorised Professional Practice (**APP**) and training, are informed, relevant and based on the best available evidence. The College operates in relation to policing in England and Wales and liaises closely with police services of Northern Ireland and Scotland, seeking to create a collaborative approach (particularly in cross-border operational arrangements, such as for deployment of police firearms teams). However, Police Scotland and the PSNI each have separate internal departments which undertake similar functions to the College of Policing.

37. The responsibilities of the NPCC did not change during the pandemic.

### **Planning prior to the pandemic**

38. This topic has been addressed by the NPCC in detail in statements and evidence submitted to Module 1 of the Covid Inquiry, which remain available to the Covid Inquiry team.
39. In addressing this topic, I have relied upon the provision of information contained in the statement of Owen Weatherill dated 14 April 2023 for Module 1 of the Inquiry. I have summarised the detailed information provided by him in that statement.
40. In overview, Covid planning was undertaken as part of the LRF framework, in which the NPCC and individual forces participated. Questions about the specific application of that framework to children and young persons should be addressed to the LRFs through the relevant Local Authority and/or the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
41. As set out in the statement of Owen Weatherill, 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.

42. Owen Weatherill held the portfolio between March 2021 and September 2023. In September 2023, ACC Mark Williams took over the role. The Local Resilience Forum (LRFs) group sits within his 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.
43. The CCA and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) Regulations 2005 (**the Regulations**) apply to the whole of the UK.
44. '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.
45. 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.
46. The Act divides local responders into two categories and imposes specific duties on each category.
47. 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.
48. 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.

49. 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 (each LRF has a secretariat responsible for ensuring that the LRF performs effectively, which includes a secretary and, where possible, a coordinator or manager) 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.
50. 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.
51. 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.

52. 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.
53. 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.
54. 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.
55. 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.

56. 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.
57. 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.
58. There was no national policing plan at as 21 January 2020 for a pandemic. 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.

### **Impact of lockdown**

#### *The announcement of the first and second national lockdowns*

59. The NPCC engaged in some discussion with UK Government prior to the first and second national lockdown however these discussions were limited in nature. The NPCC were made aware that the UK Government were initially focused on whether London, as a source of initial primary infections, could be locked down and isolated from the rest of the UK. As this developed, the NPCC was informed that regulations would be used, and therefore the NPCC was required to act quickly to consider the impact to policing nationally and to prepare suitable advice, messaging and guidance to forces. The NPCC did not have any input or influence over the initial decision to implement regulations.
60. By the second lockdown, a more developed relationship was in place, which meant that the NPCC was in regular discussion with Home Office colleagues in particular,

as well as some other departments of UK Government. As a result, the NPCC were able to engage with Government discussions around lockdown to some extent, although the decision to implement a second lockdown was entirely made by Government.

61. In general, lines of communication were established and effective. As set out in previous statements to the Inquiry, ACC Weatherill was in regular communication with the Home Office throughout the pandemic, including in relation to the issue of enforcement. Telephone calls were made and emails sent multiple times a day to senior officials within the Home Office.
62. ACC Weatherill and I regularly attended Police Operational Briefings with the Home Office, which were meetings held between key stakeholders in relation to policing matters. At the height of the pandemic, the meetings were held twice a week, but the frequency decreased over time.
63. The Home Secretary and Policing Minister were regular attendees at the meetings, as was Cressida Dick, who was then Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis. Lynne Owens, Director General of the NCA, also attended the Police Operational Briefings as required. After early meetings, an arrangement was introduced for additional police chiefs to attend the Briefings to assist in sharing contextual information regarding the situation outside of London. This was organised on a rotating system to ensure breadth of representation.
64. The meetings were used as a line of communication to brief partners, share challenges and discuss the best approach. For example, where difficulties arose with Regulations and enforcement due to the rapid pace of implementation, this was shared in the Police Operational Briefings. In my experience, the meetings were constructive and enabled us to have a method of sharing concerns with government.
65. Both the Crown Prosecution Service (**CPS**) and Ministry of Justice (**MOJ**) had representation on NPCC portfolios and worked with the portfolio lead for Criminal Justice throughout the pandemic. The NPCC also assisted in facilitating links between partner organisations. For example, when FPNs were introduced the

Border Force was not an existing prosecuting authority, so the NPCC liaised with Border Force and connected the organisation with the NPCC's CPS and MOJ contacts.

66. It was rare for the NPCC to have communications with No. 10 Downing Street or the Cabinet Office. On 2 September 2020, ACC Weatherill and I attended a meeting with the Prime Minister and some members of Cabinet in relation to localised lockdowns. Prior to that meeting, the NPCC did not have sight of government data regarding epidemiology and transmission. A request was made for the Department of Health and Social Care (**DHSC**) to include the NPCC in its weekly meetings. This allowed ACC Weatherill to receive updates on transmission data, which assisted Operation Talla in its approach to policing.
67. Part of the Civil Contingencies function of NPoCC is to attend COBR meetings where relevant to policing. ACC Weatherill and I attended a small number of COBR meetings during the pandemic in this capacity.

*The announcement of the third national lockdown*

68. One strand of Op Talla, which I will outline in more detail below, was deliberately set up to focus upon learning and reform from the outset. This strand sought to capture learning and best practice. The mechanisms used varied and included fast time debriefs and feedback to forces, as well as longer term thematic and structured work. This strand worked closely with academia and the College of Policing, to ensure rigour, expertise and long-term application of lessons learned through the pandemic.
69. Where issues and learning relating to Children and Young people were identified, they were captured in these processes and shared with NPCC Portfolio leads of the appropriate areas. Domestic Violence is just one example of this, where the learning from earlier lockdowns influenced the NPCC rational, the NPCC portfolio leads activity and steer to forces, as well as the ground level operational focus of forces. This area necessarily influenced the operational thinking and effect in relation to children, victims, witnesses and offenders.

## Operation Talla

70. The NPCC recognised that the policing strategy for the pandemic would require a coordinated approach. Operation Talla was the operational name given to that response. It was established in March 2020, with a formal commencement briefing to all Chiefs on 10 March 2020. Operation Talla is still live, but with reduced resources which are focused on Recovery and Reform work.
71. The purpose of Operation Talla was not to hold operational command for policing, which remained wholly the responsibility of individual forces through the relevant Chief Constable and/or Force Gold Commander. Instead, Operation Talla was formed to provide a national coordination function for policing activity during the pandemic.
72. In order to achieve this, Operation Talla sought to ensure that there was clear communication between forces and to facilitate effective liaison with relevant government departments. Operation Talla was also intended to provide guidance and support for contingency planning and operational responses taken by individual forces and to capture and share learning for policing and partners.
73. Operation Talla was run at a national level and had application for all forces in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Apart from the central NPCC Operation Talla Gold and Silver coordination structure, each force had its own force-specific leadership for its local Covid response. Some also named this Operation Talla, though some forces adopted different operational names.
74. The six primary strategic objectives of Operation Talla were:
- i. Save life and safeguard the vulnerable where possible;
  - ii. Identify and where possible mitigate the primary pressures which will otherwise inhibit our ability to deliver 1 above;
  - iii. Safeguard the health and wellbeing of our staff;

- iv. Provide support to other agencies where appropriate and proportionate – having regard to threat harm and risk and resource availability;
  - v. Planning for recovery phase from the outset – to enable the earliest possible return to normality;
  - vi. Coordinate communications activity across policing and government on priority issues to retain confidence of key audiences and deliver the six strategic aims.
75. Operation Talla was led by me in the role of National Gold. The National Silver was ACC Weatherill, who, as stated above, is also the NMC for NPoCC and took over the portfolio lead for Civil Contingencies from March 2021.
76. The members of the Operation Talla leadership changed over time, but included representation from Neil Pattinson as the Home Office Silver, Chief Constable Mike Cunningham from the College of Policing, Deputy Director Steve Bennett of the NCA and DCC Paul Netherton, who was the NPCC Civil Contingencies Lead prior to March 2021.
77. The twelve leaders of the NPCC coordination committees also played a role in Operation Talla, holding responsibility for the relevant thematic areas at NPCC level.
78. As part of Operation Talla, ACC Weatherill led a National Silver Thematic Leads group (**the Thematic Leads Group**), which assisted in providing tactical direction to the National Silver. The group had identified work strands and was able to consult the corresponding portfolio leads within the NPCC's coordination committees for specific areas of work. The work strands managed by the Thematic Leads Group changed over time, but included:
- i. Resources/Capability – the coordination of national mutual aid, mobilisation and national reporting mechanisms, tracking national police absence levels;
  - ii. Welfare/Wellbeing – ensuring police officers and staff were proactively informed and supported during all phases of Operation Talla;

- iii. Equipment/PPE – ensuring all police officers and staff were equipped with the necessary equipment/PPE;
  - iv. Strategic Communications and Stakeholder Management – ensuring the UK policing response and command structure communicates effectively with internal and external partners;
  - v. Community Impact/Tension – ensuring the state of normality is benchmarked, the developing impact of Covid-19 is understood and appropriate steps are taken with partners to respond to emergent changes;
  - vi. Service Delivery – tracking national trends in reported crime and demands on policing, assessing and reporting on service delivery, and monitoring any changes as a result of Covid-19;
  - vii. Policy/Legislation – ensuring that policing is linked in to government with regard to developing legislation and regulations, has the appropriate legal guidance from police lawyers and the subsequent legal guidance and advice was developed at pace into national guidance issued to forces.
79. The Thematic Leads Group included staff seconded from a number of police forces, the College, NPoCC, and His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (**HMICFRS**). The Group engaged in coordination with government departments. The group held an internal daily meeting and hosted a wider meeting on a weekly basis with stakeholder organisations.
80. ACC Weatherill met regularly with regional leads at the chief officer level, enabling a two-way flow of information related to the pandemic and the policing response. This occurred both through regular scheduled meetings and informal contact as required. There was also a separate weekly civil contingencies meeting held by DCC Netherton which included a range of external partners. This was merged with the regional leads meeting in late 2020 for efficiency purposes.
81. Operation Talla worked with the College to produce operational briefings and guidance on Covid-19 legislation and matters arising from the pandemic for police forces in England and Wales, such as PPE. Guidance and operational briefings for Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Crown Dependencies and overseas territories were developed locally due to the devolved responsibilities for policing and differing

legislative requirements, but each region drew on the materials disseminated by the NPCC when drafting operational briefings and guidance.

82. The NPCC Child-Centred Policing National Board sits each quarter and is attended by regional Chief Constables and ACC regional Child-Centred Policing leads. It was and is a well-attended board, with representation from the Youth Justice Board, Princes Trust, VKPP and the College of Policing. The meetings took place in person prior to the pandemic and then became online meetings during lockdown. Between the quarterly meetings, each regional lead would meet with their force to collate feedback to the National Board. During the pandemic, discussions around what forces were seeing locally were shared with Jo Shiner, to feed in to policing at the national level. Discussions were also had around ensuring that forces were engaging with young people appropriately, to prevent children and young people from being unnecessarily criminalised.
83. Chief Constable Simon Bailey was the NPCC lead for Child Protection Abuse Investigation (CPAI) and head of the NPCC Violence and Public Protection Portfolio (VPP) sitting under the NPCC Crime Operations Committee. The VPP portfolio included around 16 working group leads across the violence and public protection space, and as a portfolio its remit was more around the coordination of activity and gateways up to the Crime Committee/Chief's Council. CC Bailey and DCC Jo Shiner (NPCC lead for Children and Young People) attended a weekly Covid-19 meeting with Senior officials across the Home Office and the Department of Education (DfE). The aim of the meetings were to discuss emerging intelligence and help coordinate responses. This included the Director General of the DfE who had the SRO cross government role for vulnerable children.
84. To support national efforts, CC Bailey tasked the Vulnerability Knowledge Practice Programme (VKPP) to gather available data regarding demand and local/national intelligence regarding changes to the Threat Harm Risk (THR) picture; Exhibit **MH/06** [INQ000620965]. The work was initial targeted at vulnerability thematic areas including: Child Abuse (including CSAE online and in the home environment), Domestic Abuse, Missing, County Lines and Mental Health. The focus was on coordinating tasks with other key stakeholders, including Op Talla and individual

national policing leads, to prevent duplication and minimise the impact on local forces. To this end, the VKPP undertook the following activities:

- i. Coordinating with Op Talla to include weekly data captures to cover CSAE, missing and use of section 136 as well as sharing existing data captures re DA and wider demand;
  - ii. Brokering access to daily intelligence feeds provided to Op Talla and draw out specific insight regarding vulnerabilities;
  - iii. Establishing a weekly dial-in with the staff officers covering the six priority areas, College of Policing, NCA and Home Office;
  - iv. Reaching out to third sector agencies to collect data and insight and establish a bi-weekly meeting.
85. In order to draw this work together, Operation Hydrant provided analytical capability to support the production of weekly briefings to complement wider assessments produced by NCA / Home Office and enable joined up policy making to take place across Government. CC Bailey asked all chiefs nationally requesting support with sharing existing data or intelligence held by their working group where changes in THR and overt demand were being seen and responses adapted.
86. The VKPP briefings reported on different areas of vulnerability, including Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), missing persons and mental health. The briefings pulled together information from a variety of third sector agencies including Catch 22, Railway Children, The Children's Society Prevention Network, the Children's Society, CALM, Childline, CSA Centre, TCS prevention Programme, NSPCC, Karma Nirvana, SafeLives, Women's Aid, Refuge, Welsh Women's aid, Respect and Barnados. Police data was analysed to provide statistics around vulnerabilities and crime, and increase/decrease in demand across force areas.
87. The NPCC has disclosed the following documents falling within this category:
- i. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Briefing dated 28 April 2020; Exhibit **MH/07** [INQ000620958]

- ii. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Briefing dated 4 May 2020; Exhibit **MH/08** [INQ000620985]
  - iii. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Briefing dated 18 May 2020; Exhibit **MH/09** [INQ000620986]
  - iv. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Briefing dated 1 June 2020; Exhibit **MH/10** [INQ000620988]
  - v. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Briefing dated 15 June 2020; Exhibit **MH/11** [INQ000620989]
  - vi. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Briefing dated 29 June 2020; Exhibit **MH/12** [INQ000620990]
  - vii. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Briefing dated 13 July 2020; Exhibit **MH/13** [INQ000620991]
  - viii. Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Briefing dated 27 July 2020. Exhibit **MH/14** [INQ000620992]
88. The NPCC has not been able to locate any further briefings to disclose to the Inquiry. The briefings were scaled back as restrictions eased and the work of engaging with stakeholders, as well as data management, was centralised within Op Talla.
89. Regular meetings of the 'Cross-Vulnerabilities' Group were held in 2020. Attendees included NPCC portfolio holders for child abuse, neglect, CSAE and online offending, domestic abuse, mental health, county lines and missing. The objectives of the group were 'to share insight regarding changing demand /threat profile and related national responses and to identify opportunities to improve, coordinate and deconflict information collections and responses across NPCC, wider partners and Govt'; Exhibit **MH/15** [INQ000620972].
90. Briefing notes produced by the Cross Vulnerabilities Group have been disclosed by the NPCC; Exhibit **MH/16** [INQ000620975]. The notes summarise some of the work of the NPCC and VKPP in relation to vulnerable children during the Covid-19 pandemic.
91. The NPCC also worked with the College of Policing to produce guidance relevant to issues affecting children and young people. NPCC guidance has been previously disclosed to the Covid Inquiry and is available on Relativity.

92. The NPCC had College of Policing guidance available on its website prior to the pandemic with applicability to issues associated with children and young persons. For example, the Child Protection Abuse Investigation working group worked with the College to provide guidance on sexting to inform parents about potential online risks. Such guidance remained available to the general public online throughout the pandemic in order to promote safety online and highlight the risk of abuse.
93. During the pandemic, the NPCC also supported HMCTS in its accelerated implementation of pre-recorded cross examination under section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, in order to ensure that victims and witnesses who were children could give evidence in advance of trial, to mitigate the impact of delays to proceedings caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.
94. In January 2020, the NPCC launched the Child-Centred Policing Best Practice Framework; Exhibit **MH/17** [INQ000620971] and the Child-Centred Policing Principles at the Child Centred Policing conference in January 2020; Exhibit **[MH/18]** [INQ000620970]. These went to Chiefs Council in July 2021. They replaced the National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People 2015. The Best Practice Framework and Child-Centred Policing Principles were in place during the specified period. The principals were used to steer decision making to minimize the criminalisation of children and young people. The Principles were designed by reference to the four pillars of procedural justice: Trustworthiness, Fairness, Respect and Voice. The Best Practice Framework included guidance under various headings, such as Youth Offending and Criminalisation, 18-24 year olds, Force Approach, Police Custody and Engagement & Relationship as priority areas.
95. In 2024, the NPCC published an updated Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy 2024 – 2027, which is available online as an open source document.

### **Consulting on government legislation**

96. The NPCC was not asked by the Government to consult on the Coronavirus Act 2020 prior to its coming into force. Following the introduction of the Act, notice received of an imminent change to legislation or guidance was often very short,

particularly in the first 3-4 months of the pandemic. The notice period was sometimes measurable in hours, with limited if any opportunity for consultation. On at least one occasion the NPCC became aware of the existence of new proposed restrictions by social media. The result was that there were multiple occasions when there was a time lag between the coming into force of new legislation and the availability and dissemination of briefings, which meant that the commencement of enforcement was on occasion correspondingly delayed.

### **NPCC guidance and briefings**

97. As set out in my previous statements, it is important to emphasise that the NPCC played no direct role in the enforcement of Covid-19 Regulations. As an organization, it has no operational command or directive powers in respect of individual officers or forces. It issued only one instance of formal 'guidance' during the pandemic (namely the 'Four Es' guidance on the approach to be taken to enforcement; Exhibit **MH/19** [INQ000099936]).
98. The NPCC did publish other documents to support and assist officers operating during Covid. For example, in April 2020 a document was published titled 'NPCC Custody: Guidance and Recommendations for the Provision of Police Custody during the COVID-19 pandemic', which provided recommendations for police custody during the Covid-19 Pandemic following the announcement of the first lockdown; Exhibit **MH/20** [INQ000620976]. The document included some information which was of relevance to children in custody. For example, it emphasised that Appropriate Adults were considered to be essential visitors for all children and vulnerable suspects, as defined by PACE.
99. The NPCC worked with the College of Policing to produce and disseminate this guidance, as well as briefings on the application of the Regulations. Guidance and operational briefings for Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Crown Dependencies and overseas territories were developed locally due to the devolved responsibilities for policing and differing legislative requirements, but each region drew on the materials disseminated by the NPCC when drafting operational briefings and guidance.

100. The key guidance for achieving compliance with Covid legislation and regulations was the 'Four Es' approach: Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce (the 'Four Es' guidance) is available on relativity as [INQ000148415]). Enforcement, whether through the issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice or otherwise, was the last resort after the first three 'Es' had been undertaken.
101. The 'Four Es' guidance was issued in March 2020 by the NPCC and College of Policing and remained unchanged throughout the pandemic. It was regularly referred to in Covid police briefings. This was the sole example of 'guidance', formally named as such, issued by the NPCC/the College during the pandemic, as it provided guidance on how to approach enforcement of Covid restrictions.
102. The 'Four Es' guidance was published on the College website, social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) and shared via communications leads at individual police forces, then disseminated by e-mail via NPCC Operation Talla to Force Leads, Force Control Rooms, published on ChiefsNet (an intranet based method of information-sharing between Chief Officers and their team), and via the media. The guidance was also used and referred to in the Operation Talla daily police chiefs briefing telephone call.
103. 'Operational briefings' were produced by the College and the NPCC in response to proposed or finalised legislation, regulations and/or regulation amendments as and when shared by the relevant government department.
104. These briefings were intended to provide a plain English, easy-to-understand representation of the relevant legislation and regulations and were drafted and formatted so that they could be used in presentations for daily police briefings. The documents were designed to be easily accessible; they could be printed by officers or accessed on electronic devices when needed.
105. The usual process for producing and approving operational briefings was as follows. The briefings were written by staff at the College and sent to the College legal team before review by senior management at the College. A draft would then be sent to the Operation Talla legal team for review before sign off at College director level. As

a formality, the draft would be shared with the Home Office in England and/or Welsh Government in Wales for 'government review'. I was then responsible for final Operation Talla sign-off, though in reality this function was often delegated to ACC Weatherill.

106. The approval process could take anywhere from several hours to several days - with College staff working long hours, seven days a week, to ensure that briefings were provided to police officers as soon as possible.
107. Examples of the advice and support given to forces on the implementation of the Regulations are provided in the attached appendix; Exhibit **MH/21** [INQ000620977]
108. Information related to issues affecting Children and Young People was provided to assist forces in considering the most effective policing style during the pandemic. The document was titled 'Engagement with CYP during Covid-19'; Exhibit **MH/22** [INQ000620978]. It reminded forces of policing powers in relation to children, stressing the overarching importance of safeguarding children and young people. It highlighted the importance of professional curiosity and the fact that the Four Es were to be applied differently for Children and Young People, with additional emphasis on 'Engagement'. The document also provided some guidance around youth offending, engaging with Youth Offending Teams and useful resources for forces. The document was drafted by reference to advice from an Educational Psychologist.

*Fixed Penalty Notices ('FPN's')*

109. In England and Wales, FPNs were only available to be issued to persons over the age of 18. In Scotland, FPNs were available to be issued to persons aged between 16-18 prior to the introduction of the Coronavirus (No. 2) (Scotland) Act on 27 May 2020, when the age limit was raised to 18. These parameters were determined by the relevant government, rather than by UK policing, though Police Scotland advocated in support of raising the age limit for FPNs in April 2020.

110. As addressed in detail in my previous statements, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the NPCC commissioned independent expert analysis of Fixed Penalty Notices issued by police forces. The NPCC has provided numerous reports to the Inquiry which address the issuance of FPNs, including those on relativity at **[INQ000099940]**, **[INQ000187993]** and **[INQ000237005]**. These reports have been considered in previous modules and have been the subject of detailed oral evidence from witnesses in Inquiry hearings, including one of the authors, Professor Susan McVie. The NPCC is not in a position to summarise the work of the Inquiry undertaken in previous modules or the conclusions reached by the Inquiry team.
111. The First Report required analysis under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations 2020 of FPNs issued between 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020. The analysis was undertaken by John Flatley and Rosanna Currenti from the Government Statistical Service and was subject to peer review by a researcher from the College of Policing and an independent academic. The analysis relied upon the aforementioned data gathered by ACRO. The purpose of the First Report was to understand, so far as practicable, the extent to which there was disproportionality in the issuance of FPNs by age, sex or race.
112. In July 2020, the NPCC shared the First Report with all forces in order to inform and contextualise the use of policing powers moving forward. In addition to sharing the information with forces, on 27 July 2020 the NPCC published the First Report on its website along with the full data set underlying the analysis. Following publication of the First Report, the NPCC continued to publish FPN data obtained from ACRO and went on to commission further reports.
113. Following the completion of the First Report, an additional report was commissioned to reflect a significantly longer period: 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021. (**the Second Report**). The Second Report was authored by four academics: Susan McVie, Kath Murray and Victoria Gorton from the University of Edinburgh and Ben Matthews from the University of Stirling.
114. The Second Report was commissioned by Operation Talla through ACC Weatherill. This was done because:

- i. The issuance of FPNs by police forces under the coronavirus regulations was ongoing;
- ii. The NPCC considered it was necessary to determine whether the matters identified in the First Report in relation to disproportionality were continuing over the longer period of analysis and, if so, to what extent;
- iii. The provision of analysis regarding specific policing areas was helpful to assist forces in responding appropriately to local trends;
- iv. Updated analysis was needed to reflect changes in regulations and restrictions over time;
- v. Ongoing scrutiny was considered important to ensure progress and transparency.

115. The Second Report is limited in scope to the consideration of certain categories of FPNs. For example, it does not analyse FPNs issued by competent authorities other than police forces in England and Wales. It does not include FPNs issued by the BTP or the MDP. FPNs issued in relation to breaches of face covering regulations and local lockdown rules have also been excluded from analysis because of the difficulty of drawing meaningful comparisons where restrictions in force in different local areas varied significantly over time.

116. The Second Report should properly be considered in its context, which includes the role of the NPCC in relation to the enforcement of coronavirus regulations (described in paragraph 7 and paragraphs 45 - 47 above), the role of ACRO in administering FPNs (described from paragraph 51 of this statement onwards) and the central importance of the 'Four Es' guidance (described from paragraph 61 onwards).

117. Both the First Report and Second Report include some analysis regarding the enforcement of coronavirus regulations by reference to protected characteristics such as age, sex and race. The NPCC seeks to ensure full compliance with its duties under the Equality Act 2010 (and the equivalent provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998) (**Equality Duties**) when exercising its functions. Similarly, as public authorities, territorial forces have overarching Equality Duties with which all officers

are expected to comply when exercising policing powers. This was the case prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and remained unchanged throughout the relevant period.

118. The exigencies of the Covid-19 pandemic did not alter officers' or forces' existing Equality Duties. The enforcement of coronavirus regulations was subject to those considerations and obligations, in the same way as any exercise of policing powers outside of the context of a global pandemic. Consequently, it was not necessary to produce new guidance or documentation for officers to amend operational procedures. The Equality Duties were taken into consideration by the NPCC and College of Policing when guidance and operational briefings were drafted, in accordance with relevant staff members' obligations and training.

### **Independent Ethics Committee**

119. As set out in my previous statements, the day-to-day work of Operation Talla to coordinate and support policing activity during the pandemic has been described above. Within weeks of the start of the Operation, it was clear that the unprecedented nature of the policing task was giving rise, and would continue to give rise, to ethical issues and dilemmas which were also unprecedented.
120. Although the Operation Talla leadership and the leadership of individual forces were able to benefit from their discussions of problems as they arose (via the regular daily and weekly meetings and briefings) and thus to draw on a vast collective body of knowledge and experience of policing, it was decided that the Operation would also benefit from the independent advice and support of individuals with a wider range of work and life experiences.
121. This was the background to the Independent Ethics Committee (**the Committee**), whose Terms of Reference were issued on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and whose first meeting took place on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020.
122. The Bishop of Manchester, The Right Reverend David Walker, agreed to chair the Committee and Mike Stamp, the NPCC Lead for Human Rights and the Director of Legal Services for the Devon & Cornwall & Dorset Police, agreed to act as Vice

Chair. The Chair and Vice Chair appointed nine other members, each of whom was independent of both the NPCC and Operation Talla:

- i. Andrew Lockley, the Chair of the South Yorkshire Police Ethics Panel;
- ii. Ben Owusu, the Chair of the Independent Advisory Group for Race for the Metropolitan Police Service;
- iii. Gina Radford, the former Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England;
- iv. Justice Tankebe, a Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Cambridge;
- v. The Venerable Liz Adekunle, the Archdeacon of Hackney;
- vi. Mannie Sheer, an Organisational Development Consultant and Researcher;
- vii. Nazir Afzal, the former Chief Crown Prosecutor for the North West Region;
- viii. Suzanne Shale, the Chair of the London Police Ethics Panel; and
- ix. Lisa-Marie Smith, the Chair of the Association of Police Lawyers.

123. As is clear from the Terms of Reference, the role of the Committee was to provide advice and support on ethical issues relating to Covid-19, via Operation Talla, to the police forces in England and Wales and thereby to enhance trust and confidence in the governance and actions of the Police Service.

124. The Committee was intended to meet monthly for a period of a year. The last of its regular meetings took place in July 2021, although an extraordinary meeting was called at short notice in December 2021, with a much larger attendance, in order to consider the then pressing question of possible mandatory vaccinations for the Police Service.

125. Operation Talla staff provided administrative and secretarial support to the Committee. Questions or issues for consideration by the Committee at its meetings were put to the Committee, together with any relevant material, by ACC Weatherill's then staff officer, Inspector: Name Redacted Some came direct from the leadership of Operation Talla itself and others came from individual police forces. The Committee would then discuss the points arising at its next meeting.

126. ACC Weatherill attended every meeting, in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference, in order to provide contextual updates to the Committee and to facilitate discussions.
127. After discussion, the Committee would give its views or advice on the issues put to it. Sometimes, the Committee asked for more information or decided that the question merited further debate and discussion at its next meeting.
128. The Committee's role was advisory in nature; it had no power to make decisions, nor to direct the Operation Talla or force leadership. Rather, as it was put in the Terms of Reference, it acted as a 'critical friend' and provided 'constructive feedback on the challenges that Covid-19 has resulted in for the Police Service'. It considered general issues and high level policy questions, rather than individual or specific operational decisions.
129. The Committee's discussions and advice were recorded in minutes, drafted by Inspector [Name Redacted] reviewed by the Chair and then considered by the Committee at its next meeting. It was ACC Weatherill's responsibility to report the Committee's advice back to the leadership of Operation Talla. In terms of wider dissemination, this was considered on a case by case basis, depending on the nature and urgency of the issue. The Committee's advice would be passed on during Gold and Silver Group meetings, in meetings of the Thematic Leads Group and in the weekly regional leads meetings. On a number of occasions, summaries of the Committee's relevant discussions were produced for distribution to Operation Talla personnel and more widely. Sometimes, the Committee's advice was reflected in one of the many Chiefs' Operational Briefings issued during the pandemic, as explained above at paragraph 74. On significant issues, the Committee's advice shaped the contents of 'Dear Colleagues' letters sent out by the Operation Talla leadership or NPCC leads. Finally, there were occasions when the Committee's views shaped public statements or other forms of comment made by the leadership of Operation Talla.
130. At the outset of the Committee's work, it was hoped that the Committee's advice would be made publicly available via the NPCC website. However, given the

sensitivity of some of the topics considered and the media and political interest in some aspects of police work during the pandemic, it was decided that the benefits to Operation Talla and to the leadership of individual forces of the Committee's work should not be prejudiced or put at risk by wider dissemination of its deliberations and advice. It was vital that the Committee should feel able to offer frank and independent guidance as the Police Service navigated the many operational challenges posed by the pandemic.

131. Over the course of its year of monthly meetings, the Committee considered a wide range of topics. The Terms of Reference set out its scope in the following terms:

- *'Monitoring the use and the impact of the below new Police Powers, and scrutinise how these are being utilised by Forces, ensuring transparency and independent oversight.*
- *How to encourage voluntary public compliance.*
- *How best to enforce Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020, Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020 or The Health Protection (Coronavirus International Travel) (England) Regulations 2020.*
- *How to exercise powers to direct members of the public to present for COVID-19 testing and enforce medical directions under the Coronavirus Act 2020.*
- *Acting as a critical friend to provide advice which will help to inform the training for staff in relation to the new powers.*
- *Seek to engage local communities, along with skilled and experienced individuals.*

*The group does so with the aim of:-*

- *Informing the appropriate police action.*
- *Helping the service meet its obligations under the Code of Ethics and the Equality and Human Rights Legislation.*
- *Support Police officers, Staff and Volunteers and the Service generally to act in ways that are necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory and encourage public trust in the Police'*

132. Although this summary of the role of the Committee inevitably reflects the landscape as it was in June 2020, in what was a high-pressure and fast-moving operation in uncharted territory for policing, in broad terms it proved to be a fair summary of the Committee's work in the year that followed, both in terms of the areas in which it gave advice and in the types of assistance and support that it gave to Operation Talla.
133. For example, the first issue considered by the Committee at its first meeting, on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020, concerned the initial analysis of Fixed Penalty Notice data issued between 27 March and 25 May 2020, undertaken by staff from the Government Statistical Service in their report 'Policing the Pandemic' (and referred to in paragraph 106(iv) above), together with questions arising concerning consistency and proportionality in enforcement across police forces. The Committee returned to these and related questions in their August, September and October meetings and again in meetings during 2021, including at the final monthly meeting in July that year.
134. The meeting minutes show the wide range of topics covered by the Committee during its meetings, some of which were considered at a number of meetings. For example, the question of policing protests and large gatherings in light of the Coronavirus Regulations (which featured at the July and September 2020 and March 2021 meetings), the issues concerning the possible imposition of fines of £10,000 for certain breaches of the Regulations (which were discussed at the September and November 2020 meetings) and questions about vaccinations for police officers (which were debated at the November 2020 and January and March 2021 meetings).
135. Sometimes issues of this kind were brought back to the Committee for further discussion at its request, sometimes they re-appeared on the agenda because of developments in the intervening period and the need for further advice and guidance in light of the up to date position.
136. In summary, the Committee provided Operation Talla and force leaders with a regular opportunity to obtain a sense check on policing approaches and thoughtful

and considered independent guidance on some of the complex ethical and other issues thrown up by the difficult enforcement challenges facing officers in their communities.

### **NPCC Communication with Police Forces and Young Offender Teams**

137. The primary stakeholders for the NPCC are its constituent police forces, including Police Scotland and PSNI. Throughout the pandemic, the NPCC remained in communication with forces to identify and address challenges and policing matters.
138. Communication was undertaken through formal meetings, electronic communication and information sharing processes. The most common methods of briefing were through the medium of Silver meetings or by individual correspondence with the relevant portfolio leads within the NPCC as specific issues arose. In addition, many matters were linked into Gold meetings and the daily work of Operation.
139. In general, the most immediate granular or time sensitive matters were dealt with on a daily basis with communications through the Silver group, to daily/weekly briefings and/or individual correspondence with portfolio leads, whereas less time-sensitive issues of broader application could be reserved to formal consideration within the Gold group as appropriate.
140. Briefings were also issued to Chief Officers through the ChiefsNet platform on a daily basis. The briefings were short, directed updates on Operation Talla, including matters arising within specific portfolios which had relevance to policing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Chiefs' Operational Briefings, which in respect of issues of specific note might incorporate correspondence commencing 'Dear Colleagues', provided information to Chief Constables and other stakeholders regarding important updates, including in relation to changes in regulations and updates from the Independent Ethics Committee. The documents were drafted by personnel from a range of portfolios, depending on their contents.

141. For example, the Chiefs' Operational Briefing dated 9 April 2020 was circulated just before the Easter weekend 2020. It highlights the direction to use the 4Es staged approach, and provides information to Chief Constables and portfolio leads in respect of PPE guidance and public messaging.
142. Once signed off, operational briefings were disseminated in accordance with the process set out above and published on the College website. The operational briefing documents remained on the College website until they were superseded by new or updated briefings to reflect new or amended regulations.
143. The NPCC engaged in correspondence with stakeholders throughout the pandemic to share relevant materials. For example, the NPCC undertook work with the Children's Society through the Prevention Programme. As a result of this work, on 29 April 2020 CC Simon Bailey circulated briefing materials and a poster; Exhibit **MH/23** [INQ000620968] regarding Child Sexual Abuse to all Force Communications and Local Policing Leads for onwards sharing to inform officers' work on the frontline during the pandemic. The briefing document was intended for supervisors and internal communications, while the poster was intended to act as a visual reminder for frontline staff, for display in offices and custody suites.
144. During the pandemic, police adopted a measured and evolving approach to children playing outdoors, balancing public health regulations with the need for compassion and proportionality. Although there were some very few instances of officers incorrectly trying to issue FPNs to children, the regulations did not make provision for this and enforcement was never an option when dealing with children.
145. In the early stages of lockdown (March–May 2020), police were tasked with enforcing strict stay-at-home orders. This included discouraging gatherings in parks or public spaces, even among children. However, enforcement was focused on adults, and officers were encouraged to use the 4Es, engage, explain, and encourage compliance before resorting to enforcement.
146. As the pandemic progressed, there was growing recognition of the importance of play for children's mental health and development. Police forces were advised to use discretion and common sense when encountering children playing, especially

in local or household groups. This helped maintain public trust and avoided unnecessary conflict.

147. The NPCC and College of Policing guidance 'Covid-19 Policing brief in response to the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No.3) Regulations 2020'; exhibit **MH/23a** [INQ000099857] which was circulated on 18 July 2020 gave the following guidance in relation to children; *'Where the person in contravention of the Regulations is a child and they are accompanied by an individual who has responsibility for them: a constable or PCSO may direct that individual to remove the child from the event or place; and if a constable or PCSO gives the child a direction or instruction, the responsible individual must, so far as reasonably practicable, ensure that the child complies. A breach of this direction can result in an FPN issued to the responsible individual.'*
148. During the Pandemic, the NPCC maintained its existing positive working relationship with the Youth Justice Board (**YJB**). The YJB hosted a seconded police officer of Superintendent rank throughout the pandemic. The staff officer for Jo Shiner maintained almost daily contact with the YJB, with regular meetings to discuss issues related to the provision of services to young people when face to face contact was limited. Further discussions were held around the difficulties faced by the Youth Offender Teams (YOT) during lockdown. Discussions around managing direct contact were had. The YJB also maintained contact with the YOTs directly and this information was fed back into conversations between the NPCC and YJB. These meetings were informal and were not minuted, nor were agendas circulated in advance. The NPCC has not been able to locate additional records pertaining to these meetings.
149. The NPCC also engaged with young people through the existing Volunteer Police Cadet (**VPC**) scheme. Many forces implemented virtual VPC schemes, while some were required to pause the arrangements temporarily as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many participants are from vulnerable backgrounds, so forces sought to ensure continuation wherever possible. Prior to the pandemic, around 18,000 young people were engaged with the VPC scheme. The current numbers are closer to 14,000, but are increasing gradually to meet previous engagement levels.

**Offending rates for children and young people**

150. The NPCC did observe some changes and differences in types of offending committed by children and young people as a result of the pandemic in various portfolios. For example, crime rates in vehicle crime and burglary offending dropped during periods of lockdown. The NPCC recognise that changes in policing, closure of schools, lockdowns increasing people's time at home and limiting time spent outside, consequential increase in use of social media and the internet, changes to safeguarding practices and child protection systems would all have fed into changes of types of offending but cannot comment with regard to any specific data as the NPCC did not commission work in this regard.
151. The NPCC did not commission research into the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on offending behaviours of children and young people on any specific geographical areas/groups either and therefore cannot comment on this. This monitoring/assessment was not undertaken because there wasn't a need to invest resource into monitoring a positive impact (reduction in crime).
152. However, the NPCC did support a review and report from the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP), 'National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (CSAE) Crimes report. January 2022 to December 2022'. This report gave insight and analysis into the scale and nature of CSAE, trends in offending, including crime types, where they were committed, and presents profiles of both victims and perpetrators and is discussed further at paragraph 166 below.

*Police detention*

153. The first NPCC National Custody Strategy was launched in 2017; Exhibit **MH/24** [INQ000649419] in order to ensure the application of consistent principles developed at a national level to ensure forces approach custody in a manner which is legally sound, effective and efficient. The Strategy was in effect during the Covid-19 Pandemic. At the centre of the Strategy was consideration of the impact of custody on vulnerable people and the commitment to ensure all detainees are treated with

respect and their rights upheld. The Strategy set out a number of goals for police custody, including eliminating the use of police custody for Mental Health Act detentions and ensuring that children are only held in custody as a last resort.

154. In September 2022, a new and refreshed National Strategy for Police Custody was published by the NPCC; Exhibit **MH/25** [INQ000620973]. The strategy was designed to incorporate learning from the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Strategy should be read in conjunction with other NPCC Strategies which set out a broader vision for the service, notably the National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People.
155. In addition, there was guidance created by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, titled 'Expectations for Police Custody', in force during the specified period. The relevant document is Version 3, dated 2016. The guidance was updated in May 2018 to reflect changes introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017; Exhibit **MH/26** [INQ000586954] This document set out the inspection criteria for assessing the treatment of and conditions for detainees in police custody. The document is regularly refreshed to reflect changes to legislation, policies and practices, in order to improve the standards and achieve better outcomes for detainees. An updated Version 4 of the Guidance was published in June 2022.
156. The May 2018 version of the Guidance included information relevant to the promotion of the welfare and safety of those who are most vulnerable in police custody, including children. It recognises that children and young people should be treated as a distinct group with specific needs and vulnerabilities, that detention should be used as a last resort and that appropriate adults must be contacted without delay.
157. The NPCC holds a National Custody Forum on an annual basis, which is intended as an opportunity to share learning and best practice regarding police custody. The event has grown in scale and attendance, recently including addresses from the Minister for Crime and Policing, the Independent office for Police Conduct and the Chief Executive of the College of Policing.
158. In April 2020, the NPCC published a document titled 'NPCC Custody: Guidance and Recommendations for the Provision of Police Custody during the COVID-19

pandemic', as referred to in paragraph 98 above and at Exhibit [MH/21]. This document also gave guidance around hygiene and PPE which applied to all people coming into custody, including children and young people.

### **Impact of the pandemic on children and young people as victims of crime**

159. As set out above, as part of Operation Talla, the Thematic Leads Group managed the Service Delivery work strand. This tracked national trends in reported crime and demands on policing, assessing and reporting on service delivery, and monitoring any changes as a result of Covid-19.
160. Prior to Covid, there was no internal national NPCC data set for crime that took data from forces. So mindful that the NPCC might see shifts in crime, this reporting was pulled together from a fairly early stage as part of the Talla workstreams. Reports were delivered on a four-week period compared against an equivalent period for the previous year and tracked some headline crime data across some specific key areas, including Child Sexual Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation. They were high level reports and relied entirely on forces returns. As it was a new process, some forces encountered difficulties with extracting data and in the early stages often they would be incomplete or not include data from every force. The reports were used internally to share with Chiefs, inform the Talla Gold group and committee chairs of the headline trends.
161. The reports were produced by [Name Redacted] a senior analyst from Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, seconded to HMICFRS, working for Op Talla, along with a small number of other analysts. The methodology that was developed for this, was subsequently used later in 2022 by HMIFRS to create the "Digital Crime and Policing Pack", having used learning from the pandemic. Reports dated 11 October 2020 and 28 November 2021 are exhibited as Exhibit **MH/27** [INQ000620979] and Exhibit **MH/28** [INQ000620974].
162. In April 2020, the Children's Commissioner shared with the NPCC data on levels of childhood vulnerability in England, broken down by Local Authority. It built on the Children's Commissioner's Vulnerability Framework, which aims to gather and

report the best evidence on levels of need among children in England and provide that information in one place; Exhibit **MH/29** [INQ000620969].

163. Drawing on this data, the National Youth Agency (the regulator for youth work in England) circulated a report called 'Out of Sight: Vulnerable Young People: Covid 19 Response' (April 2020), supported by the NPCC; Exhibit **MH/29a** [INQ000620993]. The report focused on supporting and safeguarding vulnerable young people with needs amplified or triggered by the Covid-19 Pandemic. The report focused on those aged between 8 – 19. The report discussed the impacts of the pandemic on young people, including increased mental health issues, periods away from education, the impact of lockdown on children at risk at home, the impact of the digital divide and the impact on homeless young persons. The report called for a cross-departmental response from Government to recognise youth services as an essential key service, and to encourage local authorities, children's services and academy trusts to engage, deploy and up-skill youth workers in support of young people.
164. As referred to in paragraph 152 above, the NPCC supported a new report from the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP), 'National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (CSAE) Crimes report. January 2022 to December 2022'; exhibit **MH/29b** [INQ000649418].
165. The report is based on datasets collected from 42 police forces. The national snapshot gives insight and analysis into the scale and nature of CSAE, trends in offending, including crime types, where they were committed, and presents profiles of both victims and perpetrators.
166. The key points arising from the report include there were around 107,000 offences reported in 2022 – a 7.6% increase compared to 2021, nearly quadruple what it was 10 years ago, with evidence suggesting that many crimes remain unreported. Around 75% of CSAE offences relate to sexual offences committed directly against children, and around 25% relate to online offences of Indecent Images of Children.

167. The crime types regarding CSAE are changing. For example, historically Child-on-Child abuse accounted for around third of offences. The data in the report suggests that this is now just over half. CSAE within the family environment remains a common form of reported abuse, accounting for an estimated 33% of reported contact CSAE crime. However, the report recognised the general under-reporting of CSAE in family environment which is in part supported by the time it takes for some victims to report an offence; 35% of victims reported abuse within 45 days and 63% after this period. The report also considered that the Covid-19 pandemic may have exacerbated this due to isolation and lockdowns leaving fewer opportunities for authorities, teachers or friends to identify abuse signs.
168. The number of recorded incidents of Online Sexual Abuse continues to grow. It accounts for at least 32% of CSAE. 52% of all CSAE cases involved reports of children (aged 10 to 17) offending against other children with 14 being the most common age.
169. 87% of identified victims were recorded as 'white', 4.2% as 'black', 3.8% as 'Asian', 2.7% as 'mixed' and 2.4% as 'other'. The data showed that 91% of perpetrators were white males with an average age of 26, with the most common age being 14.
170. The report considered where offences get reported the most, across the policing regions in England and Wales. The highest percentage of offences corresponded to population density and as expected larger Metropolitan forces typically experienced the highest levels of reporting. Further exploration around how this corresponds to child populations, local crime recording integrity and other socio-economic factors was not explored in this report but will be explored in future.

### **The College of Policing website**

171. As explained in my previous statements, early in the pandemic, the College developed a COVID restrictions web page as a quick reference guide so that officers and staff could get the information they needed quickly and easily. This could be accessed on any mobile device and was structured to give one-click access to the information officers needed when attending COVID related calls. Advice was grouped to reflect potential scenarios that officers could experience on the street,

under four specific headings (persons; groups and gatherings; premises, events and places; and businesses) and included details of the relevant restrictions, offences, and the fixed penalty notice amounts. The webpage was updated daily and included a list of upcoming College events and programmes and their status.

172. Later, the College restructured the web page into the College's 'COVID-19 Hub' providing additional information on:

- i. Understanding the law;
- ii. PPE;
- iii. Interviewing victims, witnesses, and suspects;
- iv. Looking after yourself;
- v. College updates.

173. The COVID-19 restrictions meant that those crimes that occurred in the home and online appeared to increase. Early reports from China and Italy, who imposed lock down early on, indicated a significant increase in domestic abuse (DA) cases. Once lockdown was introduced in the UK, the College became concerned that there could be a risk of DA incidents rising but incidents not being reported to the police.

174. In response, the College regularly met with the DA charity sector. These meetings identified significant changes in the number and nature of demand and as a direct result, the government carried out publicity campaigns to highlight DA risks and encouraged victims to report. Many forces also carried out local publicity campaigns to encourage reporting.

175. In response to fears of an exponential increase in DA and domestic homicides, the College was involved in the Home Office 'Domestic Homicides and Victim Suicides During COVID-19 Pandemic' report and acted as a critical reader. The research was the first of its kind in England and Wales to look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic homicides and suicides following domestic abuse, learn lessons and prevent future deaths occurring. Our involvement meant domestic homicides in a domestic setting were included within the research parameters, and

therefore that child homicides were also included, as opposed to homicides falling within the narrower definition of 'domestic abuse'.

176. As part of his portfolio, Chief Constable Simon Bailey wrote to forces on 22 May 2020 seeking information/data regarding the prevalence of domestic homicides during lockdown; Exhibit **MH/30** [INQ000620960]. This information was sought in order to inform a national rapid review pilot program expediting the reporting of domestic homicides. The pilot took place over a six-week period and the results were shared with forces by letter dated 12 August 2020; Exhibit **MH/31** [INQ000620964]. The pilot was considered a success and, as a result, a full project was commissioned through the Home Office to gather and analyse data on domestic homicides through to March 2021.

177. A number of other products were readily accessible to policing via the Knowledge Hub Civil Contingencies Community. These included:

- i. Weekly Practice Briefings: provided swift identification and sharing of emerging practice, tactics and learning, and enabled forces to adopt and adapt early learning through the different stages of the pandemic;
- ii. A 'COVID community of practice' facilitated by the College, offered officers and staff from across policing an opportunity to request and provide advice on COVID related issues as well as acting as a forum for wider discussion on emerging issues.

178. The College's organisational development and peer support team captured and shared emerging practice and learning in the response and recovery phase of the pandemic. The team acted as a central hub - signposting and dealing with requests for information from forces and facilitated networking through knowledge sharing events ['KSEs'].

179. A key new process established in respect of the identification and sharing of knowledge was the holding of KSEs. These were online events, held from 5<sup>th</sup> 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 of Policing and

otherwise by the NPCC. They provided a means of capturing more information and creating a regular, live way for forces to engage and question one another's experiences and share learning. From this, the KSE evolved to support forces in a more bespoke manner. 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 were made available. Topics included both Covid specific and wider policing matters, reflective of the impact of the disruption across the whole of policing. KSEs were readily available to policing via the Knowledge Hub Civil Contingencies Community.

180. The success of KSEs in providing a forum for rapid centralised sharing of information and experience was recognised in 2020 by the College of Policing and the NPCC. KSEs are now permanent.
181. The NPCC has disclosed to the Inquiry an example of a KSE which touched upon issues relevant to children and young people; Exhibit **MH/32** [INQ000620981]. On 4 August 2020, a KSE was held with the College of Policing on 'Children and Extra-Familial Harm: Identifying and Managing Vulnerability during Covid-19'. Responses were shared by a range of forces and these were made available through the Knowledge Hub and fed into the work undertaken by the relevant NPCC portfolio-holders.

### **The National Crime Agency**

182. CC Simon Bailey (violence and public protection portfolio lead, within the Crime Coordinating Committee) was responsible for coordinating and overseeing the service's response to matters as broad as rape, as acid attacks, county lines and other issues of vulnerability, and, within that particular portfolio, he led the Child Protection and Abuse Investigations (CPAI) Working Group. He was responsible for the development in consultation and engagement with the College of Policing for the development of policies and responses to emerging issues. He was the

spokesperson for the NPCC and took the coordinating role in response to all matters of child protection.

183. In 2015, Child Sexual Abuse became a Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR). As part of CC Bailey's work as lead for the NPCC, his focus was upon ensuring that the NCA, working with forces at a regional level and then at a local level, were all contributing to the totality of meeting the threat. His work continued from 2014 when he joined the NPCC until he retired in 2021. He worked closely with the NCA throughout this period achieving results through a combination of more consistent prioritising, increased investment in capability, and the mainstreaming of a coordinated and proactive national approach.
184. An example of that joint work was during the pandemic, the National Crime Agency (NCA) launched an online safety campaign, in response to increased sexual offending (both online and contact offences). The campaign was led by the NCA and supported by the NPCC.

### **Risks from online activity**

185. The work of the NPCC does have some connection to online activity undertaken by children, but by reason of the organisation's structure and role this is limited in nature. The NPCC's focus is and was on policing matters, and therefore on risks arising from criminal activity occurring online.
186. The Online Safety Act 2023 was not in force during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was therefore not a tool or a linguistic framework which the NPCC applied in its work during the pandemic.
187. The NPCC is not aware of any research, studies or analysis undertaken by its portfolio teams or by individual forces pertaining to the amount of time children spend online, the ages of children online, the type of online services used by children, or the impact of time spent online upon children. These are not matters which fall within the remit of the NPCC.

188. The NPCC portfolio on Digital Youth Engagement (Digital Public Contract) was set up in 2018 with the aim of increasing young people's trust and confidence in policing. The 'National Youth Engagement Report' led to the funding required to start the portfolio. The portfolio set up an Instagram profile @yourpolice.uk, which was designed to engage with young people online in an age-appropriate manner.
189. During the pandemic, the portfolio recognised that there were increased safeguarding risks arising from children being out of school during lockdown, with increased visibility reducing opportunities for monitoring welfare and making disclosures. As a result, a contract was created with Barnados to work in partnership in responding to requests for assistance made to the police via Instagram. Over 100 young people who made contact with the Instagram account were referred to Barnados for support during the pandemic.
190. The profile posted content aiming to promote understanding and access to policing for children online, for example information about online harassment and steps to counter child sexual abuse images on the internet.
191. The portfolio also posted content on the Instagram profile which related to the pandemic. For example, there were posts relaying government health advice, flagging known online scams, sharing information about the right to protest and seeking to 'bust' misinformation about the pandemic. These posts remain available as open source material on Instagram.
192. The NPCC collated data illustrating levels of engagement with posts on Instagram. The profile had approximately 5800 followers in March 2020, which increased to 9100 followers by June 2020. By January 2021, there were almost 15,000 followers. The Digital Youth Engagement Portfolio continues to run the Instagram page which, at time of writing, has approximately 25,900 followers.
193. The NPCC is not able to provide opinion evidence regarding the impact of online activity upon children or changes to child development occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, as this is a matter for expert evidence or specialist academic analysis.

### **Other work in relation to Children and Young Persons**

194. In some instances, the pandemic had an adverse impact on work being undertaken by the NPCC to support children and young people and identify trends in policing. For example, the NPCC collaborated with the Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (**PSHE**) Association to fund a study carried out by the London School of Economics and Political Science (**LSE**) to test the impact of officers helping to support school delivery of PSHE lessons on drugs and the law. The report, entitled 'Police in the classroom, Evaluation of a three-wave cluster randomized controlled trial' was published in February 2021 based on data collected from more than 7000 pupils in 8 schools across England between September 2019 and March 2020. The final report is available online as an open-source document. Due to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, data collection was interrupted, meaning that only two police force areas had sufficient time to participate in all three waves of the study and 7 schools participated in more than one wave.
195. There were also some difficulties in carrying out follow-up research due to the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, in October 2023, the College of Policing launched a similar project based on this trial with the specific aim of targeting violence against women and girls. The research was ongoing into 2025 and the results have not yet been published.
196. As part of the work undertaken with the PSHE Association, the NPCC received feedback from schools about the need for greater clarity on what conduct constitutes criminal offending and when to involve the police. As a result of this communication, a document titled 'When to call the police: Guidance for schools and colleges' was published in February 2020. This document is available open source online and remained available throughout the specified period, following publication.

### **Lessons learned**

197. The NPCC provided relevant documentation to the Inquiry in 2023/early 2024, including the following key documents:
- i. Organisational Learning Priorities **[INQ000216923]**;
  - ii. Organisational Learning in Policing during Covid-19 **[INQ000099937]**;

- iii. Hydra Foundation Debriefing **[INQ000099938]**;
- iv. Covid-19 and Future Threats: a Law Enforcement Delphi Study **[INQ000099939]**;
- v. Policing the Pandemic **[INQ000099940]**;
- vi. Policing the Pandemic in England and Wales **[INQ000187993]**.

198. The need to identify, capture, and reflect on both short and longer-term learning and implications of the policing of Covid-19 was recognised and actioned 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.

199. Much of the learning identified through work undertaken during the pandemic was summarised in a "Learning Index" for ease of access by forces; Exhibit **MH/33** [INQ000620980] This workstream was led by the Recovery, Learning and Reform Programme within the NPCC.

200. 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 of Policing, the National Crime Agency, the Independent Office of Police Conduct; the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners; HMICFRS; and Counter Terrorism Policing. The first meeting was held on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

201. 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.

202. The College worked throughout the pandemic to ensure that learning and effective practice was shared. It worked with forces to gather examples of effective COVID related operational practice and tactics and shared this information through a variety of channels. As the pandemic affected geographic regions at different rates and intensities a key aim was to identify and share early emerging practice and learning so it could be quickly applied across England and Wales.
203. The College also created the COVID-19 Ideas Survey to gather ideas and practice from front line practitioners, where some key projects were identified and progressed such as: the GoodSam App - an emergency video responder application adapted to policing.
204. During 2020 and 2021 focused learning and consultation events were held and independent reports commissioned, intended to extract wider organisational learning themes and priorities. These included:
- i. In August 2020, an exercise carried out by the College of Policing, 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 **[INQ000216923]**. This was available to policing via the Knowledge Hub Civil Contingencies Community.
  - ii. 'Organisational learning in policing during Covid-19: Strengths, Barriers, and Areas for Improvement': report published in November 2020, detailed what was working well, the barriers and areas for improvement across UK policing, again available to policing via the Knowledge Hub Civil Contingencies Community **[INQ000099937]**.
  - iii. 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 **[INQ000099938]**.

iv. '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
- Inform policing strategy and policy

The report resulted in a series of recommendations including in relation to themes of community engagement; staff well-being; and activity requiring investment [INQ000099937].

v. 'Policing the Pandemic: Detailed analysis on police enforcement of the Public Health Regulations and an assessment on disproportionality across ethnic groups' [INQ000099938].

The NPCC published regular statistics throughout the pandemic on how many FPNs were issued by police forces under the coronavirus Regulations. This was made possible through the centralization of part of the FPN process through ACRO (as described above from paragraph 51 onwards) and was reflective of the NPCC drive towards transparency in respect of its work to ensure compliance with the legislation.

vi. 'Policing the pandemic in England and Wales: Police use of Fixed Penalty Notices from 27 March 2020 to 31 May 2021' [INQ000099940].

205. The Inquiry will also be aware of the Policing the Pandemic report which is focused on 'Exploring Young People's Experiences and Recommendations'; Exhibit **MH/34** [INQ000649420] This report, which was commissioned by policing and published in July 2020, contained evidence gathered from 3941 young people aged 13-25 across England and Wales. It is known to the Inquiry from analysis undertaken in previous modules.

206. 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.
207. The Inquiry's attention is 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 stakeholder through the Board and Regional Recovery Group. The final report was published on 10<sup>th</sup> 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.
208. 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.*

209. The nature and importance of the work of ACRO and the College of Policing in respect of the central coordination function of the NPCC have been described previously in this statement.

**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:

*16<sup>th</sup> July 2025*