

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Summer 2024 disorder, HC 381

Tuesday 25 February 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dame Karen Bradley (Chair); Shaun Davies; Mr Paul Kohler; Margaret Mullane; Chris Murray; Mr Connor Rand; Joani Reid.

Questions 48 - 113

Witnesses

[I](#): Emily Spurrell, Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner and Chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners; Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist, Metropolitan Police; Chief Constable Serena Kennedy, Merseyside Police; and Chief Constable Ben-Julian Harrington, Public Order Leader, National Police Chiefs' Council.

[II](#): Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP, Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention, Home Office; and Andrew Johnson, Deputy Director, Police Powers Unit, Home Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Emily Spurrell, Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist, Chief Constable Serena Kennedy and Chief Constable Ben-Julian Harrington.

Q48 **Chair:** I welcome witnesses to our first panel of the afternoon and the work that we have been doing on the policing response to the disorder that we saw last summer following the dreadful, horrendous incident in Southport. Maybe the witnesses would like to introduce themselves and then we can go into questioning.

Assistant Commissioner Twist: Good afternoon, Chair. I am Matt Twist, Assistant Commissioner for Frontline Policing in the Met. Last year I was Assistant Commissioner for Met Operations with strategic lead for disorder and protest.

Chief Constable Harrington: Good afternoon. Ben-Julian Harrington, Chief Constable of Essex. Last summer I was the National Co-ordinating Gold for the National Police Chiefs' Council.

Chief Constable Kennedy: Serena Kennedy, Chief Constable of Merseyside, which covers the Southport area.

Emily Spurrell: Emily Spurrell. I am the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside, which covers Southport. I am also the chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners.

Q49 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We will start off with a question specifically to you, Chief Constable Kennedy, about the decisions you took. You believed at the time that the organised far right was responsible for the Southport disorder. Is that still your assessment and was that different from the disorder that you saw in Liverpool itself?

Chief Constable Kennedy: What we saw, as you have already mentioned, Chair, was the tragic events of 29 July, and our thoughts are always with the families and the victims. What we saw on the 30th was a community in shock, grieving and wanting to come together. Working with partners, there was an organised vigil that took place on the evening of 30 July. We were also monitoring a number of social media feeds and intelligence coming in. There was commentary around the person who was responsible or who was in custody for those murders. Some of those social media chats that were taking place were on what we would associate with far-right social media channels.

On your question, whether I would say that the protest was linked to the far right, what we can say is that the information around calling people to attend at Southport—although I would say on that day, 30 July, there were 10 different locations and dates of people suggesting that they came together. It is not as simple as saying that everybody was called to go to Southport on the evening of the 30th, but that information was being passed through some far-right channels, as well as other channels



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and some channels that we did not have access to. There was definitely an element of far right to it.

Q50 **Chair:** That was Southport itself. What about Liverpool?

Chief Constable Kennedy: In terms of Liverpool, which took place on the following Saturday, there were two clear groupings that we would associate with what we would suggest was a left-wing protest, a counter-protest, and then a right-wing group involved in initially what I would suggest was peaceful protest.

Q51 **Chair:** Did you receive mutual aid? What mutual aid did the force receive at the time of the initial disturbances in Southport and then the further ones across Merseyside?

Chief Constable Kennedy: If I can take you back to the events of 30 July, we were planning for a community event. As I say, this was a community that was grieving. They wanted to come together. They wanted fellowship. They wanted solidarity as a community and they wanted to show their respect to three little girls who had lost their lives and show their families what that had meant to Southport.

We saw about 1,000 people come together to attend that vigil. There was some chatter, some intelligence and some information about people being called to attend at Southport across four different locations. Ten different locations in total and three different dates were being given. We were planning for a community event. Officers were dressed appropriately to police what was a community event. While the vigil was taking place, we did see some people within that vigil, approximately 70 people, who I would suggest were clearly not there for the vigil.

The vigil ended and those approximately 70 people left that vigil and grouped outside Southport town hall. They moved up towards the mosque at 19:40. The officers on the ground did a brilliant job. They quickly realised, as this group left the town hall, where they were heading for. They were heading for the mosque. The officers did a brilliant job getting a ring, a line around the mosque to protect them, because we knew there were people in the mosque. Within seven minutes of arriving at that location, the first acts of violence and criminal damage took place. Therefore we had to mobilise the officers we had had on standby to support the community event in the vigil.

That situation very quickly escalated, as I say, seven minutes from those people arriving at the mosque, absolutely intent, in my view, on getting inside the mosque, injuring the people inside it and committing acts of criminal damage. We then called for mutual aid and we were well supported from forces across the north-west. We went through our normal co-ordination channels through the RICC, which is owned for the region by Greater Manchester Police. We had officers very quickly from right across the six north-west forces, including ourselves. We had officers who were mobilising from West Midlands as well.



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Chair: Thank you very much. We will go on to some more questions around the suspect.

Q52 **Joani Reid:** Chief Constable Kennedy, as the Chair said, I want to move on to information about the suspect and how that was communicated. In the immediate aftermath of the murders, did you receive clear guidance and advice from the CPS about the communications of the man you had in custody?

Chief Constable Kennedy: We have worked closely with the Crown Prosecution Service right from 29 July. We released, in line with what we would always say, the age of the person who was in custody, the area they were from—we would not release an address at that point—and where they had been arrested. That information was released by Merseyside Police without consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service. That is standard practice as to what we would release.

Clearly some of the disinformation was out there on 29 July that the person we had in custody was an asylum seeker. On my first press release on the evening of Monday, 29 July, we knew that the suspect at that time had moved to the north-west from Cardiff, but what we did not know was whether he was born in Cardiff or not. At my first press release I said that he was originally from Cardiff, but within several hours of doing that press conference we knew that he had been born in Cardiff so my statement was updated to say that he was born in Cardiff. Again, that was not done in consultation with the CPS. That was standard information that we would always release when someone is arrested.

We worked closely during that 48 hours as we carried on with the investigation to get to the point of charge. On the evening of 31 July, we had some detailed conversations with the deputy branch Crown prosecutor and their local lead for CPS. By that time, we had obviously had the disorder in Southport and we had seen, I think, three other cities experiencing disorder. I wanted to try to give as much information as I could during the press conference that we were going to do around the charges to help my colleagues around the country to try to deal with some of the misinformation and disinformation.

We communicated. I think the first email went into national CPS at 4.43 around the suggestion that we do a joint press conference. The response back from national CPS was around being mindful of what information we release about the suspect, bearing in mind contempt. We sent over a copy of what we wanted to put out in a press release, which included the religion of the suspect and the religion of the suspect's parents. We sent that over to CPS at about half-past 9 at night, letting them know that we were doing the press conference somewhere between 11 pm and midnight.

The deputy branch Crown prosecutor attended at Merseyside Police headquarters with their head of local comms and we had about a 90-minute discussion, all around wanting to put the religion in the



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statement. I explained why. I will not say my exact wording, but it will have been along the lines of, "I need to help my colleagues out, my fellow chief constables. Some of the streets of the UK are on fire and I need to help them as much as I can". However, there were real concerns around me putting the religion into my press statement. It was very clear within that 90-minute conversation that the Crown Prosecution Service locally was very unhappy at our suggestion of including that. Based on that advice, we did not include the suspect's religion in my press statement that I did at about midnight that evening. We did not include it in the press release that went out.

I am subsequently aware that national CPS did email back into Merseyside Police's comms team at half-past 11 to say that they were happy for us to include the religion, but by that time we were downstairs and we were preparing for the press conference so that was not seen by ourselves. However, I will say that came from the national comms team and I was taking my direction from the deputy branch Crown prosecutor, who was very clear that I could not include that in my press release, which is why that was not included.

Q53 Joani Reid: Thank you. That is very clear and thorough. To clarify, you feel that there was not a consistent approach from the local CPS and national CPS?

Chief Constable Kennedy: Sorry, can you repeat your question?

Joani Reid: Was there a consistent approach and advice at a local level and a national level? What you are saying is that there was not and in fact that there was conflicting advice.

Chief Constable Kennedy: There was a 90-minute conversation, which took place in the conference room at Merseyside Police with three of my colleagues, the deputy chief Crown prosecutor for Cheshire-Mersey, and their local comms team. None of us were sighted on the fact that at half-past 11 an email arrived from the national comms team, but I would suggest that the difference between what the national comms team said—I was taking mine from the deputy chief branch Crown prosecutor, who was in the building with me, who was very clear that her priority was around justice.

I have said right from the start that my priority has been that we follow a family-focused approach and we get justice for the families of the three little girls and the victims and their families. Right throughout I have not wanted to do anything that would compromise that justice.

Q54 Joani Reid: Following that, you have said subsequently that ideally you would have liked to have released more information about the Southport murders. Were you thinking specifically about the publication of the religion of the suspect?

Chief Constable Kennedy: Initially, I wanted to give that information because obviously there was disinformation out there. We saw our



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Muslim communities across the country being subjected to hate crimes. Alone in Merseyside we would normally get in that period about 130 hate crimes. In that week we saw that shift up to about 170. We know the impact it had locally and nationally on our Muslim communities, and I wanted to get out that point that at that time there was no suggestion that the suspect in custody was from that Muslim faith. However, I was unable to say that at that time.

Q55 Joani Reid: Was there any other information that you would have liked to have shared that you were unable to share, based on advice from the CPS?

Chief Constable Kennedy: As I say, we have worked closely right from 29 July with our colleagues from the Crown Prosecution Service, locally and nationally, to make sure that in any statements, publications, planning for subsequent charges in October, planning for the trial, planning once we got the guilty plea, and then planning for the sentencing that everybody is comfortable that we are following a family-focused approach so that the families hear the information first. We have worked well collaboratively to support the families and to make sure that we were giving as much information as possible to the public without compromising the trial.

Q56 Joani Reid: After the incident that you spoke about where there was a miscommunication and you did not receive the information from the national CPS. Was that a turning point in the relationship with the national organisation? Were you then able to have a direct line of communication so you would have clear guidance and advice on the information that you did then subsequently publish?

Chief Constable Kennedy: Yes. In October and January there were joint meetings with national CPS, national CPS comms teams, regional CPS and regional comms teams, and ourselves and counterterrorism right throughout.

Q57 Joani Reid: My final question to you is—and I am asking you to speculate—in your professional opinion, do you think that being able to share more information about the suspect on 29 July in the way, in which you could not, may have prevented disorder from escalating?

Chief Constable Kennedy: I would suggest that it is difficult to say that. What I have already said is that we knew some of the disinformation that was out there about the suspect's religion and that was having an impact on our Muslim communities. I wanted to try to dispel that disinformation that was out there. It is difficult to say it would have stopped the disorder. I do not think that I can answer that.

I would say—and the DPP said it himself—the media protocol that we have in place is 19 years old. In terms of where we are with social media channels and the use of social media, we know that during that time there was about 900,000 users using Telegram. Telegram was not even a thing 19 years ago. This case highlights why we need to look at how we



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handle releases of information to the public, while also making sure that we do not impact on the criminal justice trial.

- Q58 **Shaun Davies:** This is a very quick question in regard to the ultimate decision. I accept that the CPS gave you advice, but it was your decision ultimately. What was the consideration given in terms of overriding the decision made by the local CPS? Was that in fear of the contempt proceedings and therefore was it effectively more of a direction from local CPS that you felt that you received rather than advice, which was the word you used earlier?

Chief Constable Kennedy: I think it was very clear. The language used was I was asked why we were straying from what we would normally issue. When we normally issue a charging statement, it is unusual to do a press conference and it is normally very formulaic in what we would say. The view of the deputy chief Crown prosecutor was asking me why we were straying away from what we were normally saying, and that is when I replied back that this was a unique situation in terms of what my colleagues around the country were dealing with.

Yes, it was my decision to take it out of the press release, but to me it was unclear how the investigation was going to proceed. It was 48 hours in and therefore there was a very clear view from CPS that I should not be including the religion because of the impact on the criminal justice process.

- Q59 **Shaun Davies:** Just to push you slightly, Chief Constable, this is precharge. In terms of the decision around saying where the suspect was born even—not just lived or where he is from, but where he was born was also released—I do not think it is necessarily standard in a press release to say where a suspect was born. On the advice that you received from the CPS and looking to the future as well—I accept that it is easy to examine things with 20/20 hindsight, but going forward—has there been an agreement between the CPS and police nationally around who makes the decision ultimately precharge about these press releases and press statements or is this still unclear?

Chief Constable Kennedy: I will say that we worked with both local comms and national comms for each of the three key points: charging, further charges and then the trial. There were very clear views on both sides where red pens were taken to statements. I know that the DPP has provided information around category 1, category 2, category 3, but each three of those key points there was conversations around information that I would class as category 3, where we had to negotiate and influence and work collaboratively to reach an agreed position. That definitely meandered throughout each of those three points.

- Q60 **Mr Paul Kohler:** Picking up on something you just said then, does the media protocol need updating?

Chief Constable Kennedy: In my view, it does. It is 19 years old. I do not think it takes account of where we are in terms of the impact of social



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media and as we saw it play out in events following Southport. It is not just the media protocol that needs updating. The Law Commission is looking at contempt of court in how we wrestle with that misinformation and disinformation, balancing the need for a fair trial and making sure there are not contempt of court issues.

Q61 **Mr Paul Kohler:** Is it being updated or do you not know?

Chief Constable Kennedy: The media protocol is being worked through now. As a result of Southport, the National Police Chiefs' Council is now working with the Crown Prosecution Service and with Government to look at how we deal with situations like this moving forward.

Chair: In Parliament we are looking at what we can say as well, so it has prompted that.

Q62 **Mr Connor Rand:** To clarify, you said a couple of times that it was a 90-minute meeting, obviously at a critical and stressful juncture. That was a 90-minute meeting just on that one point?

Chief Constable Kennedy: It was a 90-minute meeting around the press release but—

Mr Connor Rand: The specific focus on that—

Chief Constable Kennedy: The paragraph that got excluded from what I was going to say at the press conference and that was going to be released afterwards was basically around the religion.

Q63 **Mr Connor Rand:** Okay, and we can infer from the length of that meeting that there was a robust exchange of views from both sides?

Chief Constable Kennedy: Yes.

Mr Connor Rand: All right. That is useful.

Q64 **Chair:** When were you aware of the suspect's religion?

Chief Constable Kennedy: I am afraid I cannot remember. I cannot remember, Chair.

Q65 **Chair:** Did you think about publishing it? Did you consider publishing it before it was actually published?

Chief Constable Kennedy: It was going to be published during when we were going to announce the charges. It had not been a decision for us to make prior to that, which is why we were working closely with our colleagues from CPS.

Q66 **Margaret Mullane:** Assistant Commissioner Twist, could you briefly summarise last year's disorder on Whitehall? Could you contrast that with your subsequent policing of the Tommy Robinson supporters' protest, which had that disorder missing?



Assistant Commissioner Twist: I am happy to. I will clarify which subsequent protest, but I will touch on Whitehall first—there have been a number in the overall timeline. There had been a Tommy Robinson protest and march on 27 July, which preceded these events, where again we had not seen any challenges.

Following events in Southport, at 7 pm on Tuesday, 30 July, we received notification in the Met that there was going to be a protest by a group called Enough is Enough, who ostensibly stated they were going to protest at Downing Street for legislation around knife crime. Similar to what Chief Constable Kennedy said, we saw some of the same patterns in terms of right-wing groups and chat that indicated that that was where it would be. As a result of the information we had and the events that we had seen, section 14 preconditions under the Public Order Act were authorised to restrict that protest to a defined area within Whitehall.

On the night itself, the organisers' estimate was that they would get somewhere between 500 and 1,000 attendees. We think the number was at the upper range of that. We cannot be specific on the total number. Actions from the Met, and again this is one of the benefits of being able to act at scale, were that we generated 22 PSUs—a PSU is how we group together public order trained officers—which is somewhere of the magnitude of 550 officers, to police that protest. Originally, seven of the 22 were deployed into central London. Seven were in Whitehall, 12 were deployed across quadrants of the Met, so north-east, south-east, south-west and north-west, and we had a further five on reserve. As a result of what we saw, within a short time all 22 were deployed into Whitehall.

As for the event, the group formed up, as expected, in the conditioned area, which was directly opposite—colleagues and Members will be familiar with it. Very shortly afterwards, the group entered the carriageway. Flares were let off and a cordon was put in place. In a co-ordinated move, the majority of protesters then sought to breach the conditions that had been imposed and moved towards Parliament Square, and public order tactics were then used to prevent them doing so. We did see people throw projectiles at officers. We did see people attempt to breach the police cordons.

Over a period of time, order was restored. The group was prevented from getting into Parliament Square and a number of arrests were made. In total 111 arrests were made, principally for breach of conditions on the night, but also for offences including violent disorder and possession of offensive weapons.

Q67 **Margaret Mullane:** With the subsequent protest, you give your recount to us on the Tommy Robinson supporters as "peaceful protest". Would you agree with that? Do you think that you were able to contain them?

Assistant Commissioner Twist: It is hard to categorise a group. We assess each event in terms of threat, harm and risk. All I can say is that in terms of observations, the Tommy Robinson protest that preceded that



week on 27 July was broadly peaceful and went to plan. It was a march from the Royal Courts of Justice to Trafalgar Square. That night there was serious disorder for a short period of time in Whitehall and we managed to contain that because we were able to generate mass quickly and stop the group moving out.

Subsequent protests we did not see. The following Saturday, 3 August, we mobilised 46 PSUs—that is just over 1,100 officers—to deal with a Palestinian Solidarity Campaign callout and as a contingency for any other protest related to this, but we did not see any. The following Wednesday, so exactly a week after this, again we were concerned about 15 potential sites.

The Committee may want to touch further on the information and misinformation, but we saw Telegram channels indicating that there would be cultural and nationalist protests at 15 sites, most of which was completely fictitious but, as a result, led to a reaction from left-wing and anti-right-wing groups, counter-protests. In the most extreme example, it led to a mobilisation of 10,000 people in Waltham Forest to counter-protest against a protest that was never going to happen in the first place.

From our point of view, we had to mobilise significant resources, first because the actions on Telegram and then the subsequent reposting on social media of information, which probably had no basis in the first place, led to a significant risk of counter-protest with all the challenges that might bring. Based on the information and what we had seen elsewhere in the country, where some of these things happened quite spontaneously, we could not take the chance of not resourcing it.

Q68 Margaret Mullane: What do you think is the impact of public order policing on the Met more broadly?

Assistant Commissioner Twist: It has been enormous and I think we have to look at the span of time since October of 2023. I would say that, without any question, it is the busiest period of public order demand that the Met has ever faced. The actual chronic demand started in October of 2022 when we started seeing what I would call strategic and chronic environmental protests that were placing demand on the service every single day, abstracting officers from community policing. Principally, that was the JSO phases 1, 2 and 3.

That was compounded by the chronic and very acute protests we saw following the awful events in Israel in October of 2023 and the very large, significant protest that we saw as a result of that. Some of the environmental stuff and some of the pro-Palestinian marches generated demand every day, but also extremely high demand on weekends, as well as the routine run of events in London, with seven premiership football grounds and the major events that we deal with.



Rolling forward to the summer of 2024, by the time we got to this point, public order officers in the Met were pretty exhausted. We had just had the busiest year with the highest demand that I think we had ever had. I would say that the Met is a very resilient organisation and our officers are resilient. We were able to force mobilise quickly in London and latterly in support of other parts of the country, where we provided 208 officers on mutual aid as we developed into this scenario. The impact has been significant. I will leave it there.

Q69 Margaret Mullane: I have one small point. Do you think that as this all plays out with the public watching it—and obviously it is of great concern—that impacts on your recruitment in the Met?

Assistant Commissioner Twist: I don't know. At the moment there is not a problem with recruitment based on the numbers we are trying to get in and the pipeline that we have. We have a good recruiting position where we are. That is not a challenge. I think people look at it and it is hard work. There is something around how we recognise those officers who volunteer to become public order officers, that is the first thing, and encourage more volunteers to do it.

Over 12 months ago we started to significantly increase our number of level 2 officers, who have the enhanced public order training, because we could see that numbers over time had diminished. Our aspiration is to have around 4,000 that are level 2 public order trained, and we had moved some way to that. As a result of events that started in 2022, we had uplifted our number of resources. During the course of last summer, we started to see some of the fruits of that. We started to place other officers from different parts of the Met, who traditionally would not have done public order or uniformed operations, to support uniformed operations, which were lower risk. We had officers ranging from specialist crime to protective security and others turning out in uniform to support the wider Met effort.

Q70 Chair: On that point, are you confident that those specialist officers who have the public order training are being properly deployed and they are not doing the role that another police officer could do and then being asked to up their game and go into policing more difficult situations?

Assistant Commissioner Twist: The officers who are trained to do public order are usually well experienced, have been specially trained, go regularly on refresher training and have the right kit and equipment. That is from our full-time level 1 group, territorial support group, and then all our level 2 officers, who form the bulk of our response to higher-risk public order operations. For level 3, which is everything else—and that can be everything from ceremonial to Changing of the Guard to much smaller events where the risk is much lower—we deploy as many of our officers as we can to do that to share the burden.

Where we focus the level 2 officers is on protests where we think the risk is higher and on some football matches where we know the risk is higher.



If we can stop using the higher trained officers on events that carry much lower risk, then that shares the burden.

- Q71 **Mr Paul Kohler:** I would like to explore a more general question about how much the summer riots were a manifestation of a breakdown of trust between the police and the public, or certain sections of the public. Emily, you have spoken and written about a crisis of trust in institutions in this context. Do you want to amplify on that a little?

Emily Spurrell: This was part of an interview I did for *The Observer* last summer. It was a comment made in relation to a number of institutions. The challenge that we had is that colleagues were trying to explain the criminal justice process and the contempt of court and why every detail was not allowed to be released to the public for the reason of trying to protect the criminal justice process to ultimately get justice for the families.

The point I was trying to make was that we are trying to explain a process to people, but us as institutions—and it is not just the police, it applies in other criminal justice situations; it applies to politicians; it applies to councils. I think people have seen that public services are struggling, and we have seen over the last 15 years or so that services are not delivering for the public in the way that they expect them to. That, among some of the high-profile scandals that we have had in policing, politics and others I think has undermined that trust and confidence in those sectors.

When you are trying to go out and explain to the public how decisions are being made, why certain decisions have been taken and why certain information is not being put in the public domain to protect that process, we were coming at it from a point where they did not trust what we were saying. My point was that we need to look at how we rebuild that trust in all the different sectors so people know that they are going to get the right service when they want it. Then when we do have to explain to them or make difficult decisions, they understand why that is happening.

- Q72 **Mr Paul Kohler:** The data backs you up, particularly deprived communities having less trust in the police. Is that just a factor of deprivation or is there more to that? Is it the way police deal with those from deprived communities?

Emily Spurrell: The honest answer is: I would not know in detail. We know that in lots of deprived communities you are more likely to be a victim of crime. If you have not had the right response from the police—and unfortunately we know things do not always go the way they should do—that might be a reason why you then do not have the trust and confidence to call again or to go back to the police when you need them another time. However, I think that is true in lots of communities. It is probably something that we need to do a bit more research to understand that.



Mr Paul Kohler: Do any of your colleagues want to comment on that?

Assistant Commissioner Twist: I am happy to build on the point on trust. I think the point made, that this is an erosion of trust in all public bodies, is relevant. We see at times malign actors and social media working in a co-ordinated way to undermine trust and to sow polarisation and discontent. We see that some of this is based from abroad. We see that some of this is based from individuals.

The thing that we are dealing with today that is different from even 10 and certainly 20 years ago is the pace at which misinformation and disinformation can spread. One of the characteristics that we dealt with in 2011 when we were looking at our response to disorder in London then was how we were behind the curve in some of the disorder that was spreading via a very early form of BlackBerry messenger. Whereas now the threats are spreading at an exponentially greater rate, and the disinformation and misinformation is spreading at an exponentially greater rate, which is undermining trust and confidence because people find it difficult to distil what is actually true.

Chief Constable Harrington: The disinformation element, which has been described by colleagues here, we saw that. We saw that across the country. That does undermine trust and confidence. One of the key things around public order policing, as well as the specially trained officers and the community officers, one of the important elements is what we call a bronze engagement role, a specific senior officer whose job is to engage with local communities, independent advisory groups and local stakeholders to try to build that trust and confidence.

We trade on relied, trusted engagement and relationships in peacetime, so to speak, so that when we are in a position as we saw across the country last summer, local officers are able to speak to people and say, "No, these are the facts of the matter. Trust us". That is an important part. When we think about specialist public order tactics and the training we give our commanders in particular, we are very strong that the most important public order tactic is community engagement and communication with local communities so they feel assured, are assured and of course then can give us important information to deal with the issues of crime and criminality that take place.

Q73 **Mr Paul Kohler:** That underlines the importance of community policing, does it not?

Chief Constable Harrington: Absolutely. One of the strengths of our public order model—and I have had the privilege to go to France and see what they do, where they have a dedicated riot squad and the gendarmerie and the CRS—is all the officers that we train. Whether they are dedicated to public order duties, they are always policing London or Essex or Merseyside. They are drawn from local community policing. Now, of course that has an abstraction, because when they are not doing that, when they are doing this stuff, they are not policing



neighbourhoods. However, what it does mean is that when they are in a neighbourhood they understand that community. They are not there just to make a mess and run away. They are there thinking, "Do you know what? I am a police officer". Peelian principles. This is about prevention, engagement and discussion.

That leads to some of the discussions that you will have seen about whether officers are in full code protective equipment or whether in normal duty. There is a fine balance for commanders and officers to say if we can talk our way in and engage it is much better. You see that very often. To put that in context, there were 800 notified events, either through social media, notified to us or we came across over that two-week period. Only 250 took place and only, we would say, about 30 of those—important 30—came into a place of disorder. A lot of that was because of pre-emptive, proactive engagement with local communities. As Mr Twist has said, huge protests that had all the potential to be disorderly, because of good engagement and good policing. The same in Southport, and you saw that in many places across the country as well.

Q74 Joani Reid: I just wanted to ask you briefly about the role of social media and your approach to dealing with that during this period. It is of course a weapon of choice for a range of actors to promote hatred and provoke violence. Could you give us an overview of how you dealt with the illegal content that you saw online and if you felt equipped and had the resources at your disposal to deal with that?

As a second part to that question, has there been any systematic analysis of the way extremists used social media to promote violence that led to the scenes that we saw on our streets?

Chief Constable Harrington: From a national perspective, first of all, the first thing is around disinformation and social media. We did work with our intelligence partners and with others to make sure we had a good assessment and to utilise and understand what information was there, whether it was telling us things that were useful. As you have heard from colleagues here, we were told about things that simply did not happen from social media. They did not materialise and we had to react to those things.

Before you look at the use of social media and policing, there is a role now, given the way everybody lives their lives in social media, the influence from other places, that this might be a policing threat one day. It might be a health threat another day; it might be a political threat another day. There is something about national security, in my view, that says, "What is the baseline of this intelligence and this information that is there, this chatter, and then where does it peak and who is looking at that for us?" If it is a policing issue, a crime issue, then identify it to the policing sector so we can say, "What does that mean?" and delve into that.



Nationally, we were getting some of that feed. I know there was lots of information locally, but it is so quick and so rapid. One of the things I want to stress is all the forces across the country were using social media analysis and content monitoring to identify and try to assess where the threat, the risk and the harm was. Of course, as I showed you from those numbers earlier, many of those events were fictitious, whether they were intentionally to dupe us or whether they were trying to stir up something that did not happen. It is very difficult to react to those individual elements around it.

The final point I would make is that we do now encourage public order commanders and public order officers and policing to use social media tactically so that where you do get a piece of information that says someone is going to go somewhere and do something or something bad is happening, how quick are our communications teams in using that to say, "No, that is not true," or what the facts of the matter are, but that is a very local issue and has to be picked up locally because it moves so quickly. You could not do that from a national perspective.

Assistant Commissioner Twist: Two things are very clear. I do agree with B. J. There is clear evidence that there are click factory sites and bots that were driving up traffic, aimed at driving polarisation and division. We saw that.

To Chief Constable Harrington's point, some of the good examples where we see officers have used this well is, for example, where you are seeing something on social media that is gathering traction saying, "There is a cultural nationalist protest here," or everyone is gathering at the mosque or the hotel or whatever, I have seen individual officers just take a picture of it and post it back to go, "No, there is nobody here". The question is whether we are on the right channels. Do we have the right reach? Do we have the right number of followers to damp this down quite quickly? It is very stark and there are analytics available to this that will show that at one minute past midnight on a given day, the number of read posts on a thing that is particularly divisive will go up tenfold. That is because these are being done in an automated way.

Q75 **Shaun Davies:** Do you feel that that capability has to be available at a local level for all 40-plus forces or is that a national capability that local police forces can tap into, of course being informed at a local level by local officers? I was struck by your comment, Chief Constable Harrington, around the disadvantage of having a national public order capability. Do you apply that to this capability or could this capability be a national capability that is fed down, so to speak?

Chief Constable Harrington: You have to look at the different levels. There will be today and this weekend hundreds of events across the country where social media will play an event, football matches, protests and probably some night-time economy disorder that may have that. There has to be a local need to assess locally and deal with those things locally. They are happening every weekend, so we need to be able to do



that. You cannot rely on the centre to do that. Equally, where something of this magnitude happens and it scales up, you have the ability to take a global look—and it is a global look—to turn around and say, “What are the things that are only available perhaps to some of our security partners or other agencies who can take a broader, more intrusive look if it becomes a national security issue?”

Chief Constable Kennedy: I would agree with that need for it to have a national capability. I agree with Chief Constable Harrington that we need a local capability. I have real confidence in my Force Intelligence Bureau, but I spoke earlier around the number of events that were being posted. Twenty-three likes and 100 people said they were attending: that would normally be a very community-based response by a local PCSO to engage with those people turning up and we probably would not have expected all 100 to turn up with 23 likes. What we saw on 30 July was something very different. As I say, there were 70 hidden within the vigil and then once they arrived at the mosque they swelled to over 200 people very quickly. It was organised. It was not going through normal channels, and that is where we need to have that national capability.

Q76 **Mr Connor Rand:** Chief Constable Harrington, we saw in response to the summer disorder—I think it is fair to say, quite correctly—a desire from the Government, in the words of the Home Secretary, for a strong and determined response, and indeed for a swift response. We had the meeting on 1 August in Downing Street with police chiefs in response to this order. I wonder if you could comment on how effective you felt that the joint working between the police and the Home Office was during that period and whether police forces were overall, in your experience, supportive of actions across government to bring swift justice to the perpetrators.

Chief Constable Harrington: The support from Government and from the Crown Prosecution Service and from partners was very strong. The interest from the Home Office and from Ministers was intrusive, but rightly so. It was questioning, but it was supportive. We saw two days of disorder on the Tuesday and Wednesday that week, and then the summit took place on the Thursday and there was no disorder on the Thursday. The commitment we got from the Prime Minister, from the Home Secretary and from the Justice Minister, and then subsequently from the Crown Prosecution Service and of course the courts and the court service to bring swift justice, was there throughout. The local support from communities and community stakeholders was there across the country.

What did that allow us to do? As well as the public order officers deployed, the engagement with local communities where people committed offences—and I think there were over 800 arrests by the end of that first weekend—we have made over 1,800 arrests subsequently and many of those have been brought to justice already. I think that showed that the system worked very quickly, very fairly. We had people



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pleading guilty, so the evidence must have been there. They would have been legally advised to plead accordingly.

We saw swift justice because the system came together. There is no doubt in my mind, and certainly when I talk to colleagues, that it was that swift action, response, engagement and justice supported by the Government that brought this to a swift close. We mobilised 44,000 officer shifts. We mobilised more than the British Army—and I know that from talking to colleagues there—more quickly to deal with this, but we also mobilised communities and of course the justice system behind us. That was part of the success that saw it draw very quickly to a close and, I would say, more successfully than 2011 because some of those things came together very well.

Mr Connor Rand: It is good to hear about that strong sense of co-ordination and working together. I suppose seeing people involved brought swiftly to justice was also something that, to an earlier point, hopefully will help rebuild trust in policing.

Chair: I will bring Emily in.

Emily Spurrell: It was just to make a comment, I suppose. It is not on the operational response; obviously you have had that. As PCCs we are responsible for the funding and the budget around all this, so I cannot miss the opportunity to say that that co-ordination was impressive. The response was impressive, but it obviously cost a lot of money. There were assurances from the Home Office around helping to cover the costs of that. We are still waiting for the detail of exactly how much we will get back from that. It is just to highlight that that work was done and it was done quickly for exactly the reasons that have been outlined, but it did come at a cost that we are still working through as police forces and PCCs.

Q77 Mr Connor Rand: Thank you, that is useful to know. To go back to some of the points you made, Chief Constable Harrington, you talked about intrusion; I think that was the word you used. I just wanted to pick up on that. As the Home Secretary herself has said and as we all agree, operational independence is a fundamental principle of British policing, and quite rightly so. However, you feel that that intrusion and the signalling and direction from the Government was appropriate in terms of its level, timing and how it played out in reality?

Chief Constable Harrington: Absolutely. I am not just saying that because of the present company. It was important questioning—questioning of Gavin Stephens as the National Police Chiefs' Council chair, myself as the National Co-ordinating Gold, but also respectful of that operational independence. In the same way I was not in operational charge of 43 police force responses—I had a co-ordinating role—I was challenging the local gold commanders to say, "How much, how many, how far, what do you need; what challenges do you have?" without taking the operational command from them.



In the same way the Home Secretary and the Home Office were asking the same questions of me in order to make sure, first, that they could trust the response—that is the responsibility of any Government and I am happy to answer those questions—and secondly to provide the support for those responses and to make sure we were getting the support from other Government Departments and stakeholders, and we did.

To Emily's point around the money, the letter of comfort was useful. I speak for a force that has had some budget challenges recently, and did not have disorder, faced with significant costs to mobilise officers on rest days and overtime. The total bill was £28.5 million. That is £28.5 million that would not be spent on policing locally. Chief constables, commissioners, police and crime commissioners and mayors will be asking, "Where is that money coming from?" from my local community. The letter of comfort was important to allow us to say that the Government, for want of a better description, had our back while we were trying to restore order and keep order where disorder had not taken place.

Q78 Mr Connor Rand: Thank you. It is good to hear you feel that there was an appropriate balance in terms of questioning and direction, while at the same time maintaining operational independence.

Turning to you, Emily, I wondered whether you could perhaps comment on the role that police and crime commissioners played at that time, at that juncture and since, and whether there is anything that the Government could learn from how police and crime commissioners work in partnership with forces to inform that joint working between police and Government and maintaining that balance in the future.

Emily Spurrell: Yes. As PCCs, a fundamental part of our role is that scrutiny and that oversight, sometimes referred to as being a critical friend. We want to support and endorse, not interfere with operational independence. It is right that chiefs can direct their resources to where they think they need to go, but the importance of the PCC role is to provide that transparency and make sure that the public can be reassured that those resources are being done in a responsible way. We have worked very closely with the Home Office. We work closely with HMIC, which did an inspection to look at how different forces had responded. We pulled out lots of the themes that have come out of that, and that will be fed into the various scrutiny programs that PCCs and deputy mayors will have with their chief constables.

In terms of the immediacy, there were some robust conversations between PCCs and deputy mayors with their chiefs where the disorder was happening, trying to understand what was being done to get control of the situation. Since then, there is now a very proactive conversation for all PCCs and deputy mayors to say to chiefs, "Are you prepared now? Have you learnt the lessons? What do you know now that you did not know before? How do we make sure that, touch wood, nothing like this does happen again, but if it does, how are you going to prepare for it in



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the future?" It is about making sure that transparency and that accountability is there. As I say, we work closely with people like HMIC to pull some of that learning into that.

Mr Connor Rand: Thank you. That is very useful.

Q79 **Chair:** On the political response, what is your response to the accusations of two-tier policing?

Chief Constable Harrington: If I can start off, policing and police officers every day put themselves in between two people who have different views and opinions, whether it is on a Saturday night outside a pub where someone has drunk too much, or whether it is at a football match this weekend, or indeed where you see some of the protests we have seen. The first thing to point out is a lot of this has been discussed as protests. I think all colleagues here, and certainly chiefs across the country, would say that what we saw in many of these places was simply not protests. You have heard what Serena said: seven minutes until the first violence took place. They are not protests.

Where people are coming together to express different views, we operate within the legal framework that is given, the Public Order Act. There are lots of people who like parts of it and do not like parts of it, but in policing we are accountable to the law first and foremost and police within that framework. Of course we have to balance those views, and whether that is about a sign or a visible representation, to quote some of the law, then we have to make that balanced judgment to say what it is. It is difficult. People will have very emotive or very fixed emotions about what those mean.

It is complex and sometimes very difficult, and judgments are being made on a very small piece of information where someone, perhaps on a television screen sees the whole picture, or indeed through a very small screen sees only part of the picture, and then judges the outcome or the decisions an officer or a commander has to make. That is the first point. That view can appear to say why the officer has made that decision. They do that within the legal framework: what does the law say? Not, "What do people think?", or, "What do they want it to say?", but, "What does the law say?"

Then of course what we saw here, and when we see violence, when somebody throws a punch, throws a bottle, tries to smash up a mosque or a community centre or a citizen, that is not protest, that is violence. It is very simple when that happens. It is easy for officers. You saw some amazing bravery from commanders and from our colleagues, who I am proud to say went forward. That is easy for them to say that is not protest; that is not two-tier policing. However, where there is nuance, where there is difference of opinion, where there is emotion, that is going to be difficult. The officers have to deal with the information that is available to them, the evidence that is there and, importantly, they have to deal with the law as it stands.



Assistant Commissioner Twist: We hear a lot about two-tier policing, and I worry that it has become a bit of a catchphrase for people who want to criticise without meaningfully engaging with the substance of the debate. As Chief Constable Harrington said, we police without fear or favour to the law as it is, not as others might wish it to be. One of the common characteristics of policing protest is you have protest and counter-protest, and almost inevitably one group will think you have gone too far and the other group will think you have not done enough. That has certainly been consistent in some of the stuff that I have been dealing with in London over the past three years.

What is important to note is we have to assess each incident, protest or event based on the threat, harm and risk and provide a proportionate policing response. The response will differ based on the threat and harm and the law and what policy requires. There are a million tiers of policing, as there should be, because we need to deal with each thing on its merits. I do worry it has become a bit of a catchphrase. I have had it shouted at me at different points in the most bizarre circumstances. I don't agree that it is a thing.

I suppose what I would draw attention to is something that Sir Tom Winsor said to a version of this Committee last year, where he described in a "Policing of Protests" report in February 2024 that public order policing he considered to be the brain surgery of policing because it is so complicated. There are so many different views, it is so hard to get it right, and it is almost impossible to please everybody.

Chair: Connor Rand, and then we have a couple more questions after that if you are okay for just a few minutes longer.

Q80 **Mr Connor Rand:** Thank you for that eloquent explanation of some of the complexities, Assistant Commissioner. Do you think the police make that explanation as much as perhaps it could be made and state that as much as it could be stated, including to local communities?

Assistant Commissioner Twist: We try, particularly in circumstances where we have communities—for example, the Jewish community in London—who have been particularly fearful as a result of a number of protest activities. We try. We do it in person. We do it in our online media presence and in our actions on the ground and how we engage. However, as we have already heard in this Committee, at times you are operating against a barrage of social media and automation within that that is trying its very best to drown it out.

Of course the clicks that are generated from a wild allegation of two-tier policing based on a snapshot of a very tiny subset of one incident, as Chief Constable Harrington has described, is much more newsworthy than maybe the measured, considered view of someone who has all the facts. We do try, and I do not think we will ever fully achieve it, but we will continue trying because it is important to try to get the facts out there.



Q81 Margaret Mullane: Chief Constable Harrington, would you agree with the Government's view that the police, in response to the summer disorder, highlighted weaknesses in national policing structures?

Chief Constable Harrington: First of all, as a result of colleagues and what they did, they went forward very bravely and restored order very quickly. We saw, whether it was in Southport or Cleveland, arrests made, people brought to justice and communities protected. I am very proud of that response and I think it was an effective response.

Hindsight is an amazing thing. The retrospective scope is a very precise tool, as a medical colleague told me. It is easy to join the dots now and say we should have done more and more quickly. Of course, as the National Co-ordinating Gold, had I known what I know now, I would have mobilised more and more quickly. I think the response was strong. The response, as I said, across the community and across law enforcement and with Government was strong. We have made 1,800 arrests. We mobilised probably the biggest mobilisation of officers that we have seen across communities. We saw lots of events take place without disorder, and we have seen some criminals put in prison for a long time as a result of the damage they have caused to the communities in which they live. I think the response was good. However, like anything, as the report says, there are things we could learn. How do we deal with social media? We have discussed that in this Committee today. I think we have to modernise that and ensure we are as fit for purpose as we should be in the 21st century.

We have reviewed our tactics, and the evidence I have from the debriefs is they were largely effective, but there was still stuff to do. There is an important element where we need to make sure we maintain our training and learn from what happens because we spend a lot of time policing what I call protest policing peacekeeping—that brain surgery, as Matt describes—and then all of a sudden we are flung into what I call war fighting, where people are throwing bricks and bottles. Our officers who are inexperienced in that—how do we give them the knowledge and the experience to be able to switch as quickly as perhaps a violent crowd does, and our commanders as well? We have to make sure that we understand the impact on them, and I think the welfare is very important.

There is lots to come out of the of the inspectorate's report. We are working through that. We appreciate the praise it gave us as a service for the way we responded and of course the officers who did the very brave and hard work, which was to protect the communities. Of course we will learn from those things. We are already looking at the recommendations from that report and I know through my national operations committee we are starting to implement and look at those to make sure that we learn every lesson and perfect what I think was an effective response.

Q82 Margaret Mullane: My final question. We had the Home Secretary at



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one of our Committee meetings, and she was talking through with us about procurement and IT and what would be more beneficial to help police forces. What are your thoughts?

Chief Constable Harrington: That is a very big question, beyond public order. If I come back to dealing with this, there is something about how we formalise our national response to incidents of national security, which this was, wasn't it? We saw a large-scale disorder across many of our towns and cities across the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland also suffered, although Scotland did not see any disorder. How do we make sure we maintain the ability to scale up and get a national response to a national critical threat, while maintaining and keeping the local ownership and responsibility? Because this weekend in a town, in a city, there will be a football match, there will be some kind of incident.

We saw over the last two years a number of incidents that were successfully dealt with locally by good local officers, good local command and good local communities coming together. The one thing I would say is how we make sure we can get a national response and also make sure we have local accountability through commissioners and mayors, but also the local response, which very often—and usually—sees a successful and peaceful response for the communities concerned.

Q83 **Shaun Davies:** Chief Constable Harrington, just in regards to the report—I will not go into great detail around that—in terms of making sure that the learning from that report is being embedded across all police forces at your level and down, what role does the National Police Chiefs' Council have around that assurance? Then a similar question to Emily around police and crime commissioners, if I may.

Chief Constable Harrington: First of all, there is the National Police Chiefs' Council Operations Co-ordination Committee, which I chair. There is now a National Police Chiefs' Council public order lead. It was me, but the Chief Constable of Gwent has now taken that on. Between he and I, working with the NPCC and the National Police Co-ordination Centre, we are working through each of those recommendations, supported by the College of Policing, to go through those recommendations and make sure that we perfect the things we think were already good and to modernise and develop those things where we think we need to improve. That will be a structured programme of work.

Q84 **Shaun Davies:** That is with deadlines and timelines, is it?

Chief Constable Harrington: Yes, working through all those. Many of those things are already in place through our committees. For example, some of the questions around tactics and equipment, there is already an existing working group chaired by a chief constable who is looking at the development of tactics and equipment as of course the threat changes and new technology comes online.



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Emily Spurrell: Obviously, as we said, PCCs will be asking similar questions locally. They will be reflecting on the HMIC report and identifying the areas that were highlighted in the report. Through the APCC, we have developed a set of resources to try to make sure, with some of the issues that have been alluded to, that PCCs know the right questions to ask in terms of what the operational detail is. Not that they would direct, but they can ask the questions to make sure they have been thoroughly thought through and, as you say, those deadlines and actions are being followed up on.

Q85 **Shaun Davies:** Who owns it nationally to ensure that all police forces do that by a certain date? Because I have to say I was quite astounded by the fact that there is a 19 year-old media protocol that was found so wanting in a case like this and it still has not been updated. Who is owning this in terms of making sure that it happens and happens with pace and urgency?

Emily Spurrell: From my perspective—and I know we have spoken previously to this Committee around the police reform and the work that is going on—that for me is an example of why we need a bit more of a stronger centre, to make sure that where you need that consistency and to be able to respond more quickly to pick up some of these issues that we have that, which I think we do not quite have. For all the good work the NPCC do, I don't think we quite have that yet, so that is part of the work that I am hoping the police reform agenda will develop.

Chief Constable Harrington: In respect of the recommendations of the HMICFRS report, that is me, as the chair of the National Operations Committee.

Q86 **Shaun Davies:** Do you think fundamentally this talks to a point that there is no national body that holds you guys to account as individual police forces on stuff like this? There is clearly and rightly an operational independence of course from politicians, but on things like a social media protocol or a media protocol that is not necessarily operational, it is very important stuff to just get done. I am using it as an example because you mentioned it in your evidence, Chief Constable. Isn't there something missing here, where there is not that organisation to hold the feet of police forces up and down the country to the fire on this type of stuff that just needs to be done?

Chief Constable Harrington: I come back to the point I made. I agree there needs to be accountability around it, but when we look at social media, the threats of social media are beyond policing. If you look back into Covid, it was the misinformation about vaccines and all those issues. Yes, policing needs to make sure we have the right response in order to deal with social media: intelligence, gathering evidence and information from that to inform our response and also to bring prosecutions where people break the law in social media. There are examples where we do that. I would certainly welcome it, as a chief constable, and for a national



look at how social media monitoring takes place to ensure we identify the whole range of threats in which policing can deal with those that are applicable to crime.

Chief Constable Kennedy: Just to provide that reassurance in terms of a 19 year-old protocol, it is probably one of those cases, with hindsight, that has worked effectively until we got a case like Southport. As a result of that, the national lead, the NPCC lead for media, working with Gavin Stephens, working with Counter Terrorism Policing, working with the Government and the Crown Prosecution Service, we are all now reviewing what it is we could have done differently.

I am not sure the academic research, the evidence base, is out there on how we manage incidents like this within the social media space. Merseyside Police, Counter Terrorism Policing, National Police Chiefs' Council and the Crown Prosecution Service worked incredibly well with the traditional media. The gap is social media. If you read the academic research, the silver bullets are not out there yet and there is a gap in terms of our understanding on what we need to do.

Q87 **Shaun Davies:** Of course a protocol in itself is not the silver bullet, but I do not think it takes a brain surgeon to realise that a protocol that was probably designed and published before the invention of the iPhone was required to be updated by somebody well before 19 years after it has been published. It also links to some very practical points on the ground that are highlighted in the inspectorate's report, like lack of water and inconsistency across the country around water for officers on the frontline, stories of police officers having to convey themselves to hospital—hopefully that was unusual, but that was highlighted.

Again, in terms of the national standards and local implementation, it is something that is so important to the trust and confidence that the public have in the police force when things go wrong. Who holds that accountability?

Chief Constable Harrington: Again, I have read the debriefs now from the College of Policing for all of the officers deployed. There were officers injured, which we saw and there were examples, as you say, where officers did not get everything they needed. One of the things we do in training now, where we deploy officers on mutual aid to other forces, we deploy a welfare officer—a chief inspector, usually—who goes with them in order to make sure their pastoral needs are met, that they get fed and watered, and that those things happen. We do build that into training. Clearly when you are mobilising so quickly, when you are moving officers around the country with such speed, that did not happen on these occasions, but that is part of the training and that is part of the responsibility to do that.

We are looking at some of the issues of welfare for officers. I know kit and equipment was mentioned, about overalls, access to toilets and those



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things. It is an important part of the commander's training to make sure they can and do look after the welfare of their officers. But we will take all of that information and we are working through it to say how we update our tactics and make sure that is even more of an important part of how we ensure the welfare of the staff who do the hard work.

Assistant Commissioner Twist: Very briefly on Mr Davies's point, there is definitely a role for His Majesty's Inspectorate here. We are talking about national co-ordination of a response, which sits with the NPCC, and the chief constable, as chair of the Ops Committee, will have the recommendations. This is an HMICFRS report, and in the same way we would with any force inspection, we will provide updates as needed to the HMI. In terms of accountability, that is something that could be factored in as part of a future inspection regime, rather than creating something new. I am not saying that is the solution, but there already exist bodies to hold policing to account, whether that is the PCCs or whether that is HMI, and then the operational co-ordination is led by the NPCC.

Emily Spurrell: Just to add to that, for all that there is national co-ordination, fundamentally there is a local response. That is why you have local PCCs who then are looking at what is happening on the ground. Everything that happens nationally always comes back to the local communities. That is what PCCs are trying to do, to provide that challenge and that accountability, looking at what recommendations are coming out, looking at what issues are being raised and making sure that their force locally is responding to them, is adapting to them and is making the necessary improvements.

Shaun Davies: The thing about of an inspectorate, whether it is the HMIC in your case or CQC or Ofsted in other areas, is that it is retrospective. It is a moment in time; it is a window that is inspected. What I am probably getting to more is a systematic approach of accountability to ensure that officers on the frontline are not without water and conveying themselves to the hospital when they are injured and when you have a situation where a 90-minute meeting between senior police officers and senior prosecutors is required to issue a press release. That is the challenge I am trying to provide.

Chair: I want to thank all four of you for coming. We have indulged your time a little bit longer than we had expected, so thank you for that. Before I finish, I do want to pay tribute to all those officers who were on the frontline. We know that police officers day in and day out are putting themselves forward in ways that many people just cannot imagine. We do want to pay tribute to them and also remember that there were ultimately three little girls and an awful lot of people who were affected by this horrendous incident. If you can remove yourselves relatively quickly from there, we can then bring our second panel in, which is the Minister, but thank you again for your time.

Examination of witnesses



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Witnesses: Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP and Andrew Johnson.

Chair: Obviously you have heard some of the evidence that we have just been listening to, but we have some specific questions for you, as the Minister. I will start with Paul Kohler.

Q88 **Mr Paul Kohler:** Thank you for coming. Dame Diana, I want to pick up something, building on what Shaun was saying then. What I wanted to say to Chief Constable Harrington, but I did not have the time, was he was being too modest because he succeeded, despite the system failing him. He did not have enough power at the top to call for resources. That slowed down mobilisation. I am still not clear how we are going to address that because Shaun made the point, "Who is asking those questions?" What role do the Government have in that and is there something missing that we need to insert?

Dame Diana Johnson: Thank you very much for that question. I would like to come to that in a moment, but before I do, I did want to say I am very pleased to appear before you today. I am really delighted that you are doing this inquiry because I think parliamentary scrutiny of the events of last summer is very important, sitting alongside the work that the HMIC are doing, reviewing what happened.

Echoing Dame Karen and what you were just saying at the end of that first session, I wanted to pay tribute to those police officers who were on the frontline from 29 July, dealing with that horrific incident in Southport, and of course our thoughts and prayers are still with the victims and the families of that incident. However, recognising that those same police officers, just a few hours later, were then facing the violence and the disorder on the streets. I just wanted to say that because I know over 300 police officers were injured during the course of the summer disorder, from bones being broken, fractures to the face, concussion and trauma. I think we recognise what those police officers put up with.

It is worth reflecting that if you look particularly at the Rotherham Hotel incident, I think police officers there saved lives because that crowd of people were intent on getting into that hotel and causing harm to the asylum seekers there. I think they saved lives; they put themselves at risk on the frontline. When I spoke to police officers in Humberside and Cleveland to listen to what their experiences were, it was humbling. What you said is right, Dame Karen, about the bravery and the courage of those frontline police officers.

I agree with what you just said about the system. What struck me, as a new Minister, we were just four weeks in Government when this all happened. I remember on the 29th it was our first Home Office orals as the information was coming through from Southport. We were very new in post and then obviously from the 29th onwards this developed. What struck me during the course of those two weeks was that there was exceptional leadership and partnership working, and that was in spite



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of—not because of—the structures that existed. Chief Constable B. J. Harrington, Gavin Stephens, as the chair of the NPCC, and many other chief constables worked incredibly well together. But I would say on behalf of the Home Secretary and myself, we found the structures were not designed for that national response when facing disorder at the level that we had.

It was very clear that the localised way of policing in this country, the 43 police forces, the chief constables and the PCCs—who I think it is worth saying are responsible for the totality of policing in their area—when you are then trying to deal with things on a national level, you are absolutely right, having that ability to hold to account was a problem. I was surprised when the Home Secretary and myself were asking for information about, for example, the number of officers who would be available to be on the streets and there was a little uncertainty about that. They could not give us definite answers. I think that is because of the patchwork that happens around the country.

Some chief constables would say, “We could provide X amount,” but it was Y, it was not X. There was uncertainty. I think B. J. Harrington said this in the evidence, that there was a level of intrusion. There was a level of intrusion because the Home Secretary and myself wanted to be reassured that there were sufficient police officers on the streets to deal with the disorder. The structures that exist could not provide that certainty.

Because of the Home Office approach that has been taken to policing over the last 14 years, devolving everything down to the local level, for me it felt like it had been hollowed out around being able to hold the ring in terms of what policing was doing. We were asking lots of questions and I think the chief constables and the officials were doing their very best, but the structures were not there to support what we needed.

That is why the Home Secretary has made it very clear we need to have this reform agenda for policing to make sure that we have the capabilities that are required, that there is the ability to have a national response when required, recognising operational independence of chief constables, but also recognising that the Home Office and Ministers want to have a grip. We want to know that police forces are performing, that police forces have the workforces they need and that the capabilities that they require are there. That is my response to your point.

Q89 Mr Paul Kohler: What are you going to do?

Dame Diana Johnson: The Home Secretary set out that we are going to have a White Paper this year setting out a reform agenda. That is about looking at what we need for policing going forward. Our policing structures often are from quite a few decades ago. I just look, for example, at the national aviation capability for policing. You have to have 43 chief constables and 43 PCCs making decisions about a national aviation capability. We would all probably recognise that is not the most



efficient way of doing things and it is not necessarily the best way of achieving what we want, which is a good capability.

At the moment that sits with West Yorkshire and everyone has to agree for changes to be brought forward. What the Home Secretary is saying is that there are some capabilities we can bring into a national body for policing. An example would be aviation, perhaps forensics, perhaps IT, because we recognise that 43 police forces sorting out their own IT systems and buying the licences for each force is not the most efficient way. We all know and we all accept that money is tight and we have to make sure that every penny we spend is spent well and efficiently. I think this national policing body is important.

I am very keen as a Minister to have data and performance information. I will just tell you this: in December I asked my officials how many police officers had been injured in the riots and they said to me, "Well, we can't tell you that, Minister. We will have to write to the 43 police forces to ask them because we do not hold that information in the Home Office." The Home Secretary has set up a performance unit where we will get data and we will be able to assess what is happening in each police force. For PCCs like Emily, having that information that they are able to use when they hold their own chief constable to account I think will be very helpful. It will help me as a Minister, but it will help the PCC in terms of the accountability.

Q90 Mr Paul Kohler: When I asked them about restoring trust in the police, there was a certain degree of, "Well, it's beyond us," and almost, "It's a failure of institutions," but there are issues for the police particularly in trust as well. How are the Government helping the police to rebuild trust and confidence in them?

Dame Diana Johnson: You are absolutely right. Trust and confidence in policing is one of the key parts of our Safer Streets mission. One aspect of that—an important one—is the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. It is about putting those police officers, PCSOs and specials back into our neighbourhoods, our high streets and our communities, because we all know as Members of Parliament that constituents want to see a police presence; they want to have that reassurance. It is more than that, because we know that having neighbourhood policing will often provide the intelligence that then feeds into either antisocial behaviour or, in some cases, very serious cases, a terrorism threat that might be existing in communities. I think that neighbourhood policing presence is fundamental to partly dealing with the trust and confidence issue.

There are other things as well. I am sure you might want to ask questions about some of the dreadful cases we have seen in policing, the people who put themselves forward for policing, making sure that we have the best people and that they comply with the highest standards, and where they do not, they are no longer police officers, and having



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proper mechanisms for getting people out of policing. That is another important part of building trust and confidence.

- Q91 **Mr Paul Kohler:** Going back to the neighbourhood policing, how do you square the circle of having abstractions and needing abstractions, but maintaining neighbourhood policing?

Dame Diana Johnson: That is obviously a very big issue. As London MPs, I know you will be particularly concerned about that. Matt Twist would say to me, when I have asked him questions about this in the past, that because of London and the number of protests that are held in London, particularly over the last couple of years, there has been a huge need for officers to be present in central London at weekends for some of the protests.

I fully accept abstraction is a problem but the neighbourhood policing guarantee is supposed to be about saying that we recognise that it is important that neighbourhood officers are in neighbourhoods and only in exceptional circumstances would you be abstracting them out of that particular role. We are working through at the moment how best we can design the system so policing can accommodate that. You are absolutely right, I am not pretending it is going to be an easy thing to do, and I fully recognise abstractions are a particular issue in London.

- Q92 **Shaun Davies:** The cost of that to neighbourhoods is obvious, but also there is a financial cost. Why doesn't the Government charge organisations such as football clubs, for example? At the moment the police do get funding for inside the ground but not outside the ground. Why doesn't the Government look at ways in which to—of course, balancing the rights to protest, but where there are repeated protests from similar organisations that take a disproportionate amount of time—give police the powers to be able to either charge or otherwise manage that demand?

Dame Diana Johnson: The Home Secretary has been very clear that she is looking at that. We are currently having discussions and conversations with football in particular, but we have also made it very clear that if those conversations do not result in some clear action and some clear agreements around funding, then we will move to legislate on that issue. Absolutely, I take your point. We need to make sure that we are maximising income because, as we all know, money is very tight.

- Q93 **Shaun Davies:** On repeated protests, the same organisations time and time again, week after week, are putting a huge demand on police forces. Of course they have a right to protest and that has to be balanced, but there is also a proportionality to that, is there not?

Dame Diana Johnson: There is, but I think that is different. Protest is a very important part of our constitutional right to express ourselves, if we wish to, in peaceful protest. That is not something we have looked at



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because we recognise that people should be able to protest, but you are right that in the last few years, particularly in London, we have seen a lot of protests, on the basis of every couple of weeks with some of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign marches.

Q94 Margaret Mullane: Minister, I just asked the Assistant Commissioner about police numbers in the main and he said no, he thought everything was all right. When I speak to my local BCU commander, he welcomes all of what we are doing, but he pretty much was saying to me in a meeting about 10 days ago that he is getting new officers, which is fabulous, but as many are leaving. With the abstractions and the two-tier policing question, do you think that sometimes the police do not have honest conversations with the public?

Dame Diana Johnson: I am not sure I would say that the police do not have honest conversations with the public. Policing is complicated and complex.

Margaret Mullane: Explain themselves more then.

Dame Diana Johnson: I certainly think there is more that could be done in terms of communications and explanation of what is going on. Yes, I agree with you on that. There have been examples, and I go back to the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign protests. I think initially when those protests happened, particularly the Metropolitan Police were trying to communicate and they would recognise that some of their communications on social media were not in the end very helpful. I do think, yes, there is more they can do around explanations.

I would say on the number of officers though, obviously you will all know that in the past there have been problems with recruitment to the Met. I am being told now that that is no longer an issue in the way it was perhaps a few years ago. That is probably in some part down to the leadership of Sir Mark and the direction that the Met is now taking. They have just recently come out of the Engage process. I think that is positive. I am also told that the numbers of police officers leaving is about the average for policing; it is not above the average. I was told that yesterday by the deputy commissioner, so I hope that that is correct.

There are clearly issues about funding with the Metropolitan Police as well. That is something that we are trying to address and trying to support. Yes, there is probably something in your point about being clearer in communications.

Q95 Mr Connor Rand: Minister, I wanted to pick up on a couple of the points from your dialogue with Paul. We heard a lot from the previous panel about the importance of a tailored local response in many instances. Obviously we have talked about IT, information, aviation and a drive for more national collaboration and perhaps national standards and



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accountability as well. How will the Government ensure that that drive does not undermine the ability of police forces locally in tailoring and seeking a local response to local challenges?

Dame Diana Johnson: The way policing is set up in this country is very much about the operational independence of the chief constables of the forces. They decide on how they use their resources and the tactics that they employ. I do think there is a role, as we have already discussed, for Ministers and the Home Office to have more of a grip about making sure that policing is delivering for all of our constituents.

Most chief constables recognise the importance of what is within the Safer Streets mission, the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, the halving of violence against women and girls over the next decade and the halving of knife crime. These are things where I think there is a common view about what we want to deliver. Of course, for local police forces they decide how they deliver. One of the things I am a little concerned about though is we know there is best practice, we know there are some police forces that do things very well. What I do not quite understand is why all police forces are not then adopting and using those tactics.

There is something there about the College of Policing and the role it plays in spreading good practice and best practice. There is also something about the inspectorate, because it makes recommendations. At the last part of the previous panel there was a discussion about the role for the inspectorate. If you talk to the chief inspector, he will say he would like additional powers because he can make recommendations, but police forces don't have to accept them, they don't have to bring them into force. I know he is quite keen that as part of the reform agenda we look at whether the inspectorate should have some enforcement powers.

There are a range of things there. This is part of that broader reform of policing and the White Paper that will be produced later in the year, trying to address how you keep that local, as we have talked about, the operational side, but on the capabilities, holding forces to account and spending money wisely and well, how all of that wraps around that local policing.

Q96 **Mr Connor Rand:** In terms of Ministers getting a grip particularly, you saw in the questioning of Chief Constable Harrington that he said he thought there was an appropriate level of intrusion, with the shape and direction of what the response was in terms of the summer disorder. Has that informed the approach that you and the Home Secretary have taken going forward in terms of balancing considerations around operational independence with the oversight that you need to have confidence in?

Dame Diana Johnson: I think the experience of that period from 29 July through to the middle of August shone a very clear light on where there were gaps, where there were problems and where there were structures that did not work as effectively as we wanted them to. That



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was a very steep learning curve as a new Policing Minister, and it certainly helped me to reflect then on the direction we want to take in terms of the police reform agenda. In a way, it was a very challenging time, but it was a very instructive time as well for me.

Q97 Chair: I have a couple of questions on the back of that. The Crime and Policing Bill, the big Bill that has been published today, does not have any of the new powers for HMICFRS in it. Is that deliberate?

Dame Diane Johnson: This is the first piece of legislation that this Labour Government have brought forward and, as you rightly describe it, it is a very big Bill. The idea is that we have a White Paper that is coming to look at policing reform. As I have already mentioned, there are questions about how HMIC best fits into the new reform agenda landscape, alongside the College of Policing, alongside all these roles that we need to think about and consult on. The idea is that in future sessions of Parliament we will be coming forward with legislation, if that is what is required, but for now I think there is probably quite enough in the Crime and Policing Bill to be getting on with.

Q98 Chair: You talked about the IT system. Presumably this is something else for the White Paper, but will you be looking not just at a common IT system, but also common data collection and having police forces using the same tests for data collection?

Dame Diane Johnson: Yes, you make a very good point on that. I am sure that is probably from your own experience in a previous life. One of the other issues is that often police forces can be capturing data with a definition that they understand, but it is not perhaps a definition that the force next door understands. It can be quite hard to have data that is clean and so that we are all on the same page. Yes, part of the work that the Home Office is doing around the performance unit is to have that very clearly defined, what it is we are seeking data and intelligence on.

Q99 Chair: You guessed exactly where my question was coming from—very much a matter of experience. Just finally from me on neighbourhood policing, we do hear from police forces a concern that they will not have the right level of experience and expertise at the neighbourhood level because they will have the most experienced officers being able to work with the new officers. Bringing in a lot of new officers could mean that you end up with inexperienced officers doing the neighbourhood work. How are you going to make sure that we have police officers who can do neighbourhood policing, which we all support—in fact, I would like to think Staffordshire has been a real forerunner of this—but also that they are of the right level of experience?

Dame Diane Johnson: You are absolutely right on that. Training is important, and so the College of Policing have been piloting neighbourhood police training. I think in the past perhaps neighbourhood policing has not been seen as quite as glamorous as doing firearms or some of the other specialities, so we want to make sure that it is seen



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and recognised as a very important role in policing. It has the training and that is why the College of Policing is developing particular training to skill up and give the knowledge that neighbourhood police officers need in order to deal with some of the issues that we know are so important to our constituents.

You are also right, in that I think it is about 40% of policing now has under five years' experience. There is a real issue around training and leadership. I know Sir Mark from the Metropolitan Police will talk about leadership training being so important. If you look at the training you get in the military for leadership, you get weeks and weeks—if not months—of training. In policing, that is not the case, so again that goes back to our reform agenda and making sure that the workforce we have has the right skills, training and leadership, because at the moment that is of concern.

Q100 Joani Reid: Minister, you have mentioned in passing the new National Centre of Policing. Are you able to give us any more information about the functions or what exactly that will look like, particularly in relation to public order?

Dame Diane Johnson: Broad-brush at the moment, because this is going to be very much part of the White Paper and the proposals generally around policing. The Home Secretary has talked about aviation going in there as a national capability; forensics, looking at that; IT, the buying of vehicles, of fleet. Those kind of issues initially, but that is to be developed and looked at and consulted on. We think those are the main ones we could bring together first of all.

Q101 Joani Reid: You will be focusing on supportive functions in the initial?

Dame Diane Johnson: That is where we are starting from.

Q102 Joani Reid: I think you were here when we were discussing the role of social media, particularly in relation to Southport and the subsequent disorder. Have the Government done any assessment or any systematic analysis of the role that social media played in that disorder? Also, are there any thoughts around what can be done to deal with this going forward in a more systematic, preventative way, as well as dealing with it when crimes are committed?

Dame Diane Johnson: One thing I am sure you are aware of, HMIC is doing its second report. It is looking at the use of intelligence, which will include obviously social media and how that was used during the disorder. DSIT lead for the Government in Government Departments around relations with social media companies. I know in the disorder it was having those conversations about some of the content that was being posted. I am not sure that there has been any overarching review directly on the point that you are making.

What I was quite interested in is that after the disorder in 2011, in the report that was carried out into that, there was a very clear



recommendation about the police needing to get to grips with the role of social media and how that was developing. That was in 2011, and I think we will probably say now in 2025 that there is still much more work to do around social media and how police use it. I did hear what the chief constables were saying about the work that was going on with the intelligence agencies around social media, but I think it is one of those areas that we need to do much more on. I also recognise what the chief constables were saying about the need for that local intelligence and the local use of social media, but also bringing it up to that national level when necessary.

Q103 Joani Reid: Precisely that, they mentioned the national function, looking at it from a national level, so the Government is not very far forward in any thinking around a possible national function for monitoring of policing in relation to social media?

Dame Diane Johnson: We are certainly looking at that. Andy, did you want to say anything about this? Because I know that there are conversations with the NPCC and NPoCC about this.

Andrew Johnson: I would say three things in relation to this. First, you have heard both this afternoon and in the evidence session from the chiefs before Christmas about the importance of local capability in terms of monitoring social media, but at a more national level there are two other things that are important. First, clearly there needs to be some work looking at automation, because as the chiefs earlier talked about, there are thousands and thousands of posts and having police officers spending their time looking at that information is not a particularly effective use of their time when they need to be out on the streets. The other part is in relation to the National Police Co-ordination Centre and the role that it can play, both using the information that it gets from forces locally to turn into intelligence packages, to inform choices about national deployments, and then also what it can do for more national level events like the one we saw in the summer. There is clearly work that we need to do there with NPoCC—as its acronym is—and, as the Minister says, that work is ongoing at the moment. We will set out a little bit more in the White Paper later in the year.

Q104 Shaun Davies: I don't know if this is a question for the Minister or for yourself, Mr Johnson, but in terms of benchmarking us across other countries—this is a global issue, social media, organisation of crime, misinformation—have we done any benchmarking across the world on other areas that are further forward on this? AI is being used as an example of solving lots of problems, but AI does exist already, where Parliament itself is using AI in this space. Is that being used, deployed and brought into it as a national asset for local police forces to deploy?

Andrew Johnson: There is some AI already used, for instance, in the use of facial recognition. There are between 20,000 and 25,000 retrospective searches carried out in police forces every month. That is done by AI. There is already work in policing in England and Wales



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looking at that capability. I personally have not done any benchmarking of capabilities elsewhere, but we can take that back to the Department and we can provide you with more information if that will be helpful.

Q105 Chris Murray: Minister, I wanted to just ask a little bit about political engagement with policing in the UK. We heard from the previous panel that public order demand is now the highest the Met has ever faced. During the summer disorder, we had to see the police, the CPS and the Government working swiftly together. My ears picked up a bit when you said that, as a new Minister, you found the Home Office hollowed out in your first couple of months in the role. Could you tell us a bit about your reflections as you have started in this role and have seen the demands placed on the Government in achieving their priorities in the police forces and what you think the appropriate role for political oversight of policing should be?

Dame Diane Johnson: That is a very interesting question. Perhaps it is worth saying that one of the things that happened after 29 July was when the Prime Minister got chief constables into Downing Street, sat around the table and basically said to them, "Right, what do you need? Do you have the resources that you need? We want to make sure that if there are additional costs to whatever it is you need to do, you will be covered. We will provide that money. We will stand up the CPS to make sure that the CPS is there to help police with the charging. We will stand up the court". There was that approach of working with the police. It was not shouting from the side-lines and saying, "What is happening on the streets and why aren't you doing more?" It was about the Government, the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary saying to policing, "We are working with you on this. What can we do to support you?"

You will know as well that the Prime Minister talked at that meeting about the National Violent Disorder Programme and standing that up. That was very much how he set the tone, along with the Home Secretary, "We want to work with you. This has to be a partnership". For me, it was very clear then the direction we were going in. That is not to say that the Home Secretary was not very searching at times with senior police officers about what was happening, whether there were sufficient cops on the street and whether we could be reassured of that.

Moving on to the reform agenda, the tone is very much that we want to work with policing, respecting the roles that operational policing has, but making sure the resources are there and that we are supporting police officers. That is the approach that we are taking. Throughout the period of disorder, politically it was quite important that we were having conversations with PCCs, so I certainly had calls with them. I also had calls with Members of Parliament. I was very conscious there were a lot of new Members of Parliament in areas where there was disorder.

Four weeks in as a Minister, four weeks in as a new MP, you have your streets seeing the level of violence that happened in some cases—that could be very difficult. We wanted to make sure that MPs felt supported.



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We also had calls with the House of Lords as well, because we knew a number of peers were very concerned about what was happening. I think it was 10 August when the football season was about to start—I am not a great football fan, I have to say—and I was very concerned that we were suddenly going to be launched into the football season, where we had had this period of disorder, and the two coming together could have been very difficult.

I remember having a phone call with the national lead for football and hooliganism, who was, I have to say, remarkably calm. He had obviously done football policing for a very long time and he was very reassuring, but I was asking him quite searching questions. I think that it was appropriate to make sure that policing was ready in case things happened that particular weekend.

I do not know if that is answering your question, but it was about being supportive but challenging, and also working with the PCCs, because they obviously held their chief constables to account.

Q106 Chris Murray: Thank you, Minister. I have one follow-up on it. That analysis, that reflection of the period of the disorder, does that apply only to public order policing or do you think you will apply those lessons more broadly to the whole gamut of policing? We have talked about trust and public support. One of the issues—you talked about this in your answer there—was the Prime Minister and yourselves being very clear with the public, “We are going to be standing up here”, which of course I completely support. But the speed with which the prosecutions took place, the perceived harshness of some of these agencies, do you think that has had any negative consequences for public perception of trust, either for people feeling singled out or for people feeling other types of policing, other types of prosecutions do not get the same attention?

Dame Diane Johnson: On your first point, although my reflections were around public order and criminal behaviour—it was not protest, it was criminal behaviour—I think we could probably apply what happened in the summer more generally in terms of the structures around policing. What I was saying was the fact that we have some exemplary leaders in policing. It is because we have that exemplary leadership in policing rather than because of the structures, which do not work terribly well, that we were able to get through in the summer. That can be applied to other areas as well. I am thinking particularly around violence against women and girls, what we are saying about halving knife crime—we are looking at the structures around that and asking and questioning, policing are as well—and whether this will deliver what we want to achieve or whether we have to change the structures that we have.

As to your second point about the speed of the justice, what happened in the summer and the speed, with those people who were out on our streets throwing bricks and petrol bombs at police officers and attempting to get into asylum hotels and hurt people, it was absolutely right that



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there was swift justice and that people became very clear there were consequences. If you break the law, there are consequences.

One thing that just always stuck in my mind, in my own city of Hull looting went on during the criminal disorder in the city centre. There were young women who went into Lush in the centre of Hull, did not cover their faces, and they were coming out with armfuls of toiletries and Lush boxes, like this was completely acceptable behaviour, that you go into somewhere like that and you steal and nothing is going to happen to you. For that looting, but also the violent disorder that we saw, absolutely I think that the swift justice was the appropriate thing to do.

We cannot, as a Government, have our streets in that level of criminal disorder. You cannot have that. It was right, what happened. But you are also correct in that it shows very starkly there, for example, on rape cases, where women particularly are waiting years to get to court to have their cases heard, that cannot be right either. I feel very strongly that we have to do what we did in the summer but, by goodness, we have to sort out these delays for everyone else to get justice. That is absolutely—and I will be political here—a failure of previous Governments, the reduction that we have seen in the courts, in the cuts to CPS and so on. I think we have to get that right.

Q107 **Chris Murray:** Thank you for that. If I could come on to another question about the impact of disorder on other policing priorities, the Chair referred earlier to the issue around neighbourhood policing and inexperienced officers being moved around. You referred yourself to the football season coming straight after the summer disorder. Do you recognise that many police officers in the country feel very overstretched and not properly backed up to deal with the challenges that we are facing across multiple fronts? You mentioned retention in the Met, but more broadly it is retention of police officers with experience.

Dame Diane Johnson: Yes, wellbeing and looking after our police officers is something that I am very conscious of. I read the HMIC report and what the inspectorate say in there about looking after those officers from last summer and what they had to put up with. I heard earlier the questions about not having water, not having food, some of the equipment not being quite right in terms of the overalls that police officers were wearing at that level 2 public order and whether an overall is the most appropriate thing. When I was at Gravesend, I was talking to a woman police officer wearing the overalls and I said, "Are those unisex?" They were unisex and we all know that women's bodies are different to men's bodies. It seems to me there is a whole piece of work there to do about making sure that officers have the right equipment and they are well supported when they are out on the frontline.

Absolutely, wellbeing is an issue and we have the Police Covenant. I chaired the first one we had in this Government, the National Covenant Board before Christmas, and there is so much more to do on this. We know that police forces and chief constables are responsible, they are the



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ones who have to make sure their officers are properly looked after and there is proper occupational health, but there is much more we can do. Absolutely, that is something I am very conscious of.

Q108 Shaun Davies: One of the things that the Government absolutely can do is ensure that funding is made available, particularly when there are these types of unprecedented demands. We heard from the chief constables earlier that a letter of comfort was provided to police forces and they planned on that basis that funding would be reimbursed. Minister, could you just update the Committee of where they are in terms of that reimbursement, because we have heard from different police chief constables that the financial gap that they are carrying forward is unsustainable, putting to one side the other challenges around National Insurance and so forth.

Dame Diane Johnson: That work is ongoing about exactly what money needs to be reimbursed to police forces; but that work has not been completed yet, to be very up front about it. You will know the police settlement was announced at the end of January and there is additional money going into the police from April, up to £1.1 billion extra. There is that additional money around the neighbourhood policing to kick-start that because we recognise how important it is. But funding is a problem and we have inherited a situation where we are having to be very careful with money across Government. I think it is fair to say the Home Secretary bats very hard for policing to make sure we get the resources that are required, but it is tough.

Q109 Shaun Davies: The commitment was made to reimburse the costs to police forces—they planned on that basis. Is it something that you are pushing Treasury to fund from a special reserve on the basis that it was a special set of circumstances that none of us could have predicted or planned for financially?

Dame Diane Johnson: We are looking at that. Please rest assured that is being looked at, absolutely.

Q110 Chair: I have one final question on this and then a couple more issues, if that is okay. Is there anything, with hindsight, that you would have done differently?

Dame Diane Johnson: It has been recognised by HMIC—I think I heard B. J. Harrington say this as well—the national mobilisation was later than it should have been and I think that is acknowledged. With hindsight, and it is obviously now several months on, I think that is the main thing that stands out. There was clearly mutual aid going on between forces and Operation Yvette was set up. I think that is the one thing, the national mobilisation being too late. There is just generally a recognition that that was the case.

Q111 Chair: Very quickly on vetting. The Home Secretary made some comments this morning about the Home Office is moving at pace, I quote, “To bring forward new vetting regulations following the case”.



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What pace is that?

Dame Diane Johnson: Very, very quickly.

Chair: Not snail's then?

Dame Diane Johnson: Not snail's pace at all. Last October the Home Secretary talked about those new vetting regulations that needed to be brought forward. They had to be consulted on. The consultation closed about two weeks ago and I think the civil servants are under no illusion that both the Home Secretary and myself are absolutely determined that we need to get these regulations in. We cannot have officers who cannot hold their vetting serving as police officers. I hate that expression "moving at pace" but we are moving very, very quickly on this.

Q112 **Chair:** Thank you. I think the Met commissioner has referred to there being obstacles. Mr Johnson, can I perhaps turn to you? Is there any insight you can give us as to what those obstacles were or are?

Andrew Johnson: These are complicated regulations. At the time the focus was on regulations in relation to legally qualified chairs and replacing those with chief constables. I think that was the priority at the time, but work was still going on in the background looking at the issue about vetting. As the Minister said, with hindsight, maybe we could have done something differently, but these are complicated matters. There is a consultation process that needs to be worked through. As the Minister says, we are all aware of the need to do this quickly.

Dame Diane Johnson: Perhaps I can say this, because I do not think Mr Johnson can, but this issue has been kicking around for a while. It should have been dealt with a long time ago. This is something where previous Governments made commitments, particularly after the cases in the Met—the Sarah Everard case in particular—and said they were going to do things. They should have done them and they did not. I am able to say that, as a Minister. Previous Ministers should have dealt with this, but we are now going to deal with it quickly.

Q113 **Chair:** Thank you. The final question is around police pensions, the McCloud judgment. We have had a lot of representations to the Committee about this. What assurances can you offer to those retired police officers who are suffering financially at the moment and just need to see their remedial service statement?

Dame Diane Johnson: I am having déjà vu, because in the very last hearing as the Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee in the previous Parliament, we had this very issue in front of us. I know it is a real concern to police officers, they want to get this statement. We know that the assurance has been given that those statements will be provided by April. I think that was the agreement. I have asked specifically and I am told that that is going to happen. That is the assurance that I have been given but I know it is of concern to people.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: We will work on the basis of your assurance by April. That is very helpful, thank you very much. Thank you for your time and for coming before us today, your first time back. Thank you very much for that. This concludes the evidence that we are taking on this particular inquiry.