

Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: Increasing police productivity, HC 1239

Monday 24 November 2025

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Members present: Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Chair); Mr Clive Betts; Sarah Green; Lloyd Hatton; Rupert Lowe; Tristan Osborne, Blake Stephenson.

Home Affairs Committee Member also present: Lewis Atkinson.

Abdool Kara, Executive Director, NAO, Oliver Lodge, Director, NAO, and David Fairbrother, Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, were in attendance.

Questions 1 to 130

Witnesses

I: Dame Antonia Romeo DCB, Permanent Secretary, Home Office; Richard Clarke, Director General, Public Safety Group, Home Office; Bethan Page-Jones, Director of Strategy, Capability and Resources Directorate, Home Office; Chief Constable Sir Andy Marsh QPM, Chief Executive, College of Policing; James Bottomley, Head of the Centre for Police Productivity, College of Policing.



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Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Police productivity (HC 1380)

Examination of witnesses

Dame Antonia Romeo, Richard Clarke, Bethan Page-Jones, Sir Andy Marsh and James Bottomley.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee on Monday 24 November 2025. Policing in England and Wales is the overall responsibility of the Home Office, which allocates the majority of police funding and maintains a system of local accountability. Total police funding in 2025-26 stands at £19.5 billion, and the NAO's recent Report on this subject found that police forces are facing considerable financial pressures. The demands on policing have increased, with the Government having laid out ambitious plans to halve levels of knife crime and violence against women and girls. Criminal justice reforms are predicted to further increase the demands on the police.

The Home Office plans to deliver efficiency savings through a new police efficiency and collaboration programme—PECP—and has identified potential savings of £354 million. However, it has not yet decided how to achieve the planned savings.

Today, we will be looking to challenge the Home Office on the extent to which it understands the financial pressures facing policing; examine how the Department is supporting police forces to achieve these savings; and explore what more the Home Office can do to achieve lasting productivity savings.

We have a good cast of witnesses here in front of us, starting with the Permanent Secretary, who is a regular appearance before this Committee. Would you introduce yourself, Permanent Secretary, and your team?

Dame Antonia Romeo: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for having us, Chair. I am Antonia Romeo. I am Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, and I will ask my colleagues to introduce themselves.

Bethan Page-Jones: I am Bethan Page-Jones. I am a director in the Home Office public safety group, and I am the SRO for the police efficiencies and collaboration programme.

Richard Clarke: I am Richard Clarke. I am the director general for public safety at the Home Office.

Sir Andy Marsh: Good afternoon. My name is Andy Marsh. I am chief constable and chief executive officer of the College of Policing.



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James Bottomley: Good afternoon. My name is James Bottomley. I am the head of the Centre for Police Productivity in the College of Policing.

Q2 **Chair:** James, is this your first time before the Committee?

James Bottomley: Yes.

Q3 **Chair:** A special welcome to you. Bethan, it is yours too, so a special welcome to you, too. I hope that you find the hearing interesting.

We are going to start with some questions that I believe, Permanent Secretary, you were warned about. I am going to go straight to Andy Marsh. It is about the whole business of the police college's accounts being disclaimed. I gather that you have had an action plan put in place since then. This is a very serious matter. I gather that only one or two accounts per year that the C&AG audits are subject to disclaimers, so it is a very serious matter. Could you tell us what happened and what action you have put in place to resolve it?

Sir Andy Marsh: As the accounting officer for the College of Policing, I fully recognise that it is an unacceptable and disappointing situation that our college accounts were disclaimed in the financial year 2023-24. There has, of course, been a thorough review, including external review, and the root cause of the failure is a transition that we took in our system of accounting and managing people from a legacy SAP system to the system that the Home Office uses, which is called Metis.

We transferred that account in October 2023. The reason why we did it was to secure better value for money. We believed that, as a reasonably small organisation, we could save between four and six posts. However, in the transition, for a period of four or five months, we lost sight of the transference of the accounts from one system to another, meaning that we could not answer the reasonable questions of the National Audit Office when the audit took place, starting in October 2024.

It was a disappointing situation, and one which I rolled up my sleeves to remedy. I appointed a new director of finance with financial qualifications at executive level. I appointed a new head of finance. The chair of the board appointed a board member who also has accounting qualifications, creating a new performance and finance team. We strengthened the finance team. We put additional resources in there, and we received notable support from the Home Office in straightening out the issues, which were between the shared service centre and the new college finance system.

We are making extremely good progress into the current audit that is taking place. We are in a completely different place from last year. Our objective is to have a clean set of accounts in the financial year currently under audit. Because the start date of that audit cannot be verified, because the old audit was disclaimed, it will likely be qualified, but we are in a completely different situation, and I fully recognise what you said. This is a serious and unacceptable situation.

Q4 Chair: Dame Antonia, given that it was your system, could the Home Office have done more to assist? When did you know? When were you told about this, and could you have done more to assist? Maybe you or Richard want to answer this.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Perhaps I will say some things, and then Richard might want to join in. Transitions between systems always create issues. The question is whether you are resilient to the issues that are raised in that transition. As Andy has identified, this was not just a question of the transition between systems. It was also about the weaknesses in some of the governance—financial governance in particular—that that identified, and which Sir Andy has now remedied.

We are very supportive. I have sought assurance from Sir Andy, and the former Home Secretary sought assurance from the chair of the college, that this situation will not arise again. We have offered a lot of support during the remedy process, but we are also offering a lot of support now, as Sir Andy mentioned, in looking at last year's accounts, which are the ones that we are now working on.

In particular, the fact that the Metis issue is now resolved, and the strengthening of the financial capability and of the financial governance, give us a lot of assurance. There is a lot of ongoing close working that Richard is heavily involved in, so I will pass it to him, and he can talk a bit more about that.

Q5 Chair: Just before we do, the real question is whether, if you had known—and I do not know when you knew—you could have piled in support in last year, so that the accounts were not disclaimed. Then the other obvious question is whether you are sure that this is not happening in any of your other next steps agencies.

Dame Antonia Romeo: On the first question, we did pile in a lot of support as soon as we were aware. Indeed, the aforementioned finance director is somebody who has come from the Home Office. It was not just a digital issue. As I say, it was also a finance issue. The way that we were made aware was that the NAO flagged material weaknesses during its audit. At that point, we then leaned in heavily.

In terms of our other arm's length bodies and the extent to which this happens, one is, inevitably, reliant on the audit. We offer a lot of assistance and work closely with finance teams, but accounting officers are responsible for the maintenance of their own systems. We work with them but we are not doing that work for them.

Q6 Chair: Richard, do you have anything to add? I am quite anxious to move on, because we have a lot to cover in the main hearing today.

Richard Clarke: The majority of points have been covered, other than to say that I chair a formal quarterly oversight board of the College of Policing, and we have this, as you would imagine, as a regular item every

time. I also speak to Andy and his team about this every month to track progress.

Chair: Let us move on to the main hearing and Tristan Osborne.

Q7 Tristan Osborne: The Report indicates that we have a significant number of forces in the UK. If we take specifically figure 5 on page 24, a number of forces are borrowing significant amounts versus their net revenue expenditure. The question that I have relates to the financial pressures in the bottom 10 of those forces. Should we be worried that those 10, which are borrowing significant amounts, will be able to support frontline performance going forward?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The first thing to say is that there are a number of ways in which forces can fund those commitments. There is the funding that they get from the Home Office, or for other grants and other sources. There is borrowing, as you say. That can be internal borrowing, essentially, and then there is also drawing down on reserves. The question is whether we are working adequately with forces to understand their financial pressures, particularly local pressures.

The answer is that we work incredibly closely with forces. We are in constant communication. Those forces that need additional financial support come to us. In fact, over the last two years, we have paid out £123 million to forces when they needed additional support. We are talking now to forces that are seeking either support in-year this year, or additional support for next year. There are a number of different out-of-settlement grants that are the way that we give that money.

Q8 Tristan Osborne: If I can follow up on that, of the £123 million that you are giving in additional support, is there a parallel with those forces that are borrowing as a proportion of net revenue expenditure? For instance, are the bottom 10 of those forces, which borrowed in excess of 1.88%, the ones that are coming to you to ask for additional financial support?

Secondly, around sustainability, if they are coming to ask you for additional financial support, in local government, we would send in CIPFA or a third party to engage in a full resilience review of those organisations. Is that happening in this case?

Dame Antonia Romeo: I will let Richard talk about CIPFA and so on. The answer is yes, because we do engage with CIPFA and with other organisations. As it happens, just eyeballing the numbers at the bottom, two forces where we have given additional special grant money—or money via an out-of-settlement grant, more accurately—in the last two years are the Met in 2024-25, and Lincolnshire in 2025-26. As you would expect there to be, there is some correlation, but I do not know whether it is perfectly correlated up the list.

Richard Clarke: We do work very closely with CIPFA on exactly the kind of thing that you just described. It is fair to say that our relationship with policing is somewhat different from MHCLG's, for example, in relation to



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local authorities when it comes to CIPFA, but that is the sort of thing that we would like to see us doing much more of as part of the new police performance arrangements, which we will no doubt come on to, that we are putting in place at the moment and will say more about as part of the police reform White Paper.

The NAO called out the fact that we are gathering more data from forces than we have done previously on financial performance, and we want to do more of that as part of the police reform work that we have under way.

Q9 Tristan Osborne: When His Majesty's inspectorate goes in to police forces, it conducts financial reviews of those organisations. They are not in the public domain. Are they shared with you? Is the data that His Majesty's inspector engages with in their financial review shared with the Home Office?

Dame Antonia Romeo: They produce an annual value for money report.

Q10 Tristan Osborne: When they go in and do a financial review, is that shared with the Home Office?

Bethan Page-Jones: One element of the inspectorate's report is about the efficiency of the force. They publish their findings and there will be some publicly available data. In terms of the detailed stuff, that will depend on whether they can share it with us. We will get some of the efficiency element. Is that what you are talking about?

Q11 Tristan Osborne: I am talking about the financial resilience of the organisation. Is all the data shared with you? When the inspector goes in, do they share redacted and unredacted information with you on the financial position of the organisation?

Dame Antonia Romeo: When we are talking to the forces concerned, we are getting all the information, whether it is coming from the inspector or from our discussion with the forces. When the forces come to us and they are concerned about local issues, we will go through with them the relevant finances.

As a reminder, it is for the PCC to set a balanced budget, and they hold their chief constable to account for value for money, so we are not seeking to identify what they should be spending their money on, but, before we would consider additional levers that could come through additional funding, we would want to satisfy ourselves where the money was going and what additional funding might be needed.

Q12 Chair: Can I just follow up, Richard, on Tristan's question? That table that he referred to in figure 5 on page 24 is the raw data of running down reserves. I would like to ask you what is behind that. Going back to figure 3, is it that the formula has not been updated for years and, therefore, is behind the curve in things such as demographics, or is it to do with the



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individual police force's efficiency and that it is not using its money efficiently?

Richard Clarke: With respect, it might be neither of those circumstances. There are a range of reasons why police forces draw down on financial reserves. In some cases, it may be earmarked reserves that they are drawing down for specific capital projects. It may be for a range of local force-specific reasons. As the Permanent Secretary said, we are investing heavily at the moment in better understanding the specific context of individual forces, and there is more work that we want to do as part of our police reform work to do that. There are a range of force and context-specific reasons why forces might do that.

Q13 Chair: When do you expect to get to a position where you will have that granular data on each individual force to be able to make those sorts of decisions?

Richard Clarke: We are getting more granular data at the moment, so I would expect that to be an ongoing process. As the NAO called out, we have better data from forces now than we had a year ago, but I would expect that to really start to shift as we put in place the new police performance framework that we are hoping to be able to consult on over the coming months. I would expect that then to represent a significant uptick in the quality of data that we have over the year or so after that.

Q14 Rupert Lowe: My question is to the Permanent Secretary, and it is on the data point. The Home Office keeps saying that it wants to improve police productivity. It says that it wants to drive efficiency. It says that it wants to tackle resource pressures. How can you manage what you do not measure? How can you understand the impact of anything on productivity when you simply collect none of the data?

Through my parliamentary office, I have asked 610 questions of the Home Office since the election. Hundreds were data-related. Of those, roughly 90% of the time, there was no data, or it was not centrally collected. Frankly, that is unacceptable. We now know that forces collect some of this data, because we get it directly from the forces through FOIs.

As an example, let me ask you one direct question, which is data-related, and I would appreciate a direct answer. How many illegal migrants have absconded or gone missing from Home Office accommodation in the past five years? Do you know the answer to that?

Dame Antonia Romeo: This was something that was looked into by the ICIBI recently, and that report will be published in due course.

Rupert Lowe: I will take it that you do not know. Frankly, it is unbelievable, Permanent Secretary, because you do not hold this data. I do not know why not. Is it ideological? Is it incompetence? Why do we not hold it? The British people want this data. **Dame Antonia Romeo:** Chair, sorry, if I —



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Q15 Rupert Lowe: Hang on. Can I just finish? The British people want this data. They want to know the impact that these illegal men are having on their police forces' capabilities. How can you claim to be improving productivity when police forces are being loaded with immigration tasks that you do not measure, you do not report, and you cannot quantify? Will you commit to publishing more of this data?

Dame Antonia Romeo: I think there has been a misunderstanding about my answer to the question. I was not saying that I did not know the answer; I was saying that there has been a report, and the report will be published in due course.

Q16 Rupert Lowe: There is always a report, and it is always going to be published in due course. We keep hearing this from the civil service and, frankly, it is not good enough.

Dame Antonia Romeo: It is not my decision on when and whether the report is published.

Q17 Rupert Lowe: It is your decision.

Dame Antonia Romeo: It is not my decision.

Q18 Rupert Lowe: There are always reports that we are waiting for, and this data should be readily available. With AI, it should be much easier now to collect this data. That is, basically, my question, Chair. I do not see how we can manage police efficiency when we do not have the data. It is impossible. You cannot run a business without knowing the data. It is just impossible. Frankly, we get this in meeting after meeting that we have had. People do not know the data, so they make bad decisions.

Dame Antonia Romeo: I have something to say, and then Sir Andy wants to come in. I think I have a reasonably good record of showing up to this Committee and giving as much data as I am able to give.

On your particular question, I am saying that there was an ICIBI report, which is due to be published at some point. It is not my decision not to give that number now. I am telling you what I can tell you. I completely agree that, in order to understand anything, you have to understand the data. That is why we are setting up frameworks and a new team that exists in order to gather more data on police performance. Andy gathers a lot of data on that in the college. Presumably, we are going to go on to talking about productivity data, and that is a good example.

There is no question that, if you are running an organisation, you need to understand the data on which that organisation runs, and that is what we are already seeking to do.

Q19 Rupert Lowe: I run multiple organisations, and you are having trouble transitioning an accounting package for the school here, so that does not fill me with great confidence. It is not that difficult to transition an accounting package, frankly. I find it incredible that that cannot happen. I ask these simple questions and I never get an answer. I have asked 610



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questions, on 90% of which there are no data. Where is the data? Where is it?

Dame Antonia Romeo: Without knowing what those particular questions were, I can say that, last time I was in front of the Committee, we talked a little bit about data. I have recently written to the Home Affairs Select Committee on some things that I am doing in the Department to improve some of the ways that the Department runs. That includes a focus on data and on evidence, and how we capture and use it. This is all work in progress. A lot has been done. There is more to do.

In this particular area, we are actively seeking to gather much more granular data, as Richard says, on police forces. There are a lot of datasets that one might think we should have been gathering for some time. In practice, for reasons well understood, we have not been gathering a lot of this information, and so we are now strengthening our ability to do that with new teams gathering new information. We hope, therefore, to be able to understand better what is happening at force level. If I may, Chair, I will ask Sir Andy to say something.

Sir Andy Marsh: I was going to start by agreeing about how important data is. When I was chief constable of Hampshire, it was the fourth cheapest per head of population and top quartile performing force. Avon and Somerset, where I was chief constable, was regarded as good on the PEEL, which is the HMIC assessment criteria of efficiency.

Probably the single most important reason why it was good is that we managed to federate and connect all our data sources across the force to find out exactly what was hurting and what was working with our processes, our people and our teams. As part of the organisation, we could make decisions about how we spend our money.

If we come back to my role at the College of Policing, it is responsible for leadership, standards and performance in policing—those three things. We have set up the national Centre for Police Productivity with a direct grant from the Home Office. Recognising your point, we are going to be hampered in understanding what is hurting and what is working, unless we can master that data.

We have worked with system leaders from across the whole of policing, which might sound like a simple issue, but I suspect that we are going to come on to police reform in a moment. You have 43 Home Office police forces and a lot of other actors as well.

The work that we have started in the productivity centre is now overseen by a data reform board in the Home Office to decide just how we master this data that would give us such power across policing in England and Wales. The just right element of this is that, at the moment, forces submit data largely in manual returns. That takes people. It costs money. It is way in the rearview mirrors, because you are looking at data that is, as you will know, sometimes weeks or months old. We need to automate



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the collection of data and then make it accessible to all the decision making, so that we can make smarter decisions. This work is in hand and it is a priority.

Rupert Lowe: I worked with Hampshire police when I was chairman of Southampton, and they were excellent at their job. I have to say, though, that the Home Office, when I ask questions, is by far the worst at answering them. You are the worst offenders in terms of giving me no data, which is disappointing. I hope that we will start to see the flow of data, because it is absolutely essential that we understand the effects that everything is having on policing. You cannot really attack police productivity if you do not understand what is influencing and what is diverting police time.

Q20 Chair: Permanent Secretary, what worries me about this whole policing business is that there are an awful lot of bodies involved. When there are a lot of bodies involved, it tends to be people falling down the cracks.

What assurance can you give us that all the data in all the bodies is being collated somewhere, preferably by the Home Office? One of our witnesses says that there is the Home Office, the national College of Policing, the Police Digital Service, BlueLight Commercial, ACPO, and police and crime commissioners. All have data. How can we be sure that it is not all sitting in out-of-date systems and not being collated?

Dame Antonia Romeo: In terms of what I would want to offer on assurances, we are working very hard such that we can give you proper assurance on that in due course. This is a crowded landscape. For starters, there are 43 forces, but then, as you say, a lot of other bodies across the top of that. Everybody is probably collecting slightly different data for slightly different purposes. We need to have one clear dataset and to allow that data sharing. More widely, as you know, we need to allow it across the whole of the CJS, and that is something that I have been working on for a long time.

The police efficiency and collaboration programme is going to help us in what we are seeking to do now, because one of its strands is data, data reform, improving the data foundations, and making sure that we have the right data standards and the proper capabilities, so that we can improve performance, but also get the sort of insight that Mr Lowe was referring to.

We are not in a position right now to give you assurance that all that data is in great shape and all matching each other, but through this PECP programme, if I can now use the acronym, we are ensuring that that work will happen. It is quite difficult, partly because—and we might come on to some of this later when we talk about productivity—everybody has a different legacy system.

Q21 Chair: That was going to be my next question. How long will it take to update these legacy systems? You cannot talk to one another if you do



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not have proper interconnecting systems. They are more prone to cyberattacks. In every respect, legacy systems are a bad thing.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Richard and Bethan will want to come in, but the first thing to say about legacy systems is that, while they are a bad thing, almost every system becomes a legacy system. What you are trying to do all the time is to have agility in your system, so that you do not find yourself signed up to a legacy system. We have a number of major programmes going on in the Home Office that have been going on for years, because we have these legacy systems that we now have to roll off and roll on to something else.

The solution is not going to be trying to migrate everybody off their legacy systems on to some new system, because, for starters, as we have found in other areas in which I have worked, that system then pretty swiftly becomes legacy. The solution is going to be trying to use AI and digital mechanisms in a better way to work with the legacy systems in a way that allows us to do what we need to do, which is, essentially, to join up and apply those data standards.

The other thing to say is that it is almost always unaffordable to get off the legacy system. There is never enough money to be able to do that, especially not of a landscape of this size, so we have to be realistic about what we can do. I will let Bethan or Richard say a bit more.

Chair: Briefly, because we have an awful lot to cover, and I want to move on to something else in a minute.

Richard Clarke: To be honest, I do not have an enormous amount to add to what the Permanent Secretary said.

Chair: Right, brilliant. Thank you.

Q22 **Mr Betts:** Clearly, what you have said to us, Permanent Secretary, is that the current situation is not satisfactory. You do not have enough information to be able to compare what is happening in different forces and to see who is and is not doing well. Could you give us one or two examples of the information that you are going to start collecting that will improve that situation?

Dame Antonia Romeo: It is probably better for Sir Andy to start.

Sir Andy Marsh: I will say a couple of things. First, I am working with a member of the Permanent Secretary's team on the new performance framework for policing, which is something that I and, to my knowledge, most chief constables wholeheartedly welcome. The public have every right to expect performance and integrity. It is not a choice. That is one thing.

The bit that I want to specifically mention is that the national Centre for Police Productivity, part of the college, has done some work to establish a measurements framework. That is at an early stage of comparing



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productivity in different police forces. That is about how police forces spend their money.

We have also developed a diagnostic tool that is being tested in nine police forces. It looks at three processes—shoplifting, robbery and burglary—to compare the spend of each force, the tactics and approaches of each force, and what is working around reducing and solving the levels of those sorts of crime. That is exactly the sort of work that we need to continue to do to provide you with much better answers on who is and is not productive.

Q23 Mr Betts: Are they just the first iterations of this process? Will you go on to look at other issues?

Sir Andy Marsh: The National Audit Office recommended that the diagnostic tool was rolled out to all forces, and I am grateful for its recommendation.

Q24 Mr Betts: Will that cover other issues as well as those three?

Sir Andy Marsh: It is currently covering three crime types. It should and could, with the same technology, carry any question on any process, even if it was back office.

Q25 Mr Betts: Will that information be available to the public in due course?

Sir Andy Marsh: It should be. The Home Office performance framework will be. The antidote to any mistrust—and policing has a problem with trust that we need to address—is openness and transparency. I would want to make this data open.

Q26 Mr Betts: You would be able to have a very clear understanding of which police forces are shouting that they do not have the money, when they are not spending the money that they have well.

Sir Andy Marsh: I would say that that is correct.

Q27 Mr Betts: How long will it be before that is available?

Sir Andy Marsh: We need to fund it. It is in a prototype. We are testing it. The Home Office team probably ought to speak about when the performance framework is being rolled out. We are testing the diagnostic tool in nine forces.

Q28 Mr Betts: How long will it be before you know what is going on in police forces so that you can compare their productivity and their achievements with the resources that they have?

Richard Clarke: We are hoping to launch a formal consultation on a draft police performance framework shortly. I would expect that to likely be around the same sort of time as the police reform White Paper. We are confirming at the moment with the Home Secretary precisely when that will be published. It will take some time, once the performance framework is in place, for us to start gathering that data, but we are committed to putting more of that data into the public domain, as Andy



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called for. As I said to the Chair earlier on, I would expect there to be a significant uptick in the first year of that police performance framework operating in terms of the information that we hold and the information that we are able to put into the public domain.

Q29 **Mr Betts:** When is that first year?

Richard Clarke: It depends on precisely when the police reform White Paper is published, but I would expect that to start having an impact from 2026-27.

Q30 **Chair:** In the next financial year, we can expect to see some significant improvement in the information that you have to be able to assess the relative performance of different police forces.

Richard Clarke: I would say starting to come through to the Home Office.

Q31 **Mr Betts:** That is a slightly softer answer than we might have hoped for. You are either going to have the information that is useful, or you are simply going to have something that you are going to look at on the sidelines.

Dame Antonia Romeo: We are expecting to have the information, but what Richard is saying is that we do not know. It is a decision for Ministers as to what gets published. The plan is to publish the overall performance framework, but we do not yet know what particular datasets will be published and when.

Q32 **Mr Betts:** So, if we want to know answers to that question, we need to push Ministers about what they are going to do.

Dame Antonia Romeo: We are the team that supports the Ministers, so anything that you say to us we will dutifully take back.

Q33 **Mr Betts:** Can I just come on to an important issue, which is the neighbourhood policing guarantee? There is a commitment to 13,000 extra personnel in neighbourhood roles. There are some concerns about the funding of this. Some funding has been given for this financial year, with no commitments for the future. We cannot necessarily assume what is going to happen. Some concern has been expressed that, if the number of uniformed officers is given in any force, and there are pressures in that force, those uniformed officers will be switched to civilian roles, which is not the most cost-effective way of delivering them.

Richard Clarke: The Government put in £200 million this year to pay for neighbourhood policing resources across England and Wales. We are on track to appoint 3,000 additional personnel into those neighbourhood policing teams across forces. In January, we will publish the latest official statistics about the progress that we are making, but I can say to the Committee that we are confident that, working with the National Police Chiefs' Council lead on neighbourhood policing, we are on track to appoint those 3,000 individuals this year.



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The previous Home Secretary made a deliberate decision to manage the neighbourhood policing grant on an annual basis so that we could learn lessons each year from what has worked previously. Pre Christmas, we expect to be able to say, as part of the provisional police funding settlement, what the arrangement will be for supporting neighbourhood policing in the coming years.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Part of your question, if I may add, Mr Betts, was about the extent to which it is a good thing or not to have the target. I am clarifying.

Q34 Mr Betts: The question is whether, if you have that as a rigid target in an uncertain situation, and you suddenly find forces under pressure, they put those officers, who they have to have because that is the target, into jobs for which police officers are not the most cost-efficient way of doing them.

Dame Antonia Romeo: There are two things. There is the neighbourhood policing guarantee, which is the specific number that you referred to, and that is a manifesto commitment. The Government's position is that people want to see neighbourhood police on the streets and that it increases confidence in policing. There is a separate question about officer numbers overall, which is something that we may come on to, but that is the larger number than the neighbourhood policing number. As Richard says, we are on track to deliver the 3,000 neighbourhood policing personnel this year.

Richard Clarke: The money goes to forces only if officers are going into neighbourhood policing roles.

Q35 Mr Betts: Is the higher number of uniformed officers that you mentioned an absolute commitment now? Is it not going to be broken? Are those officers expected to be doing what everyone would think police officers should do—walking the streets and responding to crime, et cetera?

Richard Clarke: It is worth saying that it is a mixture of police officers and police community support officers—PCSOs—but, yes, the neighbourhood policing guarantee is absolutely based on the principle that those officers are out in neighbourhood teams, doing the sort of work that you just described.

Q36 Mr Betts: You keep switching between the neighbourhood policing guarantee and the overall increase.

Dame Antonia Romeo: On the other numbers, there is something called the officer maintenance grant. That is part of the funding that we give to police, and that money is available for those forces that achieve the numbers of officers that they have been set as a target.

Q37 Mr Betts: Is there a restriction that those officers should not be doing jobs that civilians normally do?



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Dame Antonia Romeo: It is quite a simple mechanism. A certain proportion of the money is ringfenced. This year, it was £378 million in total, of which £270 million was ringfenced for those that achieved their target allocation. That money is on, as I say, those that achieved the number of officers that they were given as a target.

Q38 **Mr Betts:** I am not sure that I totally understand this, Permanent Secretary. Again, to the question, are we saying that the commitment to more uniformed officers will be set alongside another commitment that those officers should not be used for tasks that civilian officers can more cost-effectively be used for?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The number is the number of officers. That is the number that has been set. If you recruit that number of officers, you can have access to the money that is in the officer maintenance grant.

Q39 **Mr Betts:** There is no commitment, then, that they should have to do certain jobs.

Dame Antonia Romeo: There is not in the officer numbers. There is for the neighbourhood policing number, which is a smaller number.

Q40 **Mr Betts:** At least we have established that. I have just two more points. One of the additions to this extra commitment to police officers was estimated potential efficiency savings of £354 million between 2025-26 and 2028-29. Is that going to be achieved?

Dame Antonia Romeo: Yes is the answer, but go on, Richard.

Richard Clarke: This is the programme that we have mentioned a couple of times—the police efficiency and collaboration programme— which we have established to do precisely that. It is a bold and ambitious programme. The NAO has said that it contains an important range of commitments that we are making on things such as joint purchasing on behalf of forces and better contractual management. We believe that it is possible to hit the £354 million over that period. That is our plan and we are making good progress towards it.

Q41 **Mr Betts:** Do you have the stats to be able to monitor that effectively?

Richard Clarke: Yes, we do. We are gathering data at the moment. Bethan chairs a programme board that brings together colleagues from across policing to make sure that we are doing the things that we need to do to deliver the programme, and that we are gathering the data necessary to show whether we are on track.

Dame Antonia Romeo: One of the problems, of course, with all efficiency programmes is that efficiency savings tend to come out at the back end. First of all, you have to really rigorously monitor that you are getting them early enough and not constantly pushing them back.

Secondly, you also often have to make an additional investment before those savings have come through, which is why we put £200 million into



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the neighbourhood policing guarantee for this year, because we knew that we would not be getting cashable savings out this year in time to use that money.

Q42 Mr Betts: A different but related issue, which you mentioned, is the oversight of what happens in police forces. PCCs are now going to be abolished. It is a political decision, so you probably cannot comment on it, but the timing seems to be a bit odd, in that PCCs are going to be abolished before there is clarity over the structure of police forces and their geography.

Reference has been made that, if it is a combined authority, the PCCs' roles will be absorbed into the elected mayor, but that has happened in many of the combined authorities anyway. When you come on to other areas, it said "elected council leaders". In situations such as the east midlands, you now have an elected mayor for the combined authority, but that is not one police force. It is at least two police forces, but they relate to counties, and the suggestion is that the counties are going to be abolished. Where does that leave you?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The first thing to say—again, Richard will want to come in on exactly how we are going to work this out—is that the reason for announcing sufficiently in advance of the end of the term was so that the exact mechanism in those areas where, for example, a mayor does not exist can be worked out. The Home Secretary said that she wants there to be policing and crime boards that will do a lot of that work.

Q43 Mr Betts: If the county that the police forces relate to does not exist— and you are saying that there is no elected mayor for the combined authority—and a county is left with no elected leader, what do you do?

Richard Clarke: It is worth saying that we will need to work all this through, including with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, as we develop the implementation plans between now and 2028, when the current terms for police and crime commissioners end. In those kinds of circumstances, we would expect the upper-tier authorities that relate to the police force in question to appoint the individual who would oversee that force.

Q44 Mr Betts: There will be no upper-tier authorities in some of those areas now.

Richard Clarke: It will depend on what happens in the future in terms of force structures, but that is our plan at the moment.

Q45 Mr Betts: It looks like everything is a bit back to front here, does it not? You are going to have PCCs abolished, but no obvious replacement available in some areas, so would it not have been better to do it together? To put it another way, seeing that you have not done it at the



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same time, is this going to be an issue in terms of force geography and who is responsible politically for forces at local level? Will it be part of the White Paper?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The decision was that, if PCCs are definitely going to be abolished, then, rather than keep it and try to do the work to map this all out and have the issue leak out, as it were, that decision, having been made, should be announced, and we can now do the work on exactly what we will replace in those areas that are particularly difficult, as you have identified. That work should be done alongside all the work that we are doing for the police reform White Paper, which is going to set out the future for policing.

Q46 **Mr Betts:** The White Paper will look at the geography of police forces—

Dame Antonia Romeo: Yes, among other things.

Mr Betts: —and then deal with the issue of how responsibilities that PCCs now have are transcribed to the new geography.

Dame Antonia Romeo: The White Paper will probably pre-date the detailed work of exactly what will be put in place in those areas where it is not immediately obvious what is going to replace the PCC. I do not think that the Government are going to want to wait to publish their White Paper until we have done all that work. They do not have to be announced together.

Q47 **Mr Betts:** So we are going to abolish PCCs, then we are going to have a White Paper, and then we are going to have something about the geography of police forces, all at different times.

Dame Antonia Romeo: The first one of those has already happened, so it is true to say that that is going to be done separately.

On the second, I am not prejudging whether they will be done at the same time. There is a lot of work to be done on police reform. There is a huge amount of work under way, not least for the PECP, but a raft of other things that we are doing. There will also be work to be done to work out exactly how we are going to implement the PCCs having been abolished. I am just saying that I do not know yet whether all those bits of work will come to land at the same time.

Chair: We will move on. I am very pleased to welcome, as a guest Member on this Committee today, Lewis Atkinson, a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Q48 **Lewis Atkinson:** Thank you. I am going to come back to the 13,000 neighbourhood policing numbers, if I may, particularly in the context of figure 6 in the NAO Report around the number of police officers in support functions. As I understand it—and I would just be grateful if you could confirm—the manifesto commitment of the Government is to increase the number of neighbourhood officers by 13,000.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Yes, officers and PCSOs.



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Q49 **Lewis Atkinson:** That is not necessarily 13,000 newly recruited officers.

Dame Antonia Romeo: That is correct.

Q50 **Lewis Atkinson:** For example, the NAO shows that, between 2019 and 2024, the number of officers in support functions increased by over 50%, or 3,000 officers. Can I just check my understanding? You might think that an efficient way of doing that would be by replacing some of those officers in support functions with, for example, an HR staffer, and redeploying the police officer who was in HR back into neighbourhood policing. In your view, would that be a way of increasing efficiency while also making progress towards the neighbourhood policing guarantee?

Richard Clarke: Yes, absolutely, and that is one of the options available to forces as part of the £200 million investment this year. The 3,000 officers and PCSOs being deployed into neighbourhood policing teams this year are a mix of officers and PCSOs newly recruited and heading to neighbourhood policing teams, and individuals currently performing other roles being moved into neighbourhood policing and being backfilled by new recruitment. In some cases, that new recruitment would be for police staff doing the kind of role that you just described, for example.

Q51 **Lewis Atkinson:** Do you have a view about how skewed the deployment of police officers in what could be staff roles is, and how that varies by force?

Richard Clarke: As the Permanent Secretary said, it is ultimately a decision for chief constables what balance they make between police staff and police officers. Successive Governments have had a commitment to increase the number of officers available to forces. For that reason, we operate a number of grants, such as the officer maintenance grant, but we have moved, for example, £75 million this year into un-ringfenced money for forces to be able to spend, whether that is on staff or on PCSOs and officers. One thing that we will focus on as part of the performance work that I described earlier on is making sure that we have better-quality data about exactly what individual officers are doing in forces.

Q52 **Chair:** Richard, let us just clarify that answer. That is not quite my understanding of how it works. My understanding of how it works is that each police force is required to maintain the same number of qualified police officers each year. That is giving a problem to a force such as mine, which is in some financial difficulties, because it would rather reduce an odd police officer and keep one or two civilian staff. What is happening is that highly qualified police officers are having to do jobs that lower-qualified civilian staff have to do. That makes no sense whatsoever, does it?

Richard Clarke: It is correct to say that the officer maintenance grant is linked specifically to the recruitment of police officers, but what I was saying in response to Mr Atkinson's question is that that is not the only way in which we supply resources to individual forces.



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We have increased the amount of money that goes to forces that can be spent on things other than solely police officers, but it is true to say that successive Governments have chosen to incentivise police forces to recruit officers through an application of grant arrangements, which are paid out only at the point at which warranted police officers are recruited.

Q53 Chair: Surely, if you are going to have a situation where chief officers are in charge of day-to-day policing of their force, you should give them discretion as to how many officers and how many civilians they employ to do the job the best they can according to the circumstances in their force area.

Richard Clarke: I absolutely understand the point that you are making. It has been the long-standing policy of successive Governments to incentivise chief constables to recruit police officers who have a wide range of powers and are widely deployable into a range of contexts. That is the arrangement that we have in place at the moment and the one that we are operating.

Q54 Chair: If you accept that it is a problem, are you going to do anything about it?

Dame Antonia Romeo: What Richard is saying is that this is a policy decision. This is what we are implementing at the moment. This year, particularly given Mr Betts' earlier question about neighbourhood policing, we will be considering all of this in the round as part of the police funding settlement that will come out provisionally this year for next year.

Chair: Thank you very much. That is a helpful answer.

Q55 Sarah Green: Dame Antonia, can I ask you what work you are doing with other Government Departments to better understand and prepare for changes that may be happening elsewhere and that will have an impact on our forces? For example—and this is just one example—it is expected that probation will scale back the supervision that it does on low-risk offenders. That may have an impact on forces up and down the country. What work is the Department doing with other Departments to better understand what is coming down the track and then help forces prepare for that?

Dame Antonia Romeo: Again, I will start, and then Richard will want to come in, since he is the person having the conversation most frequently with the Ministry of Justice. You are right that there is a lot of work ongoing on the impact of the sentencing reforms on police, as well as on other parts of the Government picture. The criminal justice system is one very joined-up system, so it is crucial to understand those impacts.

I would say that all those offenders will be under licence. Many of them will be tagged. Additional money was provided for this. Therefore, the expectation is not that probation is going to massively scale back. Probation was given significantly increased funding in order to support the sentencing reforms. It is crucial that we do not get into a situation



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where one bit of the system is just handing something over to the other bit of the system, especially when the other bit of the system has not been given additional funding.

Q56 Sarah Green: Do you have a way of tracking that and having visibility of how one change elsewhere in the system impacts on police forces?

Dame Antonia Romeo: I confess that this Committee has probably heard more than it wants to about the criminal justice system data dashboards. I can see Sir Geoffrey nodding tiredly, perhaps, because I love to talk about them, because I used to be the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice. They are all about tracking the join-up between, essentially, the justice bit of the system, the Home Office bit of the system—policing in particular—and the prosecution bit of the system in the CPS.

The idea is that, if you track the right metrics, you cannot do better for your own bit of the system by throwing something over the wall to the other bit of the system. It does not mean that that does not sometimes happen, but at least it allows you to see where the delays come in, because delays in the system are often the way that this thing is identified.

Q57 Sarah Green: Is that data publicly available?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The dashboards are available, and are available at local level as well. I very much recommend looking online for them. Richard might want to say something about the work that we are doing with MOJ in particular, if helpful.

Richard Clarke: I want to, first of all, very much endorse what the Permanent Secretary said about the sharing of data across the CGS, which has come on a very long way over recent years. We are putting more and more of that into the public domain. We have a very strong working relationship with the Ministry of Justice. We have an operational implementation group that the National Police Chiefs' Council is represented on, along with our colleagues in probation, His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, and the Prison and Probation Service, precisely in order to be able to map that throughput through the system, if you like, of the implications of things such as the sentencing review. That sort of principle could be applied to other things—changes in custodial lengths, for example, or the introduction of new legislation.

We are regularly talking to our Ministry of Justice colleagues in the other direction, if you like, about the implications that might come from the Crime and Policing Bill, for example, that is going through Parliament at the moment. We have very good visibility between the different organisations of the implications, so that we can work through them and understand any potential mitigations that need to be put in place.

Q58 Sarah Green: What about other Government Departments? The area that immediately comes to mind is the amount of time that police officers



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spend with individuals in mental health crisis. That is not a Ministry of Justice issue. That is a health issue. Do you have visibility of how that is affecting our forces, how that filters its way through the system and, more importantly, how that is funded?

Chair: Sir Andy Marsh, did you want to say something?

Sir Andy Marsh: It is an excellent question, because it is one of, undoubtedly, many examples of where we need to work better across sector. The national Centre for Police Productivity adopted what is called “right care, right person”, an initiative created in Humberside police force. It is not simply demand shunt, where police officers are dealing with people in mental health crisis, although that often does occur. Police officers are not trained to deal with that mental health crisis. They are not the best people. It is not the caring or right thing to do.

We have adopted that programme. It is in an advanced state—i.e. it is now fully complete in 36 police forces. So far, we have saved £19 million. That is not a cashable saving but an opportunity cost of reduced time and, I am told, better care for the individuals who are concerned. That is an example of where we track the data.

Coming back to Mr Lowe’s initial point, though, it was too difficult for policing to understand, across the 43 forces, how much its officers and staff were being distracted into inappropriate demand that had been created somewhere in the system. We must overcome and master that if we are to drive out many more of these efficiency savings.

Q59 Sarah Green: Is there a plan in place to try to do precisely that? I accept that the dashboards will help with the Ministry of Justice, but there will be other Departments that will make a policy decision that has a knock-on effect on our forces. That is a great example of where a change has had an effect, but that is one example.

Dame Antonia Romeo: The reality is that we have come a long way in the criminal justice system in terms of joining up. There is further to go with the DHSC, the Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions. There are lots of areas where bits of work are happening. There is quite good bilateral join-up in certain areas, but the thing that we have not quite cracked yet is how to join up the whole system and where those joins are.

In particular, with DHSC, it is not just mental health. Drugs are also a big issue, particularly for the Ministry of Justice, but also for policing. We know that, if you can get someone off an addiction as well as tackling their mental health issues at source, you do not have so many people coming into the system, and certainly not so many people re-offending, because it is a major driver. All of that work is ongoing, but I do not want to suggest that it is anything other than still in the foothills at the moment, although it has been in the foothills for quite some time.

Q60 Chair: Is there any modelling ahead of time? When a Government make a change of policy that affects the police force—let us take early release, for example—has there been any proper modelling done as to the extra resources that police forces are going to need to deploy in order to deal with people who come out of prison early, some of whom, sadly, are likely to commit more crime?

Dame Antonia Romeo: Impact assessments are the way that, across all Departments, you look at the extent to which your policy will have downstream consequences. They are heavily used as well by accounting officers, because the principle is normally that, if there is a downstream consequence that costs money, the polluter pays, essentially. That is quite mature.

In this particular case, there was some early work done. Policies often move more quickly than one can fully understand all the impacts. In particular, as identified, the first question is what the impact of the sentencing reforms is going to be on probation. What are they going to be doing? That was a lot of work that was happening even while I was in the Ministry of Justice, and then there is what that means for the police. There was some work done, but we have not yet got to the fully costed impacts.

Richard Clarke: Yes, that is correct, and that is exactly what we are working through at the moment.

Chair: We are almost halfway through. We will just have one more question and then take a break.

Q61 Blake Stephenson: I have a few questions on the police funding model. Before I get to that, can I ask a quick supplementary to the Deputy Chair's questions earlier about abolishing PCCs? From my recollection of that announcement, there is an expected £100 million saving from that. Would you be able to describe to the Committee how that has been calculated and what the likelihood is of £100 million being saved?

Richard Clarke: It is made up of two factors. The first is what we estimate to be the avoided costs in elections because of the arrangement being under a mayoral model or under existing local authority oversight. We believe that, from 2028, £20 million can be saved through greater efficiencies in the arrangements that are currently supporting police and crime commissioners and that would support the new arrangements.

Q62 Blake Stephenson: Thank you. I just thought that it would be helpful to get that on the record.

Moving on to the police funding model, just for background, I am the MP for Mid Bedfordshire. Bedfordshire has some challenges as a county. It is rural but also has Luton, which has a make-up that is much more like a London metropolitan borough. Funding is a problem, as I am sure you will be aware, and you will have seen the figures in the Report. Could I just ask you to start by explaining how the changing demands in counties



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including, but not only, Bedfordshire are increasing pressure on police resourcing?

Dame Antonia Romeo: How is changing demand increasing the pressure? The best thing to do is probably to look at figure 2, which demonstrates where the different funding comes from. If you look at the most rightward bar, the core grant is less than 50% of the total funding. There are number of sources. As we discussed earlier, if there were particular local pressures financially, that is something that we would discuss.

We have asked all forces to give us their medium-term financial plans. We scrutinise those, we analyse the data, and we use that to help us work out where additional money out of settlement, as it were, or, indeed, within special grants or as part of other government funding to PCCs, including the officer maintenance grant, might be needed.

Q63 Blake Stephenson: Using Bedfordshire as an example, it has the lowest Government funding per capita, at 57.6%. There is a reliance on these special grants. There are two important special grants that come to £7.3 million, which is 5% of the force's total budget. It has been rolled over for seven years. Every year, there is a level of uncertainty as to the funding, and the force comes with a begging bowl to the Home Office, because this 5% of the budget is absolutely critical. There is clearly a structural funding gap that is not being dealt with. Could you justify why that structural gap has not been dealt with over so many years? I know that Bedfordshire is not alone.

Dame Antonia Romeo: When you talk about the structural gap, are you talking about the funding formula?

Q64 Blake Stephenson: You have the core funding, but the £7.3 million is really important to Bedfordshire police to do its job. It has uncertainty, because it does not know, year in, year out, whether it is going to get that funding. It has to fight for that every year. It just so happens that it has been rolled over. Would it not be better for those special grants just to be rolled into core funding so that the force has certainty and can plan?

Dame Antonia Romeo: You are asking me to opine on a policy decision, but what I would say is that the special grant system—I completely understand the point that you are making—exists in order to allow for those sorts of special measures to be delivered. In a way, if it did not exist, the situation would not have the flex.

There is only so much money in the pot, so you want to hold back some money in order to give it to particular forces that face particular pressures, and that must be the right thing to do. Decisions for next year will be made in the police funding settlement for this year. We will then be looking at the whole funding picture as part of wider police reform.



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Blake Stephenson: I totally understand that there is not an infinite amount of cash out there. We always want more cash to do more things.

I am sure that you feel that day in, day out.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Yes, very much so.

Q65 **Blake Stephenson:** I have lived in my constituency for 11 or 12 years now. Every police and crime commissioner has come in and said that they are going to fight to update this funding formula. National politicians say that we need to change this funding formula. Everybody gets it, but, as soon as people get into power, it never happens. It is critical to change this funding formula so that the core funding to forces such as Bedfordshire that really need it is sorted out. Why has the funding formula not been updated for so many years to reflect the current needs and demands of our communities?

Dame Antonia Romeo: As I say, the best thing to say is that the funding formula is one part of how we fund the system. We would expect to look at that as part of wider police reform. The points that you are making have been made to the Department before.

Blake Stephenson: They have, endlessly, year after year, but nothing ever happens.

Dame Antonia Romeo: The top priority must be to have a police funding system that has the correct incentives, has clear accountability, and ensures value for money. The fact is that the other grants are crucial because they are the thing that allows, for example, Bedfordshire to access that additional funding. The system at the moment is working in a reasonable way. Your point is about whether it could be improved. All I can say is that all of this will be considered as part of police reform.

Q66 **Blake Stephenson:** My final question is on the rural impact. As I explained at the outset, my constituency is very rural, but the police force has to deal with very acute demands in places such as Luton. It is absolutely right that it focuses resource and attention in the likes of Luton. I know that there are MPs around this table who represent rural constituencies, and our rural communities feel really let down because they never see a police officer. I do not want to get into policy questions. I know the Government are trying to change that with their commitment to community policing, which is great. Would you just give us assurance that, as a civil service team in the Home Office, you really care about rurality, and that, when you think about funding, you care about our rural communities as well?

Dame Antonia Romeo: I can give you absolute assurance that we care about every citizen in the country, and that is why we do the jobs that we do, so there is no doubt about that. The question of where the money within a force goes is not a matter for the Home Office, civil service or otherwise, but I can reassure you on our concern for the citizen and the purpose of doing the work that we do.



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Richard Clarke: It might be worth adding, as a good example of the sorts of specific pots of money that we do on top of that funding formula, that, this year, we are investing over £360,000 into the national rural crime unit, which is a specialist team that looks particularly at the crimes associated with rurality.

Q67 Chair: Just to follow up on Blake's question, I also represent a very rural constituency. Permanent Secretary, I would take you to figure 3. All of the police forces on the right-hand side of that graph are facing particular problems because of population increases. In my case, like Blake's, Gloucester is a very rural force. It is one of the bottom on figure 5 in terms of taking from its reserves. You cannot go on taking from reserves. Eventually, the force will go bankrupt. What is going to happen?

What happened this year is that my force made a very strong argument for more money, but it made a strong argument particularly for more money to transform its IT systems so that it could improve its productivity as being one way of getting around the financial problems. What is going to happen in the future about forces such as mine getting some money to improve their IT systems?

Dame Antonia Romeo: First, as per the previous answer, the police funding settlement for next year is provisionally going to be set out later this year, and that will determine the amount of money that is going to each force. Overall, we expect to be reviewing all funding as part of police reform. I do not think that I can give anything more specific than that at this point, Chair.

Q68 Chair: The problem is that, if you concede to Blake's and my arguments and you change the formula, you create winners and losers, whether it is local government or policing. That is why no Government ever review the formula, is it not?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The point is that there is only so much money.

Chair: Yes, exactly.

Dame Antonia Romeo: As Mr Stephenson says, nobody wants more money more than I do. There is only so much money.

Q69 Chair: If you do not have any more money, you are bound to create winners and losers.

Dame Antonia Romeo: The question is, in a zero-sum game, how you move forward in a way that creates the right incentives, is value for money, and is equitable. That is very difficult to do. It does not mean that we will not be looking properly at all the funding, but that is part of the reason why one has these grants. They are a way of making up for those forces that, for example, are not doing as well out of the funding formula, but do need that additional money, such as Gloucestershire and Bedfordshire.



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Chair: We have got as far with that as we are going to today, and I do not expect much to change. We are going to take a short break now.

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—

Chair: Welcome back to the hearing. We are going to start with Lloyd Hatton, please.

Q70 Lloyd Hatton: Permanent Secretary, what reassurances can you offer to this Committee that the police efficiency and collaboration programme will work in a different way to and be far more effective than previous attempts to drive efficiency initiatives and efficiency savings across all the police forces in England and Wales?

Dame Antonia Romeo: I am very happy to say quite a lot on this, but Bethan runs it so she will want to add as well.

You are right that there have been a lot of attempts to drive efficiency in this sector. Most of those attempts have taken a top-down approach of signing up forces or the overall policing sector to efficiency savings. The PECP is an attempt to be much more business-led. Rather than applying targets and numbers, it is working with the police. It is run in a tripartite way between the Home Office, the NPCC and the APCC. It is a shared endeavour to ensure that we all achieve those efficiency savings.

The main way that the efficiency savings are going to come is through commercial efficiencies, which will be about 50% of the savings. That will be through things such as the national purchasing of services. We might come on to BlueLight Commercial and so on. The remainder will come from cost recovery and increased productivity, which I am sure you will want to talk about, where the college is playing a very important role, alongside, as I mentioned earlier, improved data.

My assurance comes from the governance that we have put in over this programme. Bethan is the SRO. There are a number of mechanisms for Bethan, Richard and me to satisfy ourselves that it is going to deliver. The thing that I am focused on at the moment—it comes back to the data question—is what we have to achieve in year one to ensure that we know we are going to be on track for the end of the programme. At the moment, we are still working that out, it is fair to say. A number of the metrics and deliverables are high risk. Until they are medium or low risk I will not feel I can give full assurance to this Committee.

Q71 Lloyd Hatton: There is plenty there to welcome. I might just throw an example at you all. If you are a serving police officer in one police force in England and you move to another one, the HR systems, the personnel and the software, so the portal you use to input information, are different in every single police force. There are 43 different systems for doing this.

Can you give us any reassurance that, in that case, some savings could be made, some massive simplification could be achieved or, maybe better



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still, we could have one system that works for all police forces? First, it will save a lot of money; secondly, it will make things far more efficient. It will enable a police officer to transfer between forces in a far smaller period of time.

Dame Antonia Romeo: I completely agree. By the way, this sort of problem, where there are different systems everywhere, does not just arise within the police. This is an area where there is a highly fragmented picture. Everybody has a different system. It is not just for HR. There is a different system for almost everything. From running big operations, I know that when you have different systems you get different workarounds. It is not even about gluing the systems together. Everyone has their own special spreadsheet where they are doing things on the side.

In a system such as that, you either have to try to standardise everywhere—standardisation is definitely your friend—or you have to accept that the systems are not all going to be the same, but on top of that you put in something that can join them up. We are trialling that in some areas.

The final thing to say is that you want to take as much of that standardised work as possible and put it into some central organisation. That is what we are seeking to do. If helpful, we can say more about that.

Q72 **Lloyd Hatton:** If we go back to the example that I gave, it could not be any less standardised. There are 43 different systems.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Yes, I agree.

Q73 **Lloyd Hatton:** Can you give us reassurance that this will change? How quickly can it be done? Like I said, it would bring many savings to our police forces and it would make the police far more effective, efficient and productive. It is also really frustrating, I imagine, if you work in these police forces and you have to grapple with this mess.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Bethan, do you want to say something?

Bethan Page-Jones: Shared services and seeing where we can have common standards, processes and systems is definitely part of the programme. We want to do some things quickly early on to release cash for savings, but we are also working currently with police chiefs and PCCs around what the priority areas might be to try to get a greater level of standardisation and a national approach.

As the Permanent Secretary said, it is really challenging to harmonise 43 IT systems and to change the processes and working practices of lots of people. In one area, we are piloting the standardisation of the processing of penalty notices to speed that up because we already have an existing national system. There are some areas where we could do that more quickly. Shared services and the kinds of issues that you talk about are



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definitely some of the things that are part of our programme and we are looking at. We just do not have a firm plan here for you today.

Q74 Lloyd Hatton: To return to my example one last time, how quickly do you envisage that we could change the situation when it comes to HR

portals for transferring officers between police forces? How long will it take us to get to a point where it is standardised, cheaper and simpler?

Bethan Page-Jones: I do not think I have a precise answer or a timeline for you at the moment. It is one of the things that we want to look at in the programme. As I said, it is clearly one of the things that we want to explore. I do not have a precise answer for you today.

Q75 Lloyd Hatton: I have one last area of questioning. Permanent Secretary, it returns to something that you touched on at the start of this. You said that this is not unique to the police and we might find a similar situation if we were to look at other public services.

I think you are right. I cast my mind back to some work completed by this Committee—I think in 2011—that looked at a similar state of affairs in the national health service. Its conclusions were damning and made the front pages of many national newspapers. The Committee learned at the time that, in the 61 NHS trusts that it was looking at, 652 different types of surgical gloves were being procured. One trust alone was procuring 177 different types of surgical gloves. The same investigation by the Committee found that there were 1,751 different types of cannula being purchased by 61 trusts.

If there were similar investigations into the way that policing purchases basic items such as those, might we find a similarly sorry state of affairs?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The first thing to say is that it is not always the wrong thing. By the way, I am not saying that this is the case, but it is not always the wrong thing to have different things happening in different places. There is always a tension between how much you want to do locally and how much you want to do centrally.

In the area that I know most about, which is the justice system and the prisons world, there would always be a tension between governors wanting to do something locally and the central system saying, "No, you have to procure off this place". The governors would often say, "Well, it is going to be cheaper if I do it myself over here". It is not always that straightforward.

It is clearly the case that there is no standardisation here. That is partly by design. You have 43 forces. Everybody was left to go off and set up their own systems. That is what happens. What we are now trying to do is standardise. It is a deliberate policy decision as part of PECP to standardise in a number of these areas, including on shared services, as Bethan says.



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Bethan Page-Jones: Just to give you some reassurance, we have talked quite a lot with the NHS. We have understood how it has built up its supply chain. There is some really clear learning. As you have said, it is not just about purchasing for a framework; it is standardising your specifications. We are already doing that in some categories in policing, such as laptops and vehicles. Clearly, we need to make sure that those commodities meet the needs of the frontline. As I said, there is some really good learning from the NHS and we are applying some of those principles.

Q76 Lloyd Hatton: I completely accept that there will always be that tension between the local and the national. Having flex in a system can sometimes be a good thing.

It is interesting that the damning report by the Public Accounts Committee in 2011 did drive improvements and simplification within the NHS over several years. Can you reassure this Committee that similar work will be completed by the police efficiency and collaboration programme?

From the conversations that I have had with different people working in police forces, and I am sure many other members of this Committee have had similar conversations, there could be a very similar sorry state of affairs in our police forces, where there are dozens and dozens of different places that you buy laptops, printing paper or—the list could go on and on—whatever other items are being used by police officers all the time every day.

Can you honestly reassure the Committee right now that, if the NAO or a similar body were to investigate, there would not be a similar sorry state of affairs in terms of police forces all being left to their own devices to duplicate work with often no great saving to the taxpayer?

Dame Antonia Romeo: I would rather say, “Have us back in a year and a half or two years. We will give you that assurance then”. The reality is that the reason we are doing the programme is that we do not know exactly who is doing what. We believe there is a lack of standardisation. That is why we have set up the programme. We want to get 50% of the savings already mentioned from commercial efficiencies, which includes national purchasing.

I would also like to reassure the Committee that it is one of my main goals in life not to wait for a damning report by the Committee in order to get on and fix things. That is why we are doing the programme already.

Q77 Lloyd Hatton: That is very good to hear. Again, this Committee will need significant reassurance that this programme that we are discussing will be different from those in the recent past and we can get to a point where there is not example after example after example of taxpayers’ money being unwisely spent because we have inefficiencies, duplications or, even within one single police force, a whole array of different procurement processes in place.



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Bethan Page-Jones: That is an absolute priority for the programme. We have picked some priority categories, such as technology, laptops and vehicles. We are also working really closely with the Crown Commercial Service on energy purchasing. It is about using common frameworks, standardising specifications and aggregating pipeline and demand. That is another way that you can drive down prices: by collectively procuring for a number of forces together.

As I say, it is a really key learning from the NHS and a priority of the programme to move to national purchasing, a reduction in specification, much clearer pipelines and demand aggregation.

Lloyd Hatton: We look forward to the session in 18 months' time.

Chair: Thank you, Lloyd. You have given us some good work to do in 18 months' time.

Dame Antonia Romeo: I should have said two years' time, perhaps.

Lloyd Hatton: You have said it now.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Yes, exactly. It is on the record.

Q78 Chair: We will see. It is all very well wanting standardisation, but, if your force cannot afford it, you have a problem. Can I take you to paragraph 2.15 on page 33? It says, "In 2024-25 the Home Office's national police capabilities unit allocated £105 million to programmes aimed at improving police productivity, including facial recognition, forensics, knife detection and AI", which I would have thought was the very thing that would improve police productivity. "This included £55.5 million of funding which was provided as part of a £234 million investment package announced by the previous Government".

It then goes on to say, "HM Treasury withdrew the funding for 2025-26 onwards following the 2024 general election and the Home Office allocated £50 million to fund these programmes in 2025-26, a reduction of 52%". How can any police force plan when it has that variability in funding, particularly when these are items that are not part of its normal procurement but are necessary to increase productivity?

Dame Antonia Romeo: You are probably not asking me to comment on the spending review process or the way that the money was allocated between Governments.

Q79 Chair: I am simply asking you how they can plan with these wide variations in funding.

Dame Antonia Romeo: There was a decision taken by the previous Government to give a certain amount of money. There was another spending round and the decision was taken to give a different amount of money, as is set out in 2.15.



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We have sought to mitigate that by finding £50 million to put towards that. To the earlier point, there is only so much money. There is £19.9 billion to be invested in this sector. That is a lot of money. We have to sweat it as much as possible. This is why efficiency and productivity matters.

This year, we have put £6 million towards facial recognition. There is a lot of really good work happening on facial recognition. The Met has just published its annual report on it with a number of really great stats. Since January 2024 it has made over 1,300 arrests due to live facial recognition. That is a really great example of where sweating the assets can deliver much better outcomes.

We are all about doing that. If your point is about how the funding changes from year to year, that is the spending review process for you.

Q80 Chair: I am not worried about the funding changing. I just want the police forces to invest in these items that are going to improve productivity. You have just given us an answer on why it is so beneficial.

This Committee likes to measure things. Can we have a definition of police productivity?

Dame Antonia Romeo: This is something that, as you will know—I think this is why the question is being asked—is being worked up. I am an economist. Productivity is outputs over inputs. The difficulty in this case is measuring what an output is. Inputs are always easy. It is staff time, resourcing or whatever.

The question—the ONS has been working on this for some time—is how you measure an output. We are working at the moment with police to describe those outputs so we can then measure not just productivity, which as an absolute number is not necessarily that helpful, but changes in productivity. That means you have to be totally clear on what those outputs are. That is not a decided thing at the moment. That is something that we are working on.

Q81 Chair: My problem is that you will come back here in 18 months' time or two years' time and say, "Police efficiency has improved by X hundred million". How can we measure that to know whether it is real or not?

Dame Antonia Romeo: This is why we do need to understand what the outputs are.

Q82 Chair: Yes, precisely. Why can we not get to a definition?

Dame Antonia Romeo: That is what we are working on at the moment.

Q83 Chair: That is all right. You are working on it at the moment.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Yes.

Q84 Chair: When can we expect to see results from that?



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Dame Antonia Romeo: The ONS is coming up with its version. At the moment, the way that it is calculated by the ONS is that productivity is set to one because inputs are assumed to be equivalent to outputs. Therefore, you never get any change in productivity. We are looking to measure what the outputs are. We have been developing a working definition. We are talking to police forces about it.

Another thing that I should say, before I let Bethan and Richard say something, is that not only do you have to measure the output; the output has to be something that is useful. You do not want to be measuring 500 things by way of output. You probably want to pick a basket of things, say 20 things, and say, "This is what forces should be working on. This is how we are going to measure the output".

You also have to flex. We were talking earlier about the difference between rural versus inner-city policing. How you work out what the output for the productivity measure is in different parts of the country is also quite difficult to do. It is not a job for overnight, but we are working on it.

Bethan Page-Jones: Yes, we are working with ONS on refining that topline measure. That is the thing that we anticipate will be published early next year. As the Permanent Secretary says, we are grappling with issues such as weighting the outcomes. Is it the same to arrest 10 people for one offence as for another? There is also how you mainstream equality measurement into that and whether you measure everything that the police achieve. Prevention is one of those really challenging areas.

To give you some reassurance—Andy may want to come in on the work that they are doing on benefits—that does not mean we are not tracking the savings that are being made in forces and the productive hours that are being freed up by the deployment of these technologies. By setting that baseline this year and tracking that through, we will be able to see how the take-up of redaction or the use of AI is working in forces and the time that it is saving. Andy and the college have been working really closely on how you measure productivity and ascribe benefits to it at that force level.

Sir Andy Marsh: Chair, we previously spoke about the diagnostic tool that is being tested in nine forces. We are also working on a measurements framework that is being tested in five forces. Those are going to inform what decision is made.

In terms of what we have got out of the door already, we have issued guidance to every single force on capturing benefits realisation. I have been a police officer for almost 40 years. On many occasions, the service has been through some great changes that have delivered some improvements. We have not been very good at measuring them and capturing them, as we mentioned right at the start. Benefits realisation is already out there.



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We have also issued authorised professional practice on data and digital change. We run a number of teach-ins and practice events with practitioners across all 43 forces on how they can bake some of this benefits capture into the work that they are doing.

All this needs to inform the big decision on the formal definition that needs to follow, but I just wanted to reassure this Committee that we are not waiting for that to come out.

Q85 Chair: I was hoping to get off this subject, but your answer has given rise to a load of questions. Is benefits realisation being measured in exactly the same way in each force, so that we can measure the difference between forces? Will we be able to measure benefits realisation between one year and another?

Sir Andy Marsh: If I may, I would like to bring in the head of the team, James. It is guidance.

James Bottomley: As Sir Andy has said, the intention of the guidance is to provide a consistent approach to managing benefits. When we work with forces on the engagement work that we are doing on specific projects, we use that benefits guidance. We are trying to create consistency in the way that things are measured.

It is not a mandatory set of guidance. We cannot say that all forces, at this point, are using the same approach. We continue to roll it out with the work that we are doing. We are working towards getting a system where people are measuring things in the same way.

Q86 Rupert Lowe: I have one question for the Permanent Secretary and one for Sir Andy. I had a look at your profile, Dame Antonia. I am not a great man at doing research, but it did not take me very long to find out that many in Whitehall and the media call you the “queen of woke”. Do you recognise that title?

Dame Antonia Romeo: I am not convinced that anybody in Whitehall has called me that.

Q87 Rupert Lowe: It is driven by your championing and proactive implementation of high-paying DEI roles within the civil service. I had a quick look.

Dame Antonia Romeo: I am sorry to interrupt you. I do not know what you are referring to. My championing of what?

Q88 Rupert Lowe: If you dispute that, this is what the media have said.

Dame Antonia Romeo: I do not know whether I have understood.

Q89 Rupert Lowe: If I go on to my question, I think you will understand. I had a quick look. In 2021-22, the police forces spent £15 million on DEI and there were 147 DEI officers. Whether they are highly paid or lowly paid I leave to everybody to judge. In 2023-24, there are 197. The DEI virus is growing within the police force. Are you championing the growth of these



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DEI roles? That is my first question, quite apart from the fact that it is costing a lot of money.

Secondly, I get a lot of policemen coming to see me in my constituency in Great Yarmouth—these are operational policemen—who are very frustrated by this DEI nonsense.

Chair: Let us have your question.

Rupert Lowe: Geoffrey, this is quite important. They come to see me because they think the police are being made less efficient by the cant that is coming from the top of the police force, which clearly is coming from somewhere.

This is my question. Does it make them operationally less efficient? I then have, in a moment, an observation on procurement. Those were my two questions.

Dame Antonia Romeo: To whom is your question?

Q90 **Rupert Lowe:** Are you driving the DEI agenda within the police force?

Dame Antonia Romeo: There might be a misunderstanding about the extent to which I determine who works on what in police forces.

Q91 **Rupert Lowe:** It comes from the top, Dame Antonia. The culture comes from the top.

Dame Antonia Romeo: No, the decisions about what resources work on what in police forces are a matter for the forces.

Q92 **Rupert Lowe:** Are you keen to see more DEI implemented throughout the police?

Dame Antonia Romeo: That is not a relevant question. I am sure the Chair is going to want to intervene at this point.

Q93 **Rupert Lowe:** It is a relevant question because it is costing money and it is arguably making the police less efficient, which is why I am asking that question.

Dame Antonia Romeo: My job is to allocate funding to the forces in support of the Home Secretary and therefore to ensure that the police are delivering. That is why we are here; that is why we are doing all this work. I do not recognise the thing that you said in the opening of your question about something that I was meant to have championed. I do not know where that has come from.

Q94 **Rupert Lowe:** You are not driving the DEI agenda. Is there an active DEI agenda being promoted within the police force?

Chair: This is getting towards policy, Rupert.

Rupert Lowe: Not really, because I think it does affect the operational efficiency.



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Chair: Your first question about how many DEI officers and how much was being spent—

Rupert Lowe: It has gone up, Geoffrey. It is increasing.

Chair: Give us the figure and let somebody answer.

Rupert Lowe: It is undermining the confidence of the actual operational police.

Sir Andy Marsh: I understand the point that Mr Lowe is making. To give the accurate figures for the College of Policing, we employ five people who could be described as being involved in diversity, equality and inclusion. That is reducing to three in March. That is to fulfil our lawful requirement around equality. That is the simple purpose of that.

We are talking about the College of Policing. We are a body that holds the evidence base of what works. We are responsible for improving standards in policing, driving performance and developing leadership. I am really happy to answer questions on any of them. Everything that we do must be about increasing the utility of policing to the public to cut crime and to keep people safe.

I am a straightforward police officer. That is what I am trying to do at the College of Policing. While I understand the concern that you have expressed to me, I do not recognise it within that body in policing.

Q95 **Rupert Lowe:** Okay, well, I am concerned about it. From my feedback from police officers on the ground in Great Yarmouth, that definitely is an issue.

On general procurement—we talked about this earlier—there is a logic in standardising the equipment across the police force. In running my businesses, I am never in favour of centralising all buying. That just leads to fraud. I like competing buyers. You could introduce a very interesting concept of standardising the equipment and then devolving various buyers to compete with each other and seeing whether they can procure the best price for the police force. You could introduce a degree of free market competition within the various ACPO parties. That is an observation more than a question.

Chair: Shall we just get an answer to that? Does anybody have an answer to that? Could we have standardised equipment and allow police forces to have greater flexibility as to where they buy it from?

Dame Antonia Romeo: Bethan already answered the question. She talked about having purchasing frameworks rather than one monopoly provider.

Chair: Do you want to add anything else?

Bethan Page-Jones: No. As I say, we continue to make sure that we have that good market intelligence around what pricing looks like.



Q96 **Rupert Lowe:** You are not looking at centralised purchasing.

Bethan Page-Jones: As I have said, in some of the categories that we are looking at, we are looking at and testing whether centralised purchasing works for those commodities. It is helpful to understand your observation. We need to make sure that we have a competitive strategy and that we keep a robust and flourishing market.

Sir Andy Marsh: Some equipment that we hold has a technical specification that is consistent, which makes it interoperable and acceptable for use in England and Wales. I agree with you that sometimes it is very helpful to have a number of people competing for that market rather than a sole monopoly provider.

Q97 **Rupert Lowe:** I agree, if it is handled properly.

Sir Andy Marsh: If it is handled properly, yes.

Rupert Lowe: It needs to be managed.

Sir Andy Marsh: Yes.

Q98 **Mr Betts:** BlueLight Commercial has not been the success that you hoped it would be, has it?

Dame Antonia Romeo: What makes you say that, Mr Betts?

Q99 **Mr Betts:** It was presented as something that was going to revolutionise and make much more efficient purchasing among police forces. With a benefit of £112 million in three years, it does not seem to have revolutionised very much, does it?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The team will want to comment, but we have done quite a lot. It was intended to change behaviours and culture to generate greater savings and efficiency. It has done that to some extent. It has not been used perhaps fully to the extent that we might wish or was intended. The question is how much further one could go.

From a forces perspective, you only want to use something when you feel assured that it is really good quality. One thing that BlueLight Commercial has been doing is developing something that is good enough. In the right model, what they are offering is so good that all forces want to buy into it because they see it as a way of generating more efficiency. We are not there yet. Bethan, do you want to comment?

Bethan Page-Jones: We have continued to work really closely with BlueLight. We have increased our level of oversight and scrutiny, and we support it where it needs the collective power of the Home Office. We are continuing to work with it to ensure that it is as important and influential as it can be. Again, we are doing some work with it on getting hold of better data so that it can understand what the information looks like and where people are not complying with some of the frameworks that it has put in place.

Q100 Mr Betts: After four years, why has it not got to the point where it is so good that everyone wants to utilise its services?

Dame Antonia Romeo: It is a good question. Because we now have some things that we think are much stronger within BlueLight Commercial, we are considering ways to encourage forces to use those frameworks. This is going to be part of the solution to the overall thing, and it is also part of police reform to consider exactly what BlueLight Commercial is providing versus other bits of the outfit.

Q101 Mr Betts: Is it encouragement or is it a bit more than persuasion? Is it persuasion with consequences if you do not?

Dame Antonia Romeo: It could be that. This is to be considered. The powers exist to do that. You have to be confident that what you are offering is something that is reasonable, if you go for stronger than persuasion. It has to be good.

We now have a suite of things that we think are good enough that we should be stronger than persuasion or we should be considering that. Again, the decision is for Ministers. Do you have anything to add?

Bethan Page-Jones: No. As the Permanent Secretary said, we continue to keep under review how we can support and encourage people to comply.

Q102 Mr Betts: How can you be sure that they are that good that forces ought to take them up or be strong-armed to take them up, if they do not want to voluntarily?

Richard Clarke: How can we be sure that the services that BlueLight Commercial is offering are good enough? We are involved in BlueLight Commercial's governance arrangements. We have individuals who work very closely with it. We are confident we can stand behind those aspects of BLC's offer that we would want to encourage forces to pick up. There is also a role for the college in emphasising the quality of those individual offerings.

Ultimately, the Home Secretary does have the power, in the right circumstances, should she wish to do so, to mandate forces using particular routes. That is the sort of thing that we will be considering with her as part of the police reform work that we are doing.

Q103 Mr Betts: Is it about transforming the culture so that police forces consider these matters when they are procuring?

Dame Antonia Romeo: That is part of it.

Mr Betts: Otherwise, they may simply do what they have always done and go to one firm or organisation for a particular piece of equipment because they always have.

Richard Clarke: Yes, that is definitely part of the answer, as the Permanent Secretary said. There is a "horses for courses" aspect to this.



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There was a question earlier on about the learning that the NHS has had on surgical gloves, for example. Police forces also buy surgical gloves. It would be crazy for them to do it in 43 different ways. Some of the work that we have been doing has been to put the police in touch with suppliers that serve the NHS so we can do this in a much more costeffective way for the taxpayer overall and not just specifically in relation to policing.

There will be specific bits of IT that an individual force might procure because of where it is on the journey in relation to that. There will be different contexts at different times.

Q104 Mr Betts: Does BlueLight Commercial have a list of items that you think ought to be standardised in some way? I take the point that IT systems can vary according to particular needs, but paper for printing is probably not one of those. If you can buy the standard thing more cheaply in bulk, you probably should be doing that. Do you have a list of those things? Are you saying to police forces, "Check this list because these are things that you ought to be seriously looking at"?

Richard Clarke: There are two things we are doing as part of the police efficiency and collaboration programme. Again, this comes back to the question that was asked earlier on.

The principle of doing it properly once nationally is absolutely at the heart of the approach that we are taking in PECP. That will not apply to everything, but paper is a very good example of the sort of thing that it might make much more sense to operate off a standard contract that people can draw down on where we get the efficiencies. Energy contracts are another really good example of that. It does not make sense for 43 forces to manage their own energy contract. It makes much more sense for us to do it centrally and forces can then draw down off it.

We are also supporting forces to manage procurement better locally in circumstances where it makes sense for them to do so locally.

Bethan Page-Jones: We have prioritised certain categories to focus on, whether that is because there is a high cost base for that category, or because we know that there is variation or that there are already standard routes. We are working really quickly to start those initial categories while we continue to look through everything else that police buy and add further priorities.

Q105 Mr Betts: Is the advice that you are giving available to the PCC?

Richard Clarke: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Betts: Do they know that?

Richard Clarke: It is worth saying that that work is happening now. On defibrillators, vehicles and software licences we are doing it now.



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Q106 Mr Betts: Do you have a list of forces where you are advising police officers to deal with this on a centralised procurement basis and those forces that are not doing that? Is that data available publicly?

Bethan Page-Jones: We are gathering better data on who is not being involved and the exceptions, as we are calling them. We do not have a perfect set of data yet. We have had many conversations about why that is not quite where it needs to be.

As the Permanent Secretary said, we are working really closely with PCCs, finance directors, officer PCCs and local procurement departments to make sure that we have good and shared data. We have been very open. In fact, we have prioritised our work collectively with this set of people to make sure that it is adding the greatest amount of value in the right areas.

Q107 Mr Betts: Can the public see that? Public accountability is quite important in all these matters.

Dame Antonia Romeo: You are asking about the areas that we are recommending forces to sign up to jointly.

Q108 Mr Betts: Yes. Which forces are deciding to go their own way and probably spending more than they need to?

Dame Antonia Romeo: Again, it will be a decision for Ministers what gets published, but I can see that it makes sense. Transparency is really important. On things such as this, transparency is often the way that you drive behaviour change.

Q109 Lloyd Hatton: To support what has been said, national procurement frameworks are already in place, but that is guidance; it is advice. What reassurance can you give this Committee that the future changes we see driven, whether that is by BlueLight Commercial or by the efficiency and collaboration programme, will move forward from advice and guidance?

If police forces choose not to act on it, are not particularly read up on it or do not have capacity to take this advice on board, the procurement of HR, vehicles, IT or whatever it is that these forces are procuring will continue to be done in a very disparate and wasteful way for the taxpayer.

Bethan Page-Jones: There are a number of ways that you can do that. Like you said, there are frameworks. There are powers that exist, which we keep under constant review, to push people on to those frameworks. We are trying to work closely with lots of people in forces so they really understand the benefits and move them on to frameworks that way.

We also need to make a judgment about whether pushing people through frameworks or moving to national procurement is a more efficient and effective way of getting those savings.

Q110 Lloyd Hatton: That is the clarification that we would probably welcome.



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When will the step change be made from guidance and advice to, "This is best practice, which you must follow through"? Otherwise we are going to continue to see 43 police forces operate in a not very cost-effective and disparate way.

What is not coming through today is how we will move from advice and frameworks, which already exist and which this NAO Report sets out, to something that is a lot more enforced and ensures that we make savings, drive down costs and reduce the duplication that we see so frequently.

Dame Antonia Romeo: The extent to which we use the Home Secretary's powers to mandate is still being worked up. In an ideal world, you would not have to mandate. If you were a police force and you wanted to make savings and the offer was obviously going to deliver efficiencies, you would want to sign up to it. That is the first best. I am not saying we are there. We are evidently not there.

Q111 Lloyd Hatton: The fact that we have 43 different HR systems makes me think we are a long way from there.

Dame Antonia Romeo: That is fair. If you take the energy strategy that Richard referred to as an example, 39 forces have already signed up to that and apparently two more are due to sign up. You get to a point where you have to ask questions about who has not signed up. That was not mandated, but that is a good thing. When some forces see everyone else signing up, they think, "That is the way that I am going to get more price certainty and lower risk". That is a good outcome. As you say, there is an opportunity to mandate and there are powers to do that.

Q112 Tristan Osborne: A few of my areas of inquiry have already been covered by others, including procurement. If we go to paragraph 2.13 of the Report, it says, "The policing productivity review was published in 2023" and identified that it would "save 38 million hours of police time over five years". If we fast forward to 2024, you said that you would respond to the review and focus on investment in technology.

As we understand it, that changed with the change of Government. That was the view of the previous Government, and you have taken forward parts of the review—I am about to ask which parts those were—but you were not tracking progress. A change of Government can be one reason why policies change, but that is part of the problem, is it not? Three years ago we were going to do one thing, and now we are not. It has shifted again. Some of this might be straying into policy, but what part of that were you tracking? It seems quite amorphous. Where are we now with that review?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The review has concluded. Productivity is an evergreen concept. All Governments want productivity; all systems want productivity, by and large.

We have taken a number of things out of the review. For example, the Centre for Police Productivity, which has been referred to and has already been set up in the college, is going great guns. We have invested in a



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number of auto-redaction tools. That was another thing out of the review. We have taken the most important things out of that review and a number of other internal reviews and other things that were ongoing. That is what has turned into the police reform programme generally and specifically the PECP.

Sir Andy Marsh: That was a productivity review commissioned by the Home Office, which policing certainly welcomed. All the recommendations for the College of Policing have been taken forward. That includes the tool that forces can use to compare themselves with each other.

I will just talk about some of the exciting developments happening at the centre, particularly around AI, which we have not spoken about yet. We are aware of 90 initiatives using AI in 29 forces. James and his team are about to complete the fourth sift to identify the game-changing ones that we can evaluate quickly. We evaluate between eight and 12 initiatives a year at our What Works centre, which is linked to the productivity centre, and fast-track them to policing.

Just by way of example, I can talk about some of them. There is a method called enhanced video response. Instead of an officer or two driving out and seeing someone's house, they will connect over a secure network. We have modelled between 4.1% and 5.1% of eligible incidents in the two forces where we have tested it, Dorset and Avon and Somerset. If that is scaled up, it will save between £17 million and £25 million.

I could—I know there is not time, but I would be happy to do it—work through about eight of the different initiatives, some of them including AI. We have some values attributed to most of these, which we are pushing out through policing. These are exactly the sorts of things that are recommended in that review.

The last thing that I would say about that review—this is an observation that we hear quite often in policing—is the amount of time you are spending in training. The college has an agreement with the National Police Chiefs' Council that we will not implement any additional training without costing it. In fact, we are pleased that we are just starting a pilot on officer safety training. That is police public safety training. We think we can reduce the recurrence of that training from annual to biannual without a fade in skills. That could save up to 30 million pounds of time per year. There are some really significant things in that productivity review that the national Centre for Police Productivity has taken forward.

Q113 **Tristan Osborne:** I appreciate that. In my area, Kent police has trialled one of those initiatives and has said very positive things about it. However, in the paragraph it says the Home Office "has taken forward parts of the review but has not tracked overall progress and the potential benefits have not yet been realised". You are giving me some examples of benefits that possibly have been realised, but, again, there seems to be a lack of tracking. Would you agree that that is true?



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Sir Andy Marsh: I would say a couple of things. I agree with Mr Lowe's position earlier. In some respects the sector is data-rich, but it is insightpoor. We need much better management of our data to track it.

The work that James and his team are doing is a very best effort to track the information. Many of the issues that this Committee has raised today illustrate that productivity in policing has a long way to go.

Q114 **Tristan Osborne:** Just lastly, you spoke earlier about the new tool that you are implementing looking at burglary, robbery and shoplifting. Paragraph 2.14 says that it will be ready by December, as in next month. Is that still on track?

Sir Andy Marsh: It is not. Is there anything that you want to say, James?

James Bottomley: We are in the process of testing a beta version of the tool with forces. There will be a version that is available on the back of that testing to all forces by the end of this financial year. We will have a version of that tool available and functional by the end of the financial year.

Q115 **Tristan Osborne:** Mr Chairman, this just serves to highlight that, when we look at efficiencies and productivity, dates slip and things occur. That is absolutely fine, but, again, in light of this Report and where we are today, things have already moved.

Sir Andy Marsh: Chair, I would make one observation on that. The centre was initially commissioned with more money. It is a £2 million entity. It is a reasonably small thing moving some quite significant mountains for policing. It needs to do much more.

Just to illustrate the point, quite a lot of the questions that you have been asking are about how much is done once centrally, whether there is competition or not, and how much can only be delivered locally. The overall budget of the College of Policing has fallen from 0.4% of all police funding in 2012-13 to 0.2% in the current financial year.

Unattractive though it often is—people want to put policing funding locally—the centre does not have sufficient gravity to drive some of these initiatives with the enthusiasm that many of you are saying that you want to see.

Q116 **Chair:** Permanent Secretary, I am hearing today that not enough money out of that £19 billion is going towards innovation. Sir Andy, you quoted the example of audio-visual multimedia redaction, which is outlined in the NAO Report on page 37. "As of September 2025, the Home Office expects that this will support up to 27 forces to improve their AVMM redaction capability". We have had evidence from ADS Group saying that this could create 60% efficiency savings. It is obviously a very useful tool. A lot of these AI tools could save a great deal of police resources.



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I would then take you to paragraph 3.15 on page 39. I wonder whether the problems in the rollout of these IT solutions are caused by forces not having specialist IT staff. That paragraph is staggering. At the bottom of the paragraph it says, "On average, 5% of police staff are in ICT roles but this ranges from zero to 14% across forces". If you have zero IT staff, how do you roll out any of these efficiencies?

Sir Andy Marsh: It sounds very strange to me. You are speaking to a chief who has led two very progressive forces on digital and technology. I understand the value of it. In my opinion, the only role that police officers should play in this activity is in making sure that the interface with the police officer works and solves their very practical problems. Police staff must be the people who work in police IT departments.

There is a lot of variance, but I cannot imagine that any of our police forces have nobody working in ICT. I just do not think that can be correct.

Q117 **Chair:** Permanent Secretary, this is an agreed Report between your Department and the NAO. What is the answer?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The NAO will presumably know which one has zero. Chair, a moment ago you said that not enough money of the £19.9 billion is going to innovation, but I have also heard that not enough money of the £19.9 billion is going to actual policing.

Q118 **Chair:** Well, there is not enough money to go round. If you are going to increase productivity with the small amount of money you have, the one way to do it is to improve your technology.

Dame Antonia Romeo: I agree. Again, of course, setting a balanced budget is a matter of PCCs. The question is about the extent to which we are facilitating and incentivising more investment in innovation, which is one of the things that we are trying to do. We do not determine how much money goes into innovation. Forces would not welcome an additional ringfence on the innovation pot.

Q119 **Chair:** I think they would because Gloucestershire tells me that it did not have enough money to innovate. It is one of the most IT-poor forces of the entire lot. It needs more money to be able to introduce this IT equipment.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Chair, would Gloucestershire welcome having less money for other things in order for us to ringfence it for innovation? Apologies for having asked you a question, but in a zero-sum game the money has to come from somewhere. Do you give the money in the way that we give it at the moment or do you try to ringfence more pots? There are different methods to do it.

Sir Andy Marsh: Could I just change the problem around a bit? In the year since we have been running the national Centre for Police Productivity, we have identified, through talking to forces, almost 1,400 innovations. We have set up an innovative and promising practice bank



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with over 350 examples. Of those 350 examples, 120 are around innovation. Many of them will involve technology. We have already spoken about the 90 that we are tracking on AI.

The problem is not necessarily that there is not enough innovation because, picking up Mr Stephenson's point, Bedfordshire has done some fantastic stuff on data and technology innovation.

Blake Stephenson: It has, yes.

Sir Andy Marsh: It is not a lack of innovation. It is the lack of speed to roll it out as quickly as possible across all those forces, including Gloucestershire. Some of the issues are about legacy products and how we can afford to buy the technology that Bedfordshire has, which is so brilliant.

You have posed this as a potential negative, but going in a year from a standing start to 27 forces implementing automated video media redaction technology with a potential national saving of £20 million is really good progress. In the last year James's team on text redaction—this is last November to this November—have moved from 15 to 35. It can be done.

It is not a lack of innovation. It is the methodology of spread. I would venture to suggest that the 43-force model and the funding and decision making that follows it is creating those barriers.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Essentially, the scale-up is the biggest barrier.

Chair: Thank you. This Committee is always impatient to see faster change.

Sir Andy Marsh: I am impatient too, Chair.

Chair: That is good.

Q120 **Lewis Atkinson:** That takes us on to what I was going to ask Dame Antonia about zooming out in terms of accountability for productivity. The NAO has highlighted five high-level barriers to productivity and we have talked about quite a number of them. The second one is really the one that we were talking about there: slow progress in adopting new technologies and working practices.

I just wondered, if not philosophically, then as an overview, how you feel about this. Ultimately, in a 43-force model where there is operational independence, if a force decides for whatever reason not to adopt or fails to adopt a new approach, to what extent is that a matter for the force? The college can do sharing best practice and encouragement, but ultimately that is something that the force should be held accountable for. With the changed approach—you have introduced a police performance directorate into the Home Office—is that a matter directly for the Home Office that you expect to be having a direct role in?



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Dame Antonia Romeo: You were there at the recent HASC, Mr Atkinson, where we talked a lot about accountability. Of course, you are right that accountability does remain with the chief constables and PCCs. The question is what the mechanism is for getting the data required in order to hold those people to account. That is all about getting the data. The Home Office has a responsibility. We have set it up—the Home Secretary clearly feels this way—to get a better grip on what is happening and indeed to drive that sort of innovation because it will deliver savings. It is a means to an end.

Driving innovation in a way that generates efficiency and means that money can be reinvested in the frontline will deliver better outcomes for the citizen. There is no doubt that that is what we have to do. The question is how tightly you can hold the performance measure that says where you are going to have to invest your money. At the moment, we do not decide where forces will invest particular sums of money except insofar as there are ringfences.

The scale-up point is that we have to make it easy for forces, such as Bedfordshire, to come up with a really good wheeze—it is not a wheeze; it is beyond a wheeze—or a really good innovation and use it. We then need to invest in it, fund it, work out how to evaluate it and then roll it out where needed. That all requires funding, but it also requires mechanisms to allow that to happen.

As well as the college, bodies such as Office of the Police Chief Scientific Adviser are doing that. There is a whole network of regional innovation leads that are sharing best practice. Wherever innovation is happening, it should be fed in and escalated so that overall the college, the Centre for Police Productivity and the Home Office are able to work together to ensure that that is rolled out.

Q121 **Lewis Atkinson:** What happens if it is not? It should be, absolutely, but what happens if it is not? Given the changes that were announced by the Government the other week on police accountability through the Police and Crime Commissioners, what happens if a police force, even under different accountability arrangements going forward, fails to improve its productivity? We have evidence of the Home Office, over repeated years under previous Governments, choosing to adopt a light-touch approach. Does that create a case for the Home Office to adopt a very different stance?

Dame Antonia Romeo: Yes, that is what is happening. The light-touch approach is being reversed. The setting up of the policing standards and performance directorate with a police performance framework is a specific attempt to understand more about what is happening and to hold forces appropriately to account, acknowledging operational independence and so on, and working closely with the college.

Sir Andy Marsh: There are other pieces of work to embed. In the same way that policing needs to improve aspects of its performance, it needs to



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improve aspects of its productivity. Both those topics, so to speak, are firmly embedded in all our leadership training courses. The executive, which is the chief officer, has examples of AI productivity change management, which will help them take those skills back into their forces. We have a network of evaluation and implementation officers that connect with James in terms of training. The main thing, though, is the sunlight of data on who is doing what, who is not doing what and what is working. That will greatly assist with the accountability. Let us not forget the role for HMICFRS, which make comments on efficiency in its inspections.

Q122 Lewis Atkinson: I will just come in on that point. My background is in the NHS. The CQC's inspection framework of NHS trusts has a use of resources metric. It does not just pass comment; it sets a grade, in the "outstanding" to "inadequate" framework, on use of resources. Is there a role for more assertive and explicit grading of forces going forward on some of these metrics?

Sir Andy Marsh: I previously spoke about my last force being graded "good" on efficiency. I have had a conversation with HMI around whether forces could not achieve the bar or standard of "good" unless they implement these five slam-dunk evidence-based AI transformational things. That is a work in progress. The thing about His Majesty's inspector of constabulary is that he is independent, but he makes good decisions, and I am sure he is looking at this.

Q123 Mr Betts: That was very diplomatic. Let us move on to the capabilities and skills that are needed with IT systems. In a number of different Departments and in a number of different ways, there has been a challenge to recruit the necessary people. How far are you able to help police forces with this? The costs of recruiting people with the necessary skills can be quite considerable. Sometimes their pay will be above that of the senior officers who are going to be in charge of the process.

Richard Clarke: There are two answers to that from a Home Office perspective. The first is to make sure that we have the people we need in the Home Office with those kinds of skills. We are focused at the moment on making sure that we can recruit into the Home Office, both in my area and in the central digital and data teams, the specialists necessary to be able to support the teams in driving out that kind of work.

We have a very good relationship with the National Police Chiefs' Council lead on digital and data, Rob Carden, who is the recently appointed chief in Merseyside. Bethan and I work very closely with him and with the Police Digital Service and BlueLight Commercial, both of which have some role in this as well.

The Government have been clear, though, that we need to bring more of this together into the approach that we are taking to the establishment of a new National Centre of Policing as part of the police reform White Paper, which the Government will publish soon. Part of that needs to be



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us working closely with policing to build the market for specialist skills that attracts the kind of people who would want to work in it.

Frankly, if you are an IT specialist interested in solving some of the biggest challenges and getting after some of the most interesting work out there, law enforcement is a great place to be able to do that. There is no shortage of individuals who are interested. We work closely with the police on that.

Sir Andy Marsh: The NAO Report talks about body-worn video. I was the first chief to issue that across everyone in a force. That could be a very expensive piece of equipment that simply passively observes what the officer is doing or, alternatively, it could be a piece of technology that provides the opportunity to transform utterly the way that you train, capture evidence and give evidence in court. All those things could happen. The NAO Report wisely said that, while it has been rolled out, not all those benefits have been exploited.

I am coming back to who you recruit. In my experience, most technology transformations fail because the process is not transformed, the culture is not tackled and the leadership has not embraced its ability to do these things. The answer is to change the way that the system works, to employ fewer high-spec IT people, who we cannot afford, and to invest in the process transformation, the culture and the leadership in forces. This is about how the system works better together. There is a better way of doing it.

Q124 **Mr Betts:** The point about making sure that the leadership in the organisation embraces what you are trying to do with new technology is absolutely right. Nevertheless, Sir Andy, you are still going to need key people with absolutely specialist skills, who are often paid a lot more in the private sector. This has come up in the civil service before. The civil service salary framework did not allow it to recruit those people in that way. Has that been sorted out now? Do you have any challenges with getting the people you really need into the Home Office and police forces?

Dame Antonia Romeo: One of the ways that this presents is that we have too much being done by managed services because we do not have the people with the skills to do it in some cases. That is one of the things that we are doing overall.

Speaking for the Home Office generally, we want to insource a lot of that digital work. This is true in the programme, for reasons that Richard has described, but it is also true more generally in the Home Office. We have to do more on that. It means you are onboarding. You are bringing heads in, but overall you reduce your cost because employing somebody is much cheaper than employing somebody who is working in a managed service. As long as you can crack the particular salary issue, which you normally can find a way around by working with the Cabinet Office, which oversees the limits, it can work.



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I will take this opportunity to say that I have just appointed a director general of digital and innovation.

Chair: That was going to be my next question. You were reading my mind.

Dame Antonia Romeo: Thank you for the opportunity. The new director general is going to start in January and will be a board-level member of the Home Office, bringing together all our work on science, analysis, data, digital and tech. Their role is to transform our services radically and bring in innovation. This will be an area where they will be heavily involved, working with Richard and his team.

Q125 **Chair:** Can I just clarify that? This Committee has made numerous recommendations around this. You should have a chief digital innovation officer not only on your non-exec board but at a senior executive level. Do you have that on both in the Home Office?

Dame Antonia Romeo: I will from January.

Q126 **Mr Betts:** I have one additional point. You carefully worded your answer about the civil service pay structure and whether it is an obstacle to getting the right people. You said that you can find ways around it with the Cabinet Office's help. Does that mean it is still an obstruction that you have to navigate around?

Dame Antonia Romeo: The civil service pay structure is incredibly complicated. I am sure that this Committee has looked at it many times. One could have lots of arguments about it. In market-facing roles, such as digital roles, there is an argument for paying more. We have a lot of other people who are not in those types of roles, who would then be incentivised to leave, do a digital role for a couple of years, then come back in and massively increase their salary.

I find myself frequently thinking on both sides of the argument. My point was really to say that we are able to work with the Cabinet Office, which oversees the pay structures and the pay mechanisms with the Treasury, in a way that has allowed us to do what we need to do so far in the Department. It is not always straightforward. Almost all those things need approval, often by me and the Cabinet Office.

Q127 **Mr Betts:** For police forces, Sir Andy, is there a challenge out there that you are aware of in getting the people you need? It is probably a very small number of people, but people with excellent expert skills in IT can help forces drive forward this change.

Sir Andy Marsh: It is a challenge to find the right chief technology officer. Picking up a comment that was made earlier by Richard, my team did groundbreaking work on data in Avon and Somerset. I was able to employ people pretty much just out of university, who had the appetite to do something meaningful on public safety. I had to accept that they were going to work for a pretty low salary, as the sector provided, and would



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move on after three or so years. There is a market there. They did some fantastic work for me. I think both ends throughout the whole thing.

Richard Clarke: May I just make one other very quick point? Part of the challenge at the moment is that 43 forces are seeking to recruit individuals with highly specialist skills. In the future, we want a smaller number of individuals doing the things it makes more sense to do on a national scale that forces can draw down on, as it were, from central functions.

Q128 **Mr Betts:** Is there some sense in having a central team of people who police forces can draw from? They would not be insourcing expensive private sector people; you would be providing a centralised function which police forces within the public sector can draw from.

Richard Clarke: Yes, for certain highly skilled aspects of IT. You will want a local IT manager to run the local system out in the force. That makes perfect sense. The body-worn video camera work that Sir Andy mentioned, for example, is one of the things that we are investing over £50 million in this year from the Home Office to support. For those sorts of things, it makes much more sense for us to be thinking about how to do that centrally so forces can draw down on that expertise rather than building it 43 different times.

Q129 **Chair:** Sir Andy, can I just pose one last question to you and take you to paragraph 3.18 on page 40? You talked about transforming the system. There is a list there of seven bodies that are involved in testing and rolling out new technologies. It is spread across the Home Office, the College of Policing, the Police Digital Service, BlueLight Commercial, the police chief scientific adviser, the NPCC and individual police forces. With that number of people involved, you are never going to get any innovation, are you? It is far too complicated.

Sir Andy Marsh: Respectfully, we do get lots of innovation.

Q130 **Chair:** Does the system need reforming?

Sir Andy Marsh: We get lots of innovation in the sector. Needs must, and it is out there. However, it is a crowded landscape. I do not believe it is the most efficient and effective way of delivering some of these national services.

Dame Antonia Romeo: I might just add, the Government are reforming the system, hence the upcoming police reform White Paper.

Chair: Can I thank you all very much for coming today? I am sorry if any of the questions were personal, but nevertheless I thank you all very much for coming before us. We have learned a lot today.

You can see that the Committee is frustrated with the pace of change, particularly when there is so much useful technology out there that could



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transform the way that our police work. We will be looking very much at this in the coming months and we will have you back again to see how you have progressed in that sphere. Thank you all very much.