

Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: National Law Enforcement Data Programme, HC 638

Thursday 16 September 2021

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Members present: Dame Meg Hillier (Chair); Dan Carden; Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown; Mr Mark Francois; Peter Grant; Mr Richard Holden; Nick Smith.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor-General, Richard Brown, Treasury Officer of Accounts, and Tom McDonald, Director, National Audit Office, were in attendance.

Questions 1 - 111

Witnesses

I: Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office; Mike Hill, Director, Police and Public Protection Technology, and SRO, NLEDP, Home Office; Joanna Davinson, Executive Director, Central Digital and Data Office; Stephen Webb, Former Senior Responsible Owner, Home Office.



Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General
The National Law Enforcement Data Programme (HC 663)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Matthew Rycroft CBE, Mike Hill, Joanna Davinson and Stephen Webb.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee on Thursday 16 September 2021. We are looking at the Home Office's national law enforcement data programme, which is the latest in a series of major critical digital programmes that the Home Office is responsible for. It is fair to say that the Department has had a bit of a rocky record when it comes to digital and data programmes. We are hoping to get some real openness about what has gone wrong and what needs to be done to make this important project work.

This is the project that deals with the police national computer and originally included the police national database. The former keeps records of arrests and crimes, and the latter is the more detailed database that came as a result of the tragic Soham murders and was introduced in 2011.

The former, the police national computer, has been going since 1974. It is due for a technical upgrade. It has not been a smooth ride, and we want to know what is going on. I should also add that this is an unusual project, although not, perhaps, unusual for the Home Office. It covers the whole of the UK. All 45 police forces—the 43 in England and Wales, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Scotland—rely on these databases. It is a major project, and critically important for the safety of the country, and we want to know what is going on with it.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. We have Matthew Rycroft, the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office. Welcome back to the physical room, Mr Rycroft. We have Mike Hill, the director for police and public protection technology at the Home Office; Stephen Webb, a regular visitor to this Committee, who is now at the Border and Protocol Delivery Group at the Cabinet Office, but was, of course, the senior responsible owner for this project at the Home Office, as well as other critical digital projects; and Joanna Davinson, who is the executive director for the Central Digital and Data Office at the Cabinet Office and, of course, has also been at the Home Office.

We have a really good team of witnesses to get underneath what has gone wrong with this project. We are hoping for honesty and candour. The report from the NAO sets out very helpfully and very clearly what the challenges are. I wanted to start with you, Mr Rycroft, as the person responsible overall for the safety and security of the UK, along with the Home Secretary, about why we are still creaking along with 1974 technology for something as important as the police national computer.



Matthew Rycroft: Thank you very much, Chair, and members of the Committee for this opportunity to talk about this really important programme. I broadly agree with your characterisation in your introduction, Chair, that this is technology that does date from 1974. The underpinning architecture of the police national computer is still the mainframe that was set up then. I should say it is highly stable, and, of course, it has had multiple upgrades all the way through recent years and decades. The fact that it dates from 1974 is a pretty clear signal that we need to be moving into something that is new, that is modern, that is cloud-based and that is fit for the future. That is the purpose of this programme and why the Home Office is committed to it, and why we have prioritised it and will continue to prioritise it until it is fully delivered.

The future law enforcement data system will deliver an enhanced law enforcement system.

Q2 **Chair:** We will come on to the future. I am really concerned about what it means now. There have been some outages on the police national computer this year.

Matthew Rycroft: There has been one very significant incident in January, which you are referring to, where some data was deleted that should not have been and, in fact, some data was maintained that should have been deleted. I am glad to say that all of the deleted data has now been recovered and everything that went wrong in January has now been put right. We asked Lord Hogan-Howe to do an independent review of that incident, and he reported with 21 recommendations, all of which we have accepted and all of which have either been implemented or are in the course of being implemented. I want to reassure the Committee and anyone who is concerned that that incident did not have any detrimental effect on the police's ability to keep our people safe.

Q3 **Chair:** Are you saying that at all times the police have been able to access the police national computer? There has not been a time at all when it has been offline.

Matthew Rycroft: They did not have access to all of the data all of the time, but we did set up workarounds that allowed them to be able to carry on their work.

Q4 **Chair:** How long were you expecting those workarounds to last?

Mike Hill: They were in place through the period of time it took to restore all the data, which was by the end of May. Immediately, we put in place mitigations across all of our systems, and the NPCC set up, through the Met Police, a system to actually recover that data and to make that data available to operational forces. There was no operational impact at that time.

Q5 **Chair:** If you were an officer on the ground, trying to look something up, would that have slowed you down?



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Mike Hill: No, not necessarily. The information was available, but during the period of time the workarounds that needed to be done were clearly articulated. The data was available, as I said. I spoke to the NPCC again this morning and there have been no operational impacts.

Q6 **Chair:** There is a difference between the data being available and it being available in real time. Normally you could sit at the computer and find it quickly. What extra processes were there?

Mike Hill: It was an online system that enabled the data to be available in real time as well, through the Met Police. The data was just searched in a different way, and it was enabled to be accessed at that point.

Chair: That is still not ideal.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Can I press you, Mr Hill, or maybe Mr Rycroft? It is my understanding that it is not only the deletion incident that has occurred. There has been at least one other outage incident, has there not?

Mike Hill: Yes. That was not to the PNC though. That was to the wider PNC ecosystem in our Hendon data centre. That was the network availability, and the ability for policing to access the actual PNC itself. There was a short outage earlier this year.

Q7 **Chair:** On 5 March it was unavailable for six hours.

Matthew Rycroft: In relation to the incident where the data was deleted, that was not because the PNC is old. That was human error. Our investigation identified that, and Lord Hogan-Howe's report confirmed that. Actually the PNC is remarkably stable, and the deletions happened as a result of coding erroneously put in by an individual. Of course that does not excuse it, but it does help to explain that the stability of the existing set-up through the PNC is actually strong.

Q8 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Can I just examine that, Mr Rycroft? Supposing I was a senior police officer interviewing a serious criminal and I wanted to check some fact in the middle of the interview, and the thing was down because of one of these outages. That is quite a serious incident. You would probably have to stop the interview and re-do it all again. You say it is stable, but it has had an outage. How can we be sure that this is not going to get worse as the system gets older, and that these outages are not going to become more frequent?

Mike Hill: We are investing significantly in the infrastructure for the PNC. We are undertaking a refresh of the hardware and software that the PNC sits within, so it is a modern infrastructure, and that is sustainable and available. We are also investing significantly in the ecosystem around the PNC, to make sure that the issue we had with the network to enable policing to access the PNC is unlikely to happen again as well. There is a significant amount of investment going into the infrastructure and also the software within that ecosystem.



Q9 Chair: That is for the future but, Ms Davinson, you have this huge job in government to bring Whitehall's legacy IT systems up to scratch, which we will be touching on quite a bit next week. Are you as content that this 1974 infrastructure is stable as Mr Rycroft is? I am not suggesting that you should have a disagreement with Mr Rycroft; I am sure you worked your lines before you came into the room, but you are the digital expert. It is surely suboptimal.

Joanna Davinson: As we said, it is a 1974 architecture, but all of the components that make up the PNC are at a supported level. We have upgraded the Home Office, and I was there for three years as their CIO before this existing job. It is upgraded to supported versions of hardware and software, but it continues to be a 1974 architecture, and that is actually the issue. We are not able to change it easily. It is difficult to make it available through things like mobile phones. Some of the things that we want to do, in terms of supporting modern working practices, we just cannot do on the PNC. There are also some issues in terms of its compliance with the general data protections regulation.

It is fit for purpose in the sense that it does the job that the police need it to do and it is supported, but it is not the right platform to enable us to move the police forward into a modern working environment.

Q10 Chair: What about these outages?

Joanna Davinson: Legacy systems do have outages. All systems, actually, have outages. They tend to be harder to manage in a legacy environment, because they are not architected to be as resilient as some of our modern systems, but the PNC has consistently met its service levels. Certainly all the time I was at the Home Office it met its service levels and I believe it has continued to do so.

Mike Hill: For the past five years it has met all the service availability targets.

Joanna Davinson: No outage is good. It is always a problem, but it is an inevitability in a legacy system that it does happen.

Q11 Chair: One of the challenges here is that it is old, and some of the databases are not going to be supported forever. Some are struggling now. Perhaps I will start with you, Ms Davinson. How do you balance the risk about keeping something going because changing the whole architecture is such a complex project, and managing a database without the proper back-up support that you would normally have in an ideal world?

Joanna Davinson: In an ideal world, you would keep your infrastructure and software at a supported level. The challenge, as we discussed with the PNC, is that it is so old that some of those components will go out of support in the next five years. There are options that the Home Office could take, in terms of re-engineering some aspects of the PNC to maintain it in support, but it is always a balance. Do you make the investment in continuing to upgrade the legacy system? At what level do you invest in



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that, rather than investing in actually replacing it with something that is more modern and performant for the future? That is the judgment that all Departments have to make, in terms of the balance between investing in the legacy versus new.

There is evidence, and I am sure we will talk about this more next week, that, historically, Government have not invested sufficiently in their legacy technologies in order to maintain them at a supported level. We have been over-optimistic about when the new technologies will come on stream, and so we have neglected to invest in the legacy, and that has created a backlog of problems. Actually, in terms of the police national computer, that is one of the examples where that has not happened. It has actually been maintained at a supported level through its life.

Q12 Chair: Then there was this plan in 2016 to upgrade it. It was before your time, Mr Rycroft, but, Mr Webb, you were there. You were also responsible for the emergency services network. Do you think you were spread too thin? You are not at the Home Office now; you can say.

Stephen Webb: I had a very wide range of responsibilities. Mr Rycroft will be able to explain. We are short of people with programme management and programme leadership experience. You do what you can. I am not personally convinced that more SRO time would have been the difference between these problems happening or not. They are much more fundamental than that.

Certainly it was challenging. There are examples. There were benefits and synergies across the programmes, across PNC, biometrics, ESN, national ANPR, child abuse image database, all of which I was responsible for. They are all closely related. We recognised that, with challenges on several of the programmes, this needed to be brought down, and over the time I was there it was gradually being consolidated, but we do not have a vast number of people to take them over.

Q13 Chair: Looking back, with the benefit of hindsight, what would you have wanted to have seen done differently, both from the 2016 point and then at each stage along the way? Were there bad decisions made or decisions you would have done differently in 2016?

Stephen Webb: It is a great question, and I think a lot about it, given the sheer complexity of what we have to do. We just had a discussion about the pressing urgency of replacing this mainframe. That was really always uppermost in our minds. In a way I almost slightly regret that, because problems come incrementally as the temperature increases, we should have come earlier to a stage where we actually stepped back, stopped work and said, "Look, actually, we are heading in a really difficult direction here", given the emerging complexity of what had to be done, the security environment that police colleagues wanted us to do it in, the challenges of finding resourcing within the programmes, and the different views and changes in the technical architecture.



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I think it would have been better at some stages—at an earlier reset probably—to say, “We actually have some really fundamental choices here. If the requirements have to remain as tough as they are, it is possible, but it will have implications for cost and time; or we have to agree in partnership a sort of minimum viable product; or we have to look at re-platforming the mainframe”.

We are all involved in this. I do not think we ever quite got the real sense of partnership that you would like to have. There is a sense slightly more of a client and supplier relationship between the police and the Home Office. It would have been better if we could have agreed together. There are some genuine trade-offs here, like it or not.

Some of the complexity we discovered when we really went into the innards of this 50-year-old system were quite astonishing. If you do not mind, I will just give you one example. On driver look-up, you would think that asking the system, “Show me this person’s driver’s licence” would be a relatively simple thing. We went through a requirement exercise, largely between the team, the police and a few people at Hendon. We put that down on our list as something that should be relatively simple.

When we thought it was simple, we thought that a handful of business rules were involved—one to five. It ended up being 40, because it turns out that the rules are all different, depending on when you got your driving licence. It turns out the DVLA database does not give you a definitive picture of how many points you have, so the PNC has to do that. It turns out that the data on the PNC database has to be presented to the police in a slightly different way, so there is a load of translation going on. Something that looks like it should be simple turned out to be enormous, and the lack of documentation in PNC meant that we were having these nasty shocks again and again.

I suppose my biggest regret is that, when we did the reset in late 2018-19, we then had to do it again in 2020. It is understandable that the police then lost confidence as a result of that. It was much worse even than we realised back then. Even back then it was bad enough that I was very seriously thinking, “Is this the right thing to do? Should we actually re-platform the PNC?” I had discussions with Joanna.

It was not that we had a false sense of optimism that we were confident we could do it. Nobody was more anxious or sceptical than I was about whether this was actually deliverable, and I really pressed technical colleagues very hard to ask, “Is it really the case that we cannot keep this going, because this is getting harder and harder?” but there are excellent reasons that Mr Hill and Ms Davinson can explain.

Q14 Chair: Your frontline police trying to use it are probably not thinking about that end of it. What you have thrown up there is that there is an issue about interaction with other Government systems, and a big project for Ms Davinson. Also, you have discussions about how you relate to 45 police forces, which do not even normally all work together, because the two in



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Northern Ireland and Scotland operate separately because they are separate countries. Again, in retrospect, what would you have done differently to sort out the governance in order to make sure that the police voice was louder or clearer in the system?

Stephen Webb: I do not know whether it is a governance or a cultural thing. Obviously we had a programme board; we had police representatives and we had an embedded team that sat in the programme and worked with us, but we never managed to get to a position where we could sit down and make those hard trade-offs. That was both within the programme and across the programmes.

Again, to give an example, because I had the whole portfolio of major programmes that were reallocated from the police settlement, you would come across situations where one programme was saying, in flight, "I would like to triple the size of the national ANPR service", which is really quite difficult to do. Another was saying, "Actually, I would also like to purchase this new orthogonal algorithm on the biometric side." There really was not a place where you could have that discussion with policing and ask, "Which is more important?"

We ended up in a rather strange position that we sort of had to make those decisions ourselves in the Home Office, which is not what we would like to do. We tried to create this governance forum—what we call the technology reallocation scrutiny group—which I set up with the previous head of the NPCC, Sara Thornton. It was difficult. It was hard to get it to work in quite the way that one would like. Understandably, I think the police felt that a lot of this stuff was being done to them.

Your point about the 45 forces is absolutely right. When we went through a number of exercises to try to simplify requirements, it could take months. You could get 40 on board, but to persuade the last four or five to change their processes as well, because you actually needed a full house and everybody on board, was challenging. I have to take responsibility with everybody else. We did not get the relationship into the right place. It was extremely challenging.

Joanna Davinson: Can I just add a point on complexity? We also set ourselves an additional challenge by trying to bring together the police national computer and the police national database into a single service. You ask, with hindsight, what we would have done. We have now moved to the position where we have said, frankly, the requirements of those two systems and their users are so different that we did not understand the complexity of bringing that data together. In trying to design for both, when the police national database has a much higher level of security and a much more complex data model, we added complexity to the design of the whole solution.

Stephen and I talked about it with policing colleagues back when we did the 2018 reset. We actually looked very seriously then at the option of just focusing on PNC and dealing with PND separately. At that point, we did not



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manage to get our stakeholders on board with that notion. We changed the approach.

Q15 **Chair:** When you say “stakeholders”, do you mean the police forces?

Joanna Davinson: Policing, yes. For the reasons that Mr Webb describes, you are having to have a conversation with 45 different organisations. It is very hard, when you have set a scope that says it is PNC and PND, to change that.

Q16 **Chair:** When you talk about the 45, obviously you have the two national police forces, in Northern Ireland the PSNI, and Police Scotland, but the other 43 have some governance that they share through the various professional bodies. Was it from 43 to 45, or was it that within the 43 there was also disagreement that made it difficult?

Joanna Davinson: There is a lot of autonomy within the 43.

Stephen Webb: To be fair, I do not recall any issues where there were different requirements coming out from Scotland or Northern Ireland. It was largely within the 43. The police created this chief reference group, which was supposed to be a delegated group of chiefs, out of the chiefs council in general, who were looking at this. We had some useful discussions with them, but every force is more or less autonomous in its systems and there are strong reasons why simplifications that work for some people do not work for others. There are also subject matter leads. You will have a police lead on security and audit, who will have a requirement that potentially clashes with what other parts of policing are looking for, in terms of user experience and simplicity.

Q17 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** It seems to me that it is difficult enough to upgrade it as it is, let alone without trying to get 45 different organisations to agree what it should be. We need to resolve this, because otherwise it is not only this project that is going to be a problem. Any updates in the future are going to be a problem. Mr Rycroft, what could be done to find a forum, whether it is the National Police Chiefs’ Council, a lead or whatever, so that there is somebody who co-ordinates all those 45 to agree what it is that the police actually require?

Matthew Rycroft: Before I answer that I question, can I add one thing to what Mr Webb was saying about the SRO issue? With the benefit of hindsight, we were asking one person to do too much. We have acted on that now, and I can assure the Committee that for every Home Office programme within the Government major programme portfolio there is a separate SRO. On average that is 50% of that person’s time. Sometimes it is 100%, for ESMPC, for instance. In the case of NLEDS, the one we are talking about today, Mr Hill is 50% SRO.

On the new engagement model with policing, I very much agree with what my colleagues talked about from the years when they were leading this. We have sought to create a model that really puts policing on the inside. We need to get away from this sense of us blaming them and them blaming



us. We are all in this together. We need to make sure that the Home Office provides the sort of IT that policing needs for the future of its work. We need to be attuned to its requirements so that it can do the best possible job in protecting the public, deterring and preventing crime, and following up on crime. We need to bake into every solution adaptability for the future. We do not know the way that technology will change in five or 10 years' time, but we need to have agility within our systems, and policing needs that as well.

The approach we are taking is to have police on the inside. As Mr Webb was saying, rather than a situation where policing would essentially set out the constraints, set out the requirements and hand it over, we now have a joint assessment of the constraints and a joint assessment of the requirements, and we have policing involved in all the decision making at every single level.

We have two senior policing representatives on Mr Hill's leadership team. One of them is the senior product owner and the other is the head of adoption, so the process is of going from theory into practice in every single police force. As we will come on to talk about, we are breaking up this programme into a whole series of products, each of which will come on stream at a different time. Each one of those products has an owner within policing as well. We are seeking to build on the work that happened in the previous years but take it to a new level, precisely to respond to the challenge that you have identified.

Mike Hill: Importantly, the new engagement model is co-authored, so we at the Home Office and policing have worked together very closely over the past 12 months to define the new ways of working and the new engagement model. We have agreed that jointly. That went through policing governance earlier this year. We are now working through with NLEDP being the pathfinder programme for this new way of working. We will learn the lessons, because it is a new way of working for us and policing, but the strength of the relationships we now have with policing will help us work this through and make it a success. Then we will look to roll it out on our other national programmes across the portfolio as well.

Q18 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** That is really helpful, and of course you did not have this, Mr Webb. You had to deal with the system as it was. On your evidence on the finding, for example, on the driving licences—I ask this question in a genuine spirit of inquiry—is it the old problem that we have come across so often in this Committee with big projects that the whole thing was not scoped out properly in the first place? You did not really know all the nooks and crannies before you started designing it.

Stephen Webb: That is undoubtedly true. As we have discussed, the PNC is quite poorly documented, so the overall pressing feeling was that this was becoming a legacy system and we had to move quickly. It would have been nice if we had been able to put the resource in to do that properly. The choice was made, whether rightly or wrongly, to crack on, in the belief that we would be able to sort it out as we went along.



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It turned out that the more we looked at it, the more difficult it was. The people we needed, ultimately, to tell us what really goes on in the guts of the system are incredibly thin on the ground. There is the Hendon organisation itself, and a relatively small number of people from Fujitsu. They are needed to run the mainframe day to day. To spare them and to find them enough time to work for us, documenting it and helping us with the requirements, took longer than we would ideally have liked. It was a sort of rate-limiting factor. You are absolutely right.

Joanna Davinson: If I can build on that, one of the things that we learned, and this is always true when trying to replace complex legacy systems, is that it is almost an impossible task to try to understand it all and design it before you start. By its very nature, you do not know what is in there until you open it up and have a look.

Probably our real error was that we underestimated the complexity. We went through the various stages in the development. It had a history in terms of its IPA reviews, where it went from amber to red, and then amber-red, then amber, then red again. We were finding the complexity; it went red; we did some things that we thought had bottomed that out and fixed it. Things seemed to get better and then we found that there was another layer of complexity that we had not understood. Probably that is a natural process that we have to go through.

Rather than assuming it is all going to be easy, the team is now adopting the approach that you have to find a way to start the development work and run it in parallel with increasingly understanding where the complexity is and then adapting to that complexity.

I have one final point. The real thing that I think gives us a chance now is that we have significantly reduced the complexity of what we have to do by separating the PND and the PNC. That was undoubtedly driving an extraordinarily large amount of complexity that we really did not need into the design. Separating those two has given us a much clearer path, in terms of how we develop it.

Q19 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: You have to understand that we are only lay people and this may be a stupid question, but let us try. Presumably, when you go back to the 1970s, there were not computer records and a lot of this stuff was on files. All of you have kept saying that this system was poorly documented, presumably because it is on a whole lot of files somewhere. When you design the new system, will it be designed in such a way that you can pick up bits in a computer, so that if you want to modify it in the future it will be a much easier task?

Joanna Davinson: Yes. What is different about how we design and build modern systems is that the design is sort of automated into it. You do not need a whole set of written documents in order to understand the code. The code is much more open and much more transparent. There would have been a design for the PNC back in 1974, and I am sure we could find that document if we went looking for it, but over 45 years it has been



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modified so many times. That is the challenge: 45 years' worth of change is almost impossible to comprehend.

Q20 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: With the new system, you are more or less disregarding what happened initially. You are just taking a system as it is amended and then adding on to that. Is that how it will work in future? It almost does not matter what it was originally. It is what it is now, and you can then amend that.

Joanna Davinson: Yes, and it is designed in a much more modular way, so that the components are more understandable.

Q21 Chair: I want to pick up on these collaborative ways of working. We have looked a lot at the emergency services network. To quite a large extent, individual forces have a practical veto. I know you have said "not quite", but that is ultimately what they have had on that. Do the new ways of working you developed over the last 12 months assist you in delivering ESN?

Matthew Rycroft: It is the same approach that I have talked to the Committee about before, in relation to ESN. I am hopeful and confident that the new way of working with policing is working, in terms of policing's confidence in ESN. Do not take my word for it. The police chief in charge of ESN from policing's perspective, Kier Pritchard, said at the formal gateway in July, "Confidence in policing is growing across the police service. It is now recognised as the future approach to critical communications for the service".

Q22 Chair: Yes, but there is a difference between recognising it is necessary and actually signing up to it, which I think is the challenge.

Matthew Rycroft: The next step, of course, is for each of the forces to sign up. We are working hard with all of them, partly through Kier but partly ensuring that there is going to be the right set of incentives to move forward with adoption of ESN in due course.

Q23 Chair: You might provide money to forces.

Matthew Rycroft: We might make it a good thing for them to do to come on board and to test this early.

Q24 Chair: You might give them some money.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely, yes. Similarly on this one, we put aside £30 million plus contingency, specifically to work with individual police forces on their adoption of the law enforcement data system.

Q25 Chair: That is working with them, and not even providing kit.

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, exactly. That is the way to go, and then gets you away from the sort of veto language, which I think in the end is probably unhelpful. I should say that we will only ever do this if policing itself is absolutely sure that it will work. We are not going to be taking risks.



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Chair: Let us not go around that. We had that on the ESN and effectively it was a veto.

Q26 **Peter Grant:** Good morning to all of our witnesses. Mr Hill, will the new system be significantly more resilient against cyberattack than the systems that are being used now?

Mike Hill: The current systems are resilient against cyberattack, obviously, but it is built in right from the get-go. The security element for this critical data is absolutely paramount. We have independent assurance from within policing on our approach and our design, to ensure information security. In answer to the question, yes.

Q27 **Peter Grant:** The current expectation is that the legacy system will have to operate for a year unsupported. Does that create any additional risk or vulnerability to cyberattack during that time? If, for example, a new kind of cyberattack is developed in the lead-up to that time, does it leave the system more at risk than it would be under the new system?

Mike Hill: The system actually will not be unsupported. There is only one small element of the system that will be unsupported from December 2024, but that is the most stable element of the actual system itself, and over the last four years we have had zero incidents against that particular element. We are investing significantly to ensure that we have internal support mechanisms so that the support is available for that element of the PNC as well. The remainder of the PNC will remain supportable and supported until December 2025.

Joanna Davinson: It is unsupported by the vendor, which is not quite the same as not being supported.

Mike Hill: Yes, correct.

Joanna Davinson: The actual software vendor for that small component will no longer provide support, but the Home Office team will be able to provide that support in its stead.

Q28 **Peter Grant:** Are you confident that you have not only the level of expertise but the specialism—the kind of expertise—internally to deal with anything that might come up during that year?

Mike Hill: Yes. We will have that.

Q29 **Peter Grant:** Permanent Secretary, what discussions did you have with the police before you took the decision to run the system without vendor support for a year? Are they comfortable with that?

Matthew Rycroft: They have been comfortable with that. As part of this approach that I am talking about of them being on the inside, they are involved in all the decisions now, including that one, yes.

Q30 **Peter Grant:** When you talk about the police in this context, we have already heard about the difficulty of getting 43 chief constables in England and Wales to agree about things. Who have you actually spoken to when



you referred to the police being comfortable with it?

Matthew Rycroft: The day-in and day-out contact is through those two senior police representatives on Mr Hill's leadership team, as I mentioned before. In addition to that, as part of my regular engagement with the head of the NPCC and the Commissioner of the Met, this comes up pretty regularly.

Q31 **Peter Grant:** The Commissioner of the Met, with respect, is the chief constable of one out of 43 police forces. Is it up to the Home Office to satisfy yourselves that the small number of senior police officers whom you are talking to regularly are actually reflecting what is out there on the ground in 43 different police forces?

Matthew Rycroft: The engagement that Mr Hill has day in, day out with policing, I think, assures us of that, but he might want to add to that.

Mike Hill: Indeed, thank you. The NPCC lead for the PNC is also the senior product owner from within LEADS. We are working hand in glove with the NPCC, which speaks on behalf of the wider community for the PNC itself. The work that we are doing to ensure that the police are on the inside, are part of the leadership and are part of the decision-making, moving away from that customer-supplier relationship, means that they are empowered to work with us and the wider policing landscape in order to make those decisions and to prioritise. That does not mean to say they will make those decisions in isolation. There is a significant amount of engagement across all the forces across the UK, to ensure that their voices are heard, taking into account the prioritisation and the development going forwards.

Q32 **Peter Grant:** You have described the situation of the police having representation at the senior leadership decision-making forum. Is that describing what happened after the review in 2020 or were those arrangements in place right from the beginning?

Mike Hill: Over the past nine months, up until the end of July, we are in a reset position within the programme. We started that in December. As part of that we looked at the structures, the relationships, the engagement models, the culture, the architecture, the full gamut of the programme, to make sure we addressed the fundamentals. That was a key element of it. As part of that, we have brought the customer, i.e. policing, much closer to the programme.

Q33 **Peter Grant:** When you say you brought them much closer, are you saying that, in 2020, you brought them much closer than they had been before then, or were they much closer when the project was first started in 2016?

Mike Hill: They were not on the leadership team at that point. They were part of the wider governance regime. They have always been part of the programme board and making decisions on behalf of the programme through the governance mechanisms, but now they are part of decision making within the programme as well. We are moving away from



assurance and decision making to actually a key part of the leadership as well.

Joanna Davinson: Can I just add one thing that Mr Hill and his team have been really successful in doing as part of the latest reset? Mr Webb described the challenges that he experienced as SRO, where I would characterise the way the relationship between the Home Office and policing felt as a customer-supplier type of relationship. The Home Office as supplier was always trying to reconcile the needs of multiple customers, and that proved very difficult. The new engagement model has set out much more of a partnership, and so the police representatives on the programme, rather than being there to assure what the Home Office does, are now really clearly there to co-deliver. We will need to see how that develops, but that is a really significant shift, in terms of attitude and culture, which I think is very positive.

Matthew Rycroft: The single biggest reason behind my decision to do the resets, which as Mr Hill said started in December last year, was the fact that senior voices in policing made very clear their concerns about the programme.

Q34 **Peter Grant:** Is that a change of culture and a change in the way of doing things that you would then transfer on to other major project boards? Is that a change that applies to other internal customers?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, absolutely. You could say, in a way, that the ESMPC programme is slightly ahead of even this programme, so we are already learning from ESMPC and applying it to this, but that will flow into other programmes as well, as Mr Hill said. In fact, we have just done a review of all of the police major IT programmes that the Home Office is delivering, in order precisely to get at those underlying issues that affect not just one particular programme, but the whole set of them. That goes to the heart of that.

Q35 **Peter Grant:** Why did all of that not happen in 2016? I remember being on IT implementation and development project boards in NHS Fife in 1990, and it was just a given that the customer, who was going to be the person or organisation using the system, had to be involved at every stage, at every level. Why was it that, 26 years later, the Cabinet Office and Home Office had not realised that that is how you take the initial steps towards major IT projects?

Matthew Rycroft: To be fair to our predecessors, I would say that we have learned a lot along the journey. Even in the last small number of years of this process, we have learned—

Q36 **Peter Grant:** It has taken 26 years to learn what a relatively small public body on the east coast of Scotland knew about in the 1990s. Why has it taken Whitehall so long to learn what everybody else had already been doing for so long?



Stephen Webb: The complexity there is the number of customers. In one organisation, the relationship with your supplier is probably easier, although even in a hospital we have different Departments that may have conflicting views and needs. What we had here was all the police forces and a whole range of other PNC users as well, and the cultural challenge is to find somebody who has that authority to be able to say definitively, "That is good enough. That is important. That we can reprioritise".

What we faced was a position where essentially everybody had to be happy before you could go forward. That meant that the process of agreeing requirements, architecture and so on was fantastically complex. There just was not a single person. That is what Mr Hill's team has been able to move towards, this product owner who is a single voice, such that, if they say it is okay, it is okay.

Q37 **Chair:** Mr Hill, I wanted to ask about this involvement with police. You talked about the significant engagement. Can you walk us through how that actually works in practice? You have those two senior police officers who have to go back down the trail and talk to people on the ground. It might be different levels of people in different forces, and obviously some forces are very small. Do those concerns then get brought right to the board if they are significant? How do you know that that relationship is being managed and you do not just have two chief police officers saying, "It is all going to be fine because we are going to just tell them"—not that I am suggesting anything about Home Office culture there at all.

Matthew Rycroft: Police do not usually come to the Home Office and say, "Don't worry; everything's going to be fine".

Mike Hill: That is not the case. Within the leadership team, as the permanent secretary earlier outlined, there is the senior product owner. That senior product owner is responsible for the end-to-end delivery of the products within the programmes. Each of those products will then deliver the whole entirety of the programme, once we have gone through.

Q38 **Chair:** Can you give us an example, when you say a product?

Mike Hill: We are currently going through lost and stolen property. There are services that are currently residing on the PNC that will migrate off the PNC over a period of time in a series of smaller iterative steps. The senior product owner is responsible for the end to end, from the agreement of those, so the prioritisation of which products go into the roadmap first. We can obviously guide that to make sure, from a programmatic dependency perspective, that makes sense. Then it is gaining that agreement through the chief constables reference group, so then owning that roadmap to make sure that we are working through the prioritisation that takes into account the voices from across policing. That is the role of the senior product owner, the end-to-end responsibility for the products themselves.

The other role is the head of adoption. The adoption of the capabilities, i.e. the products, is absolutely paramount. At the national level, we are not the



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users of those products, so making sure we get it into the hands of operational officers at the soonest possible opportunity is absolutely key. Working closely with the forces, enabling more up-to-date and relevant investments of smaller capability, is much easier to do than otherwise would have been the case.

Previously, we were looking at release cycles of around 12 months. As you can imagine, the risk profile of a 12-month release cycle is significant. We are now chunking that down into potentially three months, if not shorter than that as well, so the certainty of delivery is much higher. Thus the investment being made at the force level to get ready for those capabilities can be done with more certainty as well.

Obviously priorities have to be made at the force level as well on what they invest in at what point in their life cycle. More certainty from the national programmes enables more certainty in investments, thus more certainty of readiness. Those are the two ways that we are engaging very closely across the forces.

Q39 Chair: I am quite interested that you are going to the front user first, because we have seen with the ESN that it is still not with most front users by quite some distance. Did you pick that up between you as SROs and learn lessons from that experience about building confidence at the front-line level?

Mike Hill: Indeed, we all work within the environment and we understand the challenges of getting capability into the hands of operational forces. An industry standard that we are adopting across the new engagement model is that more iterative delivery, to enable much quicker release cycles than otherwise would be the case.

Joanna Davinson: One thing that has enabled Mr Hill to switch to that approach, which I fully support—it is absolutely the way to go—is that taking the decision to simplify by saying we will just focus on PNC then enables the technical possibility of doing something called two-way replication. That essentially means that you can ensure that the new system and the old system, the police national computer, are synched up in terms of their data. Rather than a force having to do a switchover from PNC to the new system or work with two systems at the same time, which is operationally not adequate, by focusing and simplifying on the PNC we have been able to look at the possibility of two-way replication. This means you can run the two things in parallel but, to the user, it does not feel like it is two different systems.

Q40 Chair: They are sitting at one terminal, looking at what they need to look at, but it is coming through two different systems.

Matthew Rycroft: That means there will not be a cliff edge where up until midnight one day you are doing one, and then you have a massive risk by going on to the other. It will be done gradually, and different forces can go



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at different times, taking account of different priorities or different circumstances, as well as different products.

Joanna Davinson: We have looked at that approach before, but it was technically just too difficult to do when we had PNC and PND trying to join the two up. Then it is not two-way replication.

Q41 **Chair:** We will come to the PND in a minute. One of the challenges of transitioning, as we have seen, is the technology that is needed at the front line as well. You have the hardware transfer, and ultimately you are going to have to have new hardware as well as the background stuff. How is that going, and what lessons have been learned from that, given we have had now two resets?

There is a cost to the police forces; that is really the point I am driving at. It is a cost they have to build into their financial planning. One of the problems we saw with ESN is that they built in some costings and then had to carry on with the old system anyway, and buy new kit to do that, so their whole budgeting was out of whack. There is a whole chain of money, as well as technical support.

Joanna Davinson: I will ask Mr Hill to pick that one up, because he is closer than I am to the latest conversations with police on their end of the equation.

Mike Hill: As the Permanent Secretary outlined earlier, we are providing £30 million of funding to forces to enable adoption. We are working very closely with the techUK organisation, which is the vendor community, on how they operate within the force-level elements as well. The key thing about that is the risk profile of that adoption and enabling them to take it on on a much quicker basis than otherwise would have been the case.

Q42 **Chair:** The £30 million is just helping them work through what they have to do. It is not actually buying the bits of kit, is it?

Mike Hill: No, it is not.

Q43 **Chair:** What is the likely bill? For some of the small forces it is a very big commitment. They have five-year investment plans on IT. There have been two resets. They have ESN still hovering around. There are an awful lot of expensive things that forces will have to do, and that is where you have had problems before, when they have said, "We have spent the money to upgrade the old system. We haven't got the money, unless you give us it, for ESN". That money argument has been a barrier to progression. How are you going to make sure that it is not for the PNC?

Mike Hill: The prioritisation that has been clearly articulated to us from policing is the services that are currently on the PNC. Bringing them across to LEDS will not impact their ways of working. Enabling, through gateways and what have you, their systems at the force level to interact into LEDS, rather than PNC, means that the services they receive will be the same. Therefore, the levels of investment will not be as significant as you could



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look at from an ESN perspective, which will be the hardware and what have you.

Q44 **Chair:** It may be not so much hardware costs, Mr Webb. That is the point.

Stephen Webb: The IT departments will have a challenging job making sure it fits with all the force systems, but fundamentally you access it through your desktop or your mobile.

Chair: Through the mobile ideally, I guess, yes.

Q45 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Can I just build, Mr Hill or Mr Rycroft, on what the Chair is asking? I think what I am hearing is something quite significant this morning. Take Gloucestershire police, for example. They have a different communications systems to some of their neighbours, so under the new ESN system, presumably under the new way of working, all police forces are going to have the same communication hardware. Presumably under this too they are going to have the same hardware—or are they not? I see you are shaking your head, and that is fine, because we are learning. Are we moving more towards a national procurement system for police forces for hardware?

Mike Hill: I am sorry. I would not be able to comment on the national procurement strategy for policing.

Joanna Davinson: I do not think it is a hardware issue. The industry is moving much more to cloud-based technology, so it is less about hardware. On ESN, the work we have had to do with the vendor community there has been agreeing a common standard around how they will connect. Then the various vendors who provide the force systems have needed to come together and agree that is the standard they are going to adopt within their force systems. It is more that. That is more of a software-based thing, rather than a hardware-based thing.

Stephen Webb: I am assuming in Gloucestershire there are different vendors out there. Again, it is one system. Airwave is a single system, but there are different handset providers and so on, and I am assuming that is where Gloucestershire might differ from its neighbours, because it is a fully interoperable system.

Q46 **Chair:** Are you content that there is enough of a market, Ms Davinson? We have seen with other areas of Government how markets shrink. We will probably touch on some of this next week but, at that high level, do you think you will have a vibrant enough market of tech providers who can plug into the things that you are trying to improve in the central mainframe, so that it is not noticeable to the user but they also have a choice of who they go to?

Joanna Davinson: To a certain extent, the actions we are now taking in developing both ESN and the national law enforcement data service are expanding the range of possible providers. What tended to happen in the past is that systems were quite bespoke and you were locked into quite a



few providers of bespoke policing systems. We are now working much more towards standards-based, open architectures, using the same sorts of technologies as the rest of the world uses. That opens up the supply chain, rather than closing it down. I think we are going in the right direction in that respect.

Q47 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: You have had resets in 2018 and 2020. Are you confident now, Mr Hill, that you have got the programme where it needs to be to deliver definitely in 2025 or 2026?

Mike Hill: We have invested significant time and energy in the relationship but also the wider aspects that were stymying the ability of the programme to deliver effectively. We talk about the whole system challenge when we engage with our policing colleagues, which is about that system that was almost preventing delivery, from within the delivery engine of the programme itself but also outwith, across the wider landscape as well.

Through the reset and the work that we are doing on the engagement model, we are certainly addressing those constraints. That gives us increased confidence of deliverability of this programme going forwards, certainly.

We have a 12-month rolling plan and we have identified the initial six products that will be delivered. Those have been agreed and governed by policing. That will be delivered over that period, and then that will be iterated as we go forward. Again, we have increasing confidence in the ability to deliver this programme on a much more iterative basis.

We also should note that the operational risk to the PNC will diminish over time as well. As we are migrating services away from the PNC, on to LEDS, the prevalence of forces and the law enforcement community using the PNC rather than LEDS will diminish. The services will come across, and one of the benefits of this new way of working is that iterative approach that then enables that capability to get into the hands of forces much earlier and quicker. We are working that through as we speak.

Q48 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I get the optimism of your answer, but there is a little way to go between now and the thing fully coming onstream. What are the milestones that we as a Committee should be looking for to make sure you are on track in the next four years or so?

Matthew Rycroft: Can I just say two things? First of all, we deliberately put into the reset a go/no-go decision. I wanted to have a no-go option. There is an option just to transfer the PNC on to a different platform but without getting the benefits of transformation, of the cloud and so on that we have been talking about. That option is still there. The reason that we have not chosen it is that it costs roughly the same amount as this, but without the transformative potential benefits.

Q49 Chair: That would mean things like not being mobile-accessible.



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Matthew Rycroft: Exactly, but it is important for the Committee to know that there is that option there. It continues to be in our back pocket, and it was the reason why I wanted to have a conscious choice to go ahead with this, as we did decide in July.

The reason that we were confident in saying, "Yes, let's go in July" was that we looked at the 12 critical success factors and could see a route through. I want to slightly temper the optimism. This continues to be a complex programme that is technically challenging, and where all sorts of things could get in its way. The approach that Mr Hill has described and is leading is one that is designed to maximise our chances of getting round whatever obstacle the future will throw at us, but there will be those obstacles. What we can be confident about is our ability to avoid the whole thing getting stuck, precisely by chunking this up into individual products, allowing much more flexible and gradual adoption, force by force, and so on.

Q50 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** When are we going to get to a stage where it is definitely go? It is unsettling for everybody if you still have that go/no-go in the system. That is not helpful. It must be you that get so far down the line that you say, "Well, we've got to finish this". I would have thought within four years of such a major programme you should be there by now.

Matthew Rycroft: We decided in July to go.

Q51 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** You said the option is still there.

Matthew Rycroft: Go continues to have a safety-net option. It is not even plan B, but plan Z. It is there as the ultimate fallback. No, it is all systems go, but that does not mean a single date by which the whole thing will come into force in one go. It means the six products over the coming six to 12 months, followed iteratively by further products and a rolling one-year timescale of milestones, which we will ensure that this committee is updated on as constantly as you like, so that you can see what the milestones are for the year ahead.

Q52 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Can you set out for us very clearly, either now or in a note, what those milestones are, so that if we come back to this subject in a year's time we can see whether you have met milestone 1 and whether you are on schedule for milestones 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6?

Matthew Rycroft: Mr Hill, why don't you go through the six products for the next six to 12 months, and what to be looking out for from them? We can provide you with more detail about that each quarter.

Mike Hill: The first product that we are delivering, in conjunction with our colleagues at DVLA, is the photographs at the roadside. That has already rolled out to 22 forces.

Q53 **Chair:** That is photographs of drivers.



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Mike Hill: Yes, correct. That is linking DVLA data into the policing systems. We have already saved 19,000 police hours to date on those 22 forces. We will roll out over the next six to 12 months to the rest of the forces, and then we anticipate that 125,000 police hours will be saved per annum just through this one thing alone.

Q54 **Chair:** Just to be clear, that comes to a phone or a handheld device.

Mike Hill: It does, yes. It enables immediate identification. There are instances where we have found people who were purporting to be someone else. There was a case, I think in Yorkshire, of someone wanted for attempted murder who was found due to the ability to check their identity at the roadside. That is the first thing.

I talked earlier about lost and stolen property. That is a relatively small product, but that helps us learn. The key part of this is learning together with policing. Rather than going for a big bang, we have decided to learn and learn some more. That is ongoing as well.

Now we are looking at the further driver information, vehicles and person, for the next period. As part of that, some of those will be broken down. Particularly person will be broken down into multiple products, because it is a significant domain within the PNC.

Q55 **Chair:** Do you mean arrests?

Mike Hill: Yes, all the data pertaining to the person that is held on the PNC. It is such a large part of the PNC that we want to make sure that we break it into small enough chunks to deliver it iteratively, rather than it being too big and unwieldy.

That is the initial roadmap that we are looking at. That is being governed by policing, and through the chief constables reference group and the senior product owner, and that cycle of roadmap development will continue over the period. We are very happy to write back, and indeed come back, to the Committee in the future to outline how we have performed against those particular milestones and the roadmap we have defined so far.

Chair: We will definitely want a regular update, and that will help us and our sister Committee, the Home Affairs Committee.

Q56 **Peter Grant:** Following on from Mr Hill's comments, this is probably one for the Permanent Secretary. He has outlined the kind of operational capability that everybody wants every police officer to have in real time when they are out keeping us safe. There is a longstanding and fundamental principle throughout the UK that each chief constable has absolute autonomy for operational decisions, including in this context for deciding what kind of operating system, hardware and so on their officers will carry.

Do we just need to accept that maintaining that complete autonomy of 43 chief constables in England and Wales is always going to compromise the ability to implement the kind of transformation that Mr Hill has been talking



about? Do we just need to accept that, if you have 43 independent police forces, it is going to be extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to get the degree of co-ordinated IT system that we would all like to see?

Matthew Rycroft: We should all accept that it is complicated and difficult, but I do not accept that it is impossible. I do think that the arrangements—this new model that we have; this spirit of partnership; the new engagement that we have described—are designed to make that complicated task as easy as it can practicably be.

It is a trade-off for policing as well. Of course, if every police chief wants to think about it in terms of a veto, total control and so on, that is just going to add hugely to the cost. There are significant benefits in policing for them to come together, as they do through the police chiefs' framework, the NPCC, on this programme and on multiple other things as well, in order to speak with one voice, and then to engage with us more smoothly than they have done in the past. That is what we are seeking to get to—a different sort of model of engagement that resolves that set of concerns.

Q57 **Peter Grant:** I can see Mr Hill wants to come in, but can I just pick up on the phraseology you used there? Is there still an issue that what the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office describes as police chiefs wanting to retain a veto and overall control is exactly the same as what a chief constable would say is "me doing my job and properly exercising the autonomy vested in me from the Crown"? Is there still a culture difference, in that what chief constables see as exercising their rightful authority is seen by the Home Office as somebody just wanting a veto for the sake of it?

Matthew Rycroft: No, absolutely not. The situation is much more mature than that characterisation. Police chiefs know that they are receiving services from all sorts of places, including, in relation to IT, from the Home Office. They have extremely mature systems to identify and streamline their requirements for those sorts of services, including for IT. It is a well-established principle. What I am saying is that the trade-offs need to happen, and are happening, with the policing family.

Mike Hill: I just want to expand on and reiterate the point I made earlier, which is the co-ownership and co-authorship of the new engagement model. That went through a significant round of governance, through both regional chief councils and then the National Police Chiefs' Council in July. That was accepted by the NPCC, which is representative of all the chiefs at that point. However, they did raise a number of qualifications and we are taking those into account. Indeed, last week I wrote back to the NPCC and the chief constables reference group, outlining our approach to address the qualifications they have raised, We are taking them very seriously and working through them diligently with our policing colleagues to make sure that this new model can work, and work effectively.

Q58 **Peter Grant:** The NAO has reported that the Home Office has made NLEDS



a pilot programme for the new approach to working with police that you described earlier on. Would it have been your first preference to pilot a completely new way of working with the police on such a large, complex, critically important system that was already running into trouble? Are you just making virtue out of necessity?

Mike Hill: No, I do not think we are. We had a whole-system challenge, as I talked about earlier, of how we deliver these national programmes at the scale and efficiency that we need to. We had to do something different to make sure we had more confidence in the deliverability of the programme going forward, and that transpired in the new engagement model. That way of working is absolutely paramount to enable us to work effectively in partnership to deliver this. I think, in retrospect, NLEDP was the ideal programme to trial this on, because we had to do it and we had to do something differently to ensure we delivered.

Q59 **Chair:** I just wanted to touch on the costs, because of course we need to look at the money as well. It is quite staggering when you look at the £59 million that IBM had for development, and BAE Systems £12 million. I am looking at figure 4 on page 21. That money has gone out the door. Is there any legacy benefit from that investment?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes. First of all, a significant proportion of the investments we have made will be directly used, either in the future of this programme or in other programmes. Secondly, we are changing our commercial strategy. Just as we are chunking up the programme into these different products, so we are chunking up the contracts so that there will be a wider range of suppliers.

Q60 **Chair:** You had 45 contracts with at least 35 suppliers before, so what are the figures now? What are you planning? What is the difference going to be?

Mike Hill: The way we are structuring it now is that we have a partner who is going to deliver the end-to-end product, reducing significantly the number of hand-offs between different teams to deliver a single entity that can actually get in the hands of operational forces.

Q61 **Chair:** That is for each product.

Mike Hill: It is for each product, indeed. We have a tactical procurement at this moment in time to get us moving. We have three partners on board now. Then we will go into a strategic framework in the near future where we will go to procurement, and we will probably have about four to five strategic partners who will then provide us up to a maximum of 10 product teams at any one time, in total, so we will be developing on a modular basis about 10 products at peak. That will be the way that we will engage going forward, so significantly simplifying the way we engage our partner base.

Q62 **Chair:** Are you working with any of those tech suppliers—Ms Davinson, I would be interested to know because you are doing this generally in



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Government—to help try to shape the contract? They have more expertise, perhaps not than most of this panel, but than most Whitehall leaders on digital.

Mike Hill: With the first product team we procured, part of the procurement was to help us define what it means to engage and then help to shape the procurements going forwards as well. We are absolutely learning from our partners and using that learning to evolve the strategic framework going forwards.

Q63 **Chair:** There is lots more we can get into there. We might cover that at next week's session. Up to August 2021, as I said, IBM had spent £59 million of taxpayers' money. What exactly is left of that? Is there any of that that is nugatory spending that is now just gone and is not going to be helpful for the future programme? I will not list them all, but everything came to an end this year at some point, out of the top six active contracts.

Mike Hill: We were assessing the artefacts and the investments made to date, and we feel a significant proportion of what has gone before will be reused. The very clear steer from me as SRO and from the Department is that reuse is where we need to be. As we are building in new product teams, we are looking to use the requirements documentation and other artefacts that have gone before and can be reused. We think that is a significant proportion.

One of the key elements of this is the work we did on the public cloud platform. Initially the LEDS was going to be delivered on hardware within data centres. It was at the cutting edge of trying to get law enforcement to accept a public cloud approach, with all the benefits that gives us around scalability and cost, in order then to enable the deliverability of LEDS going forwards. That platform is now what we term as our law enforcement cloud platform within the Department, and we are moving a lot of our national systems off hardware in our data centres to that. That is a huge benefit.

Q64 **Chair:** Some of this money has gone on that, has it?

Mike Hill: Absolutely.

Q65 **Chair:** Yes, there is not a licensing issue, for instance, with IBM or BAE Systems about this.

Mike Hill: No.

Q66 **Chair:** What they have spent money on is now owned by the Home Office.

Mike Hill: That is correct. Important to that as well, we have helped shape the market, because commercial partners are now taking that and helping to accelerate that adoption across law enforcement, to move to a public cloud infrastructure, which is certainly helping with the efficiencies that the partners can gain there as well. That is a key area of our development that we have done.

Q67 **Chair:** Perhaps back to Mr Webb, who was there when some of this



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significant amount of money was being spent, what is your view? Are you as confident as Mr Hill about the fact that that money is not going to be wasted, so it is all going to roll through?

Stephen Webb: I do not know quite what has been decided since my time. It is worth pointing out that there is, I think, £189 million or so to the end of the financial year 2021, which is largely under my watch and a little bit afterwards. Half of that is on the actual development, and Mr Hill has been talking about that. Of the other half, you have about £30 million really to do with that requirement work and the archaeology, understanding the leadership of the programme and the detailed work in understanding what we are actually dealing with. It seems to me that is going to be essential and carry forward.

Then there is, the figures suggest, about £40 million in that building the platform and getting the security architecture and controls up to cloud, which sounds like much of that is going to be used. It feels to me that a very substantial amount of that is likely going to be reusable, but Mr Hill is in a better position to judge.

Q68 **Chair:** Mr Webb, I will stick with you on the issue about the PNC and PND being put together in this huge project. You were there at the time that decision that was made. Can you tell us why that complexity was added? Individually it would have been two big projects, but to bring it together is a huge challenge.

Stephen Webb: To be fair to the people making the decisions at the time, the prize was enormous. The PND has access to basic police intelligence from all the 43 forces. Combining that sort of intelligence information with the factual data on PNC would give you the opportunity, with the analytics overlay and so on, to have a really formidable system. It was extremely ambitious, and obviously we did not understand at that point how difficult both of them were.

There is a sense that the PNC urgently needed to be re-platformed, and everyone understood that. PND is also a system that is actually not being used as much as it could be, given its potential. It has a relatively small number of users, and the vast majority are using it for relatively simple vetting checks. To pull that together in a single system would have been fantastic, had we been able to make it work.

Joanna Davinson: Just to add to that, technology evolves. In 2016 the solution to bringing those datasets together was to put them together. As we have moved into a more cloud-based world, we think about how we work with data differently. There are other ways in which we can combine that data in order to achieve the original objective, without putting it into a single system. The technology would not have supported that in 2016. It does today.

Stephen Webb: One of the things we did not quite appreciate at the time was the extent to which, with our policing stakeholders, the standards are



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driven by the most sensitive thing in the system, particularly around security and audit. We always assumed we could get into a position where you would be able to have high and low-sensitivity parts of the system. What ultimately happened is that all the security is driven by the most sensitive thing in there. That drives the vetting process, whether people are allowed to work from home, the sort of "walled garden" approach in the cloud.

That means that PND, although relatively small, is a bit of a tail wagging the dog and has driven some very severe security constraints on the whole programme, which I think are now hopefully beginning to loosen. That is something we thought we could address, but cloud is a new environment and police were understandably nervous about it. The great potential of being able to put all this data together has its own risks.

Q69 **Chair:** Mr Rycroft, figure 5 gives a very useful summary of how the PND has been in, then not quite so firmly, then in again possibly, if the funding is available, then out again. What is the plan now for the police national database?

Matthew Rycroft: For the police national database, there will be a five-year programme up and running from April of next year.

Q70 **Chair:** It is going to go through basically the same process but within the constraints that Mr Webb has just outlined.

Matthew Rycroft: It will be a separate process.

Q71 **Chair:** Yes, but a similar approach, so engaging with the police in that way, having the products delivered in that way.

Mike Hill: If I can expand on that, over the last nine months we have been working very closely with the NPCC lead for the PND. We have undertaken a discovery phase. That has helped us figure through the strategy for the PND. The key element of that, on which work is ongoing, is the refresh of the software and hardware on the PND at this moment in time. Then there is the near-term capability uplifts, and then it is realising the original vision of actually having that federated search capability across the PNC, PND and then wider datasets across law enforcement into the future as well.

That can be achieved, as Ms Davinson talked about earlier, but you do not have to put them within the same monolithic structure in order to do that. We are doing it very differently. We will achieve the same goals that we set out to do originally, which is that federated search capability, but do it in a different, much easier and less complex way than was envisaged before.

Q72 **Chair:** Originally there was a goal but no plan about how to get to that goal. Is that a fair summary?

Joanna Davinson: I think there was a plan. I think that plan did not survive contact.



Q73 **Chair:** Therefore, it was not a very good plan, was it? You can call it a plan, but it is not actually going to happen.

Joanna Davinson: When the complexity became clear, we recognised that, albeit over time. The reason it was PND, then PNC, and then PNC and a bit of PND, was that all through that process we were looking at, “How can we simplify?”

Q74 **Chair:** It is a bit like the hokey-cokey. It is in; it is out—let’s shake it all about and get it started. I guess that would be a good thing, so let’s look forward to next April. We will be keeping a close eye on that. It is another thing to add to our list.

Mr Webb, you were there through some of these critical times. Between 2014 and 2016—in preparation for next week we have been looking at this across Government too—the Home Office has had a particular problem with projects that were being put together at that period of time. What happened?

Stephen Webb: I think there was a new way of looking at the programmes. We had some ambitious technical assumptions. There was a vision across the portfolio that there would be a lot of reuse and rework.

First, we were looking to bring all the data together in one place and bring in multiple customers. As a result, you were creating programmes like Home Office biometrics, where you had the police, counter-terrorism, the borders, the immigration system and parts of MOJ. It made a huge amount of sense to have all those in one place, but it did mean that the stakeholder mapping became formidably complicated.

I think there was also an appetite at the time for very ambitious new ways, digital, agile working and so on, that we really did not have any experience in doing. We were bringing stuff back in house, where for years we put things out to prime and SIs. Again, we massively underestimated just how much resource and expertise you needed in house to do that.

I always found it very interesting. There is a bit of a sense maybe in the UK that we followed fashions a little bit. We were throwing everything out in the 1980s, and then we were bringing it all back. When I met German and international colleagues, they felt they were meeting us again, having never got out of doing stuff in house. There was an enthusiasm for a new way of doing things. Again, there was an assumption that we would be able to build things and want to share it, and therefore we could cope with this level of ambition.

Q75 **Chair:** Where was the driver of that from? Was that at official level? Was it from Ministers?

Stephen Webb: It was very much GDS, Francis Maude, at the time. It was understandable, because the products seemed to be very similar. It made sense to do things once and reuse. NLEDS is an example where, in the event, we were not really able to reuse anything—the environments or



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whatever—because of the security. Stuff that had been built in the immigration space was not acceptable for police users to be used on police data.

Joanna Davinson: I think the digital ambition was good. We see this across Government, and we will probably talk about this more next week, but we as Government did not recognise that we were building in a so-called “brownfield” environment. We did not understand that we were not building a new thing in a new world. Our reference points should not have been start-ups. They should have been large financial services institutions, because we are building new stuff on top of legacy, and we just did not understand the legacy.

Stephen Webb: That is a great point. Of the programmes I was describing, the child abuse image database was in some ways easier because we built it from scratch.

Matthew Rycroft: One of the things we are trying to do now, learning from that period, is really think about the portfolio as a whole. A lot of these issues, as this conversation today has demonstrated with policing, but also more broadly, go from one programme to another, if you think about the capability, governance, leadership and the skills that individuals have.

Q76 **Chair:** This is what puzzles me. It is not new. A long time ago now, I was a Minister in the Home Office, and we looked at data mapping then. The Magee report is buried in the archives. It was this organigram that was complex beyond belief about what data needed to be shared and where it was being shared. There was a huge problem that was very clearly identified then. There was no solution then, yet the solution has been seen to be saying, “We have this one project; we can just do this”, not looking at the integration and the links, even though they had probably been identified by another bit of the Home Office that was not talking to the bit that was delivering the IT, I suspect.

Matthew Rycroft: With the benefit of hindsight, we need to constantly keep tabs on the total level of ambition. Sometimes we need to descope. Sometimes we just need to say, “No, we are not able to do this particular shiny new thing right now. We are going to have to wait until we have freed up some resource from other things”. That is a really difficult thing to do. I will be interested in your work on this.

Q77 **Chair:** The interdependencies are interesting. For example, on the DVLA situation, not being able to find in one place the points someone has on their licence might not be so important for the DVLA. There are layers and layers of complexities here. There are lots of slips, potentially, along the way, Mr Hill. I am giving you an opportunity to get an excuse in early, but we will hold you to it.

Mike Hill: Thank you very much. That is very kind of you.

Chair: When you come back to us with your metrics and your dates, it



would be helpful to know what your level of confidence in those is, because we are moving more, as a Committee, to think about windows of time, rather than a fixed point. The Elizabeth line has learned the lesson of that one; there are many others. Mr Francois has plenty of defence examples as well. Is that what you are going to be looking at: that sort of window to roll it out to police—to get it in a period of time, rather than a fixed point?

Mike Hill: Yes, indeed. One of the key benefits of the new way of working and the two-way replication is that multi-speed adoption. We do not have to set windows for each force to take a particular release. The way we can work is that, depending on their investment cycles and their strategic narrative, they can take it when they need to. However, we want to make sure that we complete the programme at the right point and it is fully adopted. That is one of the reasons why we are investing significantly with forces to enable that to happen.

Chair: I might come back to the money in a moment.

Q78 **Peter Grant:** Mr Rycroft, I think we understand that this was a very technically difficult and complex project to take on board, but some of the mistakes that were made were basic mistakes. The failure to identify and correct those mistakes continued for far too long, to the extent that by 2020, by which time the original timetable should almost have hit the system and been put in place, an external review found, "There appears to be a lot more effort spent talking about, measuring and documenting work than is spent actually writing code". That was at the time when the system should have been almost ready to go live. Do you consider it acceptable that nobody in the Civil Service or anywhere else has been held to account for that level of failure and mismanagement?

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, I think you are making the case for the reset that we had last year. That is precisely why we chose to have the reset, to take a step back, ensure that we could put a so-called red team on to this and look at all of the assumptions, all of the constraints, all of the relationships with policing and others, all of the way that technology had moved on since the start of this programme, and literally reset and see whether we just needed to tweak, to steer in a different direction or, indeed, to stop the whole programme and restart something else. That is what we did in that time.

Having that sort of approach is important to do. Certainly, if there are any examples of individual performance that need to be dealt with through performance measures, they will be. They were actually, in relation not to this programme, but to the deletion of the records in the police national computer that we were talking about at the beginning of this session.

Q79 **Peter Grant:** You set a lot of store in the reset decision towards the end of 2020. Is it not the case that the reset should have happened a lot earlier, and secondly that the job of your predecessor as Permanent Secretary was to make sure we never got to the stage where a reset was needed? It just seems to me, and I know other Committee members feel the same



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frustration, not only at the Home Office, that time and again we look and the NAO looks at repeated systemic failures that have led to either severe delays or severe cost overruns, or both, in major Government capital projects.

It is not actually our job or the NAO's job to come in five years after the mistakes have been made and look at whether they have been corrected yet. It is the job of the Civil Service to make sure that those mistakes are not made to begin with. How do we be satisfied that our successors in five years' time are not going to be sitting with your successors, being told yet again, "Well, we did a reset in 2022. Everything's going to be fine now"? How do we break that cycle of repeated failure to deliver?

Matthew Rycroft: That is the question that I ask myself constantly in this role. I am sure my predecessors did as well. We can each of us only deal with the evidence available to us at the time. That is a very strong argument in favour of ensuring that whatever programmes we embark on, and whatever solutions we end up buying or building, we bake in the agility and flexibility to respond to future events, whether they are changes in the technological environment, changes in the relationship with policing, or any other requirements that come along. That is the approach that we are seeking to take.

On top of that, Mr Webb and Ms Davinson have done a very good job, if I can say so, at setting out the way that this programme dealt with those complexities at that time. We are working on the foundations that they set.

Q80 **Chair:** It seems to us, as a committee, that the Home Office has jumped in with two feet first before doing the checks along the way. Over-optimism has characterised things. Would you not agree, Mr Rycroft?

Matthew Rycroft: We are absolutely seeking at the moment to avoid optimism bias and to make sure that we are building in additional contingency to take account of the subconscious optimism bias. We also have the benefit of the learning of recent years.

Q81 **Chair:** There have been a lot of projects to learn from.

Matthew Rycroft: There has been quite a lot learning, quite often the hard way. We are determined to capture that learning and to get it in from now on.

Q82 **Chair:** Maybe this will be the one that we come back to and go, "Well, it worked." Let's hope, because it would be good to have one Home Office project that does.

Matthew Rycroft: You have upbraided me for doing this before, but I will do it again, Chair. Of course there are lots of programmes that have been very difficult, which you rightly focus on. There have also been a lot of successes.

Q83 **Chair:** Is this the next success, then?



Matthew Rycroft: There was the future border and immigration system, so the introduction of the points-based immigration system, the police uplift programme, the EU settlement scheme.

Q84 **Chair:** This is brand new technology, some of it. That is different to the legacy projects. The big problems are when you are taking on a legacy and everyone says, "We'll just do this", and jumps in without doing the planning. Would you agree with that?

Matthew Rycroft: I totally agree with what you are saying.

Q85 **Chair:** It is your job to parade the good bits, but even then, now you have listed them, we will make sure we have a good look at them, just to double-check.

Joanna Davinson: I am sure we will talk about this more next week, but I do not think resets are bad. The problem is that we do them too late. The challenge is how we get earlier to the point where we recognise that we need to do something a bit more fundamental. For whatever reason, there were at least two resets on NLEDS, but we clearly were not ambitious or brave enough, in that first one, to really bottom out the problem. That is the lesson we have to reflect on and learn from.

Q86 **Chair:** We are considering in the Public Accounts Committee awards, which we might inaugurate or reinvigorate—I could use impolite language—"best mistake corrected". That is a polite way of putting it. Let's hope there is a project in the Home Office somewhere that we can consider in that category.

Matthew Rycroft: We will give you lots of candidates for lots of awards.

Chair: We have lots that failed. Whether they have yet been corrected is another matter.

Q87 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I have one or two quick questions for you, Mr Rycroft, please. What will be the impact on police and other users of having to find an additional £443 million to fund delays to the programme?

Matthew Rycroft: As Mr Hill has said, we will continue to work with policing on all aspects of this programme, including the financial ones. We will make sure that they are funded to get the benefits of this set of products as they become available.

Q88 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Okay, that is fine. What are you doing to ensure that the police have the funding to adopt NLEDS when it is ready?

Matthew Rycroft: It is the same answer, really. We will keep working with them to ensure that different forces have the funding that they require in order to make the choices that each of them will need to make about their own local circumstances. That is, of course, part of the funding settlement for policing. We are in a spending review.

Q89 **Chair:** It is a very long answer, saying we are in a spending review, basically, yes. I do not think the police chiefs will be over the moon about



that answer.

- Q90 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I want to keep pressing, because the real main purpose of this project this morning is to make sure that this thing is going to be delivered in 2025-26. Can I take you to page 35 and figure 9 in particular, and look at some of those traffic light issues? First, I will take you to the continuous delivery and quality. That line says, "Infrastructure for deploying products has been identified but it is not known when this will be ready. This means the first products will start development before a deployment plan is in place". Is that a potential hazard to the delivery of the programme?

Matthew Rycroft: I am sure Mr Hill will want to add to this. We are seeking to make a virtue of that fact by this approach that we were talking about, with the more evolving approach to delivery. We are looking ahead not in static terms over the next five years but in rolling terms over a year ahead from every quarter, and will share that with the Committee every quarter. This is why we have a high level of confidence about the half a dozen products that Mr Hill set out for the next 12 months, but then, after that, we will update that as we go.

- Q91 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** You can imagine I am going to the next line now, on technology. "A new technical architecture document has been produced. The ability for data to be passed between the police national computer (PNC) and the national law enforcement data service (NLEDS) in both directions is needed to allow police to adopt NLEDS gradually, but has not yet been developed". When will it be developed?

Matthew Rycroft: This is the two-way replication that Ms Davinson was talking about, which Mr Hill can update you on.

Mike Hill: That work is ongoing, We have done initial tech spikes that have been successful. That work is looking to be complete by spring next year. One of the things that we learned very clearly from the unfortunate incident we had earlier in the year about the PNC data deletion was the ability to get data back into the PNC quickly. We have opened up different levels of thinking and different ways of working to enable that to happen. We have taken the learning from that incident and applied it to LEDS as well. That has helped to accelerate the thinking and the probability.

As Ms Davinson talked about earlier, having the PND outside of LEDS now has significantly simplified the approach to this. That is certainly going to help as well. We are confident that we will get two-way replication working, and it is a fundamental aspect of it.

- Q92 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Presumably what happened in February is somebody pressed the wrong button and deleted a whole lot of data, and it has taken you between February and now to recover that data.

Mike Hill: No, the data was recovered on time, by the end of May.

- Q93 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Still, that is quite significant, between



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February and May. If you will allow me, what I am about to say is this: if a similar incident happened again, would you now, under this new system, be able to recover that data more quickly? It could have been quite catastrophic, not having a particular piece of data between February and May.

Mike Hill: The work we have done through the lessons learned report, and the work we have done on our software engineering principles and the way we undertake our quality assurance testing, have been significantly looked into and, as part of the review, we have upgraded. All of that will enable us, from a process perspective, to make sure that, if there are erroneous data deletions, we can recover from that very quickly or stop them happening in the first place. Cloud infrastructure enables us to have a very different approach to this than we had before as well.

Matthew Rycroft: For the record, even between February and May, there were still ways for policing to access any particular bit of data. It just was not through the normal PNC. I think the Committee needs to recognise that.

Q94 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** That is a very helpful reassurance. Thank you both. Perhaps the big one and the important one is the red traffic light: "Key roles in the programme team may become open. The programme depends on access to the PNC team but that team lacks the capacity to support other programmes as well as manage the PNC. This has already caused delays". Who would like to speak to that and tell us how you will have the skills to make sure the programme is not delayed?

Mike Hill: This report is obviously a snapshot in time.

Chair: It was only in the summer.

Mike Hill: Yes, indeed, and obviously it is a very dynamic situation with the recruitment that is ongoing. We are recruiting a director-level programme director. That person we have now shortlisted and will be interviewing at the end of the month. We are looking to have that programme director in place as a senior civil servant by the end of the year or early January. In the interim, we have a very experienced programme director who has taken on that role and is working that through. The handover from the previous programme director has been undertaken.

We have also filled a number of other roles. The interview for the head of adoption that we talked about earlier, from policing, was actually yesterday, and that has now been sorted out. The chief technology officer, the chief architect for the programme, another key role that was referenced, has been filled. We are working through the key roles within the leadership team and then, underneath that, throughout the programme.

With regards to the other aspect of this, which is the capacity of resource supporting the PNC, supporting and sustaining the PNC is a day job. We need to make sure that sufficient capacity is also available to help with the



change agenda. That is exactly what we are doing with the investments we are making in the team there, through bringing in additional resource, through bringing in apprenticeships to support that team, through partners and through contractors who can bump up the amount of capacity available to sort the sustain and run agenda, as well as the change. That is a significant focus for me and my team, to make sure that happens as well.

Q95 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: While that is an encouraging answer, it also begs the question, which Mr Grant was probing on, of how it ever got to this stage where you had such a shortage of skills to deliver such a key programme.

Mike Hill: We have restructured the programme and the team over the past nine months as we led up to the end of July. As part of that, we looked at the structure and what roles we needed to deliver this programme effectively going forwards. That has led to the recruitment campaigns that have been ongoing.

Regarding the PNC resources, as Mr Webb earlier outlined, they are highly niche skills, using coding languages from the 1970s, so there are not that many resources with sufficient experience and knowledge in the marketplace. That is why we are casting our net much wider in order to make sure that we have the right capacity available to support the sustain and the change agenda.

Q96 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Again, it comes back to my original question to Ms Davinson about scoping the projects at the beginning. It seems to me fairly fundamental that you would need those skills for an old legacy programme, to convert it into an up-to-date, state-of-the-art IT programme. Why has it taken until now to realise that you actually need them?

Mike Hill: There are two aspects to that. The development of the programme itself, which is all the architecture and all the knowledge, has been in place. What we are talking about then is that, when we need to reach into the PNC teams to support the programme, to undertake certain aspects of testing or what have you, that has been a constraint. We are addressing that and we have addressed that, and we are confident that we will get the right capacity on board in that highly niche team in order to do that.

Chair: It is like a history lesson for programming and software.

Q97 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: As the Chair says, as long as we are learning the lessons so that it never happens again. I will come to the last of the traffic light worries, and that is the culture: "Decision-making powers within the programme are not yet clear and further work is required to empower the programme team". What is happening to address that?

Mike Hill: We have addressed that. The key part of the way of working that we want to do is the empowerment. That goes from our policing colleagues being empowered to make decisions to the empowerment of



the programme to operate in the way it needs to. However, that empowerment comes with guidelines and guiderails that they need to work within. As this is a new way of working, developing those guiderails and enabling the programme team to feel empowered within those guiderails is absolutely key. We do not want to create a silo where bespoke development is done without the oversight, governance and support of the wider organisation. That is what that particular point refers to.

Q98 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Can I then take you to page 38 and ask how the endgame will pan out, moving from the old system to the new system? You need to turn off the PNC at some stage. Can you describe that process? How are you going to transition from the old to the new system?

Mike Hill: As I discussed earlier, in the approach with the iterative delivery, we are taking services away from the PNC and putting them on to LEDS, so the prevalence of forces using the PNC for the activity they need will reduce over time. The more we deliver, the more capability we put in forces' hands and the less requirement there is on the PNC. It will not be a big bang at the end. It is a much more iterative nature, and it will be delivered in that way. The risk profile, as I said earlier, of the PNC will significantly diminish over the lifecycle of the programme. That iterative way is where we are working.

Q99 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: That is helpful. Can I take you to paragraph 3.26? We have discussed this morning the pathway to get to the new programme. Could I ask you an odd question about what you will do when you have got to the new NLEDS system? Paragraph 3.26 says, "Once the transition is complete, the Department will need to ensure that NLEDS is managed as a live service for its users". What planning do you have for staff, finance and everything else to make sure that the new programme is managed properly?

Mike Hill: It is how we manage our programmes and how we manage that transition to live service. I assume we are talking from that perspective. We are working very closely with our live service colleagues to ensure of the supportability of LEDS. As we work through the iterative nature, we need to make sure, and we are making sure, that the right levels of training, development, resources, capacity and capability are all in place to support the programme and the capability going forwards. All of that is part of the programme planning cycle.

Q100 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: The purpose behind that question was that, just as you have had to build up skills to get the programme delivered, you will presumably be running down some of those skills because they will not be necessary. I am concerned that you do not run them down so much that you do not have the capacity to keep updating the programme.

Mike Hill: From the PNC perspective?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Yes.



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Mike Hill: Yes, absolutely. The focus is absolutely on keeping the right levels of capacity and capability available to the PNC for as long as we need that platform. There are no plans whatsoever to diminish that.

Q101 **Chair:** You talked earlier about the qualifications that some of the police chiefs have put in. That is a very diplomatic way of putting it. Presumably that is around money—buying kit and capability. There is actually going to be a big financial discussion. That qualifications element of that negotiation is potentially a big barrier still, because those forces and chief constables, as Mr Grant says, have a Crown responsibility; they are appointed to do a job and hold a line; and they will do that if they need to. Is that a risk, Mr Rycroft?

Matthew Rycroft: It is part of the context within which the programme is operating. We can assure the Committee that we have the relationships and partnerships in place in order to work through all of those qualifications, concerns and, indeed, things that have not popped up yet but will arise over the coming years.

Q102 **Chair:** There is a lot of management still to be done. That brings me to the fact that the first product owner, which I think is the technical term, is a chief inspector. Is that senior enough to have clout with very independent-minded chief constables, and now, of course, police commissioners as well?

Matthew Rycroft: The product owner works under the aegis of the senior product owner and the chief constables reference group, so you have that policing governance wrapped around that person. That person will not be making decisions in isolation. There is a much wider support network around them, and engaging with policing as well. Yes, it is appropriate seniority for an individual product, which is why we also have on top of that the senior product owner, who is the deputy chief constable, so at that level of seniority, supporting that whole product environment.

Q103 **Chair:** So far, it has gone okay.

Mike Hill: Yes.

Chair: Do you have any worries, though, that they could report back to their senior support and find that actually they are out of kilter with politics that are going on in certain forces?

Mike Hill: There are always worries when delivering a programme of this scale and complexity. The key part is really understanding, engaging and working with our policing colleagues. That will be part and parcel of the role of not only the senior product owner but the head of adoption as well, both obviously senior police officers.

Q104 **Chair:** What are you going to do, Mr Rycroft, if a police chief constable comes and says, "Yes, this is all great stuff you have done, but we are not going to be able to do it unless you give us more money"? Obviously you will say you will go back to their settlement and so on, but what if, genuinely, some forces could potentially struggle with some of the



pressures they are facing?

Matthew Rycroft: We will listen to their concerns, talk to them about them and seek to manage them through every level of governance of this programme. If their concerns are about the product, we will seek to engage them through the product owner system that Mr Hill has identified. I am sure we will seek to bring on different forces to pilot different products. That is the normal approach that we would take.

Q105 **Chair:** Is there any prospect of bringing some of the 43 forces together? There have been programmes of that in the past. Some of them are doing backroom stuff together. Are there any Home Office plans to amalgamate police forces?

Matthew Rycroft: No.

Chair: I am just tempting you there.

Q106 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I have one final question that has just occurred to me, Mr Hill. You very kindly set out the milestones by which we can judge whether the programme is on track. There are a number of different bits of the programme. Can we have an absolute assurance from you that, if you find a problem with one bit, that is not going to delay the development of a different bit? Will you have resources to be able to fix the problem on the bit that is not working but also keep developing the other bits?

Mike Hill: Yes, correct. The benefit of the new way of working is that they can be run in parallel. The individual products, with the end-to-end lifecycle that we are following with different partners and what have you, can operate independently. There are a series of common products that will be consumed from across the programme, and those are part of that as well. They are very clearly managed through normal dependency management and risk management—the normal programmatic that you would expect. Absolutely, we can work that through.

Q107 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** You will have the skills, products and finance to be able to do that.

Mike Hill: As we are currently planning, yes. Obviously we need to be able to react to changes in the environment, and that is where our risk planning comes in, and to make sure that any bumps in the road can be easily navigated.

Q108 **Chair:** We are going to be looking a lot at skills, I think, next week, just to give Ms Davinson some warning on that. I just wanted to check one thing with Mr Webb, as you were there at the time. It was in the middle of 2018 that the Infrastructure and Projects Authority said that there needed to be some changes, but it was not until early 2019 that the reset began. What was happening in those six months? Was there stuff to navigate inside the Home Office? What was the reason? Was it dragging feet?



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Stephen Webb: It was an incremental process. We were doing a huge amount of work trying to reset our understanding of the size of the task, doing replanning, the discussions about what order. It was a long process, and, we thought, a thorough one, but I rather agree with the point Ms Davinson made earlier. In retrospect, we should have been even bolder and more radical at that reset point, rather than having then to do it twice.

Joanna Davinson: Yes. The IPA report was in May. We did respond immediately. I am actually struggling to recall the specifics of it.

Q109 **Chair:** Of course, you were there at the time as well.

Joanna Davinson: We were certainly working very hard through the summer of 2018. Whether we had formally called it a reset I just cannot recall. We need to go back and look at that.

Q110 **Chair:** We will leave that there. I just wanted to check on the amount of kit that police officers may now need to carry. They are already able in some forces to get a picture of someone. If police officers have three different phones or handsets on their belts, how are you going to make sure that that is managed, and what feedback are you getting from the police on that?

Mike Hill: LEDS will be device agnostic, so police can use the mobility devices that they currently have, if they still have them at some point in the future, to access LEDS. There is no hardware impact.

Stephen Webb: The first iteration of the images at the roadside was through the Pronto app, which is an app that officers have on their standard mobile devices, which hopefully will, in time, be done through ESN.

Q111 **Chair:** They will have their mobile device, which eventually will hopefully be ESN. At the moment they have Airwave, they have a mobile device, and they possibly have their own personal phone, because we know in reality a number of officers use that because of the complexities of the system. They will probably have to carry two devices, you reckon.

Joanna Davinson: The aim is not to add to those, and over time to reduce them.

Chair: Yes, exactly. That is the point. I am a veteran of the "Blackberrys for bobbies" policy announcement. Anyway, let's not go over more past pain in the Home Office.

Can I thank our witnesses very much indeed for their time? That is Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary; Mike Hill, who is responsible for this project and other public protection technology in the Home Office; Stephen Webb, who was responsible for this project in the Home Office and now works in the Cabinet Office; and Joanna Davinson.

We look forward to seeing you again next week, Ms Davinson, when we also have HMRC, of course, to talk about some of these legacy challenges. Our report will be coming out in the next few weeks, probably six to seven



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weeks' time. We do have a short recess in the middle, which slightly slows things down. Can I thank you very much indeed for your time?