



House of Commons  
Committee of Public Accounts

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# The National Law Enforcement Data Programme

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**Twenty-Ninth Report of Session  
2021–22**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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## Summary

The Home Office (the Department) has overseen some challenging technology and digital projects in recent years. The Emergency Services Network and Digital Services at the Border programmes are examples of critical projects which have suffered from severe delays and cost overruns, this latest project does not give the committee any comfort that the Department is learning from past mistakes.

Over the last five years, the Department has wasted both vital time and scarce funding without making any meaningful progress in replacing the Police National Computer (PNC) and the Police National Database (PND). Under the Department's current plans, a replacement for the PNC is not expected to be available until at least 2025–26, more than five years later than the original delivery date of 2020, while total costs to the Department have increased by a staggering 68% to £1.1 billion. The Department now plans to upgrade or replace PND by a separate programme, but it is unclear when this will happen and at what cost.

The PNC is vital to all aspects of police work and their efforts to prevent crime and protect the public from harm. The PNC is reaching the end of its life and requires urgent replacement. While newer, the PND also needs to be replaced. In 2016 the Department began a programme to replace the PNC and the PND, aiming to create a single cloud-based system combining the data and functions of both - the National Law Enforcement Data Service (NLEDS) programme. While the challenges of delivering national programmes for the 45 police forces across the United Kingdom have long been recognised, the Department and the police did not develop the effective working relationship needed to enable the development of NLEDS, with the former Senior Responsible Owner of the programme conceding that the police had in the past lost confidence in the Department's ability to deliver the programme. The Department has now recognised that more effective working with the police is fundamental to the successful delivery of NLEDS and other technology programmes in its portfolio and has changed tact via the announcement of a new 'partnership' approach, with policing now involved in all decision-making at every level.

Despite the failure of NLEDS to deliver meaningful benefits to the police, and several negative evaluations of its progress, the Department did not take decisive action to recover the programme until late 2020. This reset required the programme to take a different, iterative approach to its delivery and has led to changes in its senior leadership. It is not yet clear that these changes will put the programme back on track to deliver. It remains to be seen whether the Department's new approach to working with police and its more iterative approach to developing the technology will mean that NLEDS will be ready to replace the PNC within the revised timetable. We will revisit the Department's progress next year.

## Introduction

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The PNC is the most important national police information system in the UK. Introduced in 1974, it is the main database for criminal records and is used daily by police officers across the UK's 45 police forces, and by a range of other organisations. The PND, which was introduced in 2011, is a national intelligence-sharing system used across police forces and other bodies such as the National Crime Agency. As these are both national systems, the Department has responsibility for their operation, maintenance and replacement. In 2014 the Department decided that the existing PNC and PND systems should be replaced by a single, modern cloud-based system which would meet the evolving needs of its users and be more adaptable to future requirements. Consequently, it launched the National Law Enforcement Data Service programme in 2016, with the aim of delivering the new system by 2020 at a cost of £671 million.

## Conclusions and recommendations

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1. **After five years, the Department has not delivered any of the expected services to the police through the NLEDS programme, and it is not clear how it can deliver the full capability required by 2025–26.** The Department has produced a ‘roadmap’ showing the progress it expects to make over the next year on six product areas within the revised NLEDS programme. Because this is an iterative plan, it is not clear what capabilities will be developed and how and when these will be delivered beyond the next 12 months. The programme has yet to demonstrate that the PND and PNC systems can be successfully brought together to provide police officers with the single system that is envisaged. The Department lacks the skilled staff required to design, develop and manage its various technology programmes, including NLEDS. Given the problems and complexities the programme has encountered in its first five years, it is clear that NLEDS retains a great deal of risk. We are sceptical that the Home Office’s optimism for delivery by 2025–26 is justified.

**Recommendation:** *The Department must set out a detailed roadmap for the delivery of the full NLEDS capability by 2025–26 and its plans for police forces to transition from the PNC to the new service. This should include clear milestones to which the Department can be held accountable for.*

2. **The Department made poor decisions at the outset of the NLEDS programme and, despite signs it was going badly, was slow to make the necessary changes to correct this.** The original scope and ambition for the NLEDS programme was unrealistic. The Department created a programme designed to replace two vital police information systems without fully understanding the police’s requirements or how these systems worked. The PNC had evolved over several decades as it was adapted and expanded. When the programme team attempted to understand how the PNC worked, it became clear that it was much more complex than the Department had anticipated, resulting in delays and large amounts of additional work. An early programme decision to merge the PNC and PND systems made the complexity worse because the two systems used very different data formats. As the consequences of these issues became apparent, a series of internal and external reviews highlighted that NLEDS was at risk of not delivering what the police needed. Despite these warnings, the Department did not step back to assess the fundamental problems that the programme had encountered, and its first programme reset in 2019 was not effective in addressing these problems. Following the second programme reset in late 2020, the Department then took several months to decide whether to proceed with the programme.

**Recommendation:** *The Permanent Secretary should ensure that he and other senior staff have sufficient regular oversight of NLEDS from now on, to ensure that he can quickly see problems as they arise and be prepared to take early and decisive action to recover or restructure the programme.*

3. **Working effectively with the police is critical to the delivery of NLEDS and other technology programmes, but it is not yet clear that the Department’s new approach will resolve longstanding challenges in delivering national programmes for local forces.** We recognise that the challenge of managing relationships with 45 operationally independent police forces to deliver a national programme is

a significant one, but the Department and police have long been aware of this. Contrary to good practice in other bodies such as the NHS, the Department failed to establish a joint vision with police until two years into the programme. As costs increased and the programme failed to deliver any meaningful capability in its first four years, police users lost confidence in the Home Office's ability to deliver NLEDS and other technology programmes, to the point where the police's most senior officers wrote to the Permanent Secretary to raise their concerns. The Department has now belatedly changed its approach to working with the police and is aiming to establish a partnership approach rather than a customer-supplier arrangement. The Department recognises that police forces may require additional funding to adopt the NLEDS system and will need to address this in the forthcoming Spending Review.

**Recommendation:** *The Department needs to carefully monitor its new partnership approach to ensure it enables joint and timely decision-making with the police. The Department should write to the Committee in six months with an update on the new working relationship and whether further changes will be required.*

4. **The police must continue to rely on the PNC for another five years, despite the risks to its availability.** The PNC is the most important law enforcement technology system in the UK, and it is vital that it is constantly available to police and other users. Given its age, the current system is remarkably reliable. However, the PNC experienced a significant data loss in January 2021 and the knowledge of how it works has become harder for the Department to maintain. It is difficult and expensive to recruit people with skills and experience in the ageing technology used by the PNC. The team that maintains the PNC is under-resourced and several staff are nearing retirement, which means it is difficult for the team to run the PNC and also support programmes like NLEDS. The Department currently plans to run this piece of critical national infrastructure without full manufacturer support for the database after 2024, meaning it will not have that support for at least a year, though the Department plans to provide in-house support instead.

**Recommendation:** *Alongside its Treasury Minute response, the Department should set out for the Committee how it will guarantee that police will be able to access the PNC service until NLEDS is ready. This should include a full assessment of the risks of continuing to run the PNC and contingency plans for failure. This plan should include a review point at which the decision to replace the PNC's operating system can be taken promptly.*

5. **The Department does not yet have a plan for maintaining the PND and combining its data with NLEDS in future.** The Department has changed its plans for integrating the PND with the NLEDS programme several times, and it has now been excluded. The PND, introduced in 2011, is nearing the end of its original lifespan and will need a technology update. The Department intends to establish a separate five-year programme to update the PND, but this will not begin until 2022. The previous intention to integrate PND and PNC led to the Department repeatedly deferring upgrades to and investment in the PND, affecting both service quality and stability, but a refresh of the most critical elements of the PND will cost at least £13 million. The Department says that data from the PND and the PNC will be accessible to police using a 'federated search' without the need to merge the two

systems. While we welcome the prospect of police finally receiving this capability, these changes to the Department's approach mean that the planned benefits of joined-up systems and wider usage of the PND by police are now delayed and cost savings from rationalisation are less likely.

**Recommendation:** *The Department should write to the Committee when it has an approved business case for the PND setting out its plan, milestones and budget for expanding the use of the PND and ensuring police will be able to access PND data via NLEDS.*

6. **There is a risk that the Department still lacks the capacity to prioritise and deliver major digital programmes on time.** In common with many other government departments and agencies, the Department is reliant on a range of legacy technology systems that need updating or replacing. We have seen several major programmes to deliver such replacements encounter major problems and require resetting, for example the Emergency Services Network and Digital Services at the Border programmes. The Department's failure to deliver NLEDS is another example. The Department has tried to do too much at once and has failed to prioritise programmes or develop the skills it needed to adopt 'agile' methods. It did not understand challenges posed by complex legacy systems and police forces' operational independence, even though it should have been clear that these were present. In its evidence the Department recognised that it needs to be better at saying 'no' to unrealistic technology programme proposals. The Department has now made some changes to improve how it involves police users in such programmes and plans to use the NLEDS as a pilot for its new approach, which can then be applied to other police programmes. There is a clear risk that the Department still lacks the programme, technical and commercial skills needed to identify realistic timetables for its major programmes.

**Recommendation:** *The Department must be realistic about how long it will take to deliver major programmes, given the skills and capabilities and funding available. It should require all SROs of major programmes to report annually on how they will manage any gaps between the skills and capabilities required to deliver and those available in their programmes. The Department should write to us in six months' time with an update on how this is being implemented.*

# 1 Resetting the programme

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1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office (the Department) and from the Department's Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) for the National Law Enforcement Data Service (NLEDS) programme. We also took evidence from the Department's previous SRO for the programme and from its previous Chief Digital, Data and Technology Officer (CDDTO).<sup>1</sup>

2. The Department manages two police IT systems, the Police National Computer (PNC) and the Police National Database (PND), which both need replacing:

- The PNC is the most important national policing information system in the UK. Since 1974 it has been the main database of criminal records. It is used by front-line officers from all 45 local police forces in the UK<sup>2</sup> to understand who they are interacting with, as well as by 127 other organisations who need to access the data it holds. In 2019–20 the police searched or updated the PNC 143 million times.
- The PND was introduced in 2011 following the Bichard Inquiry in 2004, which criticised police information sharing and recommended that a national intelligence-sharing system be created. It makes more than four billion pieces of police intelligence available to licensed users in police forces and 18 other organisations.<sup>3</sup>

3. The Department's programme to develop NLEDS was launched in 2016 to replace the PNC and the PND, which are reaching the end of their useful lives, and to enable the combined data to be linked to other systems. The programme is run by the Department with support from contractors, which have included BAE Systems, IBM and others. In 2020, following increasing costs, delays and significant police concerns that the programme was not meeting their expectations, the Department decided to reset it. The Department removed the PND from the programme's scope, adopted a new approach to delivering technology and set out its intention for the police to take a greater role in the programme's development.<sup>4</sup>

4. The Department has extended contracts to maintain the PNC and the PND and expects NLEDS to fully replace the PNC by 2025–26. Delivery by 2025–26 will be more than five years later than the original planned delivery date for NLEDS of 2020. When the Department set it up in 2016, the NLEDS programme was expected to cost £671 million. Total expected costs to the Department have now increased by 68% to £1.1 billion. The annual cost of continuing to run the PNC until it is replaced is £21 million, while the expected annual cost to run NLEDS, once it is ready, is £17 million.<sup>5</sup>

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1 C&AG's Report, *The National Law Enforcement Data Programme*, Session 2021–22, HC 663, 10 September 2021

2 The 45 is made up of Police Scotland, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the 43 local forces in England and Wales

3 C&AG's Report, para 1

4 C&AG's Report, paras 2, 3

5 C&AG's Report, paras 3, 5

## Delivering NLEDS capability by 2025–26

5. As reported by the NAO, as of April 2021, the Department had only ‘moderate confidence’ in its new plans and did not have a programme plan assuring delivery by 2025-26. It then said in June 2021 that it had increased confidence in the deliverability of the programme. The Department now plans to deliver NLEDS technology in smaller self-contained ‘products’ rather than all at once. It does not intend to produce a detailed plan of what products it will make or when they will be completed but told the NAO that it would work flexibly with the police to agree priorities and timetables.<sup>6</sup>

6. After five years of development, nothing has been delivered into live usage across all police forces.<sup>7</sup> A preliminary version of one product - the roadside driver check – had been released to 15 police forces when the NAO reported, and the Department told us that figure was now 22. The preliminary version uses DVLA data and interfaces developed outside the programme, which allows police to view a driver’s photograph but does not yet enable access to other aspects of their DVLA record as it is intended to do in future.<sup>8</sup>

7. The Department told us about its new engagement model, with more iterative delivery intended to enable quicker release cycles, so that capability gets into the hands of police forces more quickly.<sup>9</sup> Where previously the Department had been looking at release cycles of around 12 months, it said it was aiming to reduce them to around three months or less for products, so that the certainty of delivery would be higher.<sup>10</sup> When asked about its confidence in delivering the programme by 2025–26, the Department said that its recent work on the reset and the new engagement model had given it “increased confidence of deliverability of this programme going forwards”. It added that it had a 12-month rolling plan and had identified the initial six products that would be delivered.<sup>11</sup> When asked about longer-term milestones, the Department said it had a rolling one-year timescale of milestones, on which it could give the Committee further detail and update us in future.<sup>12</sup> It said it was looking ahead not over the next five years, but a year ahead from every quarter, which was why it was confident about the progress for six products over the next 12 months, but would then “update that as we go.”<sup>13</sup> After our evidence session the Department provided us with its ‘roadmap’ covering progress of its first six product areas up to the end of quarter 3 (September) 2022.<sup>14</sup> We have re-produced some key parts of that ‘roadmap’ in Figure 1. We expect to return to this subject to see whether the Department has progressed with these products as planned, and look forward to regular updates being provided to us.<sup>15</sup>

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6 C&AG’s Report, paras 16, 3.18

7 C&AG’s Report, para 2.17

8 Q 52; C&AG’s Report, paras 2.17, 3.18

9 Qq 39, 47

10 Q 38

11 Q 47

12 Qq 48, 51, 52

13 Q 90

14 Letter from Home Office Permanent Secretary to PAC Chair 7 October 2021

15 Q 52

Figure 1: Extracts of the Home Office's October 2021 'roadmap' looking ahead 12 months for the first six product areas

Product area	Home Office's description	Expected progress
Photographs at the Roadside	Driver image from Driving Licence viewable on police-issued mobile devices.	Online in 38 police forces by the end of 2021. Available to all by March 2022.
Property	An improved register of stolen property.	Beta* release planned for March 2022.
Drivers (full roadside check)	Full DVLA driver information accessible at roadside including driver image.	Expected beta* release in March 2022 Extend release across forces by September 2022.
Person	More accessible compliant information about people of interest with automated alerts to new data - beginning with a focus on wanted people.	Discovery/alpha* phase for the first of a set of 9 person products to conclude during quarter 1 of 2022 Wanted Person Beta* live with Pioneer forces during quarters 2 and 3 of 2022.
Audit	Improved functionality supporting audit investigation underlying all products.	Discovery* and alpha* work underway building on previous design and development work to support early releases.
Vehicles of interest	Improved real-time access to DVLA data and supplementary information on vehicles.	Pre-discovery* phase expected to conclude by end of 2021. Subject to success of 2 Way replication pilot, alpha* phase quarter 1 into quarter 2 of 2022, beta* phase quarter 2 into quarter 3.

\* The Home Office defines its product phases as:

Pre-Discovery – Mapping the existing system we're operating in, reviewing our existing knowledge - revealing the gaps in our current research.

Discovery – Ensuring that we understand the problem that needs to be solved. Before we commit to building something.

Alpha – Build an evidence base for the right approach. Test with real users. Prove or disprove our hypotheses.

Beta – Build out the best option from alpha. Continue to learn and iterate by operating a product for real users.

Source: Letter from Matthew Rycroft, Home Office Permanent Secretary, to Committee dated 7 October 2021, full version with "roadmap" available on Committee website

8. The Department told us that it has also retained what it called a 'no-go option' for the programme, whereby it could still decide to transfer the PNC on to a different platform, but without getting the same benefits of transformation, such as being cloud-based. It

said it was confident in the benefits of its new approach which allowed more flexible and gradual adoption, force by force. But the programme remained complex and technically challenging, with obstacles that could get in the way, and so it was retaining this option as the “ultimate fallback”.<sup>16</sup>

9. One of the critical success factors for the programme is having the right people in place to deliver it. The programme depends on access to the PNC team but that team lacks capacity to support other programmes as well as manage the PNC, and this issue has caused delays.<sup>17</sup> Key staff on the PNC team are approaching retirement, while the specialist skills and knowledge required to maintain the PNC make it difficult for the Department to recruit and train replacements.<sup>18</sup> The Department emphasised the difficulties of finding people with the niche skills required, such as working with coding language from the 1970s. It pointed to having carried out various recruitment activities, recent and ongoing, and to having restructured the programme team over recent months.<sup>19</sup> We registered our concern that it had taken the Department so long to be getting to grips with an issue about the skills needed to deal with an old legacy programme, when the need to do so should have been clear from the start.<sup>20</sup>

### Poor decision-making about the programme

10. There were numerous reasons for the Department’s failure to deliver the NLEDS programme to the originally expected timetable. These included:

- The Department and the police did not have a consistent shared understanding of the programme, with the focus of the programme changing several times;
- The Department did not prioritise the programme’s funding relative to other law enforcement ICT programmes, resulting in short-term funding shortfalls every year from 2016 to 2019;
- The Department changed several fundamental aspects of the NLEDS technology as the programme progressed, resulting in additional work and expenditure; and
- The Department’s management approach, with multiple contractual relationships, produced a bureaucratic culture and inefficient development process.<sup>21</sup>

11. By early 2018, the Department had recognised that the programme would not deliver as originally planned. It had underestimated the amount of work required and the effort remaining was unaffordable within the allocated budget. In June 2018, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) reviewed NLEDS and concluded that delivery of the programme appeared to be unachievable. The Department began its first ‘reset’ of NLEDS in early 2019. By autumn 2020 the police had lost confidence in the programme and, in response, the Department began a second reset, which is still being implemented.<sup>22</sup>

16 Qq 48–51

17 Q 94; C&AG’s Report, Figure 9

18 C&AG’s Report, para 3.7

19 Qq 94, 95

20 Q 96

21 C&AG’s Report, paras 9–12

22 C&AG’s report, paras 13–14, 1.13

12. The former SRO for the NLEDS programme acknowledged that the Department should have come earlier to the stage where it stepped back, stopped work and considered more fundamental choices about how to proceed. He described how the Department had under-estimated the complexity it expected to find within the old PNC system. For example, it anticipated that asking the system to show a person's driving licence would be relatively simple, perhaps involving up to five business rules, but it turned out to involve 40. The lack of documentation for the PNC meant that the Department repeatedly came across such surprises.<sup>23</sup> The Department's former CDDTO added that "our real error was that we underestimated the complexity."<sup>24</sup>

### Working with the police forces

13. The operational independence of UK police forces is a key challenge for the Department's implementation of national law enforcement programmes such as NLEDS. The 45 UK police forces are independent of central government, which means that the Department does not generally direct the police to accept a particular ICT system or way of working. However, and as stated above, one of the causes of the Department's failure to deliver the NLEDS programme to the originally expected timetable was that the Department and the police did not have a consistent shared understanding of the intended outcomes. The Department and the police only documented the 'vision' for the programme in September 2018, almost two years into its development.<sup>25</sup>

14. Despite the Department's attempt to reset the programme in 2019, the police continued to have concerns about progress. In September 2020, the programme's Chief Constables' Reference Group stated that a failure to deliver against a proposed second reset would result in a formal withdrawal of consent for NLEDS from the police. This message was reinforced in October 2020 when the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) wrote to the Department's Permanent Secretary stating that the police had lost confidence in the Home Office's ability to deliver a range of law enforcement technology programmes, including NLEDS.<sup>26</sup>

15. The former SRO acknowledged that the Department had not achieved the sense of partnership with the police that it would have liked and that, following the first reset and finding things were even worse than previously realised, it was understandable that the police had lost confidence.<sup>27</sup> He acknowledged that the Department had not got its relationship with the police into the right place. For example, there had never been a position where the Department and the police could together make decisions about trade-offs between programmes, and instead that "we sort of had to make those decisions ourselves in the Home Office, which is not what we would like to do".<sup>28</sup>

16. The Department told us that the approach it is now taking is "to have the police on the inside", with policing involved in all the decision-making at every single level.<sup>29</sup> The Department said that previously in the programme, police had been part of the wider governance regime, but not part of the leadership team. It commented that previously

23 Q 13

24 Q 18

25 C&AG's Report, paras 17, 2.1–2.2

26 C&AG's Report, para 1.14

27 Q 13

28 Q 14

29 Q 17

the relationship between the Department and the policing felt like a ‘customer-supplier’ relationship, but the new engagement model was much more of a partnership approach, with police representatives clearly there to co-deliver.<sup>30</sup> The Department told us that its new engagement model is co-authored, agreed jointly with the police, and that the NLEDS programme was a pathfinder programme for this new way of working together.<sup>31</sup>

17. We asked about the inherent difficulty of reconciling the need to maintain the autonomy of individual police forces with the need to implement co-ordinated and consistent IT transformation across all of the forces. The Department said it accepted that the task was complicated and difficult, but not impossible. It said that its new engagement model and spirit of partnership were “designed to make that complicated task as easy as it can practicably be.”<sup>32</sup> The Department also told us that the National Police Chiefs’ Council had raised a number of qualifications about the new engagement model, which it was taking very seriously and working through diligently to make sure that the new model worked effectively.<sup>33</sup>

18. On funding, the Department confirmed that it might give forces funds to ‘come on board’ and test things early, and that it had put aside a £30 million contingency, specifically to work with individual forces on their adoption of the new law enforcement data system.<sup>34</sup> On ensuring that police have the funding in future for NLEDS, the Department said it would keep working with forces to ensure they could make the choices each of them needed to make, and that this was part of the spending review.<sup>35</sup>

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30 Qq 31–33

31 Q 17

32 Q 56

33 Q 57

34 Qq 23–24, 41

35 Q 88

## 2 Future resilience

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### Continued reliance on the Police National Computer

19. The Department's failure to deliver NLEDS to date means that the increasingly fragile PNC system has not been replaced, bringing greater risks for police operations and requiring the police to bear more cost. In this report we have already mentioned that key staff on the PNC team are approaching retirement, and the specialists skills and knowledge required to maintain the PNC make it difficult for the Department to recruit and train replacements.<sup>36</sup>

20. The PNC has consistently met its service availability targets in recent years; from January 2020 to March 2021 the PNC's availability was 99.74%, exceeding the Department's target of 99.65%. However, in January 2021, the PNC experienced a data loss affecting 112,697 person records. The Department's efforts to recover the data lost were made more difficult by the ageing technology on which the PNC is based.<sup>37</sup>

21. Concerning the January 2021 incident, the Department told us that all deleted data had now been recovered and everything that had gone wrong in January had been put right.<sup>38</sup> The Department said that the data had been recovered by the end of May, and that until then there had been ways for police to access what they needed, just not through the PNC.<sup>39</sup> It told us that the incident happened because of human error, not because the PNC is old.<sup>40</sup> The Department had accepted all of the 21 recommendations made by Lord Hogan-Howe after his independent review of the data loss.<sup>41</sup>

22. The Department also confirmed that there had been an outage earlier this year, which was due to a problem with network availability and the 'wider PNC ecosystem' in its Hendon data centre, affecting the ability of the police to access the PNC.<sup>42</sup> It said it was investing significantly in this ecosystem to make sure the issue with not being able to access the PNC was unlikely to happen again.<sup>43</sup> The Department's former CDDTO (who is now Executive Director of the Government's Central Digital and Data Office) stressed that the PNC had consistently met its service levels, but acknowledged also that outage at some point is "an inevitability in a legacy system."<sup>44</sup> While ideally all infrastructure and software would be kept at a supported level, she said that the challenge with the PNC was that it was so old that some components would go out of support in the next five years. The former CDDTO acknowledged that there have been cases where government has been over-optimistic about when new technologies would come on stream, and had therefore neglected to invest in legacy systems and created a backlog of problems. But she said that had not happened with the PNC, which had been maintained and supported throughout its life.<sup>45</sup>

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36 C&AG's Report, paras 15, 3.7

37 C&AG's Report, para 15

38 Q 2

39 Qq 92, 93

40 Q 7

41 Q 2

42 Q 6

43 Q 8

44 Q 10

45 Q 11

23. As the NAO reported, the PNC's current technology will no longer be fully supported beyond 2024. The Department told the NAO that it had decided to accept the risk of running the PNC without support for the database after 2024.<sup>46</sup> In our evidence session the Department claimed that there would only be one small element of the system that will be unsupported beyond 2024, which was also the most stable element with no incidents against it for the last four years. The Department said it was investing significantly to ensure it could provide internal support mechanisms for that element. The former CDDTO confirmed that while the element would be unsupported by the vendor, the Department would provide that support in its stead. The Department said it was confident it would have the necessary expertise itself to deal with anything that came up.<sup>47</sup>

## Replacing the Police National Database

24. The PND enables police forces to share intelligence that they have gathered locally. It was created in 2011 following the 2004 Bichard Inquiry prompted by the murder of two girls in Soham, Cambridgeshire, which criticised police information-sharing. The PND holds information about people, objects, locations and events, and enables analyses of these data. It contains over 4 billion pieces of information including records of organised crime, safeguarding issues and domestic abuse. In 2014 the Department recognised that the PND, while newer than the PNC, was also reaching the end of its useful life and needed updating.<sup>48</sup>

25. The Department intended that the NLEDS programme would combine the PNC with the PND, which was over-optimistic given the time originally available, but has now decided that the NLEDS programme will focus on replacing the PNC alone. In December 2020, the Department removed the PND from the scope of the NLEDS programme and it will now be maintained as a standalone system until 2031.<sup>49</sup> There had been various changes in plans for what priority to give the PND in the programme, or indeed whether to make it an optional element, before the decision to remove the PND from the scope of NLEDS entirely.<sup>50</sup>

26. Police and other users will therefore be unable to access PNC and PND data from a single system, which was one of the Department's original objectives for NLEDS, for the foreseeable future. The previous intention to integrate the PND and the PNC led to the Department repeatedly deferring upgrades to and investment in the PND, affecting both service quality and stability. The Department estimates that a refresh of the most critical elements of the PND will cost at least £13 million between 2021 and 2025.<sup>51</sup>

27. The Department's former CDDTO commented that the Department had added complexity to the NLEDS programme by trying to bring together the PNC and the PND into a single service. It had not understood the complexity of bringing that data together. In 2018, prior to the first reset and when she had still been in the Department, she and the former SRO had looked at the option of just focusing on the PNC, but at the time had

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46 C&AG's Report, para 16

47 Qq 27, 28

48 C&AG's Report, paras 1.5, 1.6

49 C&AG's Report, para 7

50 C&AG's Report, para 2.21, Figure 5

51 C&AG's Report, paras 2.24, 3.10, 3.11

not managed to get police forces on board with that approach.<sup>52</sup> She commented that separating the PND and the PNC had significantly reduced the complexity of what the Department had to do and given it a much clearer development path.<sup>53</sup>

28. The Department told us that there would be a separate five-year programme for the PND, starting from April 2022.<sup>54</sup> The Department said it had been working with the NPCC lead for the PND over the last nine months on a “discovery phase”, developing a strategy of which the key element was currently the refresh of software and hardware. Then there would be the “near-term capability uplifts”. Then they would turn to “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.” The Department said it would be doing things very differently to what was envisaged before, to join up PND and PNC systems. Rather than putting the two systems within the same ‘monolithic structure’, it would achieve the same goals in a “different, much easier and less complex way”, which is that “federated search capability”.<sup>55</sup>

### The Department’s delivery of major programmes

29. The Department is delivering several other national ICT programmes for police use, in addition to NLEDS, and needs to work closely with the police on all of them. The portfolio of programmes includes the Emergency Services Network, Home Office Biometrics and the National Automatic Number Plate Recognition Service. In 2020–21, these programmes cost £656 million.<sup>56</sup> Departments across Whitehall face huge challenges to update or replace legacy systems, and must try to get the balance right between investment in continuing to upgrade legacy systems and knowing when to replace old systems with something that is more modern and fit for the future.<sup>57</sup>

30. The NLEDS programme team is also changing the way it delivers technology to be more iterative. The November 2020 external programme review recommended an ‘agile’ approach in which technology is released gradually and changed in response to feedback. The Department’s view is that such an approach should help the programme develop technology to meet the needs of police forces.<sup>58</sup> The Department stressed to us how much it wanted to be attuned to the police’s needs so that forces can do the best possible job on behalf of the public. It does not know the way that technology will change in five or ten years’ time, but needs to ensure that every solution and system can adapt for the future.<sup>59</sup> The Department said it wanted to ensure 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.”<sup>60</sup>

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52 Qq 14, 15

53 Q 18

54 Qq 69–70

55 Q 71

56 C&AG’s Report, para 1.11

57 Qq 9, 11

58 C&AG’s Report, para 3.19

59 Q 17

60 Q 79

The former SRO for the NLEDS programme acknowledged that while there had been an appetite for ambitious new ways of doing things, such as agile working, the NLEDS team really did not have any experience in those things.<sup>61</sup>

31. The Department told us that its new way of working with the police for the NLEDS programme would be a pathfinder programme for this new way of working. It would learn lessons and then roll this approach out to the other national programmes in its portfolio.<sup>62</sup> The Department said it was already learning from the Emergency Services Network Programme about ways of working and applying it to NLEDS. It added that it had recently done a review of all the major police IT programmes that the Department is delivering, in order to get at underlying issues that affect not just one particular programme.<sup>63</sup>

32. The Department also said it was now trying to really think about its portfolio of programmes as a whole and that a lot of the issues concerning NLEDS are relevant elsewhere; not just the way of working with the police, but also issues to do with capability, governance, leadership and skills.<sup>64</sup> It said that, with the benefit of hindsight, it was aware that it needs to constantly consider its total level of ambition – that sometimes it would have to descope or in fact say “No, we are not able to do this particular shiny thing right now. We are going to have to wait until we have freed up some resource from other things.”<sup>65</sup>

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61 Q 74

62 Q 17

63 Q 34

64 Q 75

65 Q 76

# Formal minutes

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## Monday 29 November 2021

Members present:

Dame Meg Hillier, in the Chair

Shaun Bailey

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Mr Mark Francois

Peter Grant

Antony Higginbotham

Mr Richard Holden

Craig Mackinlay

James Wild

### ***The National Law Enforcement Data Programme***

Draft Report (*The National Law Enforcement Data Programme*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 32 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Twenty-Ninth of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

### **Adjournment**

Adjourned till Wednesday 1 December at 1:30pm

# Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Thursday 16 September 2021

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

[Q1-111](#)

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Low emission cars	HC 186
2nd	BBC strategic financial management	HC 187
3rd	COVID-19: Support for children's education	HC 240
4th	COVID-19: Local government finance	HC 239
5th	COVID-19: Government Support for Charities	HC 250
6th	Public Sector Pensions	HC 289
7th	Adult Social Care Markets	HC 252
8th	COVID 19: Culture Recovery Fund	HC 340
9th	Fraud and Error	HC 253
10th	Overview of the English rail system	HC 170
11th	Local auditor reporting on local government in England	HC 171
12th	COVID 19: Cost Tracker Update	HC 173
13th	Initial lessons from the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 175
14th	Windrush Compensation Scheme	HC 174
15th	DWP Employment support	HC 177
16th	Principles of effective regulation	HC 176
17th	High Speed 2: Progress at Summer 2021	HC 329
18th	Government's delivery through arm's-length bodies	HC 181
19th	Protecting consumers from unsafe products	HC 180
20th	Optimising the defence estate	HC 179
21st	School Funding	HC 183
22nd	Improving the performance of major defence equipment contracts	HC 185
23rd	Test and Trace update	HC 182
24th	Crossrail: A progress update	HC 184
25th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2020–21 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 633
26th	Lessons from Greensill Capital: accreditation to business support schemes	HC 169
27th	Green Homes Grant Voucher Scheme	HC 635

Number	Title	Reference
28th	Efficiency in government	HC 636
1st Special Report	Fifth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 222

### Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities	HC 85
2nd	Defence Nuclear Infrastructure	HC 86
3rd	High Speed 2: Spring 2020 Update	HC 84
4th	EU Exit: Get ready for Brexit Campaign	HC 131
5th	University technical colleges	HC 87
6th	Excess votes 2018–19	HC 243
7th	Gambling regulation: problem gambling and protecting vulnerable people	HC 134
8th	NHS capital expenditure and financial management	HC 344
9th	Water supply and demand management	HC 378
10th	Defence capability and the Equipment Plan	HC 247
11th	Local authority investment in commercial property	HC 312
12th	Management of tax reliefs	HC 379
13th	Whole of Government Response to COVID-19	HC 404
14th	Readying the NHS and social care for the COVID-19 peak	HC 405
15th	Improving the prison estate	HC 244
16th	Progress in remediating dangerous cladding	HC 406
17th	Immigration enforcement	HC 407
18th	NHS nursing workforce	HC 408
19th	Restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster	HC 549
20th	Tackling the tax gap	HC 650
21st	Government support for UK exporters	HC 679
22nd	Digital transformation in the NHS	HC 680
23rd	Delivering carrier strike	HC 684
24th	Selecting towns for the Towns Fund	HC 651
25th	Asylum accommodation and support transformation programme	HC 683
26th	Department of Work and Pensions Accounts 2019–20	HC 681
27th	Covid-19: Supply of ventilators	HC 685

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
28th	The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's management of the Magnox contract	HC 653
29th	Whitehall preparations for EU Exit	HC 682
30th	The production and distribution of cash	HC 654
31st	Starter Homes	HC 88
32nd	Specialist Skills in the civil service	HC 686
33rd	Covid-19: Bounce Back Loan Scheme	HC 687
34th	Covid-19: Support for jobs	HC 920
35th	Improving Broadband	HC 688
36th	HMRC performance 2019–20	HC 690
37th	Whole of Government Accounts 2018–19	HC 655
38th	Managing colleges' financial sustainability	HC 692
39th	Lessons from major projects and programmes	HC 694
40th	Achieving government's long-term environmental goals	HC 927
41st	COVID 19: the free school meals voucher scheme	HC 689
42nd	COVID-19: Government procurement and supply of Personal Protective Equipment	HC 928
43rd	COVID-19: Planning for a vaccine Part 1	HC 930
44th	Excess Votes 2019–20	HC 1205
45th	Managing flood risk	HC 931
46th	Achieving Net Zero	HC 935
47th	COVID-19: Test, track and trace (part 1)	HC 932
48th	Digital Services at the Border	HC 936
49th	COVID-19: housing people sleeping rough	HC 934
50th	Defence Equipment Plan 2020–2030	HC 693
51st	Managing the expiry of PFI contracts	HC 1114
52nd	Key challenges facing the Ministry of Justice	HC 1190
53rd	Covid 19: supporting the vulnerable during lockdown	HC 938
54th	Improving single living accommodation for service personnel	HC 940
55th	Environmental tax measures	HC 937
56th	Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund	HC 941