Written evidence submitted by Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, Paymaster General

As promised, I am writing to follow up on some questions from members raised during the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) evidence session on 1 February.

Firstly, on CSSF work to counter misinformation from Hostile State Actors, the UK has a comprehensive Counter Disinformation and Media Development (CDMD) programme. Since 2016, £100m of funding has focused on building collective resilience to Russian disinformation across Europe and the Eastern Neighbourhood region.

The programme is working with a range of partners to enhance the quality of public service and independent media, including in the Russian language, so that communities are able to access reliable information. Promoting the free circulation of accurate information and engaging positively with those most impacted by Russian disinformation is helping promote social cohesion in countries across Eastern Europe. The programme is also supporting efforts by civil society to chronicle and expose disinformation to strengthen overseas audiences’ defences to disinformation.

During the Covid-19 crisis, the UK led the international response to Hostile State Activity disinformation around Covid-19 vaccines, galvanising like-minded countries and coordinating a robust response. The CDMD programme has adapted to collect and disseminate open source information and directly counter and debunk hostile state disinformation on vaccines. This has included support to other governments to develop their own vaccination counter-messaging and campaigns, and training for journalists in the region to better understand disinformation and approaches to countering harmful narratives.

Secondly, members asked about the likely impact on CSSF programmes from the recent data loss from the national police database. An inquiry is still ongoing around the loss and I would draw the Committee’s attention to this statement made by the Minister of State of Crime and Policing to the House on 8 February. We do not believe the loss of this data will impact CSSF programmes, which are largely delivered overseas.

I will update the Committee in writing once the National Security Council has approved the CSSF’s allocations for Financial Year 2021/22.

3 March 2021