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MINUTES
AUDIT AND ASSURANCE BOARD (AAB)
FEBRUARY 13TH 2024

PRESENT:

Robert Light (LG)	AAB Chair
Gavin Stephens (GSt)	NPCC Chair
John Campion (JC)	PCC West Mercia
Katy Bourne (KB)	PCC Sussex
Gareth Wilson (GW)	CPOSA
Seonaid Taylor (ST)	Home Office
Janice Shardlow (JS)	Independent Member (1:00pm)
David Bowles (DB)	Independent Member

IN ATTENDANCE:

Louise Bailey (LB)	DARA Internal Audit
Sanjay Thakkar	DARA Internal Audit
Gemma Stannard (GS)	NPCC Head of NPCC Strategic Hub
Tracy Holyer (TH)	NPCC Head of Organisational Development & Change
Lee Milton (LM)	NPCC Strategic Risk and Planning Manager
Angela Connolly (AC)	NPCC Business Support Lead
Inderjit Malhi (IM)	NPCC Finance Committee Coordinator
Hannah Hart (HH)	NPCC Head of Strategy, Planning & Performance
Andy Begent (AB)	NPCC Data Protection Officer
Clare Gardner (CG)	NPCC AAB Secretariat (minutes)
Elliot Sydney (ES)	NPCC Business Support (observer)

APOLOGIES:

Phillip Golding (PG)	APCC, CEO
Janice Shardlow (JS)	Independent Member (11am - 12:30pm)

1.) WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, APOLOGIES, AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Newly appointed AAB Chair (RL) declared the meeting open expressing that he was looking forward to working with everyone on the key issues and challenges that the NPCC and national policing faces.

RL explained that moving forward the quarterly meetings were to be in-person at NPCC's offices with a virtual option being provided as a back-up, should travel not be an option. RL also confirmed that a standardised 30-minute working lunch would be built into future agendas.

Apologies were noted and with no COIs to record the board was quorate.

Action Arising: NPCC will review AAB dates and invitations with members' respective diary planners to inform and update that all future meetings would be in-person at NPCC's offices.

2.) MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Minutes:

RL tabled the draft minutes of the previous AAB meeting held 23rd November 2023. All agreed they were a true and accurate record and can therefore now be published on the NPCC website.

2.2 Matters Arising:

GS requested to raise Section 22a review for a short update in advance of May's AAB. RL directed this to agenda item 7.3)

3.) FINANCE

3.1 Financial Improvement Plan (FIP):

For the benefit of new members, GS gave a brief overview of FIP's historic development and successful completion progress to date. There being two items this reporting period:

- **FIP-22)** recommend closing as per the circulated update.
- **FIP-24) - Part 1** ongoing as work continues around the review being undertaken by the host force. GS asked members to consider transferring this part to the AAB Action Log for monitoring as BAU.
- **Part 2** recommend closing - training has taken place and self- service is in place as per FIP-22.
- JC commented on the FIP's evolution from the now completed (2021) Priority Action Plan (PAP) with DB adding he too had seen improvements.
- RL asked members and it was agreed to close FIP22 and FIP24, Pt2 with FIP24 Pt1 moving to the action log.

Action Arising: NPCC will update the AAB Action Log – FIP-24) Part 1 - ongoing

3.2 NPCC Quarterly Financial Statement and Reserves position:

IM presented an update on the quarterly finances, namely:

- NPCC Central Budget on budget. Earmarked reserves had been utilised for Maternity Leave, Covid Public Inquiry (CPI), and Legal; General Reserve balance remains within threshold at 1.77%.
- NPCC Operating Model will be fully utilised. Salary reimbursements for individuals on secondment are up to date for Q2, Q3 invoices progress.
- NPCC Police Race Action Plan (PRAP) has a forecasted underspend resulting from vacancies on the programme this will be returned to the National Operating Budget to help bridge financial gap for 2024/25.
- NPCC National Pension Teams is forecasted to budget. Central remedy projects on police forces' behalf continues.
- NPCC D-DaCS - Dynamic Decision and Case Management System has a forecasted underspend. Full business case being presented at Chiefs' Council in March 2024.
- NPCC Chief Scientific Advisors Office under-utilisation is expected. £53k of STAR funds returned from forces for previous years. Fifteen forces awarded STRA funding covering twenty projects.
- NPCC Violence Against Women and Girls – (VAWG) forecasted on budget. Additional funding received from Police Digital Services for the Digital Strategic Intent (DSI) that has been developed by the VAWG taskforce.
- NPCC Digital Crime Performance Pack – (DCPP) will be fully utilised. Home Office have now given notice that funding will be withdrawn for FY 2024-25 with staff impacted.

RL sought, and received, confirmation that the DCPP funding from the Home Office (HO) which was originally for 3 years was withdrawn after 2 years.

KB asked about pension reserve plans and potential redistribution, IM informed that:

- the pension team was currently examining this, alongside a view to 2024/25 reserve provisions;
- there had been extensive discussion at Chiefs' Council with regular reporting; and
- Finance Committee has regular dialogue with the Home Office funding team.

KB enquired as to whether the CSAO underspend could feasibly be part remedy to HO withdrawn funding for DCP. GS informed members that as:

- The CSAO funding from the HO is for that specific purpose only and, the DCP funding is from a HO different unit and separate grant (again purpose specific). This therefore prohibits NPCC's ability to offset cost pressures.
- Additionally, aspects of the DCP funding come to both NPCC and HMIC as it is a collaboration. A small aspect of funding will remain with HMICFRS to ensure the data in the DCP remains updated, but no funding for further development at this time.
- Any underspend against grants must be reported back to the HO with no ability to carry over into the next FY.

JC spoke to the PRAP's significant underspend and asked whether there is any certainty on HO long term commitment to the Operating Model and impact on individuals. GS explained that less than ten people are directly employed (via MPS) in NPCC – these are the resources that were in place prior to the Operating Model. All other personnel are on fixed term contracts or seconded and these are reviewed and renewed each year, subject to funding. This is on the risk register.

GSt offered further clarity around the CCC's process for reviewing and discussing the National Operating Budget and the variety of different budget requirements from it. It had previously been recognised at Finance Committee that, to aid financial planning locally, a contribution from each force would be sought at the agreed 0.13% NRE; thus, forming the National Operating Budget and preventing small amounts being presented in isolation over the course of a year. In this way decision making is simplified and enables improved governance and oversight of finance requests and spend. GSt also advanced several points for AAB's consideration for future meetings:

- Want to avoid a 'pick and mix' approach where some forces show financial support for some things and not others. Such an approach makes delivery extremely difficult. Should the occasion present that, a programme that has been allocated some National Operating Budget funding has underspend, should the NPCC Chair then to go back and negotiate with forces on redistribution/level of funding, etc? Budget requests are brought to Council for discussion and agreement, utilising as possible any reserve in the National Operating Budget
- Regarding ongoing and current work on longer term sustainability; and conversations with current government and His Majesty's Opposition; how would AAB want to structure national policing programme funding in the future to avoid lengthy, resource heavy re-negotiation process(s)?
- GSt outlined that PRAP had not been supported in the same way as other national programmes. By his estimation there remains up to ten years' work which is now being refined back. However, there is a clear message that chiefs are not willing to fund beyond the next year currently and no HO funding has been provided. GSt plans to continue to seek support as it is not sustainable for UK policing not to have a race action plan and there is need to maintain the programme of improvement for UK policing.

JC concurred with GSt on PRAP commentary and assessment and spoke to, 'keeping the collective both on board and informed' on substantial underspend(s) and what is being proposed. The onus then being placed on Chiefs to update and manage their PCC relationship(s) to avoid any PCC discontent with underspends. KB was supportive of JC's comment and RL expressed that this discussion was

indeed helpful in identifying the need for a core principle and process that all parties would be comfortable and confident with.

GS highlighted the work that the Finance Committee had undertaken (with significant help from the Hub) scrutinising those areas that seek and receive funding from the National Operating Budget. As part of this, each area receiving funding will now be required to adhere to a 'grant agreement' that will set out how funding should/should not be used, rules around underspend use and return, etc. This will be shared with members.

Action Arising: NPCC to share 'grant agreement' that all National Operating Budget areas will be expected to adhere to and ensure the policies are updated to set out rules and reporting principles for underspend.

AAB discussed the matter of estates' move finances and final costing reporting. Dilapidation final report is yet to be received. Once delivered, a final report on costs will be brought to AAB. Costs are still expected to be on budget. Final snagging and building management issues are in hand and being closely monitored.

RL enquired about the Covid Inquiry and expenditure. GS reported she had met with the lead and there will be costs into next financial year and potentially into 2025/26. Costs for this current financial year have increased as NPCC have been Core Participants in a number of modules and the devolved national modules have also garnered further legal requirement than initially anticipated. This increased level of engagement has legal counsel cost implications, in addition to the earmarked reserve (£80k), with an additional cost this FY forecast of circa £40k-£50k. An optimism bias for next financial year is in the forecast and so potentially help offset the in-year cost pressure. NPCC's national involvement is saving work and costs at local level. GS informed that another public inquiry being closely monitored is the undercover policing matter.

DB queried whether the finance dashboards were needed. GS explained that this was something that the Board had previously asked be incorporated but as the paper now is summarising same it could be removed at AAB's direction. Other members commented they found dashboards useful.

Action Arising: Members requested financial slides be circulated post meeting as they were most helpful. NPCC would ensure they were protectively marked and where appropriate any commercial sensitivity would be clearly defined.

4.) AUDIT

4.1 DARA Internal Audit Update

LB updated that the Finance Culture review report has been shared with NPCC for review and response. Headlines include:

- Rated at adequate assurance.
- Nine medium priority recommendations, no high.
- Financial training is now occurring and that must prove sustainable and embedded.
- People survey results were positive.

LB detailed that work is being scoped on programme management governance. Steps to ensure the remaining number of days' audit service are well utilised and examined to ensure the best use of resource in support of NPCC's objectives.

JC commented on whether consideration has been given to prioritise work on areas that would help provide reassurance and confidence on programmes. PRAP as an example over whether or not it was a well-run project in terms of deployment of the resource. GS reported that he and GS were looking

to widen the scope of audit work beyond the Hub. LB highlighted that the audit plan's governance contains operational delivery sections that could potentially cover programmes.

RL accepted that the use of term 'adequate' as reasonable in the audit world and asked LB that, given the journey, are DARA content with NPCC's trajectory to achieve a higher grading. LB explained this was second-highest grading and confirmed on trajectory. Other members highlighted that adequate was a good grading with GS acknowledging that using different terminology this would be comparable to 'good'. RL commented that this was exactly the type of assurance he would wish to see. In response to KB's query, LB informed the Culture report would be circulated at next AAB (May) alongside its Terms of Reference.

4.2 DARA Recommendations – Update.

TH summarised and updated on the current two DARA audits as reported in the paper.

- ICT Service Review (Mar 2023): recommendations ICT 01) – 02) and 04) are ongoing with ICT 03) recommended for closure with AAB's agreement.
- Cyber Security Governance: recommendations CSG 01) – 08) are ongoing.

DB asked for further input around Cyber Security to be able to determine the scale of NPCC's risk. GSt gave an overview on how NPCC consumes national services provided by Police Digital Services (PDS) including the National Management Centre which monitors and reports on cyber risks and ensures cyber resilience and security for UK policing. GS gave further assurance explaining that NPCC's IT is provided by PDS, but with some NPCC staff also having Met IT as Met staff. Annual letters of assurance from Met and PDS will be provided so NPCC, and the board, can be assured of the systems and processes they have in place to ensure and test their resilience and defence.

RL enquired if the new IT contract would help address a number of the recommendations and/or would affect the SLA's cyber security delivery requirements. TH and GSt assured that this would not be the case that the service level was to remain the same and cyber resilience maintained. TH also explained that eight cyber-DARA recommendations are being addressed through the work two attached Info Security Assistants are undertaking. They are working on the SyAP for NPCC. AB gave further assurance that:

- the model of the SyAP is a sound process currently employed for all police forces' assessment;
- the NPCC's work around PDS's assurance compliance and its verification process has been productive and insightful to establish a firm snapshot of where NPCC exactly is placed in this business area.

RL and members confirmed they were content with the recommendation(s) and updates that had been provided.

5.) HUB

5.1 Delivery Plan Update

LM outlined how the delivery plan work had developed over the past two years with dashboards now in place enabling monitoring by committee and programmes against delivery of their objectives and actions. Board feedback on activity, delivery and comment would continue to be welcomed. LM highlighted:

- Progress and completion on some objectives had indicated the need to target delivery dates not always as annual objectives.
- Completion of 47% of the delivery actions was up from 29% in November.
- The Future Finance Planning work has examined over 20 functions that will be funded through the National Operating Budget and work will be undertaken to seek to align them to the DPTs.

KB enquired on the OPAL work referring to the private sector funding that has been secured to support Op Pegasus and governance around this. LM informed that OPAL will be included on the

aforementioned Future Financial Planning work and would be happy to work with them to guide on development of DPT and associated benefits tracking. KB asked if, when tracking had been established would this suffice to go back to government as a body of evidence to show return on investment. GSt explained that a realistic approach on resourcing (resultant on the now reduced capability) would have to be considered with KB further commenting that should OPAL be considered as a priority for in-depth track and benefit demonstration(s) for future business case this would be welcomed.

The Board were updated on the work the ODC team have done on developing a benefits framework and associated strategy and how this is going to be linked to the DPTs in 24/25. It was highlighted that could potentially utilise OPAL as an example of a National Operating Budget funded area to trial.

DB welcomed the work on benefits explaining that he recognised the benefit in capturing and articulating clearly defined benefits (especially when reporting up to potential funding parties). NPCC's positive impact in this area should be stressed with the organisation defining more clearly benefits and that perhaps for future paper scoping AAB may wish to examine how this is being progressed and pursued.

Action Arising: NPCC to bring benefits strategy and framework to next AAB meeting in May.

Members recognised that the current reporting mechanism of describing the actions being delivered as a success does not always underpin the veracity and complex area of the work's delivery and subsequent outcome management. What the narrative is about and what the organisation actually delivers needs to be clearly demonstrated to assist with long term security and funding and keep partners informed on what and where stakeholders engage.

Members agreed that setting end dates to the 31st of March for a finished result does not drive performance effectively and that it would be preferable to look more to realistic targets for the full delivery of objectives.

RL highlighted that it would be helpful to understand how performance this year compared to last or to others. LM confirmed that a full 12 months of the DPT had not yet run but this would be done, and an end of year summary would be presented at the next meeting. LM detailed that the Strategic Planning and Coordination Board were currently looking at the lessons learned as part of the year-end review to include:

- Clearly articulated and fewer objectives to facilitate easier tracking and reporting back to AAB now being a better and matured process.
- Planning sessions for each of the business areas and the Hub will be presented to the next AAB, but with less resources prioritisation is necessary on the list of national activities that NPCC supports.
- Progressing to the next level of maturity with less resources.

GSt commented that he would need AAB's assistance to narrow down activity and manage expectations with PCC and Chiefs. Explaining that choices have now been made on the size and funding for NPCC and the central team is now a very small function. The organisation will therefore also be clear on what it cannot do. Long term forward thinking for 5-10 years must concentrate on the future political and economic environment; the need to consider the national policing infrastructure and what policing needs to do to stay ahead of criminality. This Board will be key to help with assurance.

RL summarised that there had been constructive comment for the future and recognition of where we are now placed with resources and Hub delivery planning and priorities.

At 12:40pm Members broke for working lunch and tour of NPCC's Offices resuming at 1:10pm.

5.2 Service Level Agreements (SLA) Annual Update

AC detailed that the SLA between NPCC and Met had been reviewed and a signed version of the revised agreement was on target for 15/3/24. AC highlighted that the paper outlines where there is derogation from the SLA and outlined the bi-annual review process coupled with bi-weekly meetings with the HR partner. Looking forward, seeking to move to a single, co-joined SLA for NPCC and NPoCC with Met.

In general AC reported that the relationship with Met works well with problem areas usually being resolved at a local level. If complex issues arise legal advice is sought as necessary, for example, location allowances on contracts and senior staff pay. GS commented that complexities arise due to NPCC being a national organisation and wanting a national workforce. As NPCC is a non-legal entity not possible to enter into contracts or employ directly and do seek to follow Met Policy and procedures but do need to derogate from these at times. GS also confirmed that DARA has looked at the SLA and examined at how effectively it is working. Their recommendations are reflected in the new arrangement to ensure we have the right performance metrics. The Future Financial Planning (FPP) works is also looking at this area for our national infrastructure requirements to ensure consistency around host force charges.

DB enquired on timeliness with regard to financial reporting, mandated reporting and reconciliations deliveries. GS informed that assurance will be delivered via the previously mentioned annual Letters of Assurance (as delivered to AAB September 2023) and that DARA too provides audit service on this business area.

JS congratulated NPCC on the adjustments made on the HR requirements and referred to legal cost being on the high side asking if this was outsourced external counsel. GS confirmed that Met provide legal advice for NPCC and only use external counsel when there is no capacity internally. Should such an occasion arise, then matter would be placed with legal counsel Met have 'on-books' and requires NPCC's approval. For assurance 95% of the work for NPCC is done by Met Legal through strict procurement procedure.

RL thanked all for their comments and a thorough discussion on the paper's detail.

5.4 Home Office Grant Governance Reporting - Circulated as an information-paper.

TH gave background on the progression of AAB's decision to have this circulated as an information only paper. The Board were asked for comment on whether this item should become standing on the AAB action log rather than listed as an agenda item or continue in its current format. RL enquired about format with JC reporting that he had previously attended one of the HO grant assurance meetings on behalf of AAB and had subsequently reported to the Board that attendance was not necessary by AAB, going forwards, sight of minutes was adequate. Members agreed that this reporting should continue.

5.5 ICT Contract

TH updated on progress to renew NPCC and NPoCC's ICT contract with PDS. Oversight had been through the Change and Improvement Board and Service Improvement meetings, as well as with regular meetings with Blue Light Commercial colleagues. The draft contract, expected September 2023, was received in November. Work has been ongoing with PDS to challenge and discuss costs' details within the draft contract. A number of risks had been identified (as reported in the paper) with PDS now having replied in writing to the NPCC's formal letter confirming they accept the risk(s) and further confirmed service will not be affected whilst contract sign off is ongoing. TH confirmed that the original 55% cost increase had now been negotiated down to 16.5% per user.

GSt informed on the mitigation steps taken by NPCC to date which, the Board acknowledged and accepted until the approval process had been completed. GS confirmed that all concerns and risks had been recorded in writing to PDS.

RL confirmed it would be beneficial for the Board to receive an update on progress outside of the next AAB meeting.

Action arising: NPCC will circulate written responses to AAB in advance of May AAB.
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5.6 Future Funding- Update.

TH updated the Board on the Hub Future Funding paper stating that since the papers' circulation, HO have confirmed funding for the Hub of £2.5m for 24/25. This will still require significant savings (over £1m) and therefore the plans (as outlined) have now been activated; and, communication with staff, unions and other organisations commenced. The impact has been communicated to the HO, including detail around *what would be stopped* and the additional costs associated with possible redundancies and notice periods. A wider review of the Strategic Hub is planned to commence in March and early engagement with HO for funding 2025 onwards will commence immediately.

Members thanked TH for the informative and well written paper. JC spoke to the problem of Chiefs' seeking HO funding and the NPCC's other routes of obtaining sustainable funding from PCC and policing bodies. There was further discussion around the role of AAB in that its position would need to be aligned. DB queried the funding timing and impact of forthcoming elections. GS outlined the timing is set by HO and treasury and gave further background on past and current submissions to HO, including correspondence that has been sent to the Policing Minister and DG. Timing would have to be minded for future planning and promoting NPCC in the national policing environment.

Members discussed the papers' content around operating budget under Section 22a with clarification given by GSt and IM on inflation and NRE percentage fundings. GS offered further assurance around the figures.

After lengthy discourse on PCC funding; NED's role in advocacy of NPCC's impact; with GSt outlining the process - highlighting this would have to be guided by the political decisions that are yet to come in this election year. It was recognised by RL that this would be an important part of future agenda shaping and detail and thanked members for a good discussion in terms of going forward.

5.7 NPCC Strategic Plan – Update

HH referred to paper submitted AAB November and updated on the agreed light touch refresh that had been conducted since then. HH confirmed that some minor change to language had been made and two changes had been made to strategic objectives 5) and 6) to ensure they are aligned to the now revised communications' strategy. APCC had agreed there was no requirement to go through a formal consultation for the refresh.

6.) RISK

6.1 Quarterly Risk Update

LM presented and informed AAB in summary on the paper's content where they had been asked to agree to and comment on the following:

- A new risk now added to the register – Hub-R24/001 - NPCC Financial Landscape - National Operating Budget (FFP Phase 3)
- AAB to note that risk Hub-R17/010 – 'Reporting of Committee Best Practice, Activity and Progress Against Objectives' – recommended for closure. This was agreed.
- The Board was asked to note closed, as agreed by SLT, Hub-R21/002 - ICT Provision - (BAU) Management, Development and Future as this risk now duplicated within Hub-R23/003.

- Hub-R23/005 - Policing Financial Landscape - FFP Phase 2; following completion of the second phase of the 'future financial planning' review work.
- One area for monitoring has been closed/removed from the radar: R23/019 – 'Increase in covid/sickness for Hub staff'.
- RL canvassed members for comment and informed that these closures were acceptable.

LM updated that the RMF Development and Review was now at v3 with updates made to templates to streamline risk recording. The SPP team are scheduling review sessions with each coordination committee with planned refresher training.

The National Risk Management Forum (NRMF) continues to attract significant interest. Plans are underway to develop a peer assessment approach across policing's risk management functions, with a test/scoping exercise proposed for North Wales Police (volunteers) during late 23/24 or early 24/25. This will be led by the NPCC and supported by members of the NRMF and partners, including the College of Policing. The SPP team continue to engage with risk leads across policing and various partner agencies and wider Blue Light groups, through both the NRMF and, as members of the ALARM Board. The first published version of the Strategic Risk Approach (SRA) will be submitted to Chief Constables' Council (CCC) in March and will be included in AAB documentation.

RL commented that using peers to support the review would benefit the process and LM gave assurance that NPCC's relationship with ALARM being public and private sector lead provided this.

6.2 Data Protection Update

AB gave a verbal update on four key areas of work:

- Review and refresh of the NPCC Joint Controllership Agreement had now been presented to the relevant board and will be published on ChiefsNet setting out the 'how we do' data protection in the NPCC - at foundation level.
- The Delivery Landscape Review Programme (the moving of systems from HO to policing) has made good progress with due diligence having been prepared by TLT solicitors.
- DATA Protection Digital Information Bill No.2) is now at House of Lords' Committee stage and work continues with HO and DCMS.
- Subject Access Rights requests – NPCC has a legal responsibility to respond to requests and good work continues with trust and confidence in this area.

7.) UPDATE

7.1 Health & Safety (H&S) Update

AC updated on the H&S aspect of the recent office move with a new risk assessment supplied as an appendix. A lone working policy had now been developed and weekly building inspections are now embedded. No H&S incidents to note. Members had no questions.

7.2 Chief Constables' Council Update

GSt briefly spoke on financial sustainability and national infrastructure, which had been spoken of in earlier discussions and enquired if there were any questions members may have that he could address. DB felt it could be helpful to have a simpler funding model provided with 'funder of last resort' and a range of other scenarios outlined. RL reiterated that the AAB's role is to seek and have assurance that strategically NPCC have given due consideration to all information and made sound decision but not to make the decision itself and not go into the tactical detail. GSt informed that CCC was about to embark on group meetings with HM's Opposition and will also be holding discussions with HM Government too, to discuss key areas for policing including: UK policing, financial resilience, long term financial planning.

GW commented on the useful conversations that had taken place today and requested this be carried forward to the AAB Workshop agenda which RL agreed.

7.3 Section 22a Update

GS updated on preceding months' work in this area and thanked the Board for their feedback that had previously been provided. Both APACE and its legal subgroup, along with members from the Association of Police Lawyers has been engaged in the review of the s22a. GS proposed that the draft S22a is brought to May's AAB for review, prior to it then going to PCCs and Chiefs. This was agreed to by AAB.

7.4 Actions Update. None to report.

7.5 AOB

RL tabled JS's imminent departure from the Board in her role as an independent NED thanking her for her service. JS thanked all and complimented all in NPCC on their journey and accomplishments over the term of her tenure and wished everyone her best for NPCC's future.

RL thanked all for attending and the meeting closed.