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MINUTES
AUDIT AND ASSURANCE BOARD (AAB)
23RD SEPTEMBER 2025

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, APOLOGIES AND CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

Apologies – See above

Conflict of Interests

No Conflict-of-Interest Reports were declared or received.

2. PREVIOUS AAB MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The AAB minutes from July 2025 were agreed subject to two corrections as outlined in the actions below. No matters arising.

ACTION: Update attendance on the minutes from July 2025 AAB to show Harjinder Kaur and David Bowles both present at the meeting.

ACTION: In July's minutes under section 2, is currently dated 2024. To be changed to correct date of 2025.

DECISION: With the detailed corrections to the previous minutes, the Board accepted the minutes.

3. ACTION LOG

The Chair reported that there were several items 'Recommended for closure' on the action log and the Board agreed to close these actions. The remaining three open actions were noted and will come back to November's AAB meeting.

4. STRATEGIC

4.1 Reform and NPCC Future Update

The NPCC Chair updated on the recent ministerial changes. Although White Paper is not yet published, reform work continues. A National Technology Summit is planned, performance standards are being reviewed, costing options for a new national centre are being worked on, and liaison with international colleagues who have undertaken reform continue. **Closed.**

A NPCC Future's steering group has been established, considering scenarios for NPCC with or without reform, including legal entity status and hosting arrangements.

New initiatives like the potential for an AI lab, and/or Knife Crime unit, continue to be assessed and considered where they should be hosted. There was emphasis on a cost-effective delivery and governance and the benefits and efficiency. The AI capability should ideally be going into the new centre, but it cannot wait otherwise opportunities would be lost.

Governance, efficiency, and strategic alignment are key concerns, with a need for a consistent approach to managing resources and transitioning functions. Due to current agreements, NPCC need to be careful about what they can take on and there is a need for consistent central administration.

The AAB Chair noted a useful discussion which highlighted the challenges. Chair stressed the need for a Plan B which is crucial if there is no greenlight for police reform to ensure NPCC moves to a more sustainable model.

Board accepted the report and noted agenda item 4.1.

4.2 CCC Update

NPCC Chair provided an overview of September's Chief Constables' Council (CCC) meeting in line with the slides and highlighted:

- New lead for mis/disinformation task and finish group has been appointed.
- Significant summer activity had been coordinated by NPCC:
 - **Closed**
 - High-profile visits (i.e. US President, Vice President).
 - Op Auster - changes to sentencing and prison release arrangements.
 - **Closed**
 - **Closed**

The Board noted agenda item 4.2

4.3 NPCC Hub Funding

Head of Organisational Development and Change (ODC) team provided an update on NPCC Hub funding. The Home Office (HO) Grant Award Agreement for 2025/26 has not yet been finalised and still needs to go through MOPAC governance and sign off. The deliverables for the Hub have been drafted and agreed with the Home Office. Three other areas will be included in the same grant agreement, alongside the Hub – Reform team, NPCC PECP resource, CJ improvement. Deliverables for these areas, and their assurance processes still be worked through. MOPAC governance process takes a few months to finalise and is needed before NPCC can start drawing down on the money. NPCC outlined that had discussed and pushed with HO colleagues that need to get grant into November's MOPAC governance which means the deliverables for the other areas and the overall grant agreement needs to be fully drafted and sent over to NPCC by start October.

DECISION: Board expressed concern that it takes 6+ months to get the grant award funding documentation in place and through governance. However, it is recognised this isn't within NPCC

control, who are dependent on Home Office and MOPAC governance. The Board agreed they should look at whether the different governance routes can be streamlined to prevent this in the future. Board agreed to note this for 2026-27.

2026 Hub Future funding

NPCC outlined how HO have outlined the working assumption is that funding for the Hub will continue for 26/27 at same level as 25/26, recognising that is a business-as-usual function. Engagement is ongoing with Home Office to confirm future grant arrangements.

The Board accept agenda item 4.3

5. DELIVERY

5.1 Finance Update

A 4.2% pay award has been announced for officers and the working assumption is that 4.2% will be agreed for police staff too. This creates in-year cost pressures across budget lines, managed through vacancy management and attrition. There is additional funding for forces to support the pay award but, as in previous years, NPCC are not expecting any additional funding for grant funded areas. This will be included in Q2 reporting, with the slides presented to the Board, outlining the in-year impact for each budget line.

Regarding the 2026-27 National Operating Budget, 31 funding submissions were received. This includes continuation of funding from all but one area and some new funding bids. If all bids were supported, this would create an additional cost pressure of £8m. Finance Committee, with the support of the Hub, are coordinating a review and prioritisation exercise where all Chiefs will be asked to assess and rank all the bids. **Closed** The review process aims to ensure efficient use of resources and alignment with strategic priorities. Chiefs will be encouraged to discuss the review and prioritisation exercise with their PCCs. Outcomes from the review will be reported back at November's AAB in advance of December's CCC.

The Board noted item 5.1.

5.2 Delivery Plan Progress Update

The Planning and Risk Officer presented slides on the Hub delivery plan which highlighted to the Board the delivery planning progress across the NPCC Hub and coordination committees. Most plans are nearing completion, with four committees still needing milestone-level detail. Board members voiced some concern about the volume of new objectives, sub-objectives and actions, prompting discussion on the realism and achievability of these plans given resource constraints. Delays were attributed to internal prioritisation challenges and interdependency on other factors. The Board requested clarification on terminology around the following statuses: "completed" (task is done), "closed" (task no longer pursued or relevant) and "pending" (task recorded but currently not actionable). NPCC emphasised the importance of tracking not only completed work but also rejected or de-prioritised requests to better evidence capacity and planning decisions. NPCC also highlighted how they are moving to a more dynamic, rolling delivery plan process to reflect that objectives and actions deadlines are often set arbitrarily due to the system needing a deadline rather than reflecting the ongoing nature of some work.

DECISION: Board agreed to move into more exceptional and high-level reporting in the updates, with a deep dive on Delivery reporting every September at the AAB Workshop.

ACTION: SPP to circulate a proposal on what the deep dive will look like.

The Board accepted the delivery report item 5.2.

5.3 Annual Compliance / Assurance Letters Review

The Head of Business Support presented a series of annual compliance letters, including those related to financial systems; health and safety; insurance; data protection; cyber security, and professional standards. Two letters remain outstanding: Equality & Diversity and the Police Digital Services (PDS) assurance statement. These will be circulated once received by the NPCC Business Support team.

NPCC outlined proposals to improve the process, reducing duplication and consolidate efforts through the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with a potential shift towards an Annual Governance Statement., meaning less annual letters would be needed – the exceptions being the PDS assurance letter and annual finance letter. The Board supported this move.

DECISION: Board agreed to review and renew the process pertaining to Assurance letters and improve the process in terms of needing all assurance letters annually. Board agreed to exceptions such as PDS assurance letter which needs to be reported on annually as well as the Finance letters.

ACTION: DARA team to review wording in SLA around assurance letters when AC amends the SLA and discusses with MPS.

ACTION: Business Support Team will circulate remaining two outstanding letters to the Board once received, any issues can be reported at the next Board meeting.

Board formally noted the compliance letters received so far.

6. AUDIT AND RISK

6.1 DARA Internal Audit Update

DARA presented an update and reported on three items: 1) Annual audit opinion, 2) Audit protocol and 3) completed people and development framework review.

The 24/25 annual audit opinion is rated adequate, meaning systems and controls are generally effective but with room for improvement. The audit assessed governance, risk management, operational delivery, oversight, capability and capacity, ICT, and financial control. Improvements were noted in risk management and governance, but consistency across all areas is needed to reach a substantial rating and level of assurance. DARA confirmed that the opinion reflects a positive trajectory, especially considering resource pressures and onboarding demands. Adequate is interpreted as a reasonable level of assurance, roughly in the 70–75% range of effectiveness.

A non-contractual audit protocol agreement has been agreed between NPCC and DARA to improve audit planning and delivery. While it does not have any legal standing it sets out working assumptions for how DARA will deliver its services. The agreement outlines responsibilities, services, and timelines, including fee changes and audit cycles. Following a fee increase communicated to NPCC by DARA with no prior warning in-year, a compromise position for 2025-26 has been agreed, which the protocol clearly outlining the expectation around communication of any future fee changes.

The people and development framework audit also received an adequate rating. The objective of the audit was to review the adequacy and effectiveness of the controls for the framework. Controls are generally well-designed but not always effectively implemented. Three medium-priority actions were recommended and agreed, including appointing a deputy for the Workforce Coordinator Chair who is driving the agenda forward to reduce dependency. NPCC also noted that since the report was

published, other positive developments include the launch of wellbeing passports on 1st September, with a good uptake to date, and upcoming management development training. DARA team will follow up once it has been embedded in six months.

The Board noted item 6.1.

6.2 DARA Recommendations Tracking Update

The Head of the Strategic Hub reported on the progress of the recommendations from the NPCC governance and delivery report published in March and presented to April's AAB meeting. Three of the four outstanding actions were recommended to the Board for closure. The one remaining open relates to governance improvements for the National Police FOI and Data Protection Unit where progress is being made.

Future updates will include the recommendations from the People and Development audit.

A question was by the Board asked about the National Operating Budget grant agreements having any assurance requirements for performance reporting. The NPCC explained that there is now much clearer alignment as every committee chair is being asked to review the funding bids that come into the national operating budget that are aligned to their committees. The committee is responsible for holding these areas to account, ensuring delivery expectations are met.

DECISION: Board agreed to close the three "Recommend to close" actions and noted the one remaining open.

6.3 NPCC Quarterly Risk Update

The NPCC Planning and Risk Officer provided the Board with an update that the NPCC is now operating under Risk Framework version four, which is integrated into the Strategic Insight Dashboard. Enhancements include an impact proximity field added to reporting and improved issue tracking and automation of reporting processes.

A new risk entry was noted regarding SLA delay cost implications, previously discussed at the start of the meeting in the open action. Existing risks remain under "accept and monitor" status, including:

- Hub capacity and demand
- 50 Broadway Estates capacity
- Reform pressures on Hub resources
- Transition activities, monitored through established governance

For the Strategic Risk Assessment, strategic risk submissions are now part of business-as-usual, with quarterly updates through the Chiefs' Council regional process. The NPCC Chair has found the strategic risk list useful in key senior level meetings, including the National Policing Board, to prepare and assess future threats and use for forward planning.

Board members requested a clearer understanding of the major risks impacting contingency planning and potential threats at the next meeting. The Board have confidence in the day-to-day processes which enables forward planning to review threats. The AAB Chair emphasised the need to assess both current and emerging risks, including scenario planning and implications for NPCC roles and responsibilities. The Board agreed it would be helpful for the next meeting to focus on the top three strategic risks, including looking at current thinking, and future plans, in preparation for a deeper dive workshop discussion in September next year.

ACTION: Board to be presented with the top 3 strategic risks at the next board meeting.

The Board accepted 6.3.

7. AOB

The AAB Chair sought the Board's thoughts on future meetings and attendance online or in person. It was agreed meetings would alternate between virtual and in-person, as follows:

- November 2025 – Online
- February 2026 - In person at NPCC Offices
- May 2026- Online
- September 2026 - In person (Hosted by Roger Hirst – Essex Fire & Rescue HQ)
- November 2026 - Online

The Head of the Strategic Hub raised that the final draft of the NPCC 2024-25 Impact Report had been circulated to Board members in August outside of the meeting. No additional feedback had been received. NPCC sought confirmation that Report could now be published.

DECISION: Board agreed to the publishing of the annual Impact Report on the NPCC website, along with outturn report. SPP will lead on the Impact Report next year with advice from the DARA team to ensure it becomes an annual governance statement.

ACTION: SPP Team to publish the Impact Report with the inclusion of the financial outturn report.