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MINUTES
AUDIT AND ASSURANCE BOARD (AAB)
25 NOVEMBER 2025

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies and Conflicts of Interest

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. No apologies were noted. No conflict-of-interest reports were declared or received.

2. Previous AAB Minutes and Matters Arising

The AAB minutes from September 2025 were agreed subject to one correction as outlined in the actions below. No matters arising.

Action: Update Roger Hirst as PFCC Essex.

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 two open actions were noted, and GeS provided the updates below:

- SLA charges with the MPS: there is an ongoing assessment across NPCC to identify which services are provided in-house, from the MPS, or not required. A meeting will take place with MPS SLA Strategic Lead in a few weeks' time.
- Amending wording within SLA assurance letters: Four letters have been identified to amend the wording to avoid separate letters next year.

Action: Share new wording with ST to check against previous review of SLAs.

- Shared an update on the PDS Letter of Assurance. NPCC are seeking assurance for PDS' financial stability and outcome of audits. NPCC and PDS hold regular meetings to monitor our contract and relationship.

Decision: Two ongoing actions discussed (SLA charges review and amendment of wording in assurance letters). Updates accepted by the Board.

Decision: Closure of actions supported and approved by the Board.

Decision: Police Digital Service assurance letter noted for completeness.

4. Strategic

4.1 Reform and NPCC Future Update

Opened the discussion by clarifying that neither the NPCC nor the Joint Police Reform Team (JPRT) had been involved in the decision to transition away from Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). An initial list of areas for consideration during the transition will be presented to Chiefs' Council in December 2025, with formal governance discussions on transition arrangements expected in the new year.

An extraordinary Chiefs' Council meeting has been scheduled for January to examine the implications of the forthcoming White Paper, anticipated later this year. Clarity on funding for reform will emerge following the annual funding settlement.

The National Centre of Policing (NCoP) is progressing through transition stage 1. There may be some directional oversight of group activities operating in shadow form from next year, though formal establishment would potentially be from April 2027. Work is also underway on consolidating Home Office grants, have identified circa £300 million in grant activity in 25/26to fund national business but with only small proportion coming through NPCC. These proposals will be discussed at Chiefs' Council in December 2025.

Chair asked whether the NPCC might initially host the NCoP, particularly given potential force consolidation. Indicated it was more likely that an entity such as the College of Policing would host, owing to its legal status and powers. Chair highlighted potential risks of a shift towards greater national control rather than local accountability and urged early clarification of changes affecting accountability and funding streams. Confirmed that the NPCC has no direct control over Home Office grants but has proposed a stronger coordination role to identify potential economies of scale.

There was agreement that PCC work would continue throughout the two-year transition period, and that the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) has the full support and advocacy of the NPCC to secure continued funding.

In response to questions about the pace of reform, noted that progress depends on funding availability but that there is clear energy and momentum behind the process.

Decision: The Board accepted and noted the update.

Decision: The Board wanted it formally noted that significant uncertainty has been created following the announcement on transition away from PCCs by May 2028 and implications for democratic accountability and future funding flows. The Board emphasised the need for early clarity on future governance, accountability and funding arrangements.

4.2 CCC Update

The next Chiefs' Council meeting will take place in Belfast in December 2025. The rotating geographical hosting of meetings reflects the NPCC's representation of the four-nation policing landscape.

Chair provided an overview of the agenda. On Day 1, items include:

- Progress on Operation Beaconport (the national grooming gangs investigation and enquiry)
- Policing implications from summer 2025 disorder
- Planning for Euro 2028
- Work on hate crime, non-crime hate incidents, mis and disinformation
- Updates from the Communications Advisory Group
- Standard regional papers and risk updates

- An operational framework for closer coordination with the Speaker's Office parliamentary knowledge scheme
- PCC transition planning
- Police reform
- Police AI capability and funding announcements
- The National Policing Information Technology strategy for improved collaboration and immediate operational benefits
- Finance including National Operating Budget for 26/27 and £300 million grants work.

Day 2 will cover:

- Criminal Justice Coordination Committee (CJCC) update including on the sentencing review and budget implications
- Workforce Coordination Committee update on the Workforce and Wellbeing survey and Strategic Assessment of Workforce
- Performance Management Coordination Committee (PMCC) update on performance management developments with the Inspectorate and Home Office
- Emergency Services Network programme
- College of Policing updates
- National Crime Coordination Committee (NCCC) update on international criminality, organised immigration crime and border security.

Decision: The Board expressed support for the proposed approach to consolidation/coordination of Home Office grants. The Board noted concerns on criminal justice reform pressures (sentencing review) and the principle that new burdens should be fully funded.

Decision: The Board accepted and noted the update.

4.3 NPCC Hub Funding
An update was provided on the grant agreement received from the Home Office for the 2025/26 financial year. This included £3m for Strategic Hub funding, plus additional lines for the Joint Police Reform Team, the Police Efficiency Collaboration Programme (which incorporates some NPCC roles) and the CJ Improvement Programme. The signed agreement has been submitted to MOPAC for final approval, and funds should be accessible before the Christmas 2025 break.

The Hub aspect of the grant requires detailed reporting against deliverables grouped under three strategic objectives:

- National Service Delivery
- Future of NPCC
- Hub Capabilities

Automated reporting is being developed with support from the NPCC Strategic Planning and Performance (SPP) team utilising data from the Strategic Insight Dashboard.

Current forecasts for the Reform element of the grant indicate a £191k underspend, primarily due to recruitment delays. This underspend has been reported to the Home Office and is expected that is cannot be carried forward; final decisions rest with Treasury/Home Office.

Decision: The Board accepted and noted the update.

4.4 National Operating Budget 2026–2027
Lead referred to the National Operating Budget paper and proposed Finance Committee approach to funding recommendations.

Chair, new to the Board, sought clarification on the baseline figures used when seeking percentage increases from Central Government and Chief Constables. IM explained that work remains ongoing without a definitive baseline, but efforts with national functions have reduced budget requests significantly. One example cited was a potential £200k underspend in the Forensic Collision Investigation Network, which could allow a reduced 2026/27 request and lower force contributions.

Finance suggested establishing a reserve/contingency fund of around £1m to address emerging national risks or activities, avoiding ad-hoc requests to forces and aiding local financial planning. This would require Chief Constables' consent.

Lead outlined the previous ad-hoc contribution model where requests for funding were received throughout the year into council which made it very difficult for forces to plan and the move to an annual budget setting process which has helped drive efficiencies and collaboration. He noted that forces have historically resisted upfront surplus budgets and would not accept significant increases. To build confidence, a subcommittee or delegated authority could oversee the reserve. The National Operating Budget paper was accepted.

Decision: The Board supported the Finance Committee recommendations and the drive for greater efficiency, transparency and flexibility. Message to be conveyed to Chiefs' Council at the December meeting by the NPCC Chair.

Decision: The Board accepted and noted the paper. A further update will be provided at the next Audit and Assurance Board Meeting following the outcome of December's Chief Constables' Council Meeting.

5. Delivery

5.1 NPCC Quarterly Finance Statement

The financial forecast now includes a 4.2% pay award for both officers and staff. The officer award was implemented from September 2025 following agreement in August. Staff pay within the MPS remains under negotiation. Other forces are implementing the 4.2% staff award as agreed with Police Staff Council.

Clarification was provided on implications for NPCC staff, given the varied employment arrangements. Seconded officers receive the 4.2% award uniformly. Staff terms generally align with their home force, so the award applies accordingly. For MPS contracted or seconded staff, the final award remains unknown and pending negotiations.

Grant funding forecasts show underspends. The Hydrant team, now hosted by NPCC having transferred from South Yorkshire Police, has 27 vacancies. Underspends are proposed for use on Operation Beaconport ahead of a joint NPCC/NCA paper on future funding. SLA costs and a review of 50 Broadway occupancy are ongoing.

Lead confirmed that additional Hydrant funding followed the Home Secretary's announcement on child sexual abuse and exploitation. Underspend arose from partial-year staffing. Negotiations are underway to utilise it for accelerating Operation Beaconport recruitment.

Despite budgetary pressures, the position is stable due to underspends and measures such as vacancy factors.

Decision: The Board noted that as a principle, all NPCC staff should receive national pay awards at the same time in a fair and consistent manner wherever possible, but noted the contextual differences means this may not always be possible for NPCC. The Board asked that the principle on equitable pay treatment be pursued wherever possible in future reform discussions.

Decision: The Board noted the report on the 2025-26 Q2 financial position.

5.2 Delivery Plan Progress Update

The Strategic Hub supports the 13 Coordination Committees and maintains its own delivery plan. A summary of committee support was noted, alongside the Committee Chairs' forum for delivery planning output. Final input from the Operations Committee is pending, with approximately 25 objectives being drafted across the 12 portfolios.

Delivery planning and risk are captured via the Strategic Insight Dashboard on ChiefsNet, accessible to national leads, Chairs and portfolio holders. A 2025/26 deep-dive proposal was presented, with July 2026 proposed for final review and sign-off of the annual impact report. The Board welcomed the focus on benefit realisation, noting past difficulty in tracking it.

Questions were raised on prioritisation amid competing demands between national priorities, the Strategic Policing Requirement and APCC/NPCC views. Oversight occurs through monthly Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meetings reviewing progress, delays, critical items and new requests. Reprioritisation, delay or cessation of work may be required, with risks assessed and confirmation sought from leads or the Chair where necessary. A prioritisation matrix is in development. Capacity constraints mean not all new work can be absorbed without additional resources (finance, project management, analytical or HR support). New projects impact the SLA through per-person charging, monitored via the Change and Improvement Board.

Consistency in judging the 13 Committees' performance was discussed. Coordinators provide one-to-one support, though no formal performance framework exists. Indicators are being developed for the Hub teams, recognising the diverse nature of committees and impact of Chair changes. Strategic planning documents and the impact report help alignment.

Decision: The Board accepted and noted the update, including the outlined proposals for the deep dive in July.

5.3 Workforce Data

The Head of Business Support presented data on sickness absence trends, retention, exit surveys and morale. Absence rates remain well below the national average, though some small teams exceed it due to individual cases. Data covers 195 of 235 NPCC staff, with retrospective collation required due to multi-force sourcing.

Seconded staff follow home force sickness policies, with NPCC guidelines in secondment agreements. Top absence reasons were medical procedures/recovery, followed by mental health/stress/anxiety and Covid-19. Triggers (e.g., three incidents in 12 months) prompt managerial support and possible occupational health referral. The cause of stress cannot be directly asked, but specialist HR support is available.

Support measures include phased returns, counselling, an employee assistance programme, bi-weekly HR welfare checks, monthly engagement, wellbeing groups, a wellbeing passport, events, intranet resources, coaching, mentoring and management training.

Retention is strong and above national averages, although below UK police force averages due to fixed-term contracts. Of those eligible, 78% extended, with 12 resigning from home forces to join NPCC permanently. Primary exit reasons were contract end or seeking better opportunities. Exit interviews are offered, though not mandatory.

Staff surveys have indicated a positive workplace with high levels of pride. Areas for improvement included managing workload pressures and further wellbeing support. Workload management, clearer support signposting and dedicated intranet pages have been introduced.

Two surveys are planned for next year (culture and general). No staff survey was conducted in 2025 to avoid survey fatigue. Ongoing initiatives include Cuppa and Chat sessions, Ask the Chair and a focus on skills. Future improvements target sickness reporting processes, HubNet development, data analytics resourcing, exit survey response rates, and a new culture and standards group.

The Board commented on the positive picture this data shows and agreed it has been a helpful overview and something would like to see reported on annual basis.

Decision: The Board accepted and noted the report and highlighted how useful the item had been and the good news story the data tells.

Decision: The Board agreed that NPCC workforce data would become an annual item at each November meeting.

5.4 Publication Strategy

A draft publication policy, building on the existing high-level strategy on the NPCC website and aligned with Information Commissioner's Office standards, was presented for approval. The appendix (listing publications, frequency and location) will be reviewed annually. All listed items are already published.

Views were sought on publishing AAB agendas and papers (minutes already published). The Board supported publishing agendas, with papers available on FOI request. The policy was seen as promoting openness and transparency. The Board asked why the budget is not published and requested review.

It was agreed to continue publishing approved AAB minutes and agendas, plus quarterly finance papers (including outturn). AAB papers will be reviewed for suitability for publication or made available via FOI if heavy redaction would be required.

Decision: The Board agreed that the Publication Policy was a useful document and for AAB, the following additional papers, beyond those listed in the appendix, should be published:

- AAB agendas
- AAB minutes
- Quarterly finance papers

Decision: The Board supported the publication strategy.

Action: NPCC Head of Strategic Hub to review previous AAB meeting packs to determine what could be published with/without redaction.

6. Governance and Assurance

6.1 Internal Audit Update

ST updated on behalf of Internal Audit. Ad-hoc advice has supported Annual Governance Statement preparation for inclusion in the 2025/26 Annual Impact Report. A budgetary control and expenditure audit is at fieldwork stage, assessing documentation, validity and recording.

Remaining planned audits cover the Risk Management Framework and SyAP review actions (including prior cyber security governance actions). Formal follow-ups will address outstanding People Development Framework and Programme Governance actions. No questions were raised.

Decision: The Board accepted and noted the update.

6.2 DARA Recommendations Tracking
GeS reported significant progress on the outstanding DARA governance and delivery recommendation concerning the National Police FOI and Data Protection Unit, proposing closure. People Development Review recommendations have been transferred to the main tracker. Two (DARA 055 and 057) on reflecting activity in the Hub Delivery Plan and monitoring progress are now complete and closure was proposed. One remains open pending further activity. Proposed closures were agreed.

Decision: The Board noted the progress updates and agreed those areas recommended for closure can be closed.

6.3 Quarterly Risk Update
LH presented the update. The Strategic Risk Assessment was presented with enhanced detail on the top three risks. She chairs the National Risk Management Forum for cross-policing risk discussion. A successful risk maturity peer assessment pilot with North Wales Police has attracted interest from five further forces.

A holistic risk themes review using Strategic Insight Dashboard data will be refreshed next year alongside planned deep dives, including a risk-specific session in July.

Current top three strategic risks are: (1) Police Reform, (2) Trust and Confidence (new national lead appointed), and (3) Service Delivery (demand versus capacity). Four new risks added: Fleet Transformation, Devolution Plans, and Foreign National Offenders/Immigration Flow and Response.
Discussion addressed ranking methodology clarity. Additional contextual factors influence final prioritisation beyond raw scores. Presentation improvements were agreed. The update was noted.

Decision: The Board accepted and noted the update.
Action: The Board requested more clarity (e.g. additional columns) to understand the ranking of risks.

7. Any Other Business
The Chair announced John Campion's decision to step down from the Board. Members expressed unanimous appreciation for his long-standing commitment, extensive knowledge, constructive challenge and governance contributions, noting his departure as a significant loss. Formal thanks will be issued by NPCC, with personal contact from the Chair.

Decision: The Board approved and supported the renewal of the contract for David Bowles (NED) for re-appointment to the Board. NPCC HR to make arrangements.

Action: APCC to consider and identify replacement for John Campion as third PCC Board member.

The next meeting is scheduled for 10 February 2026. The Chair thanked attendees and extended seasonal greetings for Christmas and the New Year.