Bob Neill MP  
Chair, Justice Select Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

15 February 2019

Dear Bob,

I am grateful for the work of the Justice Select Committee in highlighting the challenges policing face in handling the increasing volume and complexity of digital evidence. The Committee requested I report progress on their recommendation for a Digital Evidence Strategy by the end of 2018. I trust the delay in response is acceptable given Christmas recess.

I absolutely recognise the importance of this issue. The Home Office is working very closely with policing to develop the strategic approach in addressing these challenges.

Improving policing’s ability to handle increasing amounts and complexity of digital evidence is rooted in operational policing. We are therefore taking the approach of providing strong Home Office input and strategic oversight of policing led work to deliver on the recommendation.

I have already funded initial work in 2018/19 through the Police Transformation Fund. This includes the Digital Policing Portfolio (DPP) leading on the production of a disclosure outline business case which, by the end of March, will set out the deployment, national implementation and continuous enhancement of selected tools that could assist with disclosure challenges faced by police and the CPS. The DPP, in partnership with the Police ICT Company and the National Police Technology Council, have also been funded to deliver an overarching national Digital, Technology and Data Strategy for UK policing by the end of March. This is in addition to having already provided significant investment, via the Police Transformation Fund, to support policing in developing wider digital capability as detailed in the Government’s response to the Committee’s recommendations.
Whilst the Committee’s recommendation arose from a focus on disclosure failings, it is evident that equipping forces to handle the increasing volume and complexity of digital material, not just for evidential purposes, has wider benefits and this has also informed the approach we are taking.

Representatives from across the criminal justice system met at a Digital Disclosure Workshop at Ditchley Park last November. The event, chaired by the NPCC Chair Sara Thornton, focused on developing a collective understanding of the range of issues contributing to digital disclosure failures.

I committed, at the launch of the Attorney General’s review on 15 November 2018, to the Home Office jointly chairing a “Tech Summit”, with the Attorney General, in Spring 2019. This Summit will build on the work policing and partners have undertaken to determine the operational issues and will explore with industry partners the use of technologies, such as AI and machine learning, in dealing with them.

I recognise the importance of this issue to Parliament. It is too soon to report key actions from the range of work currently underway. However, I will ensure Parliament is updated as significant stages of the work progress. The first of these updates will pertain to the impact of the Tech Summit and I will write to the Committee again before the end of the year.

RT HON NICK HURD MP
Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service