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* I understand the MDP has been in talks about widening its role in the event of a Paris-style terror incident in Britain. Are you able to comment on that?

- The MOD works closely with other government departments and agencies to ensure that it is able to provide appropriate assistance in response to any security threats, including national security. This includes MDP.

* The 2013/14 MDP annual report, and subsequent committee meeting minutes reveal serious concerns about "unacceptably high" sickness levels in the force. Can you tell me what current sickness absence levels are? Have they improved in the past 12 months.

- MDP has taken substantial steps towards more effective sickness and non-capability absence management. A robust strategy and action plan has been operating, with changes to training, culture and supervisory action. Cases are better managed and more swiftly processed. The numbers of officers on long-term sick (28 days or more) is reducing - down from 138 officers to 77 over the past 18 months.

* I have been told that some of the high absence rates are due to injuries and chronic conditions caused by the weight of the weapons and other equipment that officers have to carry. Is this correct?

- There is no evidence that weight of equipment contributes to long-term sickness rates. However, the Force is actively working to re-configure (on a properly risk-assessed basis) the number of hours on a 12 hour shift that officers are carrying the full range of equipment.

* Does the force have an issue with officers working excessive overtime and is this causing sickness issues? Minutes refer to officers working 60+ hours per week.

- Many MDP officers have been working overtime in order to protect some of our most sensitive sites, however the Force has recruited around 250 new officers over the past 12 months, and expects to recruit a further 300 over the coming year. This will bring the Force operational strength close to where it should be and dramatically reduce the requirement for overtime working. There is no evidence that overtime levels are contributing significantly to sickness levels.

Background:

[REDACTED]