

# Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Work of the Home Office](#), HC 200

Wednesday 22 June 2022

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 22 June 2022.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dame Diana Johnson (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Lee Anderson; Paula Barker; Carolyn Harris; Adam Holloway; Tim Loughton; Stuart C McDonald.

Questions 309 - 436

## Witnesses

I: Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office; and Tricia Hayes CB, Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Matthew Rycroft CBE and Tricia Hayes CB.

Q309 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody, and particularly to our witnesses today. This is the Home Affairs Select Committee's opportunity to meet the most senior civil servants in the Home Office and to look at policy implementation in the Home Office, so we are very grateful. Would you both like to introduce yourselves for the record?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Thank you, Chair. I am the permanent secretary at the Home Office.

**Tricia Hayes:** Good morning. I am the second permanent secretary at the Home Office.

Q310 **Chair:** As you can imagine, we have quite a few questions to ask you this morning. I think that you have been given advance notice of the areas that we want to cover, and we are very hopeful that you will have all the facts and figures that you need to enable you to answer our questions. There are a lot of questions so we would appreciate you being quite focused and short and sharp in your answers.

Before we get on to the specific questions, Mr Rycroft, I imagine that your inbox is probably full at the moment with myriad that you are having to deal with in the Home Office. Could you say what the top problem is that you are facing in the Home Office at the moment?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think it is fair to say that a full inbox comes with the territory of being permanent secretary of the Home Office. That has always been the case in my two and a bit years in the role. The migration issues are probably the most tricky to deal with, migration being a divisive issue in our society. As I have said before, I don't think there is any policy on migration that would get the unanimous support of any group of 38,000 people, including the 38,000 members of staff. I think that dealing with and leading the Department through a period of significant challenge on migration, but also on the other things that we deal with, is probably the biggest issue, and making sure that we focus on the very short term and the urgent as well as on the longer term, thinking about the capability of the Department for the long term.

Q311 **Chair:** Can I ask you about a point that was raised by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration when he came before us? I asked him what kept him awake at night, and he said "leadership" and talked about political leadership and civil service leadership. He also talked about the crisis nature of the Home Office, moving from crisis to crisis. What do you say about that? Do you recognise that?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I absolutely recognise that. You may recall when the Home Secretary and I set up a transformation programme for the Home Office, called One Home Office, one of the things that we were seeking to unlock was the sense in the Department that we do go from crisis to



crisis. There is nothing that the Home Office loves better than a good crisis, and of course responding well to crises is an important part of the functioning of a Department of State, but there is a lot more to it than that. I am seeking to get us better at dealing with business as usual and preventing things from becoming crises. That is clearly not always possible to achieve, because many crises—in fact the vast majority of crises—are things that happen outside our control in the Home Office. It is about our response to external events, whether that is evacuation from Afghanistan, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or the challenge of all the small boats crossing the Channel, to name but three. There are many others as well. I think that overall we are seeking to move the Department into a place where we are better at business as usual and better at pre-crisis, to go with a strong tradition of working effectively in a crisis.

**Q312 Chair:** What do you think about what Wendy Williams found in her latest review of the Home Office? She talked about the major cultural change that is required and said that, “65% of respondents to my external survey thought there had been no progress at all or only some progress in changing the Home Office’s culture since the publication of the Comprehensive Improvement Plan” and that 44% of your staff who responded to that survey “were pessimistic or very pessimistic that that plan would result in a change of culture”. Do you recognise that?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Cultural change takes time. I recognise all that, and I hang on to Wendy Williams’s every word, as you would expect given that her initial report was the driver for the transformation programme that I have just described, among other drivers.

**Q313 Chair:** It is disappointing. Those figures are terrible, aren’t they?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I take you to the words that she used to summarise her reflections 18 months on and her two-word summary was “largely positive”. Those were her words to describe the overall Home Office response to her recommendations 18 months on. Within “largely positive”, of course, there were areas of significant disappointment to her, and I share that disappointment. We are using the report from her revisit to fire up the next phases of the transformation programme. Having done the structural change, we are now firmly in the cultural part of that, but cultural change takes time.

I think that it would be impossible to change completely a culture over 18 months. I am pleased with the direction that we have set and with the steps that we have taken but they are not enough, they don’t go far enough, we haven’t gone fast enough, and that is what we are seeking to put right now.

**Q314 Chair:** When will we see that cultural change in place?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There will not be a single day. There are things happening the whole time that give me the confidence to know that we are moving in the right direction, but this is a five-year programme and we need—



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q315 **Chair:** In five years' time the culture of the Home Office will have changed—is that your view?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely in five years. It has already changed and there is a lot further to go. It will be an ongoing process. My successor in five years' time will no doubt have a transformation programme that will be looking at the culture of the Home Office. This will always be with us but we have to focus on it. It is a relentless focus on building the capability of the Department to ensure, from Wendy Williams's perspective, that a scandal as big and as bad as Windrush can never happen again. To do that, we have to create a culture where every single person who works for the Home Office feels that they have a voice, that they can raise that voice, that they can challenge, that there is a place to challenge and that they are able to do that safely. That is what we are aiming, and where we are moving, towards. We are not there yet and we will keep going.

Q316 **Chair:** I want to ask you about what Dame Meg Hillier, the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, said about the Home Office. This was looking at the number of large infrastructure projects that you have, which seem again to be a catalogue of delay, overspending and failure. She said, "It is hard to see what steps the Home Office is taking to resolve these huge problems and whether it has any inkling that they will work". She said this in December 2021, so just six months ago.

**Matthew Rycroft:** She is right: we have a very large and very red portfolio of major programmes. We are throwing a huge amount at that in terms of resource, time, energy, effort and attention, and we will carry on doing that. We have these major programmes, including some very significant technology programmes for policing and emergency services. There is an inevitability about the delivery of those programmes; we have to deliver those programmes—the police national computer requires an update, and the emergency services network is currently on a system that will become obsolete technically within some years.

Q317 **Chair:** This has been years and years, hasn't it? What has changed in the last six months? If the Public Accounts Committee thought six months ago that you did not have a grip of this, what has happened in those six months for you now to be saying it will all happen and it will all be fine?

**Matthew Rycroft:** The words are really important, Chair, and the Public Accounts Committee did not say we did not have a grip. We have a very significant portfolio management function. We have brought in some excellent people to manage the portfolio as a whole and to be the SROs for the biggest programmes, including from policing, which is transforming the nature of the relationship between the Home Office and policing. Given that policing are the end users of some of these programmes—

Q318 **Chair:** You have got a grip? You have a grip of—

**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely, of course.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

- Q319 **Chair:** Years on, massive overspends, it is now all under control?
- Matthew Rycroft:** We have got a grip. We are giving these programmes the resource that they need to deliver.
- Q320 **Chair:** You are overspending, aren't you?
- Matthew Rycroft:** They are hugely complex. Some of them we inherited are over-complex, over-budget and over-time programmes, which we are putting right. We have had a whole reset of one of them—the NLEDS, the national law enforcement data system—and others, and we are determined to put these right, but they are not easy. If they were easy, they would have been done.
- Q321 **Chair:** I want to put to you finally that one of the comments I have heard about the Home Office is that there is a view that you have a culture of what is called toxic positivity—everything is fine, everything is going to be okay and it is all going to plan, and if any questions are raised, or any dissent, or anybody is challenging, this is dismissed.
- Matthew Rycroft:** I totally reject that as a picture of today's Home Office. It could have been like that in the past and there could be some pockets of it now.
- Chair:** Six months ago?
- Matthew Rycroft:** No, that is not what the PAC said six months ago. It did not talk about—
- Chair:** No, but I am saying was it six months ago that it was toxically positive?
- Matthew Rycroft:** No, it was not; it was absolutely not. Tricia and I, and the Home Secretary and Ministers, and many others are seeking to create a culture where, when things go wrong, but before things go wrong—going back to my point about prevention—that is the time to hear these voices.
- Q322 **Chair:** You are listening to those voices?
- Matthew Rycroft:** We are listening to those voices, and that is why we have done major resets of two of the big programmes that we were talking about. We can talk in more detail if you like, if that would be helpful—as we have done to the Public Accounts Committee—about those programmes and indeed many others. We also have some green programmes, as I reminded the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee. I hope that we will talk about the police uplift programme, which is a green programme, which means it is on time, on track and on budget and it is delivering the uplift of 20,000 police officers.
- Q323 **Chair:** Mr Rycroft, while it might be on track for now, you were at that Public Accounts Committee hearing, as I was, and it was quite clear that the next 12 months will be the most difficult; there are lots of challenges



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

around that uplift programme, so it is not all rosy. I think that indicates again that toxic positivity and the issue of being realistic about what the problems are, rather than just saying it is all fine.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Nothing that I have said today is rosy; nothing that I have said today is glossing over difficulties. The programmes that the Home Office deals with are hugely complex. The policy issues that the Home Office leads on are hugely divisive in our society, as I have already said. The job of permanent secretary, second permanent secretary, Home Secretary—any of these roles at any time in our history—are full of dealing with these most difficult issues. That is what we do to make a difference. That is why the 38,000 people who work for the Home Office come in every day, to make a difference, not just to keep our country safe and secure—words that you would expect to hear from Home Office leaders—but to protect the vulnerable, to make our country fairer and to make it more prosperous.

Q324 **Ms Abbott:** Today is Windrush Day. We know that only one in four applicants have received payments. We also know that 1,800 compensation claims are waiting to be allocated, some from as far back as March 2021. The concern is that some of the victims of Windrush may die before they receive their compensation. Does it give you any cause for concern that so many people in the community feel that you have let down the victims of Windrush?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I am sure Tricia will want to come in on this, but let me say first—

**Ms Abbott:** No, that is fine. I am asking you.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Let me say first of all, Ms Abbott, that given it is Windrush Day I want to begin by paying tribute to what the Windrush generation have done for our country. It is a significant contribution that has made our country better, and today is a day to pay tribute to them and to redouble our efforts to right the wrongs of the past. As I have said already—

Q325 **Ms Abbott:** Yes, but can you answer my question? We all know about the contribution of the Windrush generation. My parents were that generation. Can you answer the question about the backlog of compensation claims that are waiting to be allocated?

**Matthew Rycroft:** As you and other members of the Committee saw for yourself on your very welcome visit to Sheffield, where our brilliant caseworkers work on this, we have a dedicated team who are working incredibly hard to go through all the cases. They met their internal target, which was to resolve 90% of the cases from before the beginning of 2021 by March, and they achieved that. They are down to, I think, 118 of those long-standing cases, which is about 10% of the previous total, and they are working through those.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

I agree with the premise of your question, Ms Abbott, which is that we need to crack on with this because this generation are old, some are frail, some need significant support and some have died in the course of this work, very sadly. My heart goes out to their families and we are determined to be—

**Ms Abbott:** Yes, but the backlog, Mr Rycroft, the backlog?

**Matthew Rycroft:** As I have just described, we have worked through 90% of those cases, as was our target, and now we are working through the remaining 118. These are the long-standing ones from before the beginning of 2021. My heart goes out to the people in that situation. We will work as quickly as we can. As you know, we have sped up the processes of this compensation scheme, but it is still a lengthy process, to ensure that each life, which by definition is complex, is properly compensated with all the money that each individual claimant is entitled to.

Q326 **Ms Abbott:** One of our major recommendations is that the Windrush compensation should be handed to an independent organisation. Your response was that that would create more delay, but one of the reasons we suggested that was that we feel relatively low numbers of people are applying because they are put off applying to the Home Office. Are you still rejecting our recommendation out of hand?

**Matthew Rycroft:** We have looked at it. We considered it carefully, as we do all recommendations from this Committee, and we decided that the best answer is for the Home Office to carry on doing this work because, as you saw, we have a brilliant team working in Sheffield going through these cases.

**Tricia Hayes:** If I can add a couple of thoughts on that, the internal target that we set for clearing older cases was for cases that were pre-March 2020—just to make sure that the Committee is clear on that point. I am sure you will have heard that on your visit.

Q327 **Chair:** You didn't answer Ms Abbott's question, which was about the 1,800 cases that have not been allocated to any caseworker. They are not in the system yet. They have been started but they are not being dealt with, and that is what we are very concerned about.

**Tricia Hayes:** Totally, and let me come on to that straightaway. As I think you heard from our caseworkers direct when you visited Sheffield, there are a number of reasons why cases are currently being held in the system. Some of them have been allocated out to our caseworkers, where our caseworkers are in active contact with the people who are in the system. But there is a separate group of people where the cases have not made their way to the caseworking system, because of a number of barriers. By far the most significant is that they are waiting for a probate decision, so there—

Q328 **Chair:** No, that is not correct. That is not what we were told when we



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

visited Sheffield. We were told that they had been started, they had been put on to the system and they were waiting to be allocated to a caseworker. That is what we were told. There was no issue about probate or anything. They are in a queue and they are being dealt with in date order, so why are there 1,800 that have not been allocated?

**Tricia Hayes:** Chair, we either just have written, or are just about to write, to the Committee clarifying the position on the pre-April 2020 cases. I am not sure—apologies—whether you have received that note yet. You will do very shortly and hopefully that will help.

Q329 **Chair:** These are ongoing. These are people coming on to the system now, as I understood it, so these are people who are ringing up and making their claim, and they are going to the back of the queue of this 1,800.

**Tricia Hayes:** There are two points there. One is about how caseworking works as a process and the steps that have to be gone through before something gets to a decision maker. I am sure that the team talked you through this, as they talked me through it when I visited just before you did. A caseworker is given a case to deal with at the point where they have the information that they need to deal with it. That is part of the caseworking process and that—

Q330 **Ms Abbott:** With respect, we had the process explained to us in Sheffield, and one of the things they said to us is that some of the issues were policy issues. That is why we are raising them with you. You do not have an answer to the fact that there is a backlog of 1,800 compensation claims awaiting allocation.

**Matthew Rycroft:** There were 1,800, and they have been reduced to 118. Are we talking about—

**Chair:** No, that is not correct.

**Matthew Rycroft:** You are talking about a different 1,800, are you?

Q331 **Chair:** You have referred to the ones that were the oldest cases, which we agree you have reduced down—absolutely, we agree that. But when we asked specifically of your caseworkers in Sheffield how many cases were waiting to be allocated, we were told 1,800 cases were in a queue to be allocated.

**Tricia Hayes:** I am sorry; I am clearly not being very clear in describing the process. It may be helpful to set this out a bit more. There is a policy choice on the order in which cases are dealt with—I absolutely agree with that. That is a policy choice, and in almost all cases we think that the right order in which to deal with cases is the order in which they come into the system. I think that is generally the right thing to do. There are very few exceptions to that, but that is a policy choice.

In the caseworking process, a case will come to a caseworker after the information that the caseworker needs to deal with that case has been





## HOUSE OF COMMONS

brought together, so that they have the tools they need to do the job. The caseworking team that you will have met when you were in Sheffield are not about the first task that the Home Office has to deal with. When it is handling a case, the first thing is to get the case ready—

**Q332 Ms Abbott:** With respect—I know that a number of my colleagues have questions to ask—all of that was gone through in Sheffield. It seems to me that you do not really have an answer to my question.

I will move on and ask you something very quickly. One of the things in our report was that we wanted greater clarity on how compensation for impacts on lives was assessed, and we didn't get a very clear answer. Is it possible that you can write to the Committee about this?

**Tricia Hayes:** Absolutely. As you know from your discussions, we have an "impacts on life" category within the scheme.

**Q333 Ms Abbott:** We know that. Can we have some more information as to how that is actually assessed? There is a lot of unhappiness about that among people who are dealing with this.

I will move on to Rwanda. We understand that the Rwandan Government are getting £120 million as a down payment. I believe that there is also £12,000 per person allocated. Is it anticipated that there will be further payments to Rwanda for this scheme?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes.

**Q334 Ms Abbott:** Is there an idea of how much those further payments will be?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, and they will be announced in due course in the normal way through our annual report and accounts.

**Q335 Ms Abbott:** You are not able to tell the Committee?

**Matthew Rycroft:** It will depend on variable factors, including the number of people who are relocated to Rwanda.

**Q336 Ms Abbott:** Obviously, for the individual people, there is a cost—I think it is about £12,000—but over and above that what further payments will you be making to Rwanda?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There is a per person cost. There is also a contribution by the UK to the economic development of Rwanda, and there is investment, partly funded by the UK, in the infrastructure required by Rwanda to receive the relocated people in proper fashion.

**Q337 Ms Abbott:** When do you anticipate those further costs being announced?

**Matthew Rycroft:** We will announce them in the normal way through our annual report and accounts.

**Q338 Ms Abbott:** What is your current assessment as to the value for money



of this policy?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I have not updated my assessment since my letter to the Home Secretary in the middle of April saying that I did not have the evidence that this policy would be value for money. I am keeping that under review. As you may recall from the letter, the whole policy hinges on the amount of deterrence that it does. This is about preventing people from risking their lives and the lives of others by crossing the channel in small boats. This is about prevention, so the policy will be a success if there are fewer crossings than there would have been. It is too early to tell whether the number of crossings is significantly enough lower than it would have been but we are keeping that under constant review. I will happily keep this Committee and the Public Accounts Committee updated as I update my assessment. I will update my assessment either when there is any significant change to the evidence on value for money or regularly every few months.

Q339 **Ms Abbott:** As you know, the number of crossings has actually risen compared to last year, and people must know about the Rwanda scheme.

**Matthew Rycroft:** You are right that the number of crossings has risen. It is not currently rising as much as our projection for this year, but it is too early to tell whether that is because of the announcement of the Rwanda policy or other factors, including the weather. That is why we will keep this under constant review, but it would be premature to reach a definitive judgment now given that we have not even relocated anyone to Rwanda yet. If there were to be a deterrent effect, one would expect it to increase as the policy got under way through its operationalisation.

Q340 **Ms Abbott:** Finally, before I hand over to my colleagues, we understand that a monitoring committee on the Rwanda scheme is supposed to be set up. Has it been appointed, what is its budget and what will its terms of reference be?

**Matthew Rycroft:** It has been set up and it has met for the first time, and I will happily write to the Committee with its terms of reference and budget.

Q341 **Ms Abbott:** How many people are on it?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I can't remember exactly—sorry, Ms Abbott. It is six or eight, that sort of number.

Q342 **Ms Abbott:** Can you write to us and give us the names of those people?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Of course, yes.

**Ms Abbott:** Thank you very much.

Q343 **Chair:** On the value for money and your need to evaluate that as time goes on, can you explain how you will do that? You will need a fairly robust evaluation to show that there is a direct link with the Rwanda policy and not other things, so just explain to us how you are doing that.



**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely, and this will be a judgment, as you would expect—all accounting officer tests are judgments to one extent. I think that value for money is the one where there is the most evidence behind it, with numbers. It is possible to be very specific, and that is what we are seeking to do. We will be tracking a number of measures, but the most important one I have mentioned already, in response to Ms Abbott's question, is the number of crossings. We will compare that with our projection for what we were expecting and then we will seek to work out—this is where the judgment comes in—whether there were other factors that made that number higher or lower than it might have been. Then we will seek to work out the proportion of the increase or decrease in the numbers, compared to what we were expecting, that would be appropriate to say as a result of the Rwanda relocation policy.

Q344 **Chair:** When will you be in a position to publish that evaluation?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I have not committed to any particular date, but I undertake to write to you and the Public Accounts Committee whenever I do make a formal update of that assessment. I will make that update either if there is a significant change or regularly through the course of the years ahead.

Q345 **Paula Barker:** In the agreement on Rwanda it was identified that around 50 Rwandan refugees would come to the UK. They were described as 50 vulnerable refugees. Can you make any comment about that? The Home Secretary said in the Chamber the other week that they were fleeing political violence and so on. Will they have recourse to public funds immediately, and do you anticipate more than 50 Rwandan refugees coming over the course of this scheme?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There is not anything to say further to what the Home Secretary has already said about that, because we have not taken that aspect of the agreement further yet, but we will update this Committee in due course when there are further things to say.

Can I just correct what I said earlier? I was referring to the joint committee, which has met, but there is a separate thing called the monitoring committee, which has not met yet, so apologies for that error. When that is appointed I will write to you with its membership and terms of reference, as I have committed to do, but it was the joint committee that I was referring to and not the monitoring committee. Apologies.

Q346 **Paula Barker:** One of our previous visits was to Dover, before we went to Sheffield. We spoke to staff there, and they said that with Rwanda at present it would be single men. We asked whether or not that would ever be rolled out to single women and to families. Are there any plans to roll it out to women and families?

**Matthew Rycroft:** First, I thank the Committee members for going to Dover. I think it is valuable that you were able to do that as well as the Sheffield trip earlier, and I would obviously encourage other trips like that.



**Paula Barker:** We plan to have lots of trips to see what the Home Office is up to.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think it is a really good way of understanding each other, so thank you for your commitment to doing that. I think it is fair to say that the vast majority of people to be relocated to Rwanda will be single men, but obviously we have not relocated anyone to Rwanda yet so I think we need to give this time to work out. We are still in the foothills of implementing this policy.

Q347 **Ms Abbott:** The vast majority? Are you saying, therefore, that some could be women and families?

**Matthew Rycroft:** All of the 47 who received removal notices on the first attempted flight last week were single men, and that is where we are starting with the policy.

Q348 **Paula Barker:** Starting? So you are not ruling out women and families?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think I am right in saying that we have not ruled out women.

**Tricia Hayes:** I will add briefly to that. One of the things we have been really concerned with in designing this policy and in managing our illegal migration work more generally is to avoid incentivising perverse behaviours on the part of the people smugglers. We have been very careful not to put out a lot of public statements definitively about the exact selection criteria that we will use for the Rwanda scheme. We worry that, were we to do that, we would design a business model that was intended to evade it. That has been a very conscious choice on our part.

Q349 **Paula Barker:** Are you worried, Ms Hayes, that the backlash from the general public will be one of sheer horror when you are thinking of sending women and families to Rwanda? Is that the real reason?

**Tricia Hayes:** Our principal concern is to avoid giving the people smugglers information that they could use to create a new form of their business model for vulnerable people.

Q350 **Paula Barker:** Your principal concern? Do you have a concern that there will be a public outcry?

**Tricia Hayes:** The rationale behind our position is to avoid creating a new business model for people smugglers.

Q351 **Adam Holloway:** On the public outcry, look, one definitely has to take great care of women and families and single women, but for this to be successful I presume that what we are trying to do is break the link out there that if you get to Britain you will stay in Britain. That is the case in, I think, 80% of cases, and it is the reality that the entire population of several countries round the world would be given asylum here if they managed to get over the channel. If you don't send, under very careful conditions, single women and families as well, as suggested, I think you



are helping to create a business model where hundreds of millions of people are potentially eligible to come to Britain if they made that channel crossing. Do you accept that if you do not do that, you will be undermining your policy? There definitely will be an outcry from some members of the public, but do you accept that public opinion is with this policy, not with *The Guardian*?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I will leave judgments about where public opinion is to the elected Ministers and members of this Committee, and get on with the job of advising Home Office Ministers on how to implement their own intent and operationalising that intent. I think the intent of the Government is to reduce the amount of danger that people are putting themselves in through these crossings and through seeking to enter the country illegally with the purpose of claiming asylum. The Rwanda relocation policy was one of four things that the Prime Minister announced to tackle that, the other three being the Navy having primary control over the operations in the channel, an increase in detention and the acceleration of the channel border.

Q352 **Adam Holloway:** It must be the case that you create conditions such that it is substantially safer for families to go to Rwanda than to put babies in small boats.

**Matthew Rycroft:** We are seeking to do everything we can to avoid anyone—a single man, a single woman, a family, a child or anyone—making that crossing. We are particularly attuned to the danger that babies, for instance, would be put in those circumstances, and we are very keen, as Tricia said, to avoid creating, perversely, some sort of incentive for the people smugglers to change their tactics.

Q353 **Stuart C McDonald:** Obviously, you know my views on the Rwanda scheme. I have some factual questions. How many people need to be removed to Rwanda in Home Office thinking for this to be successful?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I don't think that there is a single answer to that question. Different people have different views about success. Clearly, from a value for money perspective, my judgment will be dependent on the cost, so that is what I will be looking at on value for money, but there are other aspects of success that other people will be interested in.

Q354 **Stuart C McDonald:** There must have been some thinking done on the numbers that must be removed before the disincentive actually kicks in.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely, and we have done a lot of modelling on that. Clearly, there are many factors, and the deterrent effect is by its nature quite difficult to separate out from all of the other effects.

Q355 **Stuart C McDonald:** Are we talking hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands a year?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I don't think at this stage it would be right to speculate about those sorts of numbers.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q356 **Stuart C McDonald:** It is pretty important for us as a Committee, if we are to be able to scrutinise the policy, to know what the Home Office is trying to achieve.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely, which is why we are happy to be held to account now and in many other ways.

Q357 **Stuart C McDonald:** You say you plan to create a deterrent, but I have not the first clue how many people the Home Office thinks it has to remove before it will create a deterrent. How many folk does the Home Office envisage having to remove every year to Rwanda?

**Matthew Rycroft:** The one thing I will say, Mr McDonald, is that I don't think the success of this scheme should be measured by the number of people being relocated to Rwanda. The success of the scheme should be measured by the number of journeys deterred.

Q358 **Stuart C McDonald:** Indeed. I know that is how the Home Office thinks about this, but I am trying to get at how many need to be removed before that disincentive will work.

**Matthew Rycroft:** That is impossible to answer. There are already—possibly—the beginnings of some deterrent effect visible. Although, as Ms Abbott was saying, the numbers are higher than last year, the proportion higher is already a bit smaller since the announcement than it was before the announcement. It is too early to be definitive about that. There are all sorts of other things that could have contributed to that, but in due course, when we have the evidence, I will come back to the Committee with an assessment of that evidence and then, on the basis of that, an assessment about value for money.

Q359 **Stuart C McDonald:** Do you factor in the possibility that what happens is that behaviour changes, so maybe more dangerous crossings are attempted or there is a move back to clandestine arrivals in the back of lorries, for example?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely, yes. I think it is important to see this in the round, and thank you for the opportunity to agree with you on that. I agree that we should be thinking about irregular migration in general and all of the different routes. It would be a pyrrhic victory if this set of policies was successful in closing down the small boat route but created something even more dangerous. That would not be a victory at all, so we need to make sure that we think about this in the round, as you suggested.

Q360 **Stuart C McDonald:** One of the challenges of assessing this is that people will now be going out of their way to avoid detection by the Home Office. They will attempt to sail further up the coast or they will get off lorries right in the heart of the country away from the Home Office. How will you know that that is happening?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I very much agree that we need to be mindful of other irregular and illegal routes into the country, and we are. Of course,



before the small boat crossings became the fashionable method of choice for people smugglers to ferry people into the country, there were other routes and they have not been closed down to zero. The back of lorries, for instance, has long been a route and also a dangerous one, as we know. We are continuing to assess all the routes and we will make a judgment in the round about how best to respond.

**Q361 Stuart C McDonald:** Is there evidence already that they are attempting longer crossings, for example? There seemed to be some when we were at Western Jet Foil.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think there was evidence through the course of last year that the people smugglers were attempting to evade the activity of French law enforcement by starting the sea bit of the journey off a wider range of beaches in northern France. There was some evidence of that last year. I have not seen any evidence of changes of behaviour in that particularity since the Prime Minister's announcement on 15 April.

**Tricia Hayes:** Do you mind if I add something very quickly on that? As Matthew said, we completely agree that, given the innovative nature of this policy, being able to detect when people are crossing will be even more important for us. That is part of the logic behind the work we have been doing with the MoD, putting into place military primacy in the channel, and putting additional resources in to monitor channel crossings so that we have the evidence. That will give us the evidence that we need to know what is going on, so that we can see any of those changes.

**Q362 Stuart C McDonald:** There is huge concern about how people are screened and how the Home Office makes sure that people who should not be removed to Rwanda are not removed to Rwanda. Medical Justice explained to me that it was involved with 11 people who were given directions for the flight that was eventually abandoned. The first person who got in touch with them did so because he had concerns about an exacerbation of his asthma. He was five days into a seven-day period of notice and he did not have the first clue that he was being removed to Rwanda. His notice of intention to remove had been served to him in English. He didn't speak very much English, as he was only a few days off the boat. It was only because he happened to fax that notice of intention to Medical Justice that he became aware that he was on the brink of being removed to Rwanda, and others followed afterwards. That is scandalous. This guy was days away from being removed to Rwanda. What steps were taken by the Home Office to explain to people what was happening to them?

**Matthew Rycroft:** We can look into the specifics of that case, Mr McDonald, and thank you for raising it with us. The caseworkers involved have been absolutely assiduous, as you would expect, in ensuring that every single step of this process was done in full view of our international and domestic legal obligations, including the medical ones that you have identified. We will make sure that people relocated to Rwanda only when it is safe for them, because that is at the heart of the legal framework.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q363 **Stuart C McDonald:** I am sure that is the intention but my view is that that is impossible in a five or seven-day window. I understand that there was evidence of one notice having been translated, but what efforts are made to ensure that people understand what is happening to them? We are talking about several of these people not having the first clue even that they were supposed to be going to Rwanda.

**Matthew Rycroft:** As I say, we will look into that particular case and if there is more that we need to do with either interpreting or translating, we will look at doing that. But, as you imply, we are already seeking to do that.

Q364 **Stuart C McDonald:** What is the access to legal advice? Obviously, that is critical. Is it the simple 30 minutes under the Home Office detained duty advice scheme?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I can get back to you with the detail of exactly what sort of legal advice people have access to, but we make sure that they do have access to legal advice.

Q365 **Stuart C McDonald:** You will write with specifics on that as well. How many folk were supposed to be on this flight at the outset and how many were taken off without the need for a court ruling on a specific case?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There were two sets of legal things going on in the run-up to 14 June. One was about the policy as a whole and, therefore, whether any flight could take off, and then there were the specific claims of individuals who had been served with a removal notice. On the first of those, the Government were successful in the High Court, which rejected an application for interim relief. The judge accepted that there was material public interest in the policy being implemented. The Court of Appeal chose not to overturn that judgment, and the Supreme Court upheld that.

Q366 **Stuart C McDonald:** We wait for July for a ruling on that. I am concerned about individual circumstances. How many people were taken off that flight by the Home Office without a court judgment?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Forty-seven people were given removal notices for that flight and all but seven—40 of them—had successfully claimed that they should not be on that flight, before the beginning of that day. The remaining seven who went into that day were taken off for various different reasons, which I can run through if you want.

Q367 **Stuart C McDonald:** Did all the 40 go to the end of the court process? There was a court judgment rather than the Home Office having to look at the case again and realising that they had got it wrong?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There was a specific judgment for each of the 47.

Q368 **Stuart C McDonald:** That is all I needed to know. The process we have is five days. There is a screening interview and then caseworkers hundreds of miles away come to a decision on whether this person should





## HOUSE OF COMMONS

be removed to Rwanda; is that correct?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Broadly speaking, the decision maker is usually in a different location but there is obviously face-to-face contact at this stage with each person.

Q369 **Stuart C McDonald:** But the person making the decision has not actually met the person—

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think that would vary case by case. I think it would depend on the circumstances of the individual.

**Tricia Hayes:** Mr McDonald, we have chosen to create a bit of a centre of excellence, with a team that is particularly trained to deal with these cases, which I think is what you are referring to with the “hundreds of miles away” comment. This is a new approach for us. It is a new set of processes that we have just created. It is helpful to have the expertise concentrated in a single team.

Q370 **Stuart C McDonald:** Why does it have to be done in seven days? Asylum decisions take months and years, yet in seven days you have a 30-minute interview to determine someone’s age and then you have a screening process that is designed to assess whether someone is a victim of trafficking or they have been tortured or whatever else. Frankly, it is impossible to do that in seven days. Is that not the nub of the matter?

**Tricia Hayes:** I will come back on that to draw the comparison between the challenge facing an asylum decision maker and the process that you are describing. The caseworkers who are dealing with the Rwanda cohort are doing so on the back of a judgment that has already been made that these individuals are inadmissible into the asylum system. The task that an asylum caseworker has to do, of absorbing country guidance and understanding individual circumstances, is not part of the decision-making process that a caseworker for the Rwanda scheme has to go through. It is not looking at the context of the individual’s home country; that has been handled through the inadmissibility process. It is a much more binary set of questions, a set of criteria, that are being applied by the caseworkers who are reaching judgments through the Rwanda scheme.

Q371 **Stuart C McDonald:** But we are not allowed to know the criteria; is that right?

**Tricia Hayes:** I am illustrating the difference between an asylum caseworking process where somebody is admissible into the asylum system and you are working through the standards, some of which are set in international law in terms of the criteria for dealing with an asylum seeker, and the Rwanda cohort, who, by virtue of their inadmissibility, are entirely outside the asylum system.

Q372 **Stuart C McDonald:** Again, this is one of the biggest problems we face. I don’t know what that screening process is trying to determine. What is



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

the purpose of the screening process? Basically, at Western Jet Foil, on the basis of three or four questions from somebody working for the subcontractors, people are sent off to Yarl's Wood. What is the screening process designed to achieve? We are not even allowed to be told, as I understand it.

**Matthew Rycroft:** The inadmissibility is determined, as you know, through the immigration rules reinforced in the Nationality and Borders Act. The inadmissibility is about the method of arrival in the UK. Anyone arriving on a small boat or any other irregular entry is inadmissible. That is an easy judgment to make for an individual, and then the subsequent screening is essentially about safety of the individual.

Q373 **Stuart C McDonald:** Clearly, not everybody who arrives in a small boat is being sent off to Yarl's Wood and onwards to Rwanda. Is that the policy that you are not allowed to share with us or we are not allowed to know as to why some folk are prioritised for this?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Everyone who arrives that way is potentially eligible.

Q374 **Stuart C McDonald:** Yes, but how do you decide which ones then to send on to Yarl's Wood?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think that probably is an operational detail that needs to be retained in confidence.

Q375 **Chair:** Have you been challenged on that, though, by the lawyers? Surely the lawyers need to know the basis of the decision that you have made to put people into the stream to possibly go to Rwanda, don't they?

**Matthew Rycroft:** As you know, there is a very significant number of legal challenges, as we expected and as we have in our democracy on any new issue like this. We are going through that at the moment. As I said, the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court all found on the side of the Government and there will be a judicial review on the substance in July.

**Chair:** I will move to Paula Barker. We may come back to some of these questions later on.

Q376 **Paula Barker:** Apologies, because I have to go after my set of questions, so I am not being rude. I want to talk to you about the proposal for 90,000 civil service cuts. We have delays in asylum cases, delays in Windrush compensation and problems with asylum accommodation. Quite frankly, the list of the delays and problems in the Home Office is endless. What is your view on the impact that these potential job losses will have? What are you putting in place to address those issues?

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is too early to definitively answer that question, Ms Barker, because we are just in the middle now of working out the first step of this, which is a proposal from each Secretary of State and their permanent secretary on how each Department would deal with a 20%, 30% and 40% reduction. In the Home Office case, you are absolutely



right, and there is no part of the Home Office full of people twiddling their thumbs where we could very easily see the organisation reduced.

But that is true across the piece, and what we need to do as the civil service as a whole, to meet the Prime Minister's decision that there should be 90,000 fewer, is to do things in a different way. We will iron out inefficiency, duplication or shadow functions where we can, but we will also need to invest in technology, including in automation. I am very fearful of toxic positivity, but we have a pretty good track record in parts of the Home Office, including the Passport Office, on automation, which we can spread into other parts of the Department in the coming years. I should warn that it is pretty hard to get an instant reduction in headcount as a result of investment in technology, but that will be the second part of our response. The third part will be about prioritisation—about giving Ministers options on what to stop doing—and I think what I have described is pretty much what every permanent secretary will be going through as a contribution to this exercise.

As you imply, the parts of the Home Office that are most visible to members of the public are also very busy. You have mentioned passports, asylum, visas and so on, and quite rightly. I could add Border Force as well, thinking about people coming into the country and ensuring that, as travel gets back up to pre-covid levels, we don't have any delays and so on, making sure that the business of travel is as smooth as possible for the people who are entitled to come and go. That is a really important part of our business as well. There is nowhere that will be very easy to reduce.

**Q377 Paula Barker:** There are already delays in the system, by your own admission. If we cut staff and it takes time for the systems to catch up with the new intelligence and so on, surely that will impact and we will see even more delays. Then, you will be back in front of this Committee in the months and years ahead, and we will be putting very challenging questions to you again. Surely this is just an absolutely ludicrous proposal.

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is an announcement that all parts of the civil service need to demonstrate how we would implement, and then there will be decisions later on in the year about exactly where we go. At this stage, we are coming up with a proposition, particularly for a 20% reduction, which is the central scenario, but you are right that there are risks attached to that.

We will be honest, as you would expect, in our private advice to Ministers about where those risks lie. I am pretty sure that they will not want to take any risk in the safety and security of this country and the citizens in it, so I am absolutely sure that we will retain the very strict border controls and other measures that we have in order to keep the homeland secure. I also am pretty sure that they will want to prioritise service delivery, delivering the services that you were talking about, whether that is passports or visa and asylum decisions and so on. That reduces



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

the amount of space in the rest of the Department where further cuts to headcount could happen.

I will say finally, and I am sure that Tricia will want to come in, that this will not be an overnight thing. This is a three-year commitment, and we will need—by “we” I mean the whole the civil service—the three years to meet such a big reduction. The idea of going back to 2016 was based on pre-covid, pre-Brexit, because covid, we hope, is finished and Brexit has been done. On the Home Office aspects of Brexit, of course Brexit was not an event, it was a change of the UK and the responsibilities of our border. The increase that the Home Office staff, particularly in Border Force, have seen as a result of the UK’s exit from the EU needs to be permanent, or at least the functions they are doing need to carry on being done. Of course, we can innovate about how we do them.

**Tricia Hayes:** I just wanted to add a couple of very quick points. First, I was going to make the point on time that Matthew has already made, so I don’t need to repeat it. The other thing is to reassure the Committee that we know that we have some big operational challenges over the next six months. We have the resumption of international travel, our continuing obligations for Ukraine and other visa schemes, and another wave of the passport service still to come. So as an organisation, we are continuing to recruit over the summer, between now and the end of the year, so that we can bring in some of the workforces that we need to deal with some of the near-term operational challenges that we face.

We are also doing everything we can to make sure that we have a more flexible workforce that is capable of being deployed to wherever the operational pressures are at different times, because the peak periods in visas, passports and borders are not all happening at the same time. One of the things that we have made good progress in over the last year is being a bit more multi-skilled and agile in helping people to get to the right place at the right time.

The final thing is that we are getting tremendous support from other Government Departments in helping us respond to some of these near-term operational challenges. I want to do a particular shout-out to HMRC for giving us access to its surge pool, which has been tremendously important for us to deliver what we can at the border and also on visas and passports, and also to DWP, which has made people available to us to provide surge capacity across the whole of our customer services capability.

Q378 **Paula Barker:** I am assuming that the workforce that you have just talked about that you are recruiting now, which is coming to a civil service Department where there are cuts to be made, are on fixed-term contracts, are they?

**Tricia Hayes:** We are bringing people in through a mix of different routes. Some are people who were agency staff and have been converted into fixed-term contracts; some are coming through a near-term surge



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

route, being cleared by another Government Department. It is a little bit of a mix but we have made that choice consciously because we know that we have some near-term challenges in this year. We need to deliver the operation with the capabilities we have now while we accelerate the reform programme that Matthew has talked about to get us to 2025 in better shape.

**Q379 Paula Barker:** I want to touch on Ukraine very briefly. I know that other colleagues have questions on Ukraine. On the Ukraine visa scheme, it was entirely right and proper to welcome Ukrainians to this country, because they are facing the most dreadful circumstances, but there have been fierce criticisms in terms of the comparison with the plight of the Afghan people. I am interested to hear your comments about that. Very sadly, this morning there has been an earthquake in Afghanistan that will obviously also be very distressing to the Afghan people. Why was a scheme of that nature not afforded to the Afghan people?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There was a very generous scheme, or two schemes, for the Afghan people.

**Paula Barker:** It was not anywhere near the same as for Ukraine.

**Matthew Rycroft:** You are absolutely right: it was not the same scale as Ukraine. In round numbers, there were 13,000 people coming from Afghanistan and so far it is 120,000 from Ukraine, uncapped. You are absolutely right: there is a difference of scale there. There is also a difference of geography. Obviously, Ukraine is closer to the UK than Afghanistan, but both of those were the creation of safe and legal routes to do our bit in an international response of generosity. I am proud to have been a part of both of those schemes, and indeed others that we have done for people from Hong Kong of BNO status, the Syrian scheme and so on. There are safe and legal routes that we have proudly set up and delivered.

They have been at a different scale from each other, and it is always a decision for Ministers on each occasion about what is the right scheme, the right size. The two Afghan routes were targeted very specifically at people who had either directly supported the UK and international effort in Afghanistan or were part of an Afghanistan that would be much harder to achieve under Taliban rule. It was thinking about the people who had been active before the Taliban who would have been particularly vulnerable after the Taliban regime came in. Those were the decisions taken at the time.

I think that the Home Office, working very closely with our colleagues from the Ministry of Defence and the FCDO, did a good job last year to welcome those people. We still have a fair amount to do to help integrate those people into our society, which we are carrying on doing alongside the very significant uptick in work on Ukraine.

**Q380 Carolyn Harris:** Later on I will go back to the agenda and talk about the



passports, but for now I want to ask you: with which other countries is the Home Office currently negotiating a Rwanda-style deal?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Working again with our colleagues from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, there were initial contacts with a small number of other countries—I am not at liberty to say which ones, but a handful of other countries in the first phase. Rwanda was the one negotiation that continued right up until the successful conclusion of the economic development partnership.

Q381 **Carolyn Harris:** There are currently no negotiations, no conversations, no planned visits—nothing—going on between the Home Office and any country for a Rwanda-style deal? I am being quite specific on the question. Are you stating categorically that there is no communication and no planned visits for anyone to go and talk about a deal with any other country?

**Matthew Rycroft:** No. I didn't rule that out before. I was talking, in answer to your first question, about the phase leading up to the announcement of a Rwanda deal, where there were a handful of other countries in a similar position at the beginning of that, and at various points they dropped out, until there was only one left. I don't think that the Government have ruled out having a similar agreement in the future with another country. There is certainly no funding for it at the moment, so it is not a live issue—it is not high on anyone's criteria—but you could not rule out that someone somewhere in the system might have a conversation with someone in another country about a future possible deal.

Q382 **Carolyn Harris:** There are no advanced negotiations?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There are no advanced negotiations—that is absolutely true. Of course, it would not make sense to embark on another really significant initiative such as this until we knew much more than we currently know about the success or otherwise of the Rwanda scheme.

Q383 **Carolyn Harris:** Last week's planned flight has not had an impact on any negotiations that are currently going on with any other country about a Rwanda-style deal?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Correct.

**Carolyn Harris:** Thank you.

Q384 **Tim Loughton:** For clarity, in our visit to Dover we were told that nobody would be excluded: it would be mostly men, reflecting the nature of the majority of the people coming across the channel; women could be included; it would be unlikely to include children. We were also given examples of men who were supposedly accompanying children who had turned out to have absolutely no links with that person and indeed spoke a different language. These are just examples of the subterfuge being used. I just wanted to put that on the record, for clarity.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr Rycroft, this will be a scattergun of different subjects, but just to come back to one of your opening remarks, where I think you said that there is nothing that the Home Office likes more than a good crisis, could you give examples of good crises that have ended well in the Home Office under your tenure?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes. First of all, apologies if that was an overly flippant form of words. What I was getting at was the culture in the Home Office, which I think does respond very well to a crisis. We have already talked about Afghanistan and Ukraine. Those are both crises where the Home Office contribution has been something that I, for one, have been very proud of, and I hope that everyone involved has been proud of it too.

Q385 **Tim Loughton:** You think Afghan and Ukraine are crises that have ended well?

**Matthew Rycroft:** They haven't ended well for either Afghanistan or for Ukraine, but they are continuing to go well in terms of the Home Office contribution to resettling 13,000 Afghans and, so far, 120,000-plus Ukrainians, so I think that is a positive contribution by the Home Office. Again, I am very wary now about toxic positivity, but I do feel that part of leadership is inspiring people to want to give their best and recognising the very strong motivation that people have to make the world better for people who are in very difficult situations. That is one of the reasons why people come to work in the Home Office.

Q386 **Tim Loughton:** I understand that, but I specifically wanted an example of a crisis that ended well. If you are giving Afghanistan as one, it is difficult to work out how that has ended well. One could say that the airlift was successful, and that is mostly to be attributed to the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. The biggest bureaucratic burden seemed to be the paperwork that the Home Office required. Currently, out of the 15,000 to 16,000 people who were airlifted out of Kabul, some 12,000 are still in hotels nine months on. Do you define that as a good crisis ending well?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I agree with you, Mr Loughton, that in all of these cases there are very difficult circumstances to deal with. That is part of a crisis. What I am saying is that the Home Office contribution is something that I am proud of, and I know that all the people working on it are proud of as well. It is something that, as a country, we should be proud of.

We do this sort of thing well. We are able to set up new schemes, often incredibly quickly—usually not quickly enough for public opinion. Quite rightly, people want us to go even faster, as was the case on Ukraine, but we do get there. We set up from scratch two separate schemes on Ukraine, which we subsequently updated, in a way that has allowed us, as a country, to welcome over 120,000 people. I think that both of them are positive examples.



Q387 **Tim Loughton:** Therein lies the problem, because your definition of something ending well seems to be rather at a tangent to what other people would regard that as. I do not regard ending well as 12,000 Afghan refugees still being in hotels, including children, who have to go to school, find somewhere to play, do their studies and move hotels at short notice in some cases. I understand why it was never going to be easy because of a shortage of accommodation. That is an added reason why we need to be tougher on those people who are, effectively, jumping the queue by coming across in boats.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely.

Q388 **Tim Loughton:** I cannot see how the Afghan crisis has ended well, as you would define it. What I am particularly concerned about—and this is what we have looked at before with you and others—is some of the safeguarding implications, because the reports of safeguarding for Afghan children again gives cause for concern. I think you or the Home Secretary said before that it was the Home Office taking the lead on safeguarding issues with children. Do you think that has been handled as well as it could have been?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I agree with everything you have said about the positives and the negatives. None of us want to see Afghans or others languishing in hotels, and we are working very closely with local authorities to encourage their integration in different parts of the country. You keep using the phrase “ended well” and I have not used that phrase, partly because neither of those crises has ended.

**Tim Loughton:** That was my question originally, though, wasn't it?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Both of them are ongoing. I think, even for a family in a hotel who would rather be integrated somewhere else, they are still better off in the UK than they would have been in Afghanistan. It is worth remembering the big picture about why we do this sort of thing. It is incredibly difficult but—I don't want to be overly positive about the impact on individuals—it is something that, as a country, as a Government and as a Department, we can be proud of.

Q389 **Tim Loughton:** I entirely agree with that, and I am not in any way trying to undermine the enormous effort that everybody has made. My concern is that once we get those people to the UK, we do not appear to be looking after them, in what will be their long-term home, as well as we could be and with the sense of urgency that we were told some months ago would be applied. Having so many in hotels may be better than being under fire from Taliban or abused by the Taliban in Kabul of course, but it is not what it should be.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I agree with all of that. That is why we are working with local authorities to move people out of hotels. Tricia, do you want to say more about that?





## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Tricia Hayes:** Like Matthew, I agree with you that having 12,000 people in hotels right now is not a situation we want to be in either for the wellbeing of those people or for the financial burden that it places on the Government. We have been working incredibly hard recently with our DLUHC colleagues to improve the process for matching people who are in hotels to long-term accommodation.

I think when I last gave evidence to this Committee we talked about some of the practical challenges of finding very large properties for some of the very large families that have come across from Afghanistan. We made an announcement jointly with DLUHC back on 9 May about ways in which we were going to improve the matching of people to properties, including drawing a bit of a line under the matching process, where people have already been offered two properties and recognising that this can't go on indefinitely, for exactly the reasons that you set out.

Since I last gave evidence to this Committee, we have a much easier to access portal, which is run out of DLUHC, where people who have properties that can be offered can put in the details of those properties. I think one of the things the Committee asked about last time I was here was some of the practical challenges of matching families to properties. That is much better than it was a few months ago.

The financial offer to local authorities for the Afghanistan scheme is a generous one. The funding that we are providing is equivalent to the funding we provided over five years in this area—

Q390 **Tim Loughton:** I understand all of that. What I challenge you on, Mr Rycroft, is that this could in any way be described as something that has ended well or is ongoing well. In terms of the contrast that Paula Barker raised earlier, we have a completely different Ukrainian scheme, which has been very successful in terms of people offering private accommodation. In fact, the number of people offering private accommodation has been in excess of the numbers of Ukrainians seeking accommodation here. That is one of the biggest complaints I get from people who have generously signed up—they say, "We haven't been offered anybody." Why haven't we applied a similar scheme to the one we are using for Ukrainian families coming over here, which does not rely on public housing, so that people who have been disappointed because they have not been able to accommodate Ukrainians could, under the same token, accommodate some Afghanistan families who are in hotels here and would like to move on?

**Tricia Hayes:** We have had a sponsorship element to our visa portfolio for a long time. I accept it has been very, very small. It has been used just by small numbers—hundreds of people—but that route has always been there.

Q391 **Tim Loughton:** Why haven't you promoted it?



**Tricia Hayes:** It has given us a mechanism, I agree, for relatively small numbers of people to work with the third sector, but just coming back to Matthew's answer to this question, the scale of the migration challenge posed by what has happened in Ukraine has been absolutely vast. At a global scale we have seen 7 million people displaced from Ukraine, the largest migration in the world, so it has driven—

Q392 **Tim Loughton:** I understand. Why specifically have you not run a campaign that said to people, "Thank you so much for signing up for the Ukrainian scheme. We can't offer you a Ukrainian family at the moment. Would you consider an Afghanistan family"? Some people may not want to, but some people may. If a large chunk of those 12,000 people who are in limbo in hotels could be accommodated that way at no pressure on public housing, that would be a good ending to a good crisis, would it not?

**Tricia Hayes:** I have a quick policy reflection on that and then a sort of operational reflection as well. The policy reflection is that, while these are difficult judgments, I do think it is legitimate to have a different kind of approach to the very different circumstances that we are seeing in Afghanistan and Ukraine and indeed in other places as well. The Ukraine schemes were on the back of the absolutely vast, globally significant migration challenge, which was at a different scale from the global impact of what was happening in Afghanistan, though what was happening in Afghanistan was truly horrendous.

At a practical level, and I am slightly thinking on my feet now, which I hope is okay, I do wonder, thinking out loud, whether the kind of families from Afghanistan that we are having the most difficulty placing—the multigenerational families that have large numbers of people, who we have struggled to find big homes for, given that the kind of sponsorship arrangement is typically one or two people, generally the females of a family, women and children coming together—are not generally the same kind of households as we are seeing coming through the Ukraine scheme.

Q393 **Tim Loughton:** Sure. Have you tested that?

**Tricia Hayes:** I am happy to go away and test that, but on the back of my—

Q394 **Tim Loughton:** Has it been considered by the Home Office? Have you had this conversation in the Home Office—

**Tricia Hayes:** No, because I think—

**Tim Loughton:** —rather than thinking off the top of your head in response to something I have raised?

**Tricia Hayes:** I think the answer is that the policy choice is to have a different approach to Afghanistan and Ukraine, for the reasons that I—

Q395 **Tim Loughton:** The question specifically was: at any time since 15,000



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Afghanistan citizens were airlifted to the UK has it been considered—particularly post what happened in Ukraine—that you might promote actively, proactively, a scheme whereby individuals could accommodate Afghan people rather than leave them in hotels? Has that conversation been had?

**Tricia Hayes:** We have not done work on a potential sponsorship scheme for Afghanistan behind the existing, very small-scale sponsorship scheme, but we will always try to keep challenging ourselves on whether we are doing the right thing or not.

Q396 **Tim Loughton:** I am not sure you are challenging yourselves. It is taking us to challenge you for this to come out.

Let's turn to the Ukrainian crisis, where you are now backtracking on your suggestion that it is another crisis that has ended well. We met a group of Ukrainian MPs last week. They were very concerned about the bureaucracy that is besetting the visa scheme. I fully understand why our Government require visas; I am not challenging that. What I am challenging is that there are an awful lot of people for whom this has proved exceedingly bureaucratic—just getting them out of a place of danger.

Let's take the examples of the four MPs who came over. They would have had a 784-kilometre drive to Warsaw and back to get their visa in order to come to the UK. One had been able to fly to Ireland, which doesn't require them to have a visa, and then they had flown from Ireland to the UK, for which they weren't challenged to have a visa. These are MPs coming over here for discussions with Ministers in your Department, Mr Rycroft, and with other officials in the Home Office, and finding it very difficult to get into the UK. This is just far too bureaucratic, isn't it?

**Tricia Hayes:** Mr Loughton, I am now very worried about the quality of our communications, because I don't recognise the requirement that you are describing, but I am happy to go away and have a look at individual cases.

**Tim Loughton:** There were four MPs. We can give you all their names and addresses.

**Tricia Hayes:** Please do, so four—

Q397 **Chair:** Are you saying that some Ukrainian nationals don't require a visa?

**Tricia Hayes:** No. All Ukrainian nationals will require a visa, but for—

**Chair:** These were Ukrainian MPs.

**Tricia Hayes:** For Ukrainian passport holders, there are two options that they can pursue that would not require them to travel to a visa application centre. One is they have the ability, through our standard application process, to come to the UK and then they will have permission



to stay for six months and then apply for a visa by giving biometrics after that, so they don't need to go to a VAC in region.

The other is—and I am very glad to have an opportunity to talk about this, because I don't think it is widely enough known—our Access UK scheme, which allows people to apply for a visa using a mobile device without having to give biometrics or to visit a visa application centre. I am happy to look at the individual cases. For people who are passport holders, they should not be having to travel in region to give biometrics in order to get a visa, but I am happy to look at the individual cases.

**Q398 Tim Loughton:** Perhaps we can pass on the details of the four Members of Parliament for Ukraine, for whom that was the only way to make that visit to London last week, which just seems extraordinary. If that is the problem they have, then goodness knows what people who do not have the status of MP are having to go through still.

**Tricia Hayes:** Could I pick up on the challenge about bureaucracy more generally, which I think is a very tough one? Having myself completed the application form that would be required to get a visa to come from Ukraine I have seen first hand the way in which we have improved and evolved that process since we had to launch the schemes, which we had to do at a tremendous pace, to be honest. When we initially launched the schemes, we had a toolkit that was not the very best toolkit that we would have wanted, but we have taken every opportunity to simplify the forms, to improve the guidance and to provide support to people who need to complete the process. We have, as I said, launched our new digital version.

**Q399 Tim Loughton:** Perhaps we can get submissions from those MPs, because they specifically made that exceedingly arduous and potentially dangerous journey in order to come and try to improve the scheme that you are saying is working so well.

Can I just carry on on a couple of other things? Mr Rycroft, if I am a young person escaping religious persecution in an east African country who has an aunt in the UK, or if I am somebody who is escaping the besieged city of Marib in Yemen—escaping from a warzone—with a distant relative in the UK, what is my best route, safely and legally, to get into the UK?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Obviously, it depends on the circumstances, but—

**Tim Loughton:** I have just given you two specific examples.

**Matthew Rycroft:** There is no dedicated safe and legal route for either of those conflicts.

**Tim Loughton:** Why not?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Of course, the Government could decide to set one up, but they have not done so.



**Tim Loughton:** Why not? Why isn't there?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Because the Government have not set one up. The best way to think about this is in the round, and different countries do different things in order to contribute overall to the requirement to help support people fleeing persecution. The UK has been particularly generous in the cases that I have talked about and others have as well.

Q400 **Tim Loughton:** I understand that, but I just want clarity. There are people who we would view to be in danger and who would have some familial link, albeit not a parent or a direct sibling, who would not be able to make a legitimate legal application to come to the UK, let alone choose a safe route to try to get to the UK? Just to clarify, that is the situation?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think that is the situation, but as always, it is possible for people, for instance, to engage with UNHCR or others and then we can look at particular circumstances.

Q401 **Tim Loughton:** What circumstances would those two examples need to satisfy to engage with UNHCR that would give them a safe and legal route?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I would have to get back to you on that, Mr Loughton.

**Tim Loughton:** It would be quite useful to know, because we are told there are safe and legal routes, but when you drill down into the detail—

**Matthew Rycroft:** There are safe and legal routes from some places and not from others. Other countries, as I say, have safe and legal routes from those other places, but not as generous as the UK in relation to the ones that we're being judged on. That is why I was seeking to put it in the round.

Q402 **Tim Loughton:** To go back to the Ukrainian scheme, there was an article published last week that said that one in six safeguarding inspections for the Ukrainian homes scheme was unsatisfactory. Are you happy that safeguarding checks are being carried out thoroughly and in a timely fashion for those homes now being opened to Ukrainians?

**Tricia Hayes:** Can I pick that one up, Mr Loughton? Obviously, this whole programme is a great joint enterprise between the Home Office and our colleagues in DLUHC, but the checks at the sponsor end sit at the DLUHC end of the responsibilities. I know that it is working very closely with local authorities to make sure that everybody is learning from everybody else about the process of carrying out these checks and that they are being carried out to an acceptable standard.

Q403 **Tim Loughton:** That is a bit of a wish list rather than a statement of what is happening. What oversight does the Home Office have that homes that are being made available to Ukrainian families under this scheme, including minors, have been properly safeguard-checked?



**Tricia Hayes:** Brutally, Mr Loughton, none, because that part of the scheme is administered by colleagues in DLUHC. It is not part of what the Home Office is operationally responsible for as part of the scheme.

Q404 **Tim Loughton:** Is DLUHC monitoring and scrutinising individual local authorities' capacity to carry out those safeguarding checks properly?

**Tricia Hayes:** I am very reluctant to speak for another Government Department, but I know that it is very important to my DLUHC colleagues that people are properly safeguarded.

Q405 **Adam Holloway:** On Afghanistan, I have the Gailani family, friends of mine, living in a hotel in Victoria, but isn't the critical difference—to go back to Mr Loughton's question—that the Gailani family are to be here permanently, whereas the Ukrainian families are going to go back to their menfolk or whoever, hopefully in relatively short order?

**Matthew Rycroft:** That is indeed one of the differences between the schemes, Mr Holloway. For Afghans, they are given a status that allows them to stay here indefinitely. For the Ukrainians, as you know, the commitment in the first instance is for three years.

Q406 **Adam Holloway:** We saw earlier that there are widely differing opinions about, for example, the Rwanda policy on this Committee and out in the country. I did not mean to belittle the people who are against this policy out in the country, although I would say that I think the majority of the population were in favour of it.

People are human. You refer to your 38,000 members of staff. You did not use the words "getting the agreement of them" but it was something along those lines. You are trying to create a culture where people can have a place to challenge, but where is the line when a democratically elected Government wants a policy, and potentially 40%, 20% or 49% of your 38,000—or possibly more because of the sort of demographic you employ—don't agree with the policy?

I remember talking to one Secretary of State, not in your Department, who said that he was amazed, because he thought that when he asked for something to be done, civil servants would do it, and that actually didn't happen. How do you manage that in your Department?

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is a very important question and a good challenge. The short version of my view is that the role of civil servants is maximum challenge of a policy before Ministers decide it, in order to stress-test it and make sure it is very robust, and then maximum support and implementation for that policy after Ministers have decided it, provided it is legal.

Now, it is irrelevant what any civil servant thinks about a policy if the Government of the day have determined that policy, if they have the relevant approvals, for instance, from Parliament, as the Nationality and Borders Act has. It is totally irrelevant what any of the 38,000 think. It



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

could be that 100% of them could not, themselves, have wanted to come up with that sort of policy. It is irrelevant.

After Ministers have decided what the policy should be, provided it is legal, it is then the job of the civil servants to implement it. That goes to the heart of being a civil servant. If people are not comfortable with that, then obviously either they can move away from that bit of the Department into some other bit, they can move from one Department into another Department or, if they feel they must, they can leave the civil service. That is the deal that one does when one becomes a civil servant. One is here to serve the Government of the day that is duly elected.

If there are policies that people themselves feel or think are illegal, then that is a grey area, but my judgment, particularly my accounting officer judgment, was that that did not apply to the Rwanda partnership and, of course, there will be a judicial review on that in July.

Q407 **Chair:** Of course, you did ask for a ministerial direction—

**Matthew Rycroft:** On value for money, yes.

**Chair:** —which is only the second time in 30 years in the Home Office that a permanent secretary has done that, which is very interesting to note, Mr Rycroft.

I want to follow up on a few questions and then we will just go around the table again. On the issue of Windrush and the 1,800 unallocated cases, I would like you to write to us and be very clear about those 1,800, which are very distinct and different from the backlog prior to 2021, so that is one thing.

**Tricia Hayes:** Can I very quickly come in on that? I realise we are short of time. I am sorry if I did not help the Committee with my attempts to explain the difference between the pre-2020 cases and the pre-2021 cases, but just to be very clear, there is not a queue of 1,800 cases that is sitting waiting. These are all part of our workflow and are at different stages, which I am very happy to set out in writing, but there is not an untouched backlog of 1,800 cases in our system.

**Chair:** That is not what we were told last week when we were in Sheffield—

**Tricia Hayes:** I am very happy to clarify that.

**Chair:** —so I think there is a communication problem in your Department and you need to look at that.

**Tricia Hayes:** I am happy to.

Q408 **Chair:** Secondly, I want to know about passports. Now there is a 10-week turnaround. The actual standard that you are supposed to be meeting is three weeks, so when will you be returning to the three-week



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

standard?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think it is normally six weeks—

**Chair:** No, it is three weeks.

**Matthew Rycroft:** —but it moved to 10 weeks because of the pent-up demand.

**Chair:** It is three weeks, Mr Rycroft. When this was raised at the Public Accounts Committee, I think, Ms Hayes, you weren't able to say when the return to the three weeks was going to be. Have you now decided when you will be able to return to the three-week turnaround?

**Matthew Rycroft:** No, we have not, so I think—

**Chair:** You have not?

**Matthew Rycroft:** No.

Q409 **Chair:** So it is 10 weeks now. Is that the new standard?

**Matthew Rycroft:** It continues to be 10 weeks. It is very important that people know that if they do need to renew their passport or apply for a passport, they need to do it more than 10 weeks in advance of their travel.

**Chair:** Yes, I understand that.

**Matthew Rycroft:** That is because of the pent-up demand, with the fact that in a normal year we have 7 million and we only had 4 million two years ago and 5 million last year.

**Chair:** But the standard the Home Office had set itself was three weeks. That is what I want to know: when are you returning to the standard that you had identified you could meet?

**Matthew Rycroft:** We have decided that we are not going to do that now, because we still have pent-up demand in the system. We are on track for 9.4 million this year, compared to a normal year of 7 million, so there is still more to come out of the system, and it would be wrong to go back to anything less than 10 weeks at this stage.

Q410 **Chair:** All right. I also want to know about visa applications. Because of the Ukraine crisis, I understand that you have extended the visa application timeline from 60 days to 120 days for family and marriage applications. When will that return to the standard 60 days?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I will turn to Tricia in a moment. Just let me say one thing. I am sure the Committee would want us to prioritise, and we do. At any time there are particular routes, particular parts of the visa system, that we prioritise and put extra resource on to in order to deal with what is the top priority at the time. Ukraine was a good example of that earlier in the year. We therefore deliberately—and I hope with the





## HOUSE OF COMMONS

backing of the Committee—took some people off some of the standard visa routes and put those very people on to Ukraine in order to deal with the particular urgency of that situation. Times have moved on, and we are now moving those people back again. We have a different set of prioritisation in order to tackle the issue that you have just described and others.

Q411 **Chair:** When does it go back to 60 days?

**Tricia Hayes:** I don't want to commit to a date with the Committee. As Matthew said, we have had to make some very difficult choices on resources. We learned pretty quickly that to make our Ukraine schemes work, we needed to rely on the workforce that had expertise in doing visas. That was one of the reasons why we have been able to make that scheme better. We did, as you say, change the timescale for marriage and family in May. We are still able to deal with urgent and compassionate cases that need to be dealt with incredibly quickly, so if people do have overwhelming compassionate or urgent needs they can come to us via that route, but at the minute all I can say is that we are doing our best to get back to service standard as quickly as we can.

**Chair:** But you can't give us a date?

**Tricia Hayes:** No, not right now.

Q412 **Chair:** I want to ask you about asylum claims because there are 89,000-odd asylum claims sitting waiting to be decided. I think, Mr Rycroft, that the last time you were before us you said that it would take a year to process an asylum claim. When I looked at the transcript, I think it wasn't possible for either of you to tell us when you thought the backlog would be cleared. We are at 89,000. What is the plan? How are you going to clear this backlog?

**Tricia Hayes:** I am happy to take that. The reason why it is very difficult to set a firm date, which we discussed last time, and this remains true now, is that the number of cases in the asylum system is a function of the numbers flowing into the system as much as the numbers flowing out. The backlog that we face is a function of the fact that we needed to change our process through covid and also, particularly, of the very, very large numbers of people coming through the small boats route into the UK last year.

Q413 **Chair:** We understand the pressures you are under. I am just trying to understand, from a leadership position, how you are managing dealing with that backlog of 89,000 cases. I am sure all Members of Parliament are writing to you at the Home Office constantly, asking about particular asylum cases. We have an interest in knowing how you are dealing with it and how the backlog is going to be reduced.

**Tricia Hayes:** Let me tell you about our plan. Our plan has two elements. One is, as I said earlier, that we are continuing to put more



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

people into our asylum teams. We are, as part of our workforce planning, bringing more workforce in over the summer.

Q414 **Chair:** I think when you last were before us that you were talking about 1,000 by the end of the financial year. Do you have 1,000 now?

**Tricia Hayes:** Not quite yet. We currently have 820 and we are on track to have 1,000 by September. Like many other operational workforces, we have had some issues with retention, but we are putting into place a new recruitment and retention allowance for our asylum caseworkers, which is intended to give us a more stable and permanent asylum caseworking team. Asylum caseworking is difficult. The productivity you get from a fully trained and experienced caseworker is very different from the productivity you get from somebody who has just come into the team. It is not massively surprising that bringing in lots of new people is not going to give us an immediate, overnight solution.

There are some other things that we are doing as well, which will make a huge difference. From the end of June we will be distinguishing the way in which we deal with cases that are already in the system from the way in which we deal with new cases, in what we call our legacy and flow model. Under our flow model, new cases coming in will be handled by a separate team using new processes with pre-populated templates, simpler guidance and clear service standards, so that people will know, while their case is being decided, when they might expect to get a decision, which I think will improve the experience of being in our asylum system as well.

Q415 **Chair:** Sorry, but how are you dealing with the 89,000? How are you getting that backlog down?

**Tricia Hayes:** For those, the Home Secretary announced last month that we were setting up a productivity taskforce. We are doing an end-to-end review of our decision-making processes, trying to take out parts of the decision process where we can go more quickly, while still taking good-quality decisions. Some examples of that include using one interview rather than two where we can; not fully transcribing in writing the content of every single interview; using different templates for decisions; and having simpler in-country guidance. We are confident that through that transformation programme we will find ourselves with more caseworkers and, for each caseworker, more decisions.

Q416 **Chair:** It will reduce making a decision down from a year to how long?

**Tricia Hayes:** I am sorry to once again refuse to set a target, but I am not going to make a commitment, because so much is dependent on the numbers coming in, as well as the work that we can do at our end to improve the productivity and volume of caseworkers.

Q417 **Chair:** When you come back to see us in a few months' time, where are we going to be in terms of numbers? Are we going to be at 89,000? Are we going to be higher or lower?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Tricia Hayes:** The commitment I can make, which is something that is within my control, is that with the work that we have been doing on our asylum transformation, the additional numbers of caseworkers coming in and the new caseworkers running off the training, we should have a more productive asylum system next time I see you than the last time I saw you. I think I made a commitment when I saw you last time that we would do double the number of decisions in the current financial year compared to the previous financial year. I stand by that commitment and I will give you an update when I next see you.

Q418 **Chair:** I have to say it is rather unsatisfactory that we are in the position where this backlog has built up and up and up and we do not really know what the target is to get that down.

I would like to ask you about returns as well—failed asylum seekers, people who we all believe should be removed. Why are they so low? I am just looking back. In 2010 there were 10,663 asylum-related returns. In the last year there were 806. Do not blame covid, please, because this has been going down year on year on year. Why are you so bad at returning people?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There are a number of things going on. You are absolutely right, it is not purely to do with covid. There are some longer-term trends in this area. It is first worth saying, though, that there are returns going on every week. In an average week there are a couple of return flights. The one for the relocation to Rwanda obviously got all the headlines because it did not ultimately take off, but the same team running the operation of that flight also successfully run a couple of flights each week, and they are a very dedicated team.

It is hard. It is very difficult because each person typically would seek to claim that they should not be on that flight. We saw the attrition on the Rwanda flight, with the numbers going down from 47 to seven and ultimately down to zero. Similar patterns happen on other flights as well. Of course, the Nationality and Borders Act, among other things, seeks to redress that, but obviously those changes have not come into effect yet.

Q419 **Chair:** You are saying that things have got harder since 2010? You have gone from 10,000 to 800. Is that because people are litigating more, they have more access to lawyers and they are challenging more?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, all of those things.

**Chair:** It is all down to that?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I do not think it is all down to that but that is a significant part of the picture, yes. Then it is also worth saying that we need returns agreements with some countries and we do not have them with all countries.

Q420 **Chair:** Are you negotiating return agreements?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Chair:** I think I saw that three have been negotiated in the last year or so.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes. I think that, at any one time, there are a number of negotiations ongoing, either to create returns agreements where they do not exist already or to update agreements that are not working in as streamlined a way as we would like. That is ongoing work.

Q421 **Stuart C McDonald:** I have a couple of sweep-up questions. On the issue of asylum and delays, which I think is at the heart of so many problems that the Home Office faces just now, you have outlined work that is ongoing to try to increase productivity. I am all for trying to get the decision made faster, but they also have to be done right and to be fair.

**Tricia Hayes:** Totally.

**Stuart C McDonald:** Can you tell me about the engagement you have had, for example, with immigration lawyers about that? For example, you suggested maybe not transcribing all interviews. I just worry that that will end up with lawyers having to arrange for that to happen instead. What engagement have you had with the profession?

**Tricia Hayes:** Can I just be completely clear that nothing that we are proposing to do would cause legal risk? The example that I quoted, which is not manually transcribing interviews, does not mean that we are not going to keep records of interviews; it is just that we are going to use some not very modern technology and record them rather than write them down. It is an example of a process improvement we can make that will build in efficiencies but essentially give us the same record, the same information, and not introduce any legal risk. That is the kind of change that we think we can make.

Q422 **Stuart C McDonald:** Is that sort of engagement ongoing with immigration lawyers?

**Tricia Hayes:** We are not proposing to make changes that we think will materially impact the legal robustness of the process that we go through.

Q423 **Stuart C McDonald:** I would just encourage engagement. That is one of the lessons from Windrush and Wendy Williams—that there has to be much more engagement. I will leave that there.

Another area where there has been a slip in terms of processing times is, I understand, the EU settlement scheme, but it is hard to monitor that because, as I understand it, there are no published times now for EU settlement applications or the family payments. Why are you not publishing that information?

**Tricia Hayes:** On the question around timescales, this is part of the picture that we were painting in response to the earlier set of questions around priority setting within our visas team. The team that deals with EUSS is one of the teams that has released resource to allow us to deal



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

with the urgent priority work on Ukraine and also some of the higher-priority parts of the visa, where we would be making a judgment about the hardship that would be suffered by people operating to a longer timescale.

Q424 **Stuart C McDonald:** What about the issue of publication? Am I right in thinking that there has not been any published data about processing times or standards for a couple of years now?

**Tricia Hayes:** I am sorry, but I do not know the answer to that question. I am happy to follow it up.

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is definitely not as long as that. Something might have changed when the scheme closed, which was, by memory, July of last year. It is possible that since then we have published less regularly than previously. If you are going to go on to say, "Surely we should be publishing, because there are still some people in that scheme," I think you are right and we will make sure we do that, but it might be a less frequent occurrence than previously.

Q425 **Stuart C McDonald:** The documents Wendy Williams mentioned in her progress report in March that she wanted to see published but which have not been published yet include, for example, detailed findings of the discovery phase, along with the draft evaluation plan and evaluation of individual elements of the compliant environment. When are these things going to be published for us to scrutinise?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I do not think I have a date to give you, Mr McDonald, but we will continue to work through all of Wendy Williams's recommendations.

Q426 **Stuart C McDonald:** Again, in April there was a significant change. Everybody who is here with immigration leave now has to use an online portal, as I understand it, if they are applying for work or in relation to right to rent. That is a hugely significant change but there was nothing done to raise awareness about that. Why was there no awareness-raising campaign?

**Tricia Hayes:** You have got me again, I am afraid. I am happy to take that away. Having more opportunities to engage with us online, reducing the number of paper processes and reducing face-to-face interactions are some of the things that we are trying to do across the whole of our transformation programme and it is an important, positive move, but if the feedback is that people did not know about it, then it is important for us to look into that.

Q427 **Stuart C McDonald:** Finally, on the Ukraine scheme, I do challenge the need for a visa altogether. As was alluded to earlier, you had these MPs who had meetings in Dublin. They came to London, nobody asked to see their passport, and they said to us, "We don't understand what the security concern is." Why do we require Ukrainians to have visas?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is a judgment from Ministers on the basis of security advice about what is the right requirement for each country and for nationals from each place. Obviously, that is under regular review. The advice after Russia's invasion of Ukraine was that there was a risk, for instance, of Russians in Ukraine, purporting to be Ukrainian, coming into the country if we chose then to drop the visa requirement. Also, I think I should say for the record that someone flying into Ireland and then from Ireland into the UK without the right permissions to come into the UK is using the common travel area in breach of what they should be doing.

Q428 **Stuart C McDonald:** Yes, they did have all of the permissions, but the point is that if a Russian wants to get into the United Kingdom, they can just do what those Ukrainian MPs did but without getting any paperwork. It does not seem to make any sense.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think our Irish colleagues, if they were here, would say that they robustly police the common travel area at their end of it, just as we do our end of it. As the United Kingdom and as Ireland, we are working very closely together. As you would expect, there are a huge number of mechanisms around the common travel area to ensure that that sort of abuse does not happen and, if it does, that it gets stopped quickly.

Q429 **Chair:** Just before I bring Tim Loughton in, I want to ask you one last question about the undercover policing inquiry, which was supposed to have reported by 2018. It was set up in 2015 by the Home Secretary at that time. It has now been running for seven years, it has spent over £50 million to date and only the first two of six tranches of work have been properly started. There is no forecast information about the overall expected time it is going to run, or about the cost. I have written to you about that inquiry. I have had someone who is likely to be a witness to that inquiry write to me and say that he does not think he will be alive to give evidence because of the time this inquiry is taking. The Home Office is the sponsoring Department. What do you have to say about the cost and the length of time of this inquiry?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I very much agree with you that the inquiry needs to get on with it. It has been going on for a long time. Of course, it is hugely complex work and the inquiry, as other inquiries, is operationally independent. It is up to them to work out how to fulfil their terms of reference and how to account for their budget, but it is a £50 million budget and it is seven years and counting. What the chair has agreed to do, which I welcome, is to set out an interim report that I think will help to demonstrate that there has at least been some progress on some aspects—the things that were heard through that first phase of hearings.

Q430 **Chair:** Does that mean you just have to keep paying?

**Matthew Rycroft:** We do not have to. There is a choice. The Home Secretary could choose to close down that inquiry. Of course, there would



be pros and cons to that. As with all things, it is a balance. Getting to the truth is very important for that inquiry and indeed for others, which is why it is taking time, but there is a practical consideration that you have mentioned about a potential witness who is presumably getting on in years, and we would all benefit from the inquiry being able to hear the evidence of that witness before too long. Rest assured that, in our sponsorship role, the Home Office, including myself but mainly my colleagues, works closely with that inquiry's secretary and chair in order to get a move on.

**Chair:** We will be watching what happens with that inquiry.

Q431 **Tim Loughton:** Mr Rycroft, we have had two inspectors from inspectorates who scrutinise the Home Office in front of us recently who were asked the question, "Is the Home Office fit for purpose?" and both declined to answer. Do you think the Home Office is fit for purpose?

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is a phrase that has cast a long shadow over the Home Office since a former Home Secretary used it. The Home Office's job is incredibly challenging. Today's conversation highlights that, and we have only touched the surface on some other aspects of the role. We have not really talked about policing and we have not talked about countering terrorism or state threats. You have, quite rightly, chosen to focus on really important issues; there are many other issues as well and the job of the Home Office is to deal with all of these things, many of which are divisive and controversial in our society and many others of which you only ever hear about when something goes wrong. It is a very difficult Department to be in or to lead.

The good thing about it is that it is brimful of brilliant people who are doing everything they can to keep the country safe and secure, to protect the most vulnerable and to do our bit for prosperity and other positives. That is why, as I said, people come to work in this brilliant Department of State. Yes, I think it is now fit for purpose.

Q432 **Tim Loughton:** You think it is. Right, we got an answer at the end of that. Do you think it would be more fit for purpose or that more people would accept it as fit for purpose if part of it was hived off?

**Matthew Rycroft:** No, but it is a reasonable challenge and one that we look at regularly, including as a result of a 20% headcount reduction exercise that we are embarking on. Personally, I think that we should be looking at 20% reductions at all levels and, therefore at the very top and potentially in the number of Departments that the Government have. I do not think there is any perfect size for any Department. We work, obviously, incredibly closely with the Ministry of Justice in the join-up with the criminal justice system but also with lots of other Departments in other parts of the business. I do not think that making a change to the boundaries between Departments will significantly solve the challenges.

Q433 **Tim Loughton:** Finally, on the question of the police, when Tom Winsor,



as his valedictory, came in front of us, he had concerns that the fast pace of recruitment of the 20,000 officers risked letting in, as he put it, “the wrong sort of people”. Of course we have had quite a few high-profile scandals, mostly in the Met. Do you think there is merit in that comment?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There is merit in all of Tom’s comments about policing. He is incredibly experienced and has come to the end of nearly a decade in that role. He has highlighted something that is really important, which is about vetting. The responsibility for vetting of policing does rest with each force, and the College of Policing has responsibility for the standards. The Home Office is seeking to hold it to account to make sure that the quality of vetting is such as to reduce down to zero the likelihood of the sorts of atrocious incidents in the future that we have heard of in the recent past. That is going to be a very significant job, including for the next Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.

Q434 **Carolyn Harris:** I want to talk to you about an experience of the MPs’ hotline for accessing information on passports. This is where constituents are so frustrated, having spent many hours trying to get answers on the phone and not getting any kind of response. This is one case—my office is doing, on average, two a day. We sat for hours downstairs in Portcullis House. We had a response that the application was going to be expedited. We spent several hours on the phone—in fact, a member of my staff spent three and a half hours on the phone, at a cost of £38.40. That was £38.40 just to find out, the following day, that we had to phone up again and go through the whole process again. The following day we started the process again, only to be told that the constituent’s application had been declined because there was insufficient paperwork. Within half an hour, that constituent got a telephone call asking them to go and pick up their passport from the nearest Passport Office. If that is the service MPs are getting, how on earth can you justify the level of service that the general public are having from the Passport Office?

**Matthew Rycroft:** First of all, huge apologies to your constituent for having to go through that, and to the member of your office for wasting all of that time.

Secondly, please use that example the next time anyone suggests to you that the way to reduce the size of the civil service is to privatise it, because the only bit of the passport function that has been privatised is that. It is a company that runs the hotline. That is the one bit of the passport function that is run by the private sector.

Thirdly—and Tricia might want to add to this—the Home Office, in our commercial oversight of the partner who runs that function, has been working assiduously in response to that sort of feedback to ensure that they—I was going to say “get their act together”—get back within the service levels that they have signed up to. There has been some progress on that score.

Q435 **Chair:** Can I just say that I have been an MP for 17 years, and seeing





## HOUSE OF COMMONS

people sitting in that room downstairs in Portcullis House and queuing—

**Carolyn Harris:** Yes, it is demoralising.

**Chair:** When I went past one day at 11.00 am, although you are supposed to be open 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, it said, “We are closed. We have filled all our capacity for the day.” That has never been the case—that the Home Office has had to provide that level of casework support to MPs on issues like Ukraine and passports that they are doing at the moment. I think that this cluster of crises that you are facing is a real problem for you.

I am going to take Stuart McDonald as the very last question, because we do have to get to the end.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Can I just quickly say, though, that I hope you recognise the effort behind the Portcullis House, which I do not think we—

**Chair:** Yes, but you should not have to do it. That should not be what you are having to provide in Portcullis House.

**Tricia Hayes:** We agree.

**Matthew Rycroft:** We agree, but—

**Chair:** You need to get your act together.

Q436 **Stuart C McDonald:** I have had a message that suggests that the Home Office is seeking to postpone the judicial review that is set for July in relation to the Rwanda flights until September because it is not ready. You are shaking your head.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I am shaking my head because that totally does not ring true. It is not up to the Home Office when the judicial review should be; it is up to the judge.

**Stuart C McDonald:** No, but a journalist, who I presume has been in the court, has said that the Home Office lawyers are saying that they cannot be ready for July and that they want to postpone until September.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Unless something very surprising has happened in the two hours that I have been here, I think it is more likely that that is just wrong.

**Stuart C McDonald:** We shall investigate and come back to you.

**Chair:** Who knows? In those two hours, anything could have happened.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Anything could have happened.

**Chair:** I thank both of you for coming along today and answering our questions. We will keep asking these questions. We will be in dialogue with you. We will be writing letters and following up, particularly on the



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

issues that you were not able to give us the information on today. We would like to have answers as quickly as possible.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Of course. Thank you very much, Chair.

**Tricia Hayes:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Thank you for coming along today.