



# HOUSE OF LORDS

## Justice and Home Affairs Committee

### Corrected oral evidence: The Secretary of State for the Home Office

Wednesday 21 December 2022

10 am

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Members present: Baroness Hamwee (The Chair); Lord Blunkett; Baroness Chakrabarti; Lord Dholakia; Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws; Baroness Primarolo; Lord Ricketts; Baroness Sanderson of Welton; Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia.

Evidence Session No. 1

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Questions 1 - 16

#### Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP, Secretary of State for the Home Office; Mr Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office.

#### USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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## Examination of witnesses

Suella Braverman and Matthew Rycroft.

**Q1 The Chair:** Good morning everyone, and welcome to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee of the House of Lords. We very much welcome the Home Secretary, and Matthew Rycroft, the Permanent Secretary, this morning. We have apologies from Lord Hunt of Wirral and Lord McInnes of Kilwinning. We have had problems with connections, and we are waiting for some Members to join online. Baroness Primarolo, who has warned me that there might be a power cut where she is—I hope not—and Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia, are with us online, and we are trying to get hold of Lord Dholakia. Home Secretary, I gather that we will have you until 12 o'clock. Is that right? There is lots to talk about.

**Suella Braverman:** I think it is supposed to be 11.30, actually.

**The Chair:** Okay. A lot has been happening over the last few days, and I want to have time at the end for us to get some updates. I will wade straight in with the first question, if I may.

As you may know, we are undertaking an inquiry into family migration over various routes. We had some very powerful evidence from a young man who, as a child, had managed to get out of Eritrea, escaping conscription. He had a struggle to get here. He was eventually granted asylum. He was followed by his sister, who got stuck getting into Egypt and was imprisoned for, I think, two years. His brother got stuck in Libya and was trafficked. He was desperate, as you can imagine, to get them over here. They were not eligible for any of the bespoke schemes. What should people in that situation do?

**Suella Braverman:** First, thank you very much for the invitation to address the committee this morning. At the outset, I would say that our immigration system allows people to come to the United Kingdom from across the globe to visit and join family members here. In the year ending September 2022, over 2.5 million entry clearance visas were issued.

For the scenario that you talk about, there are two routes for family members. There is the asylum family reunion route, and the family immigration route. We keep the rules under review all the time and make adjustments in light of feedback on their operation and impact, and we take into account the findings of the court, including the Supreme Court, which found on several occasions recently that our rules relating to family immigration—Appendix FM—are lawful and do not discriminate.

There are various routes open to family members of different types, and there are elements of discretion in exceptional circumstances that are injected into any decision-making process. That is the overall scheme.

**The Chair:** But as a child refugee—he was a refugee—he struggled to get here. There was no safe or legal route for him to do so, and as a child refugee he could not sponsor his siblings.

**Suella Braverman:** The position is that if it is through the asylum family reunion route, there are avenues for spouses and under-18 children and very close relatives to come in. There is also a discretionary element so that in compassionate or compelling circumstances, an exception might be made, but you are right: no siblings are eligible under that scheme.

The other limb is our family immigration rules, where again siblings do not qualify. That is open to spouses, parents, children under 18 and adult dependent relatives, which we may come to later. Again, there is an element of compassionate or compelling circumstances, which injects some discretion for particular cases.

**The Chair:** As I say, he struggled to get here. He was not confident, and he did not even know whether this was the country he was going to come to. He said, “I wasn’t aiming to come to the UK. I didn’t know where I was going. I was scared for my life”. So there is the issue of not having a safe route that was not irregular, and child refugees have no family reunion rights other than if discretion is applied. We might come to that.

**Suella Braverman:** May I just come back on that last point, by way of my broader contextual point on the issue? Our general regime for welcoming people on humanitarian grounds is very generous. We have welcomed over 450,000 people since 2015. That is one of the largest numbers of people who have come here fleeing conflict and persecution and seeking security and refuge in this country.

However, we have 100 million people who are displaced globally, and it is not feasible for all those people who might wish to come to the UK to do so. We do not have an unlimited capacity to welcome every single person who is in a difficult situation in their home country into the UK. That is a regrettable fact of the modern world and life, but it is the right one. We have to have a limit on our capacity in the UK to accept people who are fleeing difficult circumstances.

We have country-specific safe and legal routes and, as I say, I am very proud of the number of people who have found security and refuge in the UK thanks to those routes. We also have the UK resettlement scheme. Ultimately, it is the UK Government’s position that people should, where possible, stay as close to their home country as they can in case the situation changes. It will be a reality of our system that we will not be able to accept every single person who wants to come here.

Q2 **The Chair:** I do not think any of us are quite arguing that. I want to ask you about something that is related and which I heard about yesterday. I am told that Afghan refugees who have come here under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme were reassured during the evacuations, when many of them were separated from close family members, that they would later be reunited. The Government

recognised that this was important and that families should be together, and I am told that they promised that those who were airlifted to safety would be resettled with close family. It is almost 18 months since the fall of Kabul, but there seems to be no mechanism for those evacuees to be reunited with their closest family members. I am sorry; I did not mean to bowl a googly at you, but I have just been told about it.

**Suella Braverman:** No, thank you for raising it. I want Afghan families and people from Afghanistan who have come here via our two routes relating to Operation Pitting, ARAP and ARCS, to have security, a high level of well-being and a good standard of accommodation. We are working at intense pace to ensure that people who come here through the two Afghan schemes are properly processed—there are relevant checks that need to be carried out—and appropriately accommodated, and that, where possible, they are moved to areas in close proximity to where they have connections and family members, and where their settlement has the best prospects of succeeding.

**The Chair:** As I understand it, this relates to family members who are still in Afghanistan. The question is whether there is a mechanism in place, or at any rate being worked on, to bring them here.

**Suella Braverman:** If it is via the two designated routes relating to Operation Pitting that I just mentioned, their passage from Afghanistan to the UK is led by the MoD. The MoD is managing the very challenging job of ensuring that Afghans who supported the UK in Afghanistan, or have some connection to the UK mission there, are properly protected and that their passage out of Afghanistan is ensured. So we are dependent on the MoD to that extent.

When it comes to processing a visa and settling them in the UK, that is a Home Office responsibility. So far, they have been accommodated; over 22,000 individuals have arrived under ARAP and ARCS before, during and since Operation Pitting. Over 13,000 applications are registered on Home Office systems, with biometric residence permits issued accordingly, and just over 12,000 of those applications have now been granted indefinite leave to remain. Those are the numbers. I am quite proud of that achievement for the UK Government. That is a large number of people who have been supported by our generosity, and we continue to support them in the right way.

**The Chair:** I thought the ACRS was a Home Office scheme.

**Q3** **Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Secretary of State, I was involved in the evacuation of a large number of women judges and lawyers from Afghanistan. Sadly, Britain took only a small number of them, and I am indebted to Canada in particular for doing the heavy lifting there. There are still women judges in mortal danger who contact me regularly. I am told by your junior Ministers that there is nothing that can be done because of this Catch-22: that they have to have a biometric test done before they can get a visa, but there is no way of getting a biometric test in Afghanistan because we do not have an embassy or any place in

that country where that can be done. Often, these women have young children. How are they supposed to come here and escape the mortal danger that they are in? They are living in basements, they are in terror for their lives, and we have just seen what has happened in relation to women who were hoping to graduate. Things are getting worse for women in Afghanistan, and these are women who served us all by being judges. What is the answer to that one?

**Suella Braverman:** I am not aware of that particular issue. It strikes me that there is something logistically that is not quite working. As I said, we have had over 13,000 applications registered on our systems, with their biometric residence permits issued accordingly. So we are able to do that for people coming from Afghanistan. I am not sure why, in the particular cases that you are talking about, that has not been possible.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Where do they go to have the biometric testing done? I was told by one of your Ministers, "Since we don't have an embassy there, the problem is getting biometric testing done". Where can they go? Advise me, and I will advise them.

**Suella Braverman:** Logistically, there is an MoD operation for getting people out of Afghanistan. I am not on the ground and I am not part of that programme, but I understand that people who are moved from Afghanistan are taken to supportive neighbouring countries. Pakistan is one such location where checks like that are carried out and paperwork is completed. That is where we use our diplomatic presence. I do not know whether there is anything you want to add, Matthew.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Just to say, either to Baroness Kennedy or to the Chair, that if there are particular cases that you would like us to follow up after this session, of course we will do so.

To add to what the Home Secretary said, the safest route for most people in Afghanistan, depending on their particular circumstances, is to make their way to Pakistan, from where the system the Home Secretary described can operate.

**The Chair:** We will have some comments about this in our inquiry report.

Q4 **Baroness Primarolo:** Good morning, Home Secretary. I would like to ask you a question in connection with the asylum backlog. You told the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee that you would be "streamlining, digitising and simplifying the process" of claims. Could you explain briefly what that involves, how long it will take and how it will change the landscape of the applications?

**Suella Braverman:** Thank you for the question. By way of introduction, the Prime Minister set out last week our broad plan on dealing with the challenge of illegal migration and small boats' arrivals. That represented our comprehensive approach on trying to make our system work better. One element of that is bearing down on our asylum backlog. We need to improve the productivity of our caseworkers so we can process the cases moving through the system more quickly. We have over 100,000 people waiting for a decision from the Home Office. In some cases, they are

waiting for over a year, and in that interim period we are accommodating them. Some 40,000 are accommodated in hotels, at huge cost to the taxpayer, so the faster we can process the people in our system, the more quickly we will be able to alleviate the pressure on asylum accommodation in our country.

To address your specific question, we want to embark on a large amount of transformation when it comes to asylum case working and the processes related to that. For context, I have found during my few months here at the Home Office that we have very different practices. Our asylum case-working team do a great job, but frankly their productivity is too low. The average decision-making rate of a decision-maker per week is one. We need to increase that considerably. For other teams who are processing applications by people who want to come to or be in this country, the decision-making rate is considerably higher. There is a lot of variation in our decision-making processes as a whole, and I have been trying to look at what we have already in place with other visa routes, where we have digitised application processing using our Access UK customer portal and our Atlas casework system.

We need and we want to develop new technology to build on recent improvements, such as digital interviewing. We want to move away from a paper-based system, and we are developing digital tools to support aspects of case-working, such as appointment booking, case prioritisation, allocation tools and a document exchange portal. We want to improve screening so that more information is captured as early as possible. We have introduced an accelerated decision-making procedure, including, for example, shorter interviews, fewer interviews and decision templates.

There are points in the process where we can streamline. We can make the guidance for caseworkers shorter and easier to use. We can reduce the number and shorten the length of interviews and digitise the interviews that are necessary. Let me be clear and unequivocal that it is essential that every case is determined on its own merits, but we can definitely do better than one decision per decision-maker per week.

**The Chair:** Has that gone down, because we were told that it was 1.3?

**Suella Braverman:** It might be 1.3. I am rounding down.

**Baroness Primarolo:** Home Secretary, with respect, what you have just described is what everybody already knew. You were very specific with the Commons Home Affairs Committee about the changes you would be making, not just your aspirations. Indeed, the Prime Minister followed that up in his Statement on 13 December to the House of Commons, talking about the radical re-engineering, end-to-end, of the process. You have just said that this is an aspiration, but it has not happened yet; you are working on it.

You also said to the Home Affairs Committee in the Commons that it is important that caseworkers receive sufficient training, so not only are you re-engineering the system but you will need to train all the caseworkers to make sure that they achieve your aspirations of transparency and correct and timely decision-making. Can you

explain to us how that is going to happen? How and when will the training for caseworkers, alongside this aspiration for re-engineering, happen?

**Suella Braverman:** We set out the plan last week and we are now going to embark on it, so there is an element of aspiration and ambition, and it is right to have a plan. We want to triple the productivity of caseworkers. We have already doubled the number of decision-makers, and we want to double that number again. As I said, we also want to remove some of the unnecessary bureaucratic steps, we want to shorten the interviews, we want to make the guidance more accessible.

We also want to ensure that there is specialism among the caseworkers by nationality. A large cohort of people in our backlog are from Afghanistan, and a large number of people are from—

**Baroness Primarolo:** Forgive me for interrupting you, Home Secretary, because I know that your time is very precious to the committee today. Can you tell me how these caseworkers will be trained, and by whom, so that we can move on from aspiration to actually cutting down the backlog, which I would also like to ask you some questions on? Who is doing this training? Is it in-house? Has it been outsourced? What is the time period to bring these new caseworkers into the new system that you are currently developing?

**Suella Braverman:** I will hand over to the Permanent Secretary on that point.

**Matthew Rycroft:** As the Home Secretary said to Baroness Primarolo, we have already doubled the number of caseworkers. That means that we have brought in over 600 additional new caseworkers, and they have required training. We have done the vast majority of the training in-house, so we take senior caseworkers and make the training of newcomers into the system a proportion of their role. We will do that again as we go from just over 600 to 1,250 over the coming year. We need to get that right; we need to model very carefully what impact the reduction in senior people's time because of the training requirement has on the total output of the asylum decision-making system.

We have trialled the more rapid caseworking in a pilot in our small hub in Leeds, where we were seeking to get caseworkers who were fully trained making up to four decisions a week. That was successful in the short term, but we now need to keep that pace up and spread the learning from that pilot into our other hubs, including Sheffield. That is the stage of the plan described by the Home Secretary that we are now at.

**Baroness Primarolo:** Thank you very much, Permanent Secretary. Is that building on the plans that you announced on 28 June this year to introduce the new model for dealing with asylum claims, or are we talking about a completely new system, as you announced following the Nationality and Borders Act. Have you put those aside in the re-engineering and are doing something different now?

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is not a completely new system. It is an enhancement of the existing system. As the Prime Minister set out, it is looking end to end at the totality of that system to make it as efficient and effective as possible. It is not throwing everything away and starting from scratch; there are some elements which will continue.

There are also elements of learning, as the Home Secretary has said, from other routes in other parts of the Home Office where the number of decisions is significantly higher per week or day than on asylum. The reasons for the differences are sometimes to do with the complexity of the decision. It is much easier to decide that an EU citizen, for instance, is qualified for settled status than it is to decide whether to grant someone asylum.

**Baroness Primarolo:** But the asylum backlog is 122,000—

**The Chair:** Baroness Primarolo, we have to keep moving on, I am sorry. I have a question on this, perhaps for Mr Rycroft. We contacted the department some weeks ago asking if we could have sight of training materials—I appreciate that they may be changing—and, for any training that is outsourced, sight of the contract (with commercial points redacted). We have not heard about that. It would be very helpful to us to see the detail of the training. Could I ask you to take that back and see what you can do about it?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely, I am sorry that you have not received it already. I think we have a good story to tell both with what we do in-house and the other bits, and in the way we have updated it—for instance, learning all the lessons of Windrush, where the training elements are a significant part of our workplan. We will update you on all that.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We have Baroness Shackleton with us now.

Q5 **Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia:** Thank you, my apologies to all of you. Could you enlighten us on the legal advice that asylum seekers have access to? Obviously, the law is incredibly complicated, and it is a very specialist area of law. You may have training going on in the Home Office, but what access do those people have to proper specialist advice to help them navigate these complex issues?

**Suella Braverman:** We are on the receiving end of people who are receiving legal advice. Are you talking about any particular cohort? Are you talking about people whose asylum cases we are processing, or Afghans?

**Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia:** I am talking about anybody who applies for asylum and receives a decision they do not like. What access do they have to information about the right to appeal? When we were taking our evidence—this particularly refers to children, about whom I am about to ask you—we found that there is a crossover between family law and immigration law. Very few people seem to specialise in both and are able to advise applicants on both areas of law in order to assist their applications. What access are they given to proper help?



**Suella Braverman:** Anyone who receives a decision letter from the Home Office is informed of their rights in that letter and on the face of any decision that is issued to them from the Home Office. That is a standard process. It is part of our duty to ensure that members of the public or people with whom we deal are properly informed of appeal rights, if appropriate, any routes of challenge or any numbers and contact details at the Home Office or otherwise that they can use.

From a Home Office point of view, we are on the receiving end. This year we have received tens of thousands of pre-action protocol letters. Thousands of those turn into judicial review claims. There is no shortage of lawyers out there advising individuals on action that they can take against the Home Office. We have many hundreds of people working to respond to lawyers, their letters and their claims on behalf of particular claimants.

I am aware of a large number of law firms, charity groups and support groups who are working actively in this sector to support claimants with any legal challenges.

**Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia:** I presume that legal aid is available for them to access those lawyers.

**Suella Braverman:** If you satisfy the criteria for legal aid, you are entitled to claim it.

Q6 **Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia:** Thank you. The question I wanted to ask is in relation to family migration. During our evidence sessions, we heard that children are treated “as immigrants first and children second”. If that is indeed the policy, how does it fit in with the best interests of the child being dealt with satisfactorily?

**Suella Braverman:** The phraseology that you use is not a Home Office policy or line. I think it is a quote from someone else; I do not know who has been quoted.

**Baroness Shackleton of Belgravia:** The children who may apply feel that they have to go through the immigration maze before they are treated as children. Obviously in the Family Division, the children’s best interests are considered as paramount, but when you are making an application to stay as an asylum seeker, immigration trumps the child’s best interests. The evidence led us to believe that that was the case.

**Suella Braverman:** There is a clear legal duty on the Home Office to carry out our functions in a way that takes account of “the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children” in the UK. That is under Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009. That is included in Appendix FM to the Immigration Rules. They are commonly known as our family rules; you will be very familiar with them. They are in paragraphs GEN.3.1. through to GEN.3.3.

The published guidance for decision-makers considering family cases advises them that they have to take into account, as a primary consideration, the best interests of any relevant child. In practice, considerations that are relevant include—but are not limited to—the fact that it may well be in the child’s best interests to remain with their parents where possible. If it is not possible, they might need to remain with a

natural relative. You have to consider how they will be financially supported and accommodated and whether their well-being needs are going to be met.

**The Chair:** Can I—

**Suella Braverman:** I am just giving an example of the specific factors that are included in guidance which our decision-makers are required by law to take into account when considering a case of the nature that Baroness Shackleton has talked about.

**The Chair:** We have been hearing from witnesses that there is a difference between the law—as you said, Section 55 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child—and implementation.

**Suella Braverman:** This is a legal duty; we take it very seriously. Going beyond that, we take the welfare of any child who comes into contact with the Home Office incredibly seriously; their well-being is of paramount importance.

I should also say that age assessment is a relevant factor when it comes to children in the system.

**The Chair:** I do not think we should take time talking about that now.

**Suella Braverman:** It is a relevant factor that is an operational reality for us. We have a high number of people who claim to be children, but on closer inspection do not turn out to be. That is a relevant and necessary factor for us to bear in mind. Section 55 is clear.

**The Chair:** I will move on to Baroness Kennedy.

**Q7 Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Secretary of State, I have just completed chairing an independent commission of inquiry into asylum provision in Scotland. I will press that report into your hands, and I hope you will take the opportunity to read it and its recommendations, because it was a very serious critique of the Home Office, I am afraid.

One of the recommendations was that a unit independent of the Home Office be set up to determine asylum claims. I just wondered what you thought of that. Let me explain the rationale for that.

**The Chair:** As quickly you can, please.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** You will know that there is a very strong feeling that there is a culture of disbelief in the Home Office, and that the starting point in dealing with asylum applicants is not to believe their account. The idea of tinkering with the system that you already have, and having the people who are already in place training new cohorts, is therefore not very inspiring. How about creating something independent of the Home Office, with an independent assessment taking place that is not going to be impacted by politics or the pressures that the Home Office comes under in the tabloid media and perhaps sections of your own political

party?

**Suella Braverman:** I would challenge the assumption in your question. I have to take this opportunity to thank the many people in the Home Office who work incredibly hard to make these decisions, particularly in our immigration and asylum caseworking teams. I have met many of them, and my impression is that they are incredibly sensitive to the real-life impacts of their work and the individuals that they are considering in their case work.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** But they are under great pressure to reach targets. They are under pressure from the political cohorts at their head to reach certain outcomes. There is antagonism towards increasing the numbers granted asylum. The pressure is on to keep those numbers as low as possible, which is why, when cases come to the courts, there is a huge success rate. It is not because the judges are a pushover; it is because they are looking at the details and reaching a decision without the political pressure to keep people out.

**Suella Braverman:** I do not think that is borne out by the numbers. The grant rate for asylum is quite high in the UK. The number of people applying for asylum and then being granted it—

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Usually after applying to the courts.

**Suella Braverman:** We have a very high rate of asylum grant in this country. According to our numbers, what you are talking about is not actually borne out.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Why not have a system that is independent of the Home Office, where people can be employed to assess this independently and in compliance with international law?

**Suella Braverman:** The Home Office is there to discharge a public function. Those decisions are a reflection of our public function, which is to control our borders. Decisions on individual immigration cases are a fundamental aspect for which, rightly, elected politicians need to be held to account. There is therefore an important connection that is necessary between political accountability and performance on our asylum cohort, strategy and policy, not individual cases. I am never going to make an individual case on someone's asylum application, but our policy must be the product of clear steers from Ministers, for which we have a mandate given to us by the British people through democratic processes. Outsourcing that to an independent body that would not be held to account politically—

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** There are many independent bodies that are ultimately accountable to government, as you know, so there would be a way of doing that. It would mean that there was no pressure to reach targets. You are already talking about one case a week not being good enough and saying there will be targets to reach more than that every week. That puts pressure on people to reach an easy decision sometimes on complex cases, when what they need is more

evidence.

There is real concern about what you are describing as a way of tinkering with the system to put more pressure on, when in fact the problems of delay are caused by your having reduced the number of people working within the Home Office on this case work. The numbers were really reduced. People were waiting for as long as three years, not able to work, suffering from mental ill health. You know the problems that have flowed from that.

**The Chair:** I am sorry, this is an interesting debate that we could probably spend an hour on—

**Suella Braverman:** We could spend a whole day on these individual subjects.

**The Chair:** —but I think the Home Secretary has answered the specific question. There are clearly different views.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Without prolonging this, as the senior civil servant in the Home Office, I feel the need to defend civil servants there.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** I have great respect for the civil servants. I do not have great respect for those putting pressure on them to reach decisions that they are not able to make on full evidence.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I assure the committee that all the civil servants in the Home Office take their decisions in difficult, demanding and emotionally sensitive areas on the basis of very clear published guidance, which sets out in a huge detail for you, your members and any members of the public who might be interested exactly how those decisions should be taken. I reject any charge of political interference in that process.

Q8 **Lord Ricketts:** I am so sorry not to be with you in person. Before I come to my question, as a former ambassador to France, I am glad to see that the relationship with the French is now working much better on the small-boat crossing issue. I am sure that working closely with the French, as you are doing, is the right way forward.

My question is on the adult dependent relative pathway for immigration. The figures we have been given for grants of settlement on that pathway show that it has fallen from over 1,700 in 2011 to zero in 2021. Several witnesses have told us that the Home Office's own examples of how to use that pathway suggest that it will be granted only if a relative is no longer able to dress, eat, cook or bathe without assistance. Is that indeed the Home Office policy? If so, does that not really mean that the pathway is shut, because it must be extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, for people to make a long journey if they satisfy the criteria that I have set out?

**Suella Braverman:** Yes, the rules on adult dependent relatives aim to ensure that only those who need to be physically close to and cared for by a close relative in the

UK are able to settle here. That is a high bar, I accept that, but I think it is right. Those who do not have such care needs can be supported financially in the country where they live by their relative in the UK. Basically, those most in need of care remain most likely to qualify, compared to those who simply have a preference to come and live in the UK with a relative here. That is an important element of our rules, and their lawfulness was upheld by the Court of Appeal in May 2017 in the case of *BritCits v the Secretary of State for the Home Department*.

There is an important dimension here: we reformed the route for adult dependent relatives given the significant NHS and social care costs that can be associated with these cases. The Department for Health estimated that a person living to the age of 85 costs the NHS on average around £150,000 in their lifetime, with more than 50% of that cost arising from the age of 65 onwards, and that does not take into account any of the social care costs met by local authorities. So grandparents and other adult relatives may visit the UK for up to six months on a visit visa, and they can keep in touch with family members, but I believe that the way the rules are set at the moment strikes the right balance between compassion and openness and a pragmatic approach to the resources that we can realistically afford in such cases.

**Lord Ricketts:** If you have set the bar so high that zero people came through that route in 2021, and I think only single digits did for a couple of years before, are you not effectively making it impossible, because the sort of people who qualify simply will not be able to come to the UK?

I wonder if you will also accept the importance for the well-being for children and grandchildren of being reunited with their grandparents. I declare an interest as a grandparent. There must be benefit in having family reunification with elderly relatives. There is the example of doctors. The BMA passed a resolution at its conference this year that was strongly critical of what it called the “stringent requirements”. We have had a lot of evidence of doctors leaving the NHS because they cannot bring their elderly relatives here, and they move to other countries where there is a policy that allows them to do that. Is there not a national interest, at this time of crisis in the health service, in doing everything we can to keep foreign-born doctors working here by allowing them to bring healthy elderly relatives who will not be a burden on the NHS?

**Suella Braverman:** I am not against families spending time together across transnational boundaries. The fact that we have cheap travel and genuine opportunity for families to be reunited is a great feature of modern life. We have to have a balanced approach, which is why taking into account the costs that bringing over an elderly relative may impose on our National Health Service is an important factor. That does not stop grandparents or other elderly relatives visiting their grandchildren in the UK. As I said, you can get a visit visa for six months at any one time, and that is a great way for families and intergenerational relationships to be fostered and kept alive.

**Lord Ricketts:** Thank you.

**Q9 Lord Dholakia:** Good morning, Home Secretary. Over three years after the inception of the Windrush compensation scheme, only 7% of those impacted have been compensated for their losses. What target do you intend to achieve by Windrush Day 2023?

**Suella Braverman:** I am very clear that we must compensate members of the Windrush generation and their families for the losses and impact they suffered as a result of the scandal. I have come into the Home Office really wanting to resolve this issue once and for all, and properly compensate those who have been adversely affected. I am taking it so seriously that I have already met Bishop Webley twice, and I have met members of the committee because I want to work closely with them and hear the needs of the communities. I want to ensure that, fundamentally, a fair resolution is reached.

We have made significant progress, having now paid or offered a total of more than £59.58 million in compensation. We have continued to make improvements to the Windrush compensation scheme since our overhaul in December 2020, when the minimum payment rose from £250 to £10,000.

I am keen to take any further questions, but that is my overview. It is something I feel really passionately about. I have made active efforts to listen to the representatives and I really want to secure a good legacy for those who have been affected by this issue.

**Q10 Lord Dholakia:** Thank you. You have been very reluctant to say how much the Rwanda scheme will cost over the next five years. It would be helpful to know what sort of provision you have made financially for compensation under this scheme, bearing in mind that many of the people who may lose their appeal may be reluctant to go to their homeland. Are you intending to create a destitute world of people in Rwanda?

**Suella Braverman:** When it comes to our ground-breaking migration partnership with Rwanda, I am very proud of what has been achieved, and I put on record my thanks to and appreciation for my predecessor, my right honourable friend the Member for Witham, and former Prime Minister Boris Johnson for their foresight and commitment to trying to solve the Channel crisis with an innovative agreement.

The costing relating to the Rwanda partnership is that the UK has invested an initial £120 million in the economic development and growth of Rwanda. Funding will also be provided to support the delivery of asylum operations, accommodation and integration, and we have made a £20 million upfront payment to the Rwandan Government to support initial set-up costs. I spoke to Minister Biruta, the Foreign Affairs Minister in Rwanda, on Monday and, following the judgment from the High Court, we both reconfirmed our commitment to delivering the scheme in practice as soon as possible.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I have one thing to add to what the Home Secretary said about the money for the Windrush compensation scheme. I assure the committee that there is no cap on the scheme, so people have as long as they want to enter it, and

we will make sure that everyone who is entitled to any compensation receives everything they are due. There is no cap and no trade-off between that and any other part of the Home Office.

**The Chair:** I hope we might have an opportunity to come back to Rwanda before we finish the meeting.

On Windrush, the specific question was about a target for Windrush Day 2023. The £59 million that the Home Secretary referred to deals, I believe, with just under 60% of claims that have had a final decision. Being “passionate” about it, is there something specific that we can look to by the next Windrush Day?

**Suella Braverman:** I am very glad about the progress that we have made so far. There is still more to do to; I am also clear about that. We have issued final decisions to more than 59% of the claims received, and we have concluded more than 43% of the claims.

We are also recruiting additional caseworkers, we are directing resources to maximise performance, and we want to refine the processes so that the cases can progress as quickly as possible. Over £51 million has been paid out already and 1,900 cases have been concluded as of the end of October. We still have some cases that we need to process, and we are putting more resources behind them and improving our processes to ensure that we can resolve all of these.

**The Chair:** It has been going on a long time and people are getting older, which is why we are concerned to ask about the specifics. Thank you for that. Baroness Kennedy has a question about accommodation.

**Q11 Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** I wanted to raise the issue of accommodation, because you mentioned the great expense of keeping people in hotels. The outsourcing of this responsibility to find accommodation for people has been a source of great concern in the inquiry that I conducted, because the welfare component of it is very poorly presented to the people who need help. Many of the people who are asylum seekers have mental health problems, and I know that you are aware of that. If you are a genuine asylum seeker—I hate even using that term, because the majority are—and are applying for asylum, you have been through traumatic experiences, and being here, separated from family and so on, and going through the processes is also traumatic.

The companies to which you outsource the provision of care—basically, to find accommodation for people and to support them—are deeply inadequate. I wondered whether you had done review of what is on offer, because, for example, people have been left without proper mental health support, and people who call the migrant helpline can be told that they are number 60 in the queue. The provision of support just now from the Home Office is totally inadequate. I wondered what you have to say about the provision of support and help for people who are here, often waiting for years, unable to work. Why do we not let people work while they are applying for asylum?

I am just interested to hear what you have to say about the provision of support and help.

**Suella Braverman:** We are accommodating, overall, 117,000 people in our asylum process. In the 2022-23 financial year, we are due to spend £3.5 billion on accommodation and supporting that population of people. That includes £2.7 billion on accommodating asylum seekers, £2.3 billion on hotels and £400 million on other types of accommodation, such as dispersed accommodation. A huge amount of money is going into accommodating a very large number of asylum seekers.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** And a lot of profit is made by the private companies that you are using to do that. If you look at Companies House and the profits that are being made by those companies, it is quite shocking that the public purse is paying out to private companies and that they are making a profit from it. Why are you not using NGOs, or other sorts of bodies that are not going to be profit-making, to provide the sort of support that asylum seekers need?

**Suella Braverman:** It is not realistic, with respect.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** What is wrong with local authorities?

**Suella Braverman:** We have, as I said, 100,000 people who we need to house. If you can point me to a charity that can provide 100,000 beds, I would be very interested but there just is not one.

The reality of the situation is that we are working very closely with local authorities through dispersed accommodation. We have over 50,000 asylum seekers in the private rental sector. Local authorities receive funding for this accommodation of asylum seekers. That has not been sufficient.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Have you looked at—

**Suella Braverman:** We have duties to accommodate asylum seekers, and I am not willing to let people be destitute and roaming, so we have had to use hotels. We have had to manage that massive operation. Over 40,000 people are in hotel accommodation because we do not have any extra places to put them. Therefore, there is a private sector element. The state does not own an infinite number of bed spaces that can be deployed for this use, unfortunately. The NGOs, civil society and charities do not own those and are not able to provide us with that capacity, so we have to produce it in some way.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** But companies—

**Suella Braverman:** If I can just finish, because it is a very important point to make and lots of misassumptions are commonly made about this, we are using private contractors to enable the bringing on, the identification, the procuring of bed space, whether in hotels or via local authorities. That is coming at a considerable cost; I do not deny that. But the alternative is to leave these people destitute.



**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** The private contactors are making a profit out of doing this.

**The Chair:** Helena, again, we really have to get on.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** I would ask that the Home Secretary applies some inquiry inside the Home Office to how the amount of profit has increased over Covid with the increased use of hotels and to the fact that that profit has been made by the companies that are doing this; it is not going to not-for-profit organisations. These companies do not own the properties that you are talking about. They are accessing them and then making enormous amounts of profit. They have increased that profit over the last few years during the Covid crisis. It is quite shocking the amount of profit that is being made, and it is a choice that has been made by the Government to go to private enterprises that are profiteering from the asylum system that you are running.

**Suella Braverman:** It is not a choice; it is our duty to accommodate these people. If you can provide me with an NGO or a not-for-profit organisation that is a viable alternative, I would be very interested.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** It was an ideological decision not to use local authorities. You know that.

Q12 **The Chair:** Helena, I am sorry, but I have to move on, because we have heard what both of you have to say. I have a couple of specific questions.

You mentioned local authorities providing accommodation. They do not have very much accommodation, as I think we would all agree, and the private rental sector is under considerable strain. I wonder if you could acknowledge that, because it is a problem. The other day in the House of Lords, as well as the holiday parks, surplus military sites and so on that you were looking at there was mention of cruise ships that are no longer in use because they are about to be scrapped. It would be helpful to know whether disused cruise ships are on your list. I do not want to discuss the merits of it.

**Suella Braverman:** You mentioned local authorities and I accept the point you make about them. Our primary preference is to accommodate asylum seekers via local authorities. That is why we want to significantly boost the use of that form of accommodation. Currently, 57,000 people are housed via local authority dispersal accommodation. We have an ambition of 100,000. That is challenging and incredibly difficult. We need local authority support for that. We need to find the properties, and for many reasons, not just migration-related ones, there are huge pressures on the housing supply. That is why we have had to go to the next option, which is hotels.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Why not let people work? Then they could pay the rent themselves for properties.

**Suella Braverman:** You then asked about cruise ships.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** I would like an answer to that question at some point.

**Suella Braverman:** We want to end the use of hotels as quickly as possible, because it is an unacceptable cost to the taxpayer; it is over £5 million per day on hotel use alone. As you heard from the PM, we will bring forward a range of alternative sites, including disused holiday parks and former student halls. I should say that we are looking at those sites; nothing is confirmed yet. We need to bring forward thousands of places. You talk about vessels. All I can say, because we are in discussions with a wide variety of providers, is that everything is still on the table and nothing is excluded.

Q13 **Baroness Chakrabarti:** Home Secretary, I have two short questions on two matters of public interest journalism that I would like to put to you.

The first is the story that broke overnight from the BBC suggesting, from emails that were made available under an FOI request, that the day before you flew to Manston detention centre on a military aircraft your officials were discussing the fact that people in overflow accommodation—detention centres—had been held for many weeks longer than was legal. That email chain also suggested that there was some pushback and prevarication from senior people in the department, names redacted, as to how quickly to end that illegal detention. Would you like to comment on that?

**Suella Braverman:** It is really important to remember the context of the situation that we were dealing with in September, October and through into November. In September, we received a total number of small boats' arrivals approaching 8,000. In October, on some days there were over 1,000 arrivals on a single day. On 9 October, for example, over 1,000 people arrived, as they did on 12 and 29 October. Very large numbers were arriving. The challenge—it is an ongoing challenge—is how to accommodate those very high numbers of people arriving at Western Jet Foil, being processed at Manston and then moved on to alternative and more sustainable accommodation.

That all depends on outflow; your outflow needs to exceed your inflow. The reality of those several weeks was that outflow was being exceeded by the inflow, because it was very difficult to procure a sufficient number of beds around the country, whether in local authority dispersed accommodation or hotels. The pipeline of hotels was very thin, so my instructions were to work intensively to try to procure hotel space as quickly as possible, and urgently.

My other action was to try to increase the capacity at Manston, because we were getting very high numbers and we needed to provide suitable accommodation for those people. I then instructed General Stuart Skeates to take over the running and the operation of Manston around the end of September/early October. We put up very urgently—I would describe it as an emergency—extra accommodations so that people would have a roof over their head and a warm bed. That was a very challenging situation. I must put on record that the alternative would have been to

release people to no fixed abode into the local community, and I was not willing to do that.

Q14 **Baroness Chakrabarti:** Thank you, Home Secretary. You have talked at length about challenges and attempts to address challenges in accommodation. As a lawyer, of course, you will be well aware of the distinction between accommodation and detention, for the purposes of the illegality that was pointed out for some time in your department.

Secondly, and again very briefly, you are also responsible for policing policy in this country at a time when there has been quite a crisis of confidence in policing.

I am not going to get into a back-and-forth about how we might disagree about public order, but let me turn to a specific point, in the hope of some consensus before Christmas. The Prime Minister's spokesperson said of Charlotte Lynch, the LBC journalist who was arrested by Hertfordshire police and held for five hours in a police cell on 8 November, "It's vital journalists are able to do their job freely, without restriction". I wonder if you would consider the amendment that Baroness Boycott and I have tabled to the Public Order Bill, to ensure that public order police powers are never used for the primary purpose of preventing those who monitor and report on protests and on their policing?

**Suella Braverman:** You have raised two important points. On the issue of legality, for completeness, I speak as a former lawyer and a former Attorney-General. Whenever I have been presented with legal advice, whether verbally or in writing, I have always considered it. I attach huge weight to legal advice, and it is a factor in decisions that I make now as Home Secretary.

You talked about public order; again, we could talk about it for hours. I do not know the terms of your amendment, but I will happily look at it and consider it. Policing protests has become more challenging for the police. I should say that they do a great job when protesting has crossed a line and the criminal law has been undermined, whether there has been damage, obstruction of the highway or serious disruption. Our police are working in very challenging circumstances because some protesters are using ever more novel methods to get around police powers. I think the British public would back the police to take a robust approach.

Of course, when it comes to the rights of journalists to carry out their democratic job, in the name of freedom of speech, we need to ensure that that is respected and safeguarded. If any mistakes or errors of judgment have been made, I know the police will be the first to put up their hands. But it is always a really difficult situation for them. We all need to strike the balance between allowing the right to protest and policing against what becomes serious disruption, huge levels of inconvenience to the law-abiding British majority, and a fundamental undermining of public order and peace.

**Baroness Chakrabarti:** I am grateful for your consideration of the amendment in due course, thank you.

**Q15** **Baroness Sanderson of Welton:** I want to ask about modern slavery. The Government have made it clear they want to change the Modern Slavery Act, which they say is being abused. What is less clear is how you intend to do that without reducing the protections that we have for victims of modern slavery.

**Suella Braverman:** Thank you for raising this issue. I am very proud of the achievements led by former Prime Minister Theresa May in pioneering a world-leading and victim-focused modern slavery system in the United Kingdom. It is a heinous crime and one that the Home Office is committed to tackling. I do not think anyone, myself included, would want to undermine the good work that is achieved for genuine victims of modern slavery. That is a primary concern and focus for the Home Office. However, what has been happening in recent months and years is that generosity and compassion, which are golden threads running through our modern slavery regime, are being abused, and this is leading to some unintended consequences that undermine our ability to serve the genuine victims of modern slavery, because the system is being overwhelmed by people who are gaming it, I am afraid to say. It is undermining our ability to secure our border, and our ability to return people who do not have a right to be in the United Kingdom. We are not scrapping our modern slavery rules but reforming our modern slavery regime to make it better able to support the genuine victims, but also not be vulnerable to gaming. That is the aspiration in general terms.

**Baroness Sanderson of Welton:** I am sorry, I should declare an interest as someone who still works with the former Prime Minister, but I am asking this question on behalf of the committee.

There is a debate we could have, but we do not have time, about how the system is being gamed and where the proof for that lies. In the time available, it is probably most useful to ask, with new legislation coming forward when we will then have those debates, about the progress on the Anti-Slavery Commissioner. Dame Sara Thornton stepped down in April this year and if we have new legislation coming up. If changes are going to be made, scrutiny should be done, and an Anti-Slavery Commissioner is quite an important component of that.

**Suella Braverman:** You talked about evidence, and I want to touch on that briefly because it is so important. When I say the system is being gamed, that is not just my opinion; it is backed up by the first-hand accounts from people working for Border Force on the front line and dealing with this issue directly. Dan O'Mahoney, our Clandestine Channel Threat Commander, gave evidence to this effect at the Home Affairs Select Committee in October. Tony Smith, the former director-general of Border Force, has been emphatic about his perception of how modern slavery laws are being used by people who do not have the right to be here to stay longer. There are a number of cases concerning foreign national offenders—serious criminals—who have been here for many years, sometimes decades; they have several convictions and have served several custodial sentences. We want to remove them but at the 11th hour they will generally put in a claim for trafficking or modern

slavery. A common-sense view must be that it is to thwart their removal, when you have someone who has been here for 15 years and has served—

**Baroness Sanderson of Welton:** I can understand the individual cases and I presume that the evidence will be brought forward at the time of the legislation.

**Suella Braverman:** The point is, there is evidence.

You asked about the anti-slavery commissioner. It is important that we have oversight of our modern slavery regime, our track record and our performance. Matthew, is there anything that you would like to add on this?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think we had better write to the committee with an update on exactly where we are with the appointment.

**Baroness Sanderson of Welton:** That would be really helpful, thank you.

**The Chair:** I would like to come back to the evidence. It is well known that people who have been trafficked, enslaved, exploited, tortured and so on find it very difficult to talk about these subjects. Does that not argue for more time being spent by caseworkers on interviewing those who claim that they have suffered as slaves? Given that the Home Office has accepted claims from 90% of people who say they were trafficked—I understand the difference between trafficking and slavery—and it has recognised that they have been trafficked, where is the abuse? It is a very delicate subject, and it takes a lot of work by everyone concerned.

**Suella Braverman:** It definitely takes a lot of work and that is why we take seriously our duties to those who are genuine victims of modern slavery. I am very proud of the support that we put in place for them. However, let me give the example of a foreign national who illegally entered the UK in 2005 and was subsequently convicted for manslaughter, robbery, possession of weapons and driving offences. We finally wanted to remove him in 2019 and he claimed then to be a victim of modern slavery. When it comes to the timing of the claims, that is a relevant factor in respect of people who want to thwart their removal. There are lots of examples like that. When it comes to people arriving here illegally on small boats, we see instances where we ask them on repeated occasions, “Are you going to claim modern slavery? Are you a victim of trafficking?”, and they will say, “No, no, no”. Again, when we try to remove them, they will make a last-minute claim that they now remember that they were a modern slavery victim. So I think the pattern of behaviour demonstrates that this is being used as a tool to thwart removal.

**The Chair:** You used an example at the beginning of someone who is clearly a criminal. Of course, every system will be abused to some extent. I will indulge myself with the comment, if I may, that it is a pity to tar genuine claimants with that brush when the majority do not fall into that category.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** They are small numbers.

Q16 **Lord Blunkett:** I have a declared interest on the Lords register. Welcome, Home

Secretary. I recognise that your time is very precious, and we are running out of time. I just want to endorse what Lord Ricketts said about our relationship with France, which, 20 years ago, made a significant difference to the traffickers and the risks that people were taking in coming over the Channel—in a different form, at that point.

I want to raise the issues that were prominent in the days after the net migration figures were announced in November. You and I know, but people outside may not be aware, that over half the total of net migration for the previous year came from Ukraine, Afghanistan and the Government's open-door policy in relation to residents of Hong Kong. Instead, there was a briefing—I do not think it was a Statement or an announcement; perhaps you could clarify that—in relation to international higher education students coming to regulated higher education institutions in this country.

For the sake of our economy and the viability of our higher education system, as well as the levelling-up agenda in terms of anchor institutions, could you clarify for me whether the briefing that went out was authorised and whether the two issues it covered are government policy?

One was, bizarrely, that there should be a two-tier system whereby domestic students could go to any regulated higher education institution, but international students would be confined to what I think would be described as research-heavy, research-focused universities.

The second was about restrictions on postgraduate students bringing close relatives—namely, spouses—which is pretty crucial to the attractiveness of the courses because of their longevity and the maturity of the students. Could you help me out on this?

**Suella Braverman:** I am familiar with something that was briefed—or reported by the press; I think that is how we put it—about considering potential rules on international students. We are always considering all our rules relating to the points-based system. That is the whole point of taking back control: we can apply different levers and different rules and criteria as we wish to do so.

The recent net migration figures reflect a very high number of people coming here from Ukraine and Hong Kong but also a high number of people coming here on student and work visas. I cannot confirm where the Government are at the moment. We are always considering options. However, when it comes to international students, it is useful to note that, in 2019 or 2020, the Government's international education strategy set out a target of attracting 600,000 international higher education students to the UK by 2030, and we have already achieved that target. We have seen a high number of people come here from abroad to study, and they bring a high number of dependants.

It is always a legitimate question to ask, as elected representatives, whether we are striking the right balance when it comes to our net migration and the number of visas that we are issuing. Yes, we welcome international students who want to

come here on a short-term basis and gain a qualification from the UK and go back or go somewhere else. We welcome people who want to come here to work and contribute to our economy via higher education. We equally have to consider the impact that growing numbers of people coming to the UK have on our resources, our accommodation, our health service and our other public services. That always requires a delicate assessment of competing factors.

**Lord Blunkett:** In the spirit of the profile in the *Times* newspaper last Saturday where you declared yourself to be a truth-teller, is it not the truth that that briefing was not authorised and is not government policy?

**Suella Braverman:** I cannot speak about briefings. That is not my area, I am afraid. I speak here for the Home Office and for government policy on home affairs.

**Lord Blunkett:** Then let me ask the Permanent Secretary. Your staff in your press office were not authorised to make that briefing.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think the briefing you are referring to came from the Prime Minister's official spokesman in light of the net migration statistics. As he said, and as the Home Secretary has said, all these things are constantly kept under review. There is no particular proposition—

**Lord Blunkett:** That is very helpful. Will you be able to provide the Home Secretary with the information that I have about the immediate tightening of visas for our citizens on business and higher education business who were going to key countries of origin of international students, the immediate cancellation of pre-prepared meetings at the highest level in those countries as a consequence of that briefing, and the likely impact—beneficial to the Americans, the Canadians and the Australians, but detrimental to us—arising from that briefing?

**Matthew Rycroft:** The briefing was factually accurate in the sense that all these things are under review and, clearly, as the Home Secretary has said, the points-based immigration system gives the Government lots of different levers that can be pulled at any time. We are looking at those things, but there is no particular plan in mind that would need any of the countries that you have referred to be alarmed.

**Lord Blunkett:** Given the pressure of time, I will finish by saying that I had the advantage, when I came into the Home Office all those years ago, of having been the Education and Employment Secretary, so I was aware of the cross-subsidy of international students that is crucial to our research capacity, the diplomatic benefit that we get, and the economic impact of deterring students—and their Governments—from wanting to come to the UK. I just hope that, in discussions inside the Home Office and with the UKVI, that can be recognised.

**Suella Braverman:** Noted.

**The Chair:** We have about three minutes left. I will see if anyone catches my eye.

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Rwanda.

**The Chair:** Home Secretary, let us not have a debate about this, but could you take away the strength of feeling about asylum seekers' right to work in order to earn enough money to contribute to the country and to be able to afford their own accommodation? It seems to be quite a popular issue among the public, quite apart from the strength of feeling among my colleagues here and in the House of Lords.

**Suella Braverman:** I am not aware of any polling that supports that assertion. In my constituency, speaking anecdotally, I would not say that it is necessarily supported by the people I have a mandate from.

**The Chair:** We have different experiences, then. I have a specific question about the operation of the Rwanda scheme. We understand your passion for it. Have you found another airline to operate flights to Rwanda since Privilege Style pulled out after the abortive flight in June?

**Suella Braverman:** We have a lot of ongoing discussions with several airlines. We are returning people almost every week to various countries around the world. We do that through scheduled flights and we charter flights, so we are in a variety of discussions with several airlines for lots of different destinations. At the moment, the delivery of Rwanda—that is, removing people to Rwanda—is on hold while we go through litigation.

**The Chair:** Someone's phone is ringing. Is it someone telling me that we should stop?

There are plenty of other questions and it is a pity that we cannot spend longer on this session. I conclude the meeting by thanking you both very much, and your officials in serried ranks behind you in the usual way. We wish everyone a very good Christmas and a happy 2023 with your respective families, something that we feel strongly about.

**Suella Braverman:** Thank you for the opportunity. I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a good break.