



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The work of the Home Secretary, HC 561](#)

Wednesday 24 February 2021

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Dehenna Davison; Ruth Edwards; Laura Farris; Simon Fell; Adam Holloway; Dame Diana Johnson; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald.

Questions 88-182

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary, Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office, and Paul Lincoln OBE, Director General, Border Force, Home Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Home Office](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Priti Patel, Matthew Rycroft and Paul Lincoln.

Q88 Chair: Welcome to this evidence session for the Select Committee on Home Affairs. We welcome this morning the Home Secretary, the permanent secretary, and Paul Lincoln, the director general of Border Force. Welcome to our witnesses; we are very grateful for your time this morning.

May I begin by asking you about your response to the Wendy Williams review? Wendy Williams said that the Home Office needs to put fairness, humanity, diversity and inclusion at the heart of what it does, and was very critical of the operation of the Home Office, not just through the Windrush experiences, but beyond. Home Secretary, you said in response that your ambition is to “build a fairer, more compassionate, Home Office that puts people first and sees the ‘face behind the case’”. How far do you think you are achieving that?

Priti Patel: Morning, Chair. There are a number of points that I would like to make with regard to the appalling scandal of Windrush, but also about the cultural side of the Home Office, in terms not just of our approach, but of how we bring fairness and actually understand the people who were caught up, in the way we tackle individual cases and the claims that have come forward.

First, on the Windrush review and the recommendations—I will go to Matthew shortly about the progress on those recommendations—fundamentally, there have been a number of changes across the Department and, in fact, the actual Windrush team. Both in the House of Commons and in previous sessions, I have spoken about the need not just to look at cases, but to put people first.

This is not about the money that has gone into raising awareness—obviously, grassroots organisations and community support have very much been at the forefront of our approach—but about the training of Home Office staff, to make sure that they have empathy, to ensure that our communications and letters going out to the individuals putting in cases are fully understood, right down to the circumstances that people found themselves in, and right down to the way in which the Home Office asks individuals to provide evidence to support their claims. There have been changes on that basis, and there have also been team changes. Naturally, all that is to make this process not just simpler, but clearer, and, actually, more humane.

There has been a fundamental legacy in the Home Office with regards to Windrush, but also more broadly, I think, around casework. That is something that Matthew and I speak about daily, I think it is fair to say. There is no question that that is part of the wider change and the wider



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reform that is taking place in the Home Office in terms of how we review cases.

Q89 Chair: Thank you. Permanent secretary, Mr Rycroft, you said that the Home Office will be “open to scrutiny” and that you will ensure that you have “a more compassionate approach that looks at people, not cases.” Again, how far do you think you are achieving that?

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you very much, Chair. As the Home Secretary said, the Windrush scandal was a real wake-up call for the Department, and I think Wendy Williams’s review sets the course with her 30 recommendations. We are making good progress towards fulfilling all of those recommendations, coming up to the first anniversary of that report. It requires a top-to-bottom transformation of the whole Department and of the culture, towards a more open and, as you say, more compassionate, Department. We have already set out our vision for the Department, which is to help build a UK that is safe, fair and prosperous. We have set values for the whole Department, which are to be respectful, compassionate, collaborative and courageous. We have a structural part of that transformation that we will be implementing this year as well.

Q90 Ms Abbott: Home Secretary, in relation to the new early payment of compensation, how many people have been offered the new early payment, how many have actually accepted the offer, and how many have received the £10,000 payment?

Priti Patel: In terms of the overall claims that we have received, you will understand the background to the changes that we have made with the overhaul of the scheme. This was all about people receiving significantly more money, and more quickly. Until the end of January this year—the end of last month—the scheme has offered over £12 million, of which £4.1 million has been paid out already. We are actually publishing this morning the number of individuals who have received the money. That has happened primarily because of the wider work that we have put in place around communication, surgeries, and actual engagement with individuals.

Q91 Ms Abbott: On the new early payment that you announced, though, how many people have actually accepted that offer of early payment specifically, and how many have received the £10,000 payment?

Priti Patel: On the claims, I can give you total numbers in relation to the scheme—

Q92 Ms Abbott: I know that a lot of colleagues want to ask questions and your time is short, but with respect, it is not about the total numbers; it is about the new early payment. Maybe you could write to us with that information.

Priti Patel: We have just had over 200. I will absolutely write to you, because we are publishing the numbers with regard to the new, or overhauled, scheme. We have paid out over 200 thus far—it is just over 200—but I will absolutely give you the full breakdown of the claims received, the offers made, the claims that have been paid, and also of the



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time it has taken to process some of those claims. I would be very happy to provide that.

- Q93 **Ms Abbott:** At the end of January, the Home Office had received 1,867 claims, compared with the 11,500 people whom the Home Office most recently estimated would be eligible. Why do you think so few people have applied?

Priti Patel: There is no straight answer for that at all. There is not a simple answer as to why people have not applied. I am sure the Committee will recognise that from the evidence it has taken from previous witnesses about Windrush. Bear in mind that over recent months we have had 80 outreach surgeries, we have launched the Windrush community fund, and we have had a range of activities with stakeholder groups. We still have a great deal of work to do. Let us not forget either that the coronavirus pandemic has stopped face-to-face meetings, so we have been doing a lot of online work as well. Engagement and outreach events are one thing, but it is also still about building bridges within the community.

We should always reflect on the facts and look at the history of Windrush, not just in the Home Office, but across successive Governments who did nothing about it. Therefore, it is going to take time; it is absolutely taking time to build bridges, raise awareness, and give people trust and confidence about the scheme and the ability to claim from it. That is why we overhauled the compensation scheme in December, and, as we can see now, more people are coming forward. There is more work to do here—it will take time—and I think we should all reflect on the historical reasons why it will take time. That is why I have to say that Matthew and the Windrush team, and the changes that we have made to staff and training—that that cumulative approach will lead to better engagement, and will also drive the right kind of outcomes that we want to see on this.

- Q94 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Good morning to our witnesses. I want to turn now to the issue of asylum accommodation, particularly contingency accommodation, including military barracks. Mr Rycroft, can I ask you first about some of the advice and research the Home Office has done? We have received a lot of evidence that the military barracks are in pretty disgraceful conditions and that there are wider problems with contingency accommodation, so I want to dig down into what the Home Office relies on when it disputes that evidence. For example, could I ask about the following documents and whether they are publicly available? There is an equality impact assessment about the use of barracks that has featured in the newspapers. Is that publicly available?

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, let me assure the Committee that the Home Office takes our statutory obligations extremely seriously. We have a statutory obligation to provide accommodation for all asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute in this country, and we do provide that. We have a variety of different ways of providing that accommodation, whether it is through what we call dispersal accommodation or some of the contingency accommodation, which includes hotels, former student



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accommodation and, in two cases, former military barracks. Let me say that both the two barracks in question have recently housed members of the British armed forces—

Q95 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Several years ago. In fairness, I think we know all this. The equality impact assessment that was done before using those two barracks—is that in the public domain?

Matthew Rycroft: We do not routinely publish equality impact assessments. That is a case-by-case decision each time. We will look again at whether we can publish this one.

Q96 **Stuart C. McDonald:** It would be very helpful for the Committee to see that, if we could. There is also reference in the newspapers to advice from Public Health England from 7 September that suggested that dormitory accommodation would be completely inappropriate during the pandemic. Is that advice in the public domain, or would you be willing to send it to the Committee?

Matthew Rycroft: Just to clarify, Public Health England did not say it would be completely inappropriate. In fact, they give us advice on how to make dormitory-style and other shared accommodation covid-safe. It is that advice which we have followed to the letter.

Q97 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Can we see that, then? Because that does not really tally with the understanding we have of it through the newspapers. The newspapers may well be wrong, but how are we supposed to do our job unless we can see that advice?

Matthew Rycroft: There is all sorts of advice that you can see. There are also court cases ongoing which it would be wrong of me to prejudice.

Q98 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Would you be willing to share that advice from 7 September with us?

Matthew Rycroft: We can certainly have to have a look at that, but, as I say, it would be wrong to prejudice any ongoing judicial proceedings.

Q99 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay. More broadly, there was an independent review of asylum accommodation carried out, I think, by Human Applications. Is that going to be shared with the Committee or published?

Matthew Rycroft: Again, it was private advice to help us back at the time when we were setting up this additional asylum accommodation—

Q100 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay. And the review of what happened in Glasgow—is that going to be published? That is something the Committee has asked to see previously.

Matthew Rycroft: It is the same answer, Mr McDonald. We can have a look at it case by case. We would not routinely make these things public, because they are private advice, but we can look at them case by case.

Q101 **Stuart C. McDonald:** You see the problem, Home Secretary, is that we have an abundance of evidence that has come from lots of reliable



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organisations telling us that there are huge problems in contingency accommodation, particularly in these barracks. The Home Office says, "No, it's all fine," but then offers nothing to us to prove that is the case, or on how it has been reassured that that is the case.

Priti Patel: First of all, Mr McDonald, I know the Chair of the Committee has been in touch with the Home Office and written to us about institutional accommodation. It is really important first of all to put this within the context of the coronavirus pandemic and how contingency accommodation has been stood up throughout the pandemic. It applies to other aspects of Government as well in terms of finding accommodation. What I can say—Matthew, our permanent secretary, has already said this—is that it is right that we work with independent organisations in the way in which we do, but also with Public Health England. That advice is not static advice. Just in terms of the maintenance of our accommodation estate, we are constantly working with Public Health England.

Now, I recognise and fully appreciate the individuals who have come to the Committee and given their views and their advice, but some of the information that has been put in the public domain is incorrect. The permanent secretary has also made it abundantly clear that we do have court cases taking place right now. So inevitably we will provide information where we can. We will certainly write back to the Chair and the Committee about our plans around contingency accommodation, exit and recovery plans, and working with local authorities, because this is not for the Home Office alone.

Q102 **Stuart C. McDonald:** If you could write, that would be helpful. When the permanent secretary appeared before the Public Accounts Committee in October, he confirmed that it was a goal of the Home Office to move away, again, from the use of barracks and hotels as contingency accommodation and back to the model of community dispersal. Is that the plan, Home Secretary—to get away from this as soon as possible?

Priti Patel: We do want to move out of hotel accommodation, yes.

Q103 **Stuart C. McDonald:** And military barracks?

Priti Patel: This is contingency accommodation that has been adapted and stood up—

Q104 **Stuart C. McDonald:** To be clear, your answer suggests that you have no intention of closing the military barracks.

Priti Patel: This is not about closing military barracks. I think we should look at this within the context of Government estate and Government accommodation. It is right that we look at Government estate and Government accommodation as potential contingency accommodation for asylum seekers. I think the public would expect that. This is not just about an automatic default position of putting people into hotels—

Q105 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I think the public will be horrified that you appear to be saying that you are going to continue using military barracks to accommodate asylum seekers, yet we are not getting any information or



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justification for that. No evidence is provided to us. The evidence that we have seen is horrific. I cannot believe that it is not part of the plan to close military barracks accommodation.

Priti Patel: As the permanent secretary has said already this morning, this is military accommodation that has housed our servicemen and women, and it has housed servicemen and women recently.

Q106 **Stuart C. McDonald:** If you were to put military personnel there now, it is you who are insulting our servicemen, not folk who criticise it.

Priti Patel: Not at all—

Stuart C. McDonald: It's apples and oranges anyway.

Priti Patel: If I may finish and answer the question, we will continue to look at Government estate. It is right that the Government have a wide footprint in terms of estate. It is not just about barracks. Matthew has already said that there are other facilities that we will look at, and we will also adapt them. Napier and Penally have been adapted in line with and in light of Public Health England guidance. That is absolutely the right thing to do, and as I have said—

Stuart C. McDonald: If you could write. We only have another 30 seconds or so.

Priti Patel: [*Inaudible*] and Public Health England, absolutely to make sure that we have the right kind of accommodation in place. I will, of course, as you have already heard me say, respond to the letter from the Chair of the Committee, which was very specific about institutional accommodation.

Q107 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Excellent. Mr Rycroft, quickly on the EU settlement scheme, we have been waiting for months and months for the detailed guidance about what a reasonable excuse would amount to. Why has it not been published, and can we expect it by, say, the end of March?

Matthew Rycroft: The reason it has not been published is that there are still another few months to go before the deadline at the end of June, and we—

Q108 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But it was promised earlier this year.

Matthew Rycroft: Rest assured, we have set out the general policy, which is that if there is a reasonable reason for not meeting that deadline, which is already six months after the end of the transition period, we will set that out. We will set that out in due course before 30 June.

Q109 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay, but people need time to be able to be prepared for providing advice afterwards. In the meantime, can I ask, if I, as a care home manager, discover on 5 July that four or five of my workers from EU countries have not applied for EU settled status, would I be obliged to sack them?



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Matthew Rycroft: It would depend totally on the circumstances, Mr McDonald. What I would say now is that, if you are a care manager who thinks that there might be those people now, you still have several months to go before the 30 June deadline in order for those people to—

Q110 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But if it is only on 5 July that the HR manager discovers that that has not happened, how does it depend on the circumstances?

Matthew Rycroft: You are asking a hypothetical question. I am saying that there are all sorts of things that that care home manager can do between now and 30 June to live within the—

Q111 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Yes, but there will be thousands of workers who fail to apply in time. It is not a hypothetical question; this is going to happen, and you cannot tell me whether or not I have to sack these people.

Matthew Rycroft: We will set out exactly what the reasonable grounds are that would allow people to miss the 30 June deadline, but for now I would really encourage everyone to try to meet that deadline, as—

Priti Patel: Mr McDonald, may I come in on this? When we look at the EU settlement scheme in its entirety, it has worked at every single level to deal with settlement applications in good time.

Q112 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Congratulations on the 5 million, but can you tell me the answer to that question? Do I need to sack these workers on 5 July?

Priti Patel: The answer is that, where a person has clear and reasonable grounds for missing the deadline, of course they can make a late application.

Q113 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Yes, but in the meantime, what does the employer do while that person is making an application?

Priti Patel: We will work with them in the same way in which we did for the previous deadlines. We will take a pragmatic and flexible approach to these applications. Matthew, the permanent secretary, has said very clearly that we will publish guidance in the spring. Our focus right now, I think it is important to say, when you look at the scheme, and this was a scheme that many rubbished at the outset, and many made many disparaging—

Q114 **Stuart C. McDonald:** No. You say that every time you come here. I never said that it would be rubbish; I said—

Priti Patel: It has been a success, and we focus as a Department on encouraging people to apply to the scheme. If I may just link to that as well, because I think it is important, at every opportunity, we always encourage people to apply, and that applies equally to vulnerable people—

Q115 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Yes, absolutely—that is all good. I have one last question, about citizenship. Again, last week, the Court of Appeal found to be unlawful the outrageous citizenship fees that even your predecessor



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called a huge amount of money to ask a child to pay to access their right to British citizenship. Surely, someone at the Home Office will now engage seriously with this, and recognise that people have been deprived of their right to British citizenship by those fees, which should be, if not abolished, at least reduced to an administrative cost.

Priti Patel: We will review and look at all of this. That is one judgment that came out, and it is right that we reflect upon that and take policy decisions that could inevitably flow from that. We cannot just jump into a conclusion right now. It is right that we are given the time and space to review what will happen after that judgment.

Chair: Diane, did you have a follow-up question on the asylum accommodation?

Q116 **Ms Abbott:** Yes—I think it is a question for Matthew Rycroft. The Committee has been told that people have been sleeping in dormitories of up to 28 persons, and that some people continue to have to sleep in dormitories after the covid outbreak started. Can you tell us—or write to us if you cannot tell us now—in total, how many people who have been in Napier since 1 January have now tested positive for covid, and is it correct that people with positive covid tests continue to sleep in dormitories?

Matthew Rycroft: I can say that at the moment, the numbers in Napier have gone down to 61, and at Penally, down to 71. All along, in Napier, the maximum size of the dormitory was 28, but at the moment, there are four to 10 in each block, and in Penally there is a maximum of six per dormitory. When there was an outbreak of covid in Napier, on Public Health England advice, we moved into alternative accommodation all those who had a negative test, to allow for those who had tested positive for covid to remain with greater space around them.

Q117 **Ms Abbott:** How many people who have been in Napier since 1 January have now tested positive for covid?

Matthew Rycroft: I will write to you with the figure for the total number from 1 January.

Ms Abbott: Thank you very much.

Q118 **Chair:** Is it more than 120? It is reported in the media that it is 120 people; the Select Committee heard evidence that it was at least 120 people. Can you confirm that it is at least 120 people?

Matthew Rycroft: I will write, Chair, with the exact number.

Q119 **Chair:** I do not think that is acceptable. Can you tell us whether it is more than 100 people, then?

Matthew Rycroft: Sorry, I do not have the figure in front of me at the moment, Chair. If I find it later—

Q120 **Chair:** Because you have electronic communications during the course of this session, you can confirm it. We have been told very clearly that it is



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over 120 people—that is a lot of people in a single outbreak. Home Secretary, did you agree to putting up to 28 people in a dormitory in the middle of the covid crisis?

Priti Patel: First of all, advice around dormitories and the use of the accommodation was all based on Public Health England advice, and that is being managed by the Department, in terms of the provider, and by working at local authority level. It is all based on social distancing. That is the point: it is all based on social distancing and covid-compliant measures—it is really important to emphasise that. It is all working in line with public health guidance and with local authority partners throughout all this, so we have been following guidance in every single way.

Q121 **Chair:** So Public Health England and the local authority said it was okay to put more than 20 people in a dormitory in the middle of the covid crisis?

Priti Patel: Well, Public Health England, as Matthew has already said, is a partner that we work with—

Chair: Did they say it was okay?

Priti Patel: This was at the start, and that has changed. That obviously changes throughout the pandemic because Public Health England guidance is not static. When there is an outbreak, clearly there is work that takes place on site in terms of site management, moving people out who are negative, and making sure that cleaning and all the associated factors are put in place.

Q122 **Chair:** Back in November—26 November—you received a letter from the Faculty of Public Health, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and others, warning you that keeping people in that dormitory accommodation and at Napier barracks was not safe in covid terms. What did you do at that point?

Priti Patel: I think it is fair to say that all our measures are constantly under review when it comes to accommodation and Public Health England guidance. The dormitory accommodation is obviously where people sleep, and there are facilities within the actual venue itself for people to move out and about, and be free, so to speak, but—

Chair: Sure, so they can go out and about—

Priti Patel: Every step that has been undertaken has been in conjunction on site with site managers, but also in light of and bearing in mind the public health guidance that comes forward.

Q123 **Chair:** Okay. I just want to clarify whether Public Health England or the local authority told you that these dormitories of 20-plus people were safe in covid terms.

Priti Patel: We have had advice as a Department. So—

Chair: Did they look at those arrangements—yes or no? Did they say that it was safe?



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Priti Patel: The Department has reviewed at every stage, from day one, from the outset, in getting these locations, these sites, up and running and ready, throughout every single phased approach, because quite frankly regulations have changed, obviously, since December.

Chair: This is not an answer to my question.

Priti Patel: Guidance has changed. The Department works with Public Health England and local authorities at every single level.

Q124 **Chair:** I am sure you work with everybody. I simply want to know whether Public Health England or the local authority said to you, "Yes, we approve of these arrangements. This is social distancing, and this will work. This is covid compliant." Matthew Rycroft, can you tell us?

Matthew Rycroft: If Public Health England were here, they would, I think, explain that they do not do those sorts of approvals. They do not certify that certain conditions do or do not meet their standards. What they do is give advice, and they gave advice on how to make the circumstances of the Napier barracks covid-safe, and that is the advice that we followed. They do not provide a service of certification.

Secondly, I now have the numbers. With apologies for not having had them earlier, in total in January there were 178 positive tests, and 19 in February, leading to a total of 197 between the start of January and now.

Q125 **Chair:** Oh my God! You had 178 cases at a centre that had dormitory accommodation of over 20 people in those dormitories. That looks like pretty clear evidence to me that those dormitories were not covid-safe if you managed to generate within them 178 covid-positive cases. Presumably that will have affected staff who will live in the local community as well. On what planet did you think, in the middle of a covid crisis, that it was safe or sensible to put over 20 people in a dormitory so that they were all sleeping together in the same room with the same air overnight each night?

Matthew Rycroft: As the Home Secretary said, we were following the guidance at every stage, and the guidance was to ensure that there was as much space as possible, certainly at least 2 metres between beds and so on. We followed that guidance.

Q126 **Chair:** Okay, so that's all right then. There were 2 metres between beds. That will presumably mean that it is okay for people to sleep safely. That obviously was not sufficient and there were 178 cases. You said that you have not published the public health advice on this. Given that you said at the beginning that you were open to scrutiny, can you agree now that you will publish the public health advice that you received on Napier barracks?

Matthew Rycroft: I can commit, Chair, subject to the ongoing court cases, to providing as much transparency as possible.

Q127 **Chair:** Given what you said at the beginning about seeing the face behind the case, do you really think, Home Secretary and permanent secretary,



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that the Home Office saw the faces behind the cases of those people who you put in that unsafe accommodation?

Priti Patel: Let me come in on this. The answer is yes, absolutely, because every single individual who comes into the care, the estate, of the Home Office has personalised support, and that happens at the initial stages of their own personal assessment. We should bear that in mind. If I may just add, particularly with regard to Napier barracks, there has been a range of factors that we have had to take on board. The permanent secretary is absolutely right in terms of following the advice from Public Health England to mitigate the risks of contracting or spreading covid.

At the same time, Chair, you will recognise as well that within accommodation—contingency accommodation, initial accommodation for asylum seekers—people do mingle. People also—it is a fact, when we look at what happened at Napier barracks three weeks ago—people were also not following the rules. We also have to bear in mind that covid, being as contagious as it is, spreads. So we have spent a significant amount of time working with our stakeholders, Public Health England, Kent County Council, and, obviously, putting in mitigation measures to mitigate the risk, while also undertaking the right kinds of checks, the covid test, and removing people from this facility as well.

Chair: Home Secretary, that is still a bit of an astonishing response, though. Effectively you are saying you are blaming those people for not following the rules when they were put in accommodation where they had to sleep over 28 people to a room. I really would ask you to provide us with some further written information about what decisions were taken, and when, to go ahead with this accommodation, and then the public health advice that was given on this as well. I would urge the whole Department to reflect on whether this incident does reflect seeing the face behind the case. We need to move on.

Q128 **Dame Diana Johnson:** I would like to ask a very quick question to Mr Rycroft, which is around the EU settlement scheme. It is about the number of looked-after children. How many of those now have had their applications made by the local authorities, and what percentage is that of the total population of looked-after children? Could you just give me those figures?

Matthew Rycroft: I can't find it immediately, but I can write to you with that figure. Just to expand on an earlier answer, we have been, I think, all of us, very pleasantly surprised by the total numbers of applications into this scheme—so, now, over 5 million people; and with the ease with which the vast majority have been able to do that, given that it is digital for—

Q129 **Dame Diana Johnson:** Okay. We are very short of time, so I am going to move on to the substantive questions I wanted to ask you around technology, and particularly about what happened over a month ago, when 400,000 records were erased from the police national database. We know that there were also a number of records that should have been erased that weren't. Obviously, Home Secretary, the public were shocked



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to hear this and would have thought that the safety and security of the population was at stake. Could you just say, Home Secretary, what has been the impact of this loss of data, and the information corruption, on policing?

Priti Patel: First of all, thank you for the question. You are absolutely right. As a Department, dealing with legacy technology is clearly the challenge; but importantly, we have worked with police in NPCC from the outset in terms of data recovery and putting mitigations in place. We have also identified the total number of records that have been affected and also various mitigations that we have been making. So we are now well under way in phase 3—if you recall, we said that this would be a phased approach—where data recovery is taking place. On that basis we have been able to identify—I don't have the figures at hand but I will get them for you shortly—in terms of the actual records that we have: we have found in total, and I do have them here now, that 209,550 offence records were wrongly deleted, which were associated to 112,697 persons' records. Of that, we know that our analysis has identified that 195 full fingerprint records were deleted. These related to cases that were over 10 years old, and no records of convictions have been deleted. We are in this phased approach now, of recovering data and also identifying which data was lost.

Q130 **Dame Diana Johnson:** What do you think the impact has actually been, though, on policing, with the loss of this data? What is your instinct about how this has affected policing?

Priti Patel: We work with NPCC every day on this, and they have been a partner alongside us in terms of every stage of recovery. Of course, the police have other mitigations in place as well, so we are not seeing, we are not hearing, from policing that this has hindered them in terms of day-to-day policing at all.

Q131 **Dame Diana Johnson:** So there has been no effect from the loss of these records.

Priti Patel: I have just highlighted the records relating to cases over 10 years, but the police national computer holds data on approximately 13.2 million individuals, and the deleted records represent 0.85% of the overall total. Of course, there are the time lags and how historic some of this data is as well.

So we have not heard from the police that this has caused problems in terms of policing per se because they have other mitigations in place. But, as I said, from the outset—Matthew has overseen this—our focus has been not just data recovery but looking at the measures we are putting in place, which are much more about legacy IT and how we will shore up our systems going forward.

Q132 **Dame Diana Johnson:** It sounds to me from what you are saying that, in your view, actually the loss of these records does not seem to have had any effect on policing because the police can access other data or material to help them in their investigations. I find that astonishing, to be honest.



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May I move on to the legacy technology, which you have raised, and the fact that these technologies are over 50 years old? As I understand it, we are not going to get the national law enforcement data programme for another seven years, so you will have to rely on the PNC and the PND during this time. What is your view about 50-year-old technology? We know there have been a number of mishaps over the last few years around data being lost. What is your view about how you will ensure these technologies are effective for the next seven years?

Priti Patel: Not surprisingly, I do not only have views. I have to say that this is something across the whole of Government, and also in the Home Office. Legacy systems seem to absolutely dominate the infrastructure of the Home Office. Notwithstanding what is going on with the national law enforcement data programme—NLEDP—and other programmes that have been recently reviewed, how we start to build cloud platforms and update our systems and what kind of hardware we need is all under review right now. This is part of the Home Office’s change and transformation programme, which Matthew is leading.

It is clearly wrong. This is something that has been neglected by successive Governments for far too long. But right now we are working on projects that both Matthew and I have inherited, many of which were in a very difficult situation a year ago. Matthew will want to come in on this, because he has reviewed and led departmental reviews of these technology programmes, and the work we are now effectively undertaking is not even to update the systems but to fundamentally bring in the capability and qualified IT experts to give us the infrastructure that we need.

Q133 **Dame Diana Johnson:** Do you feel confident that over the next seven years you will get the support that these old technologies need to make them effective and work for us? Are you confident about that?

Priti Patel: It is not just a priority—we absolutely have to. I will be very clear about this. As we have seen from the police national computer issue, the infrastructure is out of date and struggling, and we absolutely have to update our systems. This is not a negotiation, actually. There has been a lot of work—I should bring Matthew in.

Dame Diana Johnson: I think I have run out of time, actually—I can see the Chair giving me the eye—so I think we had better leave it there.

Priti Patel: I think it is important just to add that we have the Infrastructure and Projects Authority working with the Home Office on these key areas, and it is that kind of support and assistance across Government that not just does the RAG ratings, looking at the risk, but works with to us to improve our systems.

Chair: We are going to stay on technology so there will be a chance for Mr Rycroft to come in.

Q134 **Simon Fell:** Sticking on that point of legacy systems, I am interested in the Airwave system transferring to the Emergency Services Network. My



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understanding is that that programme has been reset and we are looking at a delay of, essentially, twice as much time to get it delivered, with twice as much cost attached to it, and the business case being signed off next month. I am interested in your confidence as to whether the parties involved—devolved Governments, the Department of Health and Social Care and so on—are in a position to sign that off next month and your level of comfort around that, and also in whether you think that once that it goes has happened, you will be able to deliver on time and it will be an effective replacement for Airwave.

Priti Patel: Thank you, Mr Fell. Let me come in by saying that this is a very good example, actually, of a project that, again, Matthew and I have inherited, but that now makes steady progress and, by making steady progress, also speaks to broader confidence across the Home Office in the technical viability of the actual solution, which means working with other Departments, devolved Administrations, etc. It is a fact that it is over budget, it has been overrunning—it has had a terrible, terrible past; it really has. This was one of those red programmes a year ago, in fact, when Matthew joined the Department, and I picked this up as well, where we still have more work to do. That obviously means building confidence with other partners. It's not just about the fit-for-purpose nature of it in the Home Office; it's about working with stakeholders and partners, too. But if I may, I would like to bring Matthew in, because Matthew has really led a transformation, if I may say so, in departmental ways of working on this particular project and on IT more broadly.

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you, Home Secretary; thank you, Mr Fell. On the Emergency Services Network, you are absolutely right that we are approaching an important moment with the new revised business case, which will require and is getting a lot of outreach to devolved Administrations, to other Government Departments and to other organisations such as Transport for London, bearing in mind the importance of coverage for this future network in the London underground and across many, many kilometres of roads where the current system does not provide coverage, as well as up in the air. This is going to be a product that the emergency services need, because the existing Airwave contract is very expensive and, in time, will run out of being technically up to date, so there is an inevitability about this project, but as the Home Secretary said, it is behind and it is over budget, which is why we are putting significant attention on it in order to get it back on track, and there are some early signs of progress there.

Very briefly, in response to the previous questions, we will provide the full impact of the effect of the deleted records from the police national computer once all the recovery has happened. We will make sure that the Committee receives that, but as the Home Secretary said, on current evidence, the impact on policing is somewhere between zero and minimal, because of the other ways they can go to reach the records. And finally, we will update the Committee in due course on the future of the successor to the police national computer—the national law enforcement programme.



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Q135 **Simon Fell:** Taking you back to the ESN, you have talked about partnership working and working across Government, which is good to hear, because my understanding is that this isn't just for emergency services; quite a lot of the Government's commitment to rolling out 5G to difficult-to-reach rural areas hinges on the masts that are part of this programme. So I am keen to understand how well you are working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on this, in terms of meeting their obligations. How are your two Departments working together?

Matthew Rycroft: We work extremely closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and others. There is very close working on this programme and on many other issues where there is an overlapping interest—on all things digital and cyber, for instance. The masts roll-out aspect of this programme is on track, and then the end product of this programme will be handsets, which—you are right—will be for the police and other emergency services but also for other organisations.

Q136 **Simon Fell:** Thank you. Home Secretary, I would like to move on to the issue of county lines briefly, if that's okay. We have seen some quite positive stories in the press recently—*[Inaudible]*—Operation Horizon—*[Inaudible]*—arrests—*[Inaudible]*—about 100 years of prison sentences across those who were picked up. But I am aware that it's something of a whack-a-mole approach: you catch one gang and another pops up. So—*[Inaudible.]*

Chair: Simon, we may have to come back to that question, as unfortunately you seem to have frozen. I am going to move on to Laura Farris and we will come back to Simon when your video is stable—oh, let's try again.

Simon Fell: Sorry, I apologise for causing trouble. Let's hope my internet holds out. So, county lines. We have seen some positive stories, but the approach appears to be whack-a-mole—you hit one gang and another one springs straight back up. I am interested in the work the Home Office is doing to co-ordinate action across the British Transport Police and the National County Lines Coordination Centre, as well as in safeguarding young people who are involved in this process. What is your perspective on what the Home Office is doing on this now and whether funding can be maintained for the uplift of those programmes?

Priti Patel: This is a really important question. Although it focuses on whack-a-mole and zapping drug gang lines and things of that nature, it speaks to a wider societal issue, which is being looked at by the whole of Government. There is specifically a cross-Government taskforce—it is called the crime and justice taskforce—that looks at some of the end-to-end challenges around drugs, drug abuse, drug gangs and how children, sadly, are getting sucked into much of the criminality and being used—cuckooed—as drug mules and so on.

From a Home Office perspective, we have set the strategic direction in terms of the approach on county lines. We have put in money—more than



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£25 million since October 2019. The results are clear. We have had something like 3,400 people arrested and 550 drug lines have been closed. In north Wales, that has meant that there are no more drug lines.

At the same time, and this is quite shocking, 770 vulnerable people have been safeguarded. That speaks about county lines as an issue, a social ill, and how it sucks in and preys upon vulnerable people.

To come back to the cross-Government work that we now have taking place—I will come on to the National County Lines Coordination Centre and British Transport Police—we are now working with the Department of Health, as well as the Ministry of Justice, to do a number of things. First, with the Department of Health, about a month ago or maybe six weeks ago, we announced an investment in terms of drug addiction. We absolutely as a Government have to now invest in drug addiction to get people off drugs. Those communities have been blighted by county lines and drug addiction. That is some wider work that is taking place, because the Home Office can continue to do the law enforcement piece, but we also have to look at the wider societal impacts.

The work of British Transport Police, the National County Lines Coordination Centre, the National Crime Agency, and the 43 police forces—specifically, there have been three police forces, the Metropolitan police, Merseyside and West Midlands—has been strategic. It has been very much about targeting, using intelligence to target the gangs and do the interaction that is required. Also, and this is equally important when we think about the 770 vulnerable people, it has increased support for the victims, that are effectively used to facilitate this.

County lines, from a law enforcement perspective, will continue as part of the strategic direction we have set, but I want to emphasise that this is now becoming a cross-Government piece of work or initiative in terms of bringing in other Government Departments. We know that too many children are brought into gangs and used for county lines. Our job as a state and as a society is to put in place everything that we can in terms of protective mitigations to stop them ending up in these gangs or being trafficked or used—

Chair: Apologies for interrupting, Home Secretary. I am just conscious that we have to cover as many issues as possible. Any further information you can send us in writing about that would be immensely helpful, because it is hugely interesting. Thank you.

Q137 Laura Farris: My first question is to Matthew Rycroft. I am covering the issue of domestic abuse. A week or so ago we heard from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner-designate about a number of issues, including funding. We know that the Home Office invested close to £50 million last year in additional domestic abuse funding support. Of course, as with all these things, there is a bit of ebb and flow as to whether those services need more or not. I was wondering whether you could comment on your assessment of how that funding was spent last year, when most of the evidence seems to suggest that there was about a 35% spike in calls to



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the domestic abuse hotline and so on. What is your view on whether the funding at present levels—or at that level—had met demand?

Matthew Rycroft: The first thing to say is what a high priority this issue is not just for the Home Office but in working collaboratively with other Departments, including the Ministry of Justice, which leads across Government on victims policy. We work very closely with it and others, including through the criminal justice taskforce to which the Home Secretary referred earlier.

Last year, the Government increased funding, including as a result of the domestic abuse consequences of the covid pandemic, if I may put it that way, and bearing in mind how important it is to tackle that. As a Government, we have also committed to support domestic abuse organisations through the pandemic and out the other side, including with training, outreach and a lot of other activity. We will be making assessments about the effectiveness of that funding as part of the preparation for the next spending review, which will be ramping up in the coming months.

Q138 **Laura Farris:** My next question is for the Home Secretary. I wanted to ask about migrant women, because I think it is fair to say that in the Commons and more recently in the Lords it has been a big topic of debate. The Home Office has a pilot starting soon on migrant women with no recourse to public funds and how they will be treated if they report domestic abuse. First, I will draw your attention to something Baroness Williams said, I think in closing in the Lords. She was sympathetic to the idea but said: "This Government are concerned that expanding the scope...would...introduce a route to settlement that might lead to more exploitation of our immigration system—or indeed of vulnerable migrants." When the pilot goes live, what tests will need to be met for you to consider changing Home Office policy on migrant women with no recourse to public funds? Will you explain to the Committee what the risks are of the abuse of the immigration system to which Baroness Williams was referring?

Priti Patel: I suppose there is quite a lot to be said, if I may, around this whole area. I also echo our permanent secretary's comments on domestic abuse. We should recognise—this applies equally to migrant women as to all women when it comes to domestic abuse—that we have to think about them through the right lens, and the right support needs to be put in place, not just by the Home Office, but also by the Ministry of Justice and in our work with the Victims' Commissioner. There are also other factors that we need to consider.

We are renewing our approach to domestic abuse. There will be a new cross-Government domestic abuse strategy to ensure that everyone across Government has a more end-to-end and comprehensive role in tackling the whole issue of domestic abuse. We cannot look at it only under X category or Y category, or among particular groups of individuals. Equally, that applies to our strategy on violence against women and girls.

You asked specifically about migrant women. We cannot define the parameters until we start our pilot. We very much have to use the pilot as an evidence base for our approach going forward. That may have implications for immigration, but I cannot sit here and tell you that right now—I really cannot. We need to work with our partners on the pilot, and with individuals in the pilot to understand many of their circumstances—what brought them here, how they came here and about their other experiences. It would be wrong even to speculate now about various future changes in policy. We have to get this right, we really do.

Domestic abuse, the abuse that women face, and violence against women and girls are issues that we speak frequently about as parliamentarians. Yes, we are debating them with a Bill that is going through the Lords right now. We will build upon that Bill going forward. The Bill has taken a long time to come to Parliament, and after that time we are now dealing with new issues, such as revenge porn, upskirting and all sorts of implications through technology.

We are also dealing with a system that is not holistic, and I think we should all just reflect upon that; we really should. We should try to join all this up—

Q139 Laura Farris: I am sorry to interrupt you, but time is a bit limited. You are right. Time does not allow us to explore all the new issues—revenge porn and so on, and other things that have been raised in the Lords.

However, one of the things that I wanted to ask you about is the work that the Home Office has done consistently in the last year to shine a spotlight on domestic abuse. We had the “You are not alone” campaign and the safe spaces campaign. I know that it is probably situation-specific, but we had the agreement with the railways to provide free travel to women who were escaping from domestic abuse. Most recently, and I think this complied with what the Victims’ Commissioner had asked for, we had the Ask for ANI campaign at pharmacies.

I wanted to ask you this, Home Secretary: what do you think you have taken from the last year, in terms of the effectiveness of those campaigns, and which of those strategies do you think will become a permanent feature of British law and the way that we approach domestic abuse in general?

Priti Patel: When we talk about the way in which we approach domestic abuse, I am going to answer that very much through the way that we should all view domestic abuse as a society—not as politicians at all, but as a country and as a society. Domestic abuse affects men, women and children, and obviously has an unspeakable impact upon people, in the same way that violence against women and girls does.

Raising awareness, and calling out some of the most vile and unacceptable behaviours, is absolutely crucial. I have spent a lot of time speaking to young girls and women throughout the pandemic, and obviously practitioners as well, whether it is those at refuges or others who are on the frontline and providing incredible support.



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I have to say, though, that I think one of the most conclusive features that I can take out from the last 12 months is that clearly there are a lot of hidden harms, and domestic abuse is one of them. It takes place behind closed doors. We recognise that; everyone recognises that.

Our response has to be a whole-of-Government response. It cannot just be for one particular Department to look at one piece or another, and I would just like to reflect upon the example of refuges. Refuges are a commissioned service. I know this—we all know this, actually, as constituency MPs making the representations that we make. I have several local authorities covered by my constituency. We see just a different approach. We cannot have that anymore; we really can't. We need standards—we absolutely need to have standards—and, with that, we need to have money.

The other area that I think is equally important is domestic homicide. Domestic homicides are linked to domestic abuse; that is clear. At some stage—I cannot tell the Committee when yet—I want to review how we approach domestic homicide reviews. Currently, local councils are paying for those reviews. I think we need to learn some lessons. I am very keen on working with my colleagues here—

Chair: We would be very keen to hear more about that.

Priti Patel—to understand the approach that takes place and how we can have a much more coherent approach.

Chair: Thank you, Home Secretary; sorry to interrupt you. Dehenna Davison.

Q140 **Dehenna Davison:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Home Secretary, for your time today.

To continue on a similar theme, on domestic abuse but also other crimes, you have talked already about the joint working that has been done between the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. One of the real concerns that I am getting through, both from my local police forces and from constituents, is about the speed at which courts are currently operating.

We know that some of the most serious crimes, like domestic abuse, are being prioritised through that court system, and I know that this is largely within the remit of the Ministry of Justice. However, it is the fact that police officers are finding it quite challenging—that they are gathering evidence and in some cases there is the difficulty of having to go through that court system and the agonising waits are enough for people to drop the cases completely. What joint working is the Home Office doing with the Ministry of Justice to try and tackle this?

Priti Patel: That is a hugely important point and question, as I know not just from being Home Secretary, but from my previous work with the APPG for victims. There is no doubt about our concern—I hear it from the police, my colleagues in Government and the Lord Chancellor. There is recognition of the potential attrition of victims and witnesses—quite



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frankly, because cases are taking far too long, and also because of the changing in court listings. That obviously has a devastating impact. On top of that, the access to victim support services has clearly been challenged. I think we all recognise that all aspects of the state have been challenged throughout the pandemic. Again, how do we knit this together to bring the various services together? That work is taking place—I can absolutely say it is taking place—with the MOJ, but there is now work through a Government taskforce, in terms of looking at court backlogs. There is a great deal of money, which my colleagues in the Ministry of Justice could speak about, in terms of boosting capacity, recruiting new staff and particularly the use of Nightingale courtrooms, but also bolstering that victim services piece.

From a policing perspective—we can all recognise this, as well as public confidence around the justice system—they want to see the perpetrators brought to justice. I have heard this repeatedly over the last nine months or so, when courts were being closed and the Government was trying to get things moving, obviously with the MOJ. It is absolutely right that the victim support providers continue to be supported, and that we support the victims throughout all of this, while at the same time the Ministry of Justice continues to lead the work that it is doing in terms of court capacity and the wider issues around the criminal justice system.

Q141 Dehenna Davison: Brilliant. Thank you. Let's stick on policing but move to a different issue. Some people might consider it trivial, but my inbox would suggest that a huge concern for a lot of my constituents is whether police officers and police forces are equipped enough to tackle what seems like a growing pandemic of antisocial behaviour. What is being done by the Home Office to ensure that police forces are properly equipped to handle this, and certainly to get enough police officers out on the streets with the capacity to actually tackle these crimes?

Priti Patel: Antisocial behaviour is the bane of every community, in terms of the impact that it has. It is not a trivial issue at all. From a policing perspective, throughout the pandemic there are hundreds and hundreds of examples that chiefs and officers from the 43 police forces talk about where, at the same time, people are also effectively in breach of the coronavirus regulations and the rules—gatherings and all those types of things.

Throughout the pandemic—I would like to put this within the pandemic, because this is the period that we are speaking about—the police have had the resources. We recently announced more funding—part of the surge funding that goes to police forces—and I am happy to provide the breakdown and the details of how much money has gone specifically throughout the pandemic to policing. They absolutely have the tools, the equipment and the officers. We now have 6,620 more officers who have been recruited. They are out there already doing amazing work. But as ever, there is this balance between crime and antisocial behaviour—the very issues that blight our communities. Obviously, police and crime commissioners and police chiefs, through their own approach to what is going on in the community, can resource and do resource accordingly.



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Q142 **Chair:** Let me turn to the border issues and ask you some very quick factual questions first of all. This may be a question for Paul Lincoln. How many people are currently arriving at the moment? How many of them are going to hotels, and how many of them are going home?

Priti Patel: Can I bring Paul in? We do have that information, Chair.

Paul Lincoln: In broad terms, at the moment there are about 14,000 or 15,000 people coming into the country on any given day. That is now about 95% down on what we would have seen routinely at this time in previous years. That is the start point for any subsequent questions.

Q143 **Chair:** How many of them are going into hotels, and how many of them are going home?

Paul Lincoln: At the moment, about a third or more of that will be hauliers coming into the country. About a third of those are also British citizens. On the number of people who are routinely going into hotels, there are just over 1,100 or 1,200 people currently in the managed quarantine service hotels.

Q144 **Chair:** But how many? As a proportion of the 15,000 a day, what proportion of them are going into hotels?

Paul Lincoln: The number of people who have gone in is relatively small. It's only 100 or so per day of people who are going into hotels at the moment. In terms of the actual figures associated with that, as I said, we are talking on average about 150 per day in the early stage, but it has risen slightly since then.

Q145 **Chair:** Do you have an estimate of the number of covid cases arriving each day? The SAGE paper suggested it was about 830 a day in December. That would be 25,000 a month if there were no restrictions. Do you have an estimate of the proportionate number of covid cases a day?

Paul Lincoln: PHE are due to publish their figure of what the percentage is going to be in due course. The last time the Committee looked at this question, there was 0.5% of arrivals in comparison with the domestic case. It is estimated by PHE. They have not published that data yet, but it is substantially lower than that.

Q146 **Chair:** Sorry, say that figure again. What figure did you say?

Paul Lincoln: The Committee has taken evidence on this point before. In previous evidence, the Department has said, on the basis of SAGE papers, it was 0.5% previously. In domestic cases, it is currently much lower than that, but PHE are due to publish the figure in due course.

Q147 **Chair:** Okay. That is still significantly more people than are actually going into the hotel quarantine. Can you confirm that only about 1% of people arriving a day are going into hotel quarantine?

Paul Lincoln: I would put this in the context of the number of people who have been coming in, who come from the 33 red list countries—



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Q148 **Chair:** I understand that. I am just trying to clarify the figures. Are we correct to say that 99% of people arriving in the country at the moment are not going into hotel quarantine?

Paul Lincoln: About 150 people versus the 15,000 are going into the hotel quarantine, as a percentage. That is about right

Q149 **Chair:** So 99% are not going into hotel quarantine. For that remaining 99%, what is your compliance estimate once people get home? The ONS assumed 67% from their survey; Ipsos MORI 55%; Oxera said it could be as low as 29% for asymptomatic people. What is the Government's assessment of compliance likelihood once people get home?

Paul Lincoln: The Government assessment has been high as it has gone through. The latest assessment from the police is that it is at least 85% from their own visits, which they have done to individual residents as part of this, and that is in addition to the other checks that are being done by the isolation assurance service, which is run by PHE and DHSC.

Q150 **Chair:** So 85% is the point at which the police knocked on the door; not 85% were staying home for the whole of that time. In the 15% of cases where nobody is in when the police knock on the door, what action are the police currently taking? As of December, they were taking no further enforcement action in those cases. What are they now doing?

Paul Lincoln: The police are capable of going back and re-looking at people if they are not in, and they are issuing fixed penalty notices where they are not persuaded to comply with the regulations.

Q151 **Chair:** I understand they might be capable of it, but are they doing so? As of December, in those cases, no further follow-up action was being taken. Are they doing any follow-up action?

Paul Lincoln: I will have to come back to you. We can write to the Committee on the specifics of what has happened since December, but certainly the police are taking action. They are persuading people to comply where they find them not to be compliant, and they are also issuing fixed penalty notices at the same time.

Q152 **Chair:** If they are not in and they are not going back, and they are not taking any further enforcement action, then they are not actually issuing any fixed penalty notices, are they?

Paul Lincoln: The police are issuing fixed penalty notices as part of this programme.

Q153 **Chair:** As of the figures up to December, they are not issuing any fixed penalty notices on the people who were not in when they knocked on the door.

Paul Lincoln: We can write back to the Committee. Obviously, this is a matter for the police rather than for Border Force, but we can come back to the Committee on those figures.

Q154 **Chair:** The police told us they were referring those cases back to Border



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Force when we had their evidence in.

Paul Lincoln: We have a process that is run between the three sets of organisations. We provide referrals in the first instance in terms of the data from the passenger locator forms, which goes to the isolation assurance service and DHSC/PHE, and where there are concerns from them we will triage those back to the police. Then the police can refer back if necessary.

Q155 **Chair:** It sounds like quite a lot of referring between people. On those phone calls that are taking place, 5,000 phone calls a day you were aiming for. That is 2,500 people given a follow-up call, so it looks as though you are only aiming to do a phone call follow-up to one in six people arriving. Is that correct?

Paul Lincoln: If you put this in terms of the number of people who are exempt, of the 15,000 or so people who are coming into the country at any given time, it is closer to 50% of people who will be followed up. At the moment, everybody who has been previously to a red list country has been being followed up, and the expansion of the 5,000 therefore obviously takes into account a lot of people from the other countries as well.

Q156 **Chair:** I think you will need to write to us on those figures, because that does not follow. If one third are hauliers, that means 10,000 people are not. The vast majority of those are not going into hotel accommodation and you are currently only trying to reach 2,500 individuals a day. That looks like one in four to me, so I would like some clarification on those figures.

I have a question to the Home Secretary. Given that there is clearly a very leaky system here in terms of the number of people going home and that people will travel home on public transport, don't you think it would have been more effective in stopping new variants to either have a South Korea-style test at the border and then no public transport for people to get home or, alternatively, a more comprehensive hotel quarantine system? Are you really confident that, with 99 people not going into hotels, you have a robust system in place?

Priti Patel: First of all, may I just build on some of the numbers that you have spoken about? The isolation assurance service is now sampling 8,000 a day, and up to 17 January there have been 332 FPNs issued by the police. I would just like to put this into the wider context of the measures that had been put in place. This is a layered approach, and I think people are now familiar with the testing prior to travel, the passenger locator form and all the various measures that have now been put in place to give assurance. This is not just Border Force and Public Health England; carriers also have a responsibility to give assurance and to manage the risk. This is all about managing the risk. Obviously, we are at a different stage of the pandemic and we now have a vaccine roll-out programme, so a range of factors have now been taken into consideration.

Q157 **Chair:** Going forward, then, Professor John Edmunds told us, "Once...we



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get infections down to a much lower level, border restrictions become much more important...people will think, 'Great, I can go on holiday to Greece, Croatia and so on.' That is exactly when we should tighten up the restrictions, not relax them." Do you agree with that?

Priti Patel: That would obviously be dependent on data at the time. When we look at the road map that has been announced this week, the Government have been very clear about looking at the data and also other factors that are taking place. There could be new variants, for example, which would be a variable to consider, as well as the vaccine roll-out and the efficacy of the vaccine roll-out. There are just too many factors to consider before we can even speculate in a binary way whether, yes or no, people should be travelling.

I should just emphasise that there is a lot of work taking place now between Health, Transport and the Cabinet Office, who are leading on this work now in terms of not just future measures, but potentially—I say "potentially" now, because the road map has only just been announced—if people can travel, how they can travel. This is clearly about mitigating the risk. We are going to be living with this disease and, as we all keep hearing, we are having the vaccine roll-out right now, but we could end up having an annual jab, for example, to protect us against coronavirus.

Q158 **Chair:** Sure, but specifically on that scientific principle, the advice we were given was that, as domestic rates fall, the international constraints and restrictions become more important. It is what you said yourself last June. You said that as our transmission rate continues to decline, "Travellers from overseas could become a higher proportion of the overall number of infections". The logic of what you said last summer and what SAGE said in January was that, as our infections come down and as we have the road map, the border restrictions would become more important, not less. Do you agree with that scientific principle?

Priti Patel: We will always follow the science, but at the same time, logic would dictate that we have to look at the data and the science that is applicable and valid at the time. That is looking to the future in terms of how things may change. As we all know, it is far too early to even contemplate any particular changes right now.

Q159 **Chair:** But what is your advice to people thinking about booking overseas holidays? At the moment, we have had a soaring increase in the number of bookings. People think that international restrictions are likely to come down as domestic restrictions come down. This scientific advice suggests that as domestic restrictions come down, international restrictions may need to go up. What would be your advice to all those people booking their holidays today—to book away, or to wait?

What would be your advice to all those people booking their holidays today—to book away, or to wait?

Priti Patel: Well, it is too early, as you have already heard me say. It is far too early and we have to look at the data at every single stage. The road map set out by the Prime Minister makes that abundantly clear.



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Q160 **Chair:** So, people thinking about booking right now a summer holiday in Greece or Spain should wait until after the global taskforce report, and should not be booking things now?

Priti Patel: First of all, it is too early—absolutely. There is a road map and we would advise everybody to follow all the restrictions and measures that have been put in place. As I have said, we have to continue with the vaccine roll-out, and we will need to meet the four tests that the Prime Minister outlined before restrictions change.

Chair: Thank you—that is very helpful. We may have lost Ruth Edwards from the call, so we will go to Tim Loughton.

Q161 **Tim Loughton:** Thank you, Chair. Morning, Home Secretary. There are three unrelated issues I want to raise quickly. May I start with Operation Midland? You will be aware of the extraordinary revelations in *The Daily Mail* over the last week, and that the Committee is having a look at the way the IOPC operates. Sir Richard Henriques, who did the damning review in the operation, and who has also been quite damning about the workings of the IOPC, said, “A district judge was knowingly misled into issuing search warrants”, and he referred to corruption at the highest level. The senior district judge, the chief magistrate Howard Riddle, who issued the warrants, has said he was given false and misleading information, and that he was knowingly misled, yet no heads have rolled, and many of the senior officers involved in that whole operation still hold senior positions. Why have no heads rolled and what do you propose to do about it?

Priti Patel: Thank you, Mr Loughton. This is a very sensitive issue, as we all know. When I first became Home Secretary, I met some of the victims of Operation Midland, and I reiterate my sympathy, also for the way in which they have been represented throughout what has been a terrible time.

I commend the Committee on the review that you are undertaking on the IOPC. If I may say so, Mr Loughton, in the light of the very points that you have just made, I would urge the Committee to go wider than that, and to look at an all-encompassing Operation Midland inquiry. Primarily, as you highlighted, there are some key questions around accountability, the way warrantry came up and so on. Sir Richard Henriques wrote an open letter to me just a few weeks ago. I intend to reply to Sir Richard’s letter. I would like to meet Richard Henriques myself, primarily to effectively understand the processes, what has happened, and what went wrong.

This is a difficult issue because there is obviously a historical timeline and because of the way evidence was collected. More clearly needs to be done here. I will absolutely follow the inquiry that the Committee is holding, and I would be very happy to come back to the Committee at some stage to talk further about this. My priority right now—obviously, with all respect and sympathy to the victims—will be to follow up with Sir Richard Henriques, not just in responding to him, but in hearing from him as well.

Q162 **Tim Loughton:** Thank you, Home Secretary. So, you share our concern,



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certainly about the way the IOPC has really failed to investigate this properly, and about the fact that no one has been held accountable for Operation Midland itself. Given the enormous impact it has had on the lives of high-profile victims, some of whom are now dead, will you not rest until further investigations have properly taken place to see if there really was corruption at the highest level and whether some people should still be in their positions of authority?

Priti Patel: There are outstanding questions. I think I need to assure myself, but I appreciate the extent of the IOPC's investigations. I think they considered something like 1,800 documents and 300 statements. You will all know the figures and will be familiar with that. While there are questions that still need to be answered—and, as I have said, Richard Henriques has written an open letter to me—I need to not just assure myself. I want to respond to him and I definitely need to ask some further questions in terms of what has happened.

Q163 **Tim Loughton:** Thank you very much. It is helpful that you have offered to come back, or that another Minister will come back, as part of that separate inquiry that we are doing.

Can I go on to the slightly niche subject, which I have raised before, of TOEICs—test of English for international communication—and the scandal that took place? It was really exposed back in 2014, with wide-scale cheating involving various colleges, which have been shut down, and a firm that was clearly bogus in the way it was doing these examinations. A number of people were innocently caught up in this. Many of them have been left absolutely high and dry, with no status in this country at the moment and with no recourse to appeal. Obviously, there were people who were guilty and they have been, quite rightly, dealt with.

One of your predecessors, Sajid Javid, did offer to look at this back in 2019, which came as a great encouragement to the many people who have been caught up in this limbo, because the only recourse that they have at the moment is to go to court but they do not have the money to do that. Will you now, please, have a look at this again and bring it to a resolution, one way or the other, so that we can put these poor people out of their misery, give them some proper status and allow them to get on with their lives?

Priti Patel: Mr Loughton, thank you for this. You and other colleagues have raised this in the past. I know we receive a great deal of communications and correspondence in the Department about this issue. I think you are right to contextualise this issue in the way in which you have. It is yet another one of those legacy issues that we need to look at. I will be very clear about that—we do need to look at this.

I completely recognise and appreciate the strength of feeling that this issue has across colleagues, the cases and the individuals. It is indisputable. There are examples where individuals have won appeals because they may have been innocently caught up in terms of the process. Clearly, there were issues, as you will be familiar with, around



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the margin of error in terms of the actual test itself. There are many others that, simply, and as you have highlighted, can't go to court.

Now, in terms of where we are on this, I do know that there are currently two cases that are due to be heard at the upper-tier tribunal next week, which will go right to the heart of this issue. I am going to await the outcome. The permanent secretary and I will be looking at this, post the outcome. It is a really unsatisfactory situation—there is no doubt about it. The measures that were brought in were clearly brought in by predecessors for a range of reasons, and the scheme itself did not deliver in the way in which it was meant to deliver. Off the back of this, we still have a number of people—too many people; I don't have the figures to hand—who were caught up in this. We need to find a resolution and, actually, to bring not just clarification, but some justice around what has happened.

At some stage—perhaps when I next come back to the Committee—I would be very happy to talk about what we will do as a Department on this, because it is not the case that we can just flick a switch and make an instant change. There are individual cases. Obviously, there is a great deal of process around this. I would like to come back and talk further to the Committee about how we intend to approach this.

Q164 **Tim Loughton:** Thank you. Again, that is helpful and I think will give some hope to people caught in limbo. If there are cases coming to the tribunal next week, perhaps you might write to the Committee at an earlier stage, having reflected on that, to give us some indication of what line of action you are going to follow, rather than for us to wait for you to be next in front of us, or for something substantive to happen for you to make a statement to the House, or whatever. Perhaps an update, and your reaction to that, would be helpful, to give people a route map.

Priti Patel: Of course.

Q165 **Tim Loughton:** Finally, can I turn back to Paul Lincoln, to make sure he gets his bus fare's worth having sat patiently for most of this hearing, and the cross-channel crossings? I want to talk about migrants who do not come through the legitimate routes of airports and ports. Obviously, this is an issue that we have raised with you, Home Secretary, at previous Committee sessions. Although there has been a lull in some of the unlawful migrant crossings recently, it has started again. I gather that the numbers attempting are still very high, but more of them have been thwarted before making it to sea. I hope that is a result of better co-operation between the UK police and the French authorities, but still far too many are coming across, and the season is coming for that to increase.

A lot of people are now also concerned that we have all these strict quarantine arrangements for people coming from red list countries. Surely people who are picked up coming across unlawfully should be subject to such strict quarantine arrangements, at the very least. What's your assessment of where we are? What is being done to ensure that



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there is not the additional pandemic hazard, not least because there are high levels of the pandemic in northern France and the coastal area from where they are coming?

Chair: Sorry to intervene, Home Secretary, but we have Ruth Edwards to follow up with the final questions. Are you all right to continue for three or four minutes after? I know you have a deadline.

Priti Patel: I will answer this one and then we can go to Ruth Edwards. I have a hard deadline, I'm afraid, because I do have another meeting to attend.

Chair: In which case, can I ask you for a very short answer, so that we have time?

Priti Patel: Mr Loughton, I am happy to write with more specifics as well. That would probably be fair. There is a whole programme of work. The top line is in terms of interceptions by the French authorities, because this is a joint operation. They are intercepting 70% more people who are trying to cross.

You also made the point about self-isolation in light of covid. It is absolutely right that everybody who comes to the UK illegally through a channel crossing is put into self-isolation. They are tested once the initial checks have taken place and they are put into self-isolation. But I will do a note and write to the Committee and answer all the specific points Mr Loughton just raised.

Q166 **Ruth Edwards:** Home Secretary, thank you for your time today. I would like to pick up on a number of issues around online harms that we discussed with social media companies when they gave evidence to us a few weeks ago.

The first is the issue of Facebook and the introduction of end-to-end encryption on Facebook Messenger. Facebook admitted to the Committee that they expect the number of reports of child sexual exploitation to go down as a result of implementing this technology. But they were unable to give us any idea of what proportion of reports we would lose from that. I know the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in the US estimates it at roughly 70% of reports. Does the UK Government have a view of how many UK reports will be affected?

Priti Patel: If I may, because of time, I will write to you with specifics in terms of numbers and the work we are undertaking here. I do want to state that this issue is becoming stronger and greater, not just in terms of urgency from a Government perspective but as a serious concern. I have raised the concern since literally the first weekend I hosted the Five Eyes conference, around Facebook's approach to end-to-end encryption, because they are simply not taking seriously the need to deal with the public safety issue. We have got a lot of work taking place on this. Because of time, I will have to come back and put this in writing.

At present, tools to identify child sexual exploitation abuse content are simply not commonly used on end-to-end encrypted channels. We've

already committed to work with Ofcom to analyse different technical options. We've got technical talks and technical discussions taking place right now—with Facebook as well. In fact, just last week our Department had technical discussions with them.

We need to do much more to be able to identify not just images but abuse, in the name of public safety. This is absolutely about public safety and public protection. Of course, the severity of what we are speaking about now—in terms of end-to-end encryption, Facebook, the ability for them almost to turn a blind eye when illegal content is being hosted on their platform—yes, it is shocking, but it is also going to have such a detrimental impact, because it is going to prevent law enforcement from securing access to information that would be part of their investigations.

We do have the online harms framework, which you will be familiar with. If I may, Chair, because of time and in fairness to Ms Edwards's question, I would like to write back and break down the work we have but also some of the estimates that we are pulling together, in terms of potential not just cases but imageries, because it is the imageries and the impact that will have on law enforcement that is going to be so problematic.

Q167 Ruth Edwards: Thank you, Home Secretary. I have one final question. Obviously, we have talked about online harms. Do you think that the scope of the current online harms work should be widened to include financial harms? The reason I ask is that a constituent came to see me last year. He and his wife had lost £30,000 of their retirement savings because they had invested in what was essentially fraudsters posing as a legitimate bank. One of the reasons that he had thought the scheme was legitimate was that the organisation in question was advertised on Google. He thought that if it was advertised on Google—a search engine—it must be a legitimate outfit and they must have checked it out.

Do you think that current requirements for search engines to carry out "know your customer" checks on potential companies that want to advertise are sufficient, and do you think there should be financial liability for them when they do not carry out these checks properly? I understand that this is a huge problem at the moment and not just limited to the experience that I have heard about.

Priti Patel: That is absolutely right, and you are right to ask the question, primarily because—as with the example of your constituent—all sorts of schemes are being advertised on search engines, and that is simply not acceptable.

We are actually doing some work right now through the economic crime board that I chair with the Chancellor—I chaired it just last week. If you speak to many financial regulators and to the financial services sector, they are equally concerned about this. One of the key outcomes that we are now discussing and picking up across Government is: how are we going to make the online harms Bill much stronger, and how are we going to tackle many of these online advertising platforms that come up through search engines, social media and other forms of electronic communications?



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We still have a way to go, but what I can say—and I am very grateful to colleagues in the Treasury on this as well—is that the level of focus and attention to this issue definitely means that it will be given a huge push, a significant push, because, quite frankly, economic crime is now becoming one of the most predominant challenges when it comes to law enforcement but also criminality.

Q168 Chair: I am conscious, Home Secretary, of your time. It would be helpful if we can just put the factual questions that Tim Loughton raised to Paul Lincoln. We understand if you have to go to a security meeting. May I just check whether Committee members have any other questions that they wanted to raise for the Home Secretary to be able to come back to us in writing? Diane Abbott? I think we may have to contact you in writing about that—I think there were a couple of further follow-on questions—but thank you very much for your time, Home Secretary. We appreciate it.

Priti Patel: Thank you, Chair.

Q169 Chair: Mr Lincoln, may I just come back to you on Tim Loughton's questions about the channel crossings situation at the moment?

Paul Lincoln: Yes, certainly. As the Home Secretary set out, we have done a significant amount of work with the French, and the French are now intercepting about 75% of all those who would otherwise come into the UK, which is a significant improvement on where we were this time last year. We are very grateful for the co-operation between our two countries on this matter.

Q170 Tim Loughton: May I follow that up, because what I hear is that the numbers are that much greater? Although they are intercepting 70% to 75% before they get in the water, the numbers that are getting in the water—and if it continues as the weather gets better—will still be quite high compared with last year. Is that true, or are we actually putting more people behind bars, and the ringleaders who are facilitating all this?

Paul Lincoln: There has been a substantial number of investigations carried out on both sides of the channel, and there have been some real successes and prosecutions. I don't have the particular stats in front of me, but hundreds of years' worth of sentences have been provided as a result of the investigations that have been done, including the sharing of intelligence between both sides of the channel on exactly this matter.

On the total numbers, as you say, Mr Loughton, the weather is a part-driver in this, but the total numbers that we are seeing attempting to come over on any given day at the moment is lower than we would have seen during the height of last summer.

Q171 Tim Loughton: On people being returned to EU countries post 31 December—perhaps the permanent secretary wants to come in on this as well—have we seen a dropping off or an increase in the number of returnees? What plans are there, given the new arrangements—or lack of new arrangements—post Brexit, for people to be processed and, if they are found not to have a claim, to be returned to EU countries, if that was

their departure point?

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, we brought in new immigration rules on inadmissibility, depending on the route by which people have come in. Secondly, we are negotiating with France and other EU member states to secure bilateral returns agreements. We will not give a running commentary on those negotiations, but we will keep the Committee updated on their progress.

Q172 **Tim Loughton:** How many returnees have been sent back to EU countries since 1 January?

Matthew Rycroft: I think we might have to write to you with that figure, Mr Loughton.

Q173 **Tim Loughton:** That would be helpful, please, because that is of concern, if the figure is very low, as I suspect. Without giving a running commentary, is there a timeline for when we are likely to hear progress about future arrangements post Brexit?

Matthew Rycroft: Each of the countries is in a slightly different position and they are all going at slightly different paces, but we will certainly update the Committee regularly, if that is helpful.

Q174 **Chair:** That would be very helpful. It would also be helpful to have information on the number not only of returns but of children coming through family reunion. Do you have those figures to hand?

Matthew Rycroft: If we may, we will write with those figures as well.

Chair: It would be helpful to have the number of young children coming through family reunion since 1 January, under the Government's new arrangements. Diane Abbott, did you have a further question?

Q175 **Ms Abbott:** This is for Mr Rycroft and is about the proposed new immigration detention centre for women. People are concerned because the understanding was that the Home Office had an aim to bring down the numbers of women in such detention centres and to look at alternatives to detention. I would be grateful if you write to the Committee to explain why your position to bring down the number of women in the detention centre estate appears to have gone into reverse.

Matthew Rycroft: I will be very happy to do that in detail, but let me assure the Committee now that immigration detention is an important part of the overall approach to tackling illegal migration and to protecting the public. We just need to make sure that we have the right amount of accommodation to do that. Overall, the amount of immigration removal estate is smaller than it was, and of higher quality, but we keep that under constant review, as you would expect.

Paul Lincoln: Sorry, Chair, but may I respond more formally to Mr Loughton on the number of arrests?

Q176 **Chair:** Go on, please.



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Paul Lincoln: There were 465 arrests last year and 161 convictions resulting in a combined sentence of more than 190 years. Obviously, there is a significant number of MCA investigations ongoing as we speak.

Tim Loughton: That is calendar 2020 you are referring to, is it?

Paul Lincoln: Yes, it is, Mr Loughton.

Q177 **Chair:** I have a factual question, going back to the border issues. Have you looked at the option of doing arrival tests at the airport? If so, why was that ruled out?

Paul Lincoln: If you put this into the end-to-end system, some of which the Home Secretary described, the most important part is the self-isolation. On top of that is a layered defence. We require people to do a pre-departure test, which is up to 72 hours beforehand. They also have to complete their passenger locator form. Both of those are checked upstream by the carrier. If anyone does not have a negative test, of course they are not allowed on to the aeroplane for these purposes in the first instance. Then, when they arrive back in the UK, the advice that we have taken on this, including from PHE and others, is that the best time for taking the tests are day 2—which is the one we are doing for genome sequencing, to make sure that we have the best indication of whether or not there are new variants coming into the country as part of that process—and day 8, as I think I mentioned earlier, which is around assurance about the negative outcomes before release.

Q178 **Chair:** That does not pick up people before they get on to public transport. What proportion of the 15,000 people do you estimate go on to public transport after they arrive?

Paul Lincoln: I do not have a figure for that. Of course, the 1% which we have talked about is of those who have arrived indirectly from red list countries and are therefore considered to be the most problematic on the percentage of new strains coming into the country. That is very different from people coming in who have already tested negative before arriving.

The guidance that the Government has put in place on this is that, wherever possible, you should take private transport to go to your place of residence or your place of self-isolation, but it recognises that this will not always be possible. Therefore, if you do take public transport, you must take the same measures as any other member of the public would do. You should be following the same guidance in terms of wearing face coverings on public transport to get home, which of course is a legal requirement in any case.

The one additional advantage of people who are coming back into the country is that they will have had tests before they come in. Of course, that is not the case for many members of the public.

Q179 **Chair:** Sure, but again my understanding of the papers going to SAGE and the evidence they cite is that it is estimated that if the test is done maybe three days beforehand, you are likely to be picking up only 20%



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to 40% of infectious cases. That means there are an awful lot of other infectious cases that you are not picking up through those pre-travel tests. So, I ask you again: have you looked at the option of doing an additional round of testing at the airport before people go on public transport?

Paul Lincoln: The Government has considered a range of different options and they have followed the scientific advice as a guide to the policy taken into place. The SAGE papers on this also say that a layered approach is one of the most effective ways of delivering the outcomes that we are trying to achieve.

Q180 **Chair:** Which is partly why I am asking you about this additional potential layer that you are not currently doing. Has anybody in this process done any estimate of the number of people who are going on to public transport?

Paul Lincoln: I haven't got that estimate for you. I can examine where we have looked at this in the past, and if there is a particular issue I am sure we can write to the Committee.

Q181 **Chair:** It would be really helpful to know if you have got an estimate of the number of people going on to public transport, and also if you have your own current best estimate of the number of people fully complying with the self-isolation measures at home.

Paul Lincoln: We covered that earlier, Chair, so I am sure we can follow up with the figures on that.

Q182 **Chair:** But all we got on that was that 80% of people are in when the police arrive, which is not the same as an estimate of self-isolation compliance. We know there is a problem with self-isolation compliance for domestic cases. The ONS is saying an upper limit of 67%. What we have not got from you is whether there is a Government-wide assessment of what you think compliance is.

Paul Lincoln: I can come back, as we agreed earlier, with what that looks like. The specific figure was 85% when it came to the police, rather than 80%. But, as was said earlier, I am sure we can come back to the Committee on that point.

Chair: That would be really helpful. Thank you very much for your time this morning. We very much appreciate it. We look forward to hearing from you again.