

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes, HC 69

Tuesday 19 May 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 19 May 2026.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Chair); Mr Calvin Bailey; Alex Baker; Lincoln Jopp; Emma Lewell; Mike Martin; Jesse Norman; Ian Roome; Michelle Scrogam; Fred Thomas.

Questions 437-538

Witnesses

I: Luke Pollard MP, Minister of State for Defence Readiness and Industry, Ministry of Defence; Dominic Wilson, Director General Transformation, Ministry of Defence; and Major General Ben Cattermole, Commander Operation LAZURITE and Director Operations Defence Afghan Relocations and Resettlement, Ministry of Defence.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Luke Pollard MP, Dominic Wilson and Major General Ben Cattermole.

Chair: I call to order today's House of Commons Defence Committee evidence session. Before we go into the session, yesterday I learned the very sad news of an outstanding, fearless soldier who died after a fall from a horse at the Royal Windsor horse show. On behalf of the whole House of Commons Defence Committee, I pay tribute to Lance Bombardier Ciara Sullivan and convey our heartfelt condolences to her family and loved ones.

I would now like to move on to today's session, which is on the Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes. It is our final evidence session on this inquiry and I am very pleased to say we have with us the Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry, Luke Pollard MP, Mr Dominic Wilson, Director General Transformation at the Ministry of Defence, and Major General Ben Cattermole, Commander Operation LAZURITE and Director Operations Defence Afghan Relocations and Resettlement.

There are lots of things to cover, Minister and panel; we may well not be able to cover all the things we want to. Minister, could I please get an undertaking from you at the outset to provide any written responses and follow-ups by Thursday 18 June—a month from now? Would that be possible, please?

Luke Pollard: I am very happy to look into that.

Q437 **Chair:** Brilliant, thank you. Given that there is a lot of ground to cover, I request that Members and panellists should be as concise and precise as possible. Please do take that on board.

Without further ado, let us get into questioning. Minister, we first want to set the scene regarding the Government transition. For the record, can you state when you each became aware of the data breach and when you were each read into the super-injunction, starting with the Minister?

Luke Pollard: Thank you for your opening remarks about the soldier we lost recently. That is much appreciated.

It was immediately after becoming a Minister—I think it was 10 July 2024—when the super-injunction was disclosed to me, and I was read in on that injunction. In opposition, it was only the now Defence Secretary who was read in on the super-injunction.

Dominic Wilson: I was read in, to my recollection, in May '24. In April '24, I was contacted by the Cabinet Office, which said that the Cabinet Secretary had a job he wanted me to do but could not tell me what it was until I had accepted, which I did. I was then read in subsequently in May.

Q438 **Lincoln Jopp:** Mr Wilson, when did you first become aware of the data

breach?

Dominic Wilson: When I was read in—in May.

Major General Cattermole: I was read in on 28 May last year, which was about two months before I assumed my current role, so it was part of my handover before I took over. That was after the super-injunction was lifted.

Q439 **Lincoln Jopp:** You did not hear anything about the data breach before you were read in.

Major General Cattermole: No.

Q440 **Chair:** Minister, obviously you were not aware, as you pointed out. Was it only the shadow Defence Secretary at the time, John Healey, who was made aware?

Luke Pollard: That is right. In opposition, as the shadow Armed Forces Minister with responsibility for Afghans, I had raised a number of concerns around data and the handling of the Afghan scheme, but I was not aware of the super-injunction until I became a Minister.

Q441 **Chair:** Did you ever consider, or was it suggested to you when you took office, that the super-injunction could be lifted—and perhaps should have been—in the first few months of the new Parliament? That is what the former Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, indicated that he envisaged would be happening.

Luke Pollard: It is not what he did, though, when he was in charge. Certainly, when we assumed office, having been briefed on the super-injunction and made aware of the other challenges affecting the ARAP scheme, our assessment in opposition was the one that I had immediately after coming into office: that it was a mess that needed to be sorted out. We wanted to establish the facts and get the scheme on a sustainable footing.

It was on that basis that we started looking into not just responding to challenges around resettlement, around assessments and around the backlog, but then, having been read on to the data breach issue, looking at what we could do to assess that. It is certainly true that there were a number of court hearings throughout this period when the super-injunction was in place where the Ministry of Defence had to either ask for its continuation or for its discontinuation.

It was certainly our view immediately on taking office, due to the reasons that it had been put in place—the reasons why the previous Government had applied for an injunction—and the established risk understanding at the time about the risk to people who were on the dataset, that continuing the super-injunction, however unpalatable it was, was the right decision against the risk profile.

However, that invited us and challenged us to then look at the risk assessment that was made by the Department about the individuals who



HOUSE OF COMMONS

were on the dataset. That started the process whereby we stabilised the overall ARAP schemes, brought together the disparate schemes in a single programme—the Afghan resettlement programme—took decisions to the cross-Government HEA committee, so it was a cross-Government response to this, and then looked at how we could, in time, challenge and understand the risk for those individuals who were on the dataset. That is why the Defence Secretary ultimately commissioned the Rimmer review, from the retired senior civil servant Paul Rimmer, which established a different risk appetite for us.

Q442 Chair: At the time of handover, did any Ministers from the previous Government indicate to you that this super-injunction should be lifted as soon as possible? Was that ever indicated to you or to the Defence Secretary?

Luke Pollard: I do not think I have—on taking office, I have had no correspondence that I can recall from Grant Shapps at all, and that is not one that I am aware of.

Chair: Okay. Let's move on then.

Q443 Mike Martin: Minister, did you consider briefing a wider group of parliamentarians—perhaps members of this Committee or members of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy?

Luke Pollard: When we took over and were made aware of the super-injunction, it was our sense that we needed to continue the spirit of the super-injunction due to the risk that, at the time, was applied to the individuals on the dataset. To be honest, it was pretty unpalatable for me as a parliamentarian, especially as someone who had spent the previous two years asking questions of a Government that were not giving me the answers that I think the public, or the Afghans—in particular the Triples, an area that I spent a lot of my time on in opposition—wanted.

It was appropriate, I think, having been confronted with what was an unprecedented super-injunction, that we took the steps to understand it, to stabilise the disparate Afghan resettlement schemes that sat behind the super-injunction, and then to look at the assumptions around risk. That was the basis as to why the previous Government had applied for an injunction in the first place, and that was something that we looked at during that period.

Mike Martin: I'm just asking about your thought process on informing other parliamentarians and this Committee, because you decided not to. Why did you decide not to?

Luke Pollard: The spirit of the super-injunction was that, due to the risk involved, only those individuals necessary for the protective action should be told about it. I was uncomfortable with the super-injunction; I think we all were in the Department—there was no one who was comfortable with this situation—and that led us, in time, to challenge the assessment behind it and then to the desire to lift the super-injunction, which we did.

Q444 **Mike Martin:** Upon taking office, did you read in any Members of the new official Opposition?

Luke Pollard: At the time, the new shadow Defence Secretary, James Cartlidge, was a read-on Minister from the previous Administration, so that effectively mirrored the arrangement under which John Healey had been read on in opposition.

Mike Martin: So no new people?

Luke Pollard: During that period, I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition, inviting her to be read on. As you will recall from the time, it took a wee while to get a response to that, but we read her on ahead of the lifting of the super-injunction. And, just at the point of lifting the super-injunction, as part of a managed briefing of the super-injunction, I was able to brief Members, including the Chair of the Committee.

Q445 **Lincoln Jopp:** When you were read on, presumably you were shown a list of the other people in the compartment so that you knew who you could discuss it with.

Luke Pollard: I was not shown a full list of the people in the compartment, but broadly there was an understanding that this was a tightly held restriction. It was not a departmental compartment, so to speak; it was one required by the courts in terms of the risk of it. We could not acknowledge either that it existed or the contents of it, which is a considerably high bar in terms of protective legal activity. But I was broadly aware of those parliamentarians who had been read on by the previous Government and the team around us.

Q446 **Lincoln Jopp:** When you got read on, was Mr Speaker one of the people who had been read on? You just said you were aware of the other parliamentarians. Was he one that you were aware of?

Luke Pollard: Yes, what I am saying is that the previous Government had read on the Speaker and the Lord Speaker. In the event that a debate happened in the House of Commons, I think the previous Government made the decision, which I think was reasonable at the time, that in order to support the spirit of the super-injunction, there would be a requirement that those chairing the debates would need to be aware of that matter.

Q447 **Mike Martin:** Why did they make the decision that those chairing those debates would need to be read in? Parliamentarians have a right of privilege of free speech, so if I or another parliamentarian were to find out about this and talk about it in the House of Commons, would the Chair have shut me down, or to take it away from me, would the Chair have shut that parliamentarian down?

Luke Pollard: I am not privy to the decisions that the last Government made as to who they chose to read in on this.

Q448 **Mike Martin:** What is your thinking on it though?

Luke Pollard: My sense of this is, having inherited a situation where a number of parliamentarians were read on, that that work had already



HOUSE OF COMMONS

been done. Those people had already been read on. The legal application of the super-injunction had been applied to those individuals, and that was the current sense.

Q449 Mike Martin: Was there a single person who knew the identities of all the people who were in that compartment?

Luke Pollard: I suspect there was someone. That might be a question for Dominic. We would have to have kept a record of all those people who the super-injunction had been applied to, but that was not a long list that I was privy to—and nor was there a necessity for me to be.

Dominic Wilson: A central record was kept within the team in the MOD of individuals that had been signed on, but we did delegate to Departments within that construct the ability to—

Mike Martin: To sub-delegate?

Dominic Wilson: Yes, to read on others. At any given time, I dare say the paperwork coming backwards and forwards was probably not perfect, but yes, there is a central list.

Q450 Emma Lewell: It is coming up to a year since the super-injunction was lifted. In November last year, the MOD, we were told, was conducting an internal review into the super-injunction. Can you give us a progress report on that internal review, please?

Luke Pollard: Again, I will turn to Dominic for the details on that question, but broadly, on the basis of the Rimmer review that assessed a different level of risk, we were able to make a different decision around the risk, which enabled the Defence Secretary and me to agree to lift, or to apply to the court to lift, the super-injunction. Our desire was to place this in the public domain and invite parliamentary scrutiny on it. A key part of that is understanding what lessons can be learned from that. Some of those apply to the Ministry of Defence, and a lessons-learned exercise is being undertaken by the Department currently.

There are also broader lessons that can be learned from across Government. Some of that work is quite rightly being led by the Cabinet Office as the lead body for those areas, but internally we have a lessons-learned exercise that Dominic can update you on.

Q451 Emma Lewell: I was more interested in the MOD lessons learned. What lessons have been learned?

Luke Pollard: I will let Dominic talk about the broader exercise. We have put in place—as this Government rather than the previous Government—improvements to data protection, data handling and record keeping. That includes implementing new IT systems that would make it impossible to send entire datasets out from MOD systems. Previously, records were being kept on Excel spreadsheets, which I think we all recognise is not ideal and carries considerable risk.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I think the context in which I look at that one is in terms of what was happening with Op PITTING at the time. I believe people were acting in good faith to try to do what they could at the time. I think we would not do that again today, but I understand the way the Department responded. Subsequently, we have made improvements to data protection, data control and record keeping. We have also undertaken activities to look at how we can get greater assurance—

Q452 Emma Lewell: Sorry, Minister. I think we are going to get on to the data control issues later. It is more about the super-injunction. What lessons were learned about the application of the super-injunction in the MOD's internal review?

Luke Pollard: That might be one for Dominic.

Dominic Wilson: There are three things worth touching on. The first is the internal MOD review, which is broader than just the super-injunction. That work is ongoing at the moment, and we hope to report later in the year. Obviously, one of the things we would like to do is await your report before we reach any conclusions on that.

Q453 Emma Lewell: Sorry for interrupting, but will that be made public?

Dominic Wilson: We will certainly make the results of it public. On whether the report is published or not, I could not say at this stage, but we will certainly be happy to share the results with the Committee.

First, there is the MOD piece of work, which will touch on the super-injunction, the circumstances around it and the lessons from it. Secondly, there is some work that the Government Legal Department are leading, which is specifically about super-injunctions. As you would expect, they have a particular interest and expertise in that.

Thirdly, the Treasury are doing some work on the specific issue of informing the NAO and the Public Accounts Committee, which is a subset of the question about parliamentary accountability, including for the NAO and the Comptroller and Auditor General, and that work is ongoing. What they are trying to do is think of a convention or mechanism that might apply in future circumstances that are almost unique as these circumstances were.

Q454 Ian Roome: Thousands of Afghans were found eligible under the ARAP scheme, but they have yet to be brought to the UK. For some of them, their relocation has been delayed by administrative failures—most obviously with the Triples—or because priorities shifted after the breach. What is the essence of your message to those people today?

Luke Pollard: My message, very clearly, is that we will honour our obligation in full to eligible Afghans. This country, under both the previous Government and the current Government, has promised that we will honour that obligation. We have relocated 38,000 or so eligible Afghans to date, including key principal individuals and immediate or additional family members. We have roughly 9,000 left to relocate, and our intention is to

conclude all the casework on the backlog of applications by spring next year.

When we closed the schemes, the eligibility rate was less than 5%. It is now less than 1%, so we know that the vast majority of people in the remaining application backlog will probably be found ineligible, based on the trends that we have at the moment. But we will continue to support those individuals who are eligible.

We have set out a timetable for how we will do this, but we will also seek to close the scheme by the end of this Parliament, because the Afghan relocation schemes that the UK has are the most generous in the world. We have a responsibility that I feel very strongly, as someone who was arguing on Afghan resettlement long before I became a Minister, but also as an MP for a constituency where we have a lot of Afghan interpreters and other Afghan communities who served alongside our forces—in many cases losing friends, just as UK forces lost people at the time.

We have an obligation to fulfil in delivering that scheme, but it cannot be an open-ended commitment. That is why the Defence Secretary and I have set the clear instruction that the scheme will be brought to a close by the end of this Parliament. The delivery stages, which I set out in my last written ministerial statement to the House, set out the timetable as to how we will do that. Honouring our commitment to Afghans is important for me personally, and also for the Government.

Q455 Chair: Minister, the Secretary of State is saying that he is going to honour the commitment to bring back the remaining Afghans, but in reality we are actually preventing their means of escape, because we have stopped helping the Afghans by stopping the third-party assistance. Would you say that there is a complete contradiction there?

Luke Pollard: No. What we have seen since the pausing of facilitated departure from Afghanistan, ahead of the lifting of the super-injunction, is a large increase in the number of people who are, in our parlance, self-moving. They are legally relocating themselves from Afghanistan to a third country, and we are providing support to move to the UK from the third country.

We can also see, on the basis of the Rimmer review, that the risks for individuals in Afghanistan have changed, and we can see a model in the ACRS—the Home Office-led scheme—whereby roughly half the individuals eligible for that scheme have self-moved after Op PITTING. It is a self-move scheme that the Home Office runs there, and we can see successful self-moves in action.

Since we have closed the schemes and given an update to the eligible Afghans about self-moves, the majority of those who have corresponded with us—we do not expect everyone to reply to their emails straightaway—have indicated that they will be self-moving, so we believe that we are still able to complete entirely our obligations, but using a different route to deliver against the timetable that was set out.

Q456 **Chair:** Mr Rimmer asked you specifically about the Triples. What would be your message to the Triples who are still stranded?

Luke Pollard: The handling of the Triples is something that I have been incredibly vocal and critical about, including in opposition, and that is why, upon taking office, we continued the Triples review announced to the House by my predecessor, James Heappey. It was reassuring that one reason that that was announced was the pressure that we had applied on the Government when in opposition.

We discovered that, within the Triples review, additional data was discovered, which required us to review some of the decisions that had been made on the Triples, based on the data that we had uncovered during the Triples review work. That is why I announced the start of phase 2 of the Triples review. All that work is now concluded. Roughly half of those who have self-moved recently are Triples, so Triples have been self-moving already, prior to the self-move announcement that we made.

Q457 **Lincoln Jopp:** Now that the review has concluded, part of the root cause of the problems there seems to be a failure to verify Triples' identities. What lessons have we learned from that, what have you put in place in terms of process and lessons identified, and who is responsible for ensuring that we do not repeat something like that again, perhaps when more Triples come forward?

Luke Pollard: I will turn to Dominic to give some of the detailed recommendations, but broadly it was apparent for those who were following the Triples over a number of years—before the Triples review started—that the data required to demonstrate that the Triples had indeed worked alongside UK forces in Afghanistan was not being correctly assessed as part of any application process. That is one of the reasons why I was so vocal about this in opposition—as indeed were Members from across the House. It is very clear to me that the way in which the different bits of the Ministry of Defence were handling data and, in particular, keeping records was not consistent or joined up, and did not deliver the assured process that was, I think, necessary to make a decision as important as assessing someone's eligibility. For that reason, the Triples review has exposed those processes and reviewed the cases of the individuals.

At the same time, we have applied new data protection and record-keeping checks, and when new data has been made available, we have been reassessing it. That is what phase 2 of the Triples review was largely about: the data that had been discovered in the first phase, which necessitated a revision, or to look again at some of the Triples decisions that had been made. If I was taking a broadbrush approach to this, it is about record keeping, data integrity and the consistency of decisions. I would not create a system like the one we inherited. I do not believe that the decisions that were taken and the systems that were created were created through malice or malign intent.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Initially, especially after Op PITTING, they were created by people trying their best in difficult circumstances to remove people from Afghanistan quickly, but that did not lead to the consistent record keeping that was required. To be fair to them, there was no expectation that that would be a requirement for employment records during the 20 years that we were in Afghanistan. In hindsight, there are ways that we could improve that; certainly, the data systems that we have now implemented will address both improvements in record keeping and improvements in how we manage and handle data, which is an important part of it. Dominic, do you want to add anything?

Dominic Wilson: I don't think there is a lot to add, really—that was very comprehensive. Essentially, this was not something that we ever imagined we were going to do, so it was started from scratch. That reflects some of the imperfections that we have learned about along the way. In the definition of the original policy and the record keeping, in the processes that are applied to decision making—all those things are so much better now. We will definitely learn those lessons.

Q458 **Lincoln Jopp:** To follow that down to the nth degree, have the Joint Forces Command or the services been given specific new operating procedures, so that when they conduct expeditionary operations, they have it set out: "This is how we want you to disburse money, work alongside indigenous sources and employ civilians locally"?

Dominic Wilson: I don't know the answer to that question. Ben, do you?

Major General Cattermole: I can't answer.

Lincoln Jopp: Otherwise, you have learned the lessons at the policy level, but unless the troops have been told to do something different from what they did last time, you are just going to repeat it.

Luke Pollard: My sense is that we have, yes. However, to answer your question fully and give you confidence on that, I will write to the Committee with the details, as per the Chair's instruction earlier. We are not anticipating having operations in the same way as we have had in Afghanistan. However, we do work with partner forces in a number of missions around the world. I think it is important that each of those missions is dealt with separately, and that there is not an expectation created, either by the generosity of the Afghan relocation scheme or by applying what happened in Afghanistan to any other theatre, that those people who work with UK forces are automatically eligible for certain types of activity.

Q459 **Lincoln Jopp:** No, indeed, but it is just about record keeping.

Luke Pollard: Certainly, record keeping has improved considerably across defence in recent years. However, on the specific details, I am happy to write to the Committee.

Q460 **Fred Thomas:** Minister, we know, because the MOD had to reveal documents in a judicial review in May 2025, that the MOD conducted at



HOUSE OF COMMONS

least two internal investigations into the process by which UK special forces officers or liaison officers were involved in approving or turning down applications from people who said that they were Triples and served with UK forces. The BBC has reported that in 2023, there was a period of maybe a few weeks, or potentially a couple of months, when a particular UK special forces officer or liaison officer rejected around 2,000 applications—the BBC reports 1,585, but I have seen it reported differently elsewhere—and approved zero applications. As part of the Triples review, do you have data on how many of the applications that that individual rejected in a blanket way have subsequently turned out to be valid applications from valid Triples? Can you give us your view of whether that was a negligent, unfortunate or deliberate practice?

Luke Pollard: It is hard for me to comment on the actions of a particular individual, because I will not be able to talk about individuals and anything around special forces; the Committee will know that that is difficult for me as a Minister.

Broadly, the Triples review was necessary, and it identified that decisions had been taken that removed or did not grant eligibility when they should have done. Much of the reason for that is the lack of information connecting the decisions and the records of employment or top-up pay with individual cases. That is why it was right to go over all those decisions again through the Triples review—both phase 1 and phase 2.

The lessons that I draw from all this are that, regardless of the unit that was involved—I am speaking generically across all our Armed Forces when I say this—the level of record keeping was insufficient, and the intention to keep those records was not designed for this purpose. Certainly, in the operational space, as a Minister who signs off eligibility decisions, ultimately, there is a variety of—

Q461 **Fred Thomas:** I am sorry, but on the record keeping, it is clear from the court documents revealed a year ago that, very quickly upon investigation of those applications that were turned down, many of them—I have asked you how many, but we know it is many of them—were found to be valid applications, so I challenge the idea that this is all about record keeping. Quite clearly, over a period of weeks, one individual rapidly turned down thousands of applications, many of which—I don't know how many—were found subsequently, immediately upon investigation, to be valid. It is not really a question of record keeping.

I am asking you for your take. Clearly, you were in opposition at the time, but you have inherited this and you have been read on. What is your sense? Was this one person who was really bad at their job and doing a really bad, potentially lazy job, or were they doing what they were told, which was potentially to turn down all applications from Triples? The BBC included in its reporting the idea that that would be to protect UK service members who served with these folks who were applying to come to the UK so that they would not be able to give evidence to an inquiry into alleged wrongdoing by UK forces.

Luke Pollard: I think you are referring to the TPL1 judgment, which found that it is clear that there was no evidence of bias or hidden motives on the part of the UKSF liaison officer in that respect.

Q462 **Fred Thomas:** Do you agree with that?

Luke Pollard: My assessment, broadly—without talking about individuals, because it is difficult for me to do so—is that I do not blame individual actions; I blame a system that was not set up to deliver the intended outcomes and was not comprehensive enough to access all the evidence and data that Defence held across our different systems, which may include systems held by the units that you are talking about. I blame it more on a system failure that we are getting after than on individuals, and that is what the TPL1 judgment also found.

Q463 **Fred Thomas:** So that individual did not do anything wrong; it is the system's fault.

Luke Pollard: As I said, I will not be able to talk about individual judgments, but the Defence Secretary set it out in a statement to Parliament, when he talked about not the actions of individuals, but a system that was not delivering.

Q464 **Fred Thomas:** When you say "the system", do you specifically mean the fact that UK special forces had a veto right over applications?

Luke Pollard: I don't believe that was necessarily the case. What I do think is that the whole system was not set up to deliver the correct eligibility decisions. That is because the eligibility decisions were not able to access the correct information required for doing so. We know that from the Triples review, because during the review we discovered additional information that had not been taken into account during the early stages—not just phase 1 of the review, but the original decisions. In theory, a system that is working effectively should not require a review to be set up, and should not require it to be further enhanced with a second phase when additional information is discovered as part of that work. That is why I blame it on the system.

Q465 **Fred Thomas:** I thought the MOD had now accepted on record that UKSF did have veto rights over applications, but you are saying that maybe they didn't.

Luke Pollard: It is hard for me to talk about SF, as the Committee will know. I am happy to clarify elements around that with the Committee privately, if that would be helpful.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q466 **Alex Baker:** Minister, I know you have said that you cannot really talk about SF, but we as a Committee want to ask you some questions in this space. It has been widely reported that individuals from the special forces were responsible for both the data breach and the flawed verifications process. As you said, there was no evidence of bias or hidden motives in the TPL1 piece. It did, however, find that "slack and unprofessional

verification processes" were practised by UK special forces. Do you think that lessons have been learned at both a local level and a Defence-wide level, and what assurances have you sought that those local lessons have been effectively implemented?

Luke Pollard: We are not aware of any veto that the special forces had in relation to that particular process, but as I said in response to the previous question, the process that was being followed in the original assessment of the Triples, but more broadly around ARAP applications, was not able to access all the available data. I do not think that it was as consistent as it needed to have been. These are the changes that we have made to the ARAP process more broadly since taking office.

I am certainly very critical of the process that we inherited. I do not think there was sufficient grip over the broad range of Afghan relocation schemes, and there was not really a clear strategic direction as to what would happen with them. It has been our intention as a Government to close those schemes by the end of the Parliament. We did not inherit from the previous Government a similar type of objective, and with that objective comes the necessity to ensure that the decisions are being taken correctly and that the process is working through the applications.

Also, we inherited a situation where applications were open for the ARAP scheme, and we know that people were continuing to make applications during this period. But we also know from the processing of those applications that the eligibility rate was incredibly low. Choosing to close the schemes, to reassess them and to put them all on a sustainable footing were decisions that we took as a Government, having inherited a set of circumstances that I do not think were acceptable for the Ministry of Defence to be running. Partly because of my personal experience with the Triples, I could see that the schemes were failing individuals, and we needed to be able to give them a firm answer.

When it comes to the Triples and Afghans, they are not just numbers on a spreadsheet; they are people—especially those who have been granted eligibility—who served alongside our forces, who took risks alongside our forces, and whom we owe an obligation to. From representing a military community, I know that the Royal Marines and the Army, and the other forces that served alongside them, feel a personal commitment around this, and we need to get that right. On taking office, my sense was that the system was not right, which is why we put in measures to improve it and to learn the lessons from the clear failures that had taken place, including the data breach.

Q467 **Mike Martin:** I understand UK Government policy on not commenting on special forces operations or the special forces more generally, but there is a problem with using that as a defence if it is shown that UK special forces committed war crimes in Afghanistan. This particular individual, who is a UKSF officer who served in Afghanistan, rejected all these applications, and the MOD admitted to the High Court that he is potentially involved in all that mess. There is a bit of a problem if you are defending him—I am assuming it is a man—and protecting his identity. Does that not make you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

complicit in the cover-up of war crimes?

Luke Pollard: There is a proper investigation into those allegations, and the review is taking place at the High Court level. It is right for me to allow that to continue without commenting on what evidence may be presented. I am not able to second-guess anything that goes into it—nor do I want to. I am not using that as a defence in the way that you put it; I am saying that the actions of individuals were part of a system that was not performing. I have been through the reasons why I felt it was not performing in data management, record keeping and correct decisions. I have also set out how we have taken steps to address that. The issues raised there are very serious, and it is absolutely right that they are looked at. There is an appropriate way for that to happen, and it is right that they are looked at as part of that broader effort, not here.

The effort here, when it comes to looking at the applications, is: were those decisions made correctly? It was my assessment, on the Triples in particular, that they were not, which is why I called for those reviews originally while in opposition, and why we have extended the Triples review in government, to ensure that I could be satisfied that the correct decisions had been taken.

Q468 Mike Martin: On that point, because you gave a very full answer earlier, if this officer who rejected all those Triples applications is shown to have acted deliberately, as a mechanism of covering up war crimes through the Afghan special forces inquiry, what should happen to him?

Luke Pollard: I am not able to get ahead of any decisions that are taken. It is probably not right for me to comment on hypotheticals, as the Committee will appreciate. From what we have seen with the decisions taken here, I am not aware that there was any intent, malice or malign activity behind them. I can certainly see a system that was not working. That means it was not just down to an individual's actions. I can see a system that was not producing the quality of results that we would want. I would be cautious about conflating those two issues before any reports have been made.

Chair: There are a couple of very quick supplementaries, because we are running out of time on this. I do not want to get bogged down just on the Triples and the special forces.

Q469 Mr Bailey: This is not to do with the Triples at all. I want to take you back to lessons learned, because we are going to move on to what was done. You were asked why this came about and gave a representation on that, but it does not align with what the previous PUS said when he was in front of us.

It is obvious that the first reason this came about was that an organisation was willing to accept tasks it was not resourced for. That is why people within the organisation were placed in a situation where they did not have the kit, equipment, knowledge or training to do what they were being asked to do. The second is that, in terms of advice, there was a culture of giving "yes, but" answers when they should have been "no".



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The third reason, and I am hearing it in the language now, is about what the DGT, Dominic, said: "This was not something that we imagined we were going to do." It leaves me wondering about the real big lessons: your organisation's ability to manage and conceive of highly catastrophic events in a reasonable manner. I would like your view on that, because we had a clear response from the PUS that that was the case.

Luke Pollard: I am certainly not accountable for, or able to comment on, the decisions relating to the initial data breach, because that happened under the last Government. I am responsible for how we responded to it from July 2024 onwards.

In doing so, from July 2024, we took a steady set of measures: stabilising the schemes, which was right approach; assessing the risk via the Rimmer review, which was also right; and then taking the prudent steps to declare the super-injunction and shut down the schemes over the course of this Parliament. That is the area I am responsible for as the Minister since 2024.

If I were to look back at the decisions taken by the previous Government and the initial responses to what they were tasked to do around Op PITTING and subsequently, it is certainly true that Dominic is correct—people were not expecting it to be at this scale of commitment.

Q470 **Mr Bailey:** And that is entirely the point. If we are to learn lessons from this, we should be hearing from you all that you have taken the measures and steps to reappraise how you manage risk. When there are things you do not conceive of—we will come to programme controls later—culture eats those things for breakfast. If the culture is that you will always say "yes, but", you will invite these things upon yourselves. How can we be comfortable that you are managing catastrophic risks well enough at the moment?

Luke Pollard: I am happy for Dominic to come in on how we manage risk. The distinction that I would make, as the Minister responsible for it since July '24, is different from the accountability of the Ministers and officials who were in charge of the scheme at the point of Op PITTING, the initial data breach, and the setting up of ARAP and the predecessor schemes. If I was to take a view as someone who was scrutinising elements of this in opposition, how the ex gratia schemes—the original schemes—morphed into ARAP certainly put more obligations on the Ministry of Defence during this period. I do not think the Ministry of Defence had a history of running an immigration scheme in that way, separated from where the Home Office was. But I also saw the Government system that we inherited in 2024, in which the Departments were very different in their approaches to this. We aligned those together in a single scheme to have a cross-Government effort.

It is appropriate for you to challenge me on what lessons we have learned since July '24, and I can demonstrate that we have process improvements, data-handling improvements and cross-Government improvements in how we have addressed this. The lessons-learned exercise that we are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

undertaking as a Department at the moment deals with precisely some of the questions that you have just asked, and it is right for us to deal with the big picture as well as the actions that we have taken as a Government since July '24. But am I happy with the super-injunction being put in place? Absolutely not. Am I happy that we took steps prudently and carefully to lift it? Yes, I am.

Q471 Fred Thomas: Minister, since you assumed office in July 2024, the Government line has changed several times on the situation regarding the Triples. We have had a correction to a PQ that the MOD acknowledged was wrong, and the High Court has acknowledged that UKSF did have veto rights over applications. The current Government line, as you have said, is that when there was a blanket rejection of applications—a period during which no Triples were approved by UKSF; it was subsequently found that many of them should have been approved—that was just the system, as you said. The Government line has changed. If the Government line changes again to acknowledge that it was potentially deliberate, would you condemn that? I will give you a chance to put that on the record now. Would you say that that was wrong, if that is what happened?

Luke Pollard: I am not going to comment on hypotheticals, and you would not expect me to do such a thing. I have seen no evidence to suggest that that is the case. If evidence subsequently emerges, of course we will look at it, but I cannot see that evidence from where I sit today. I can see evidence of a system that is not working. If there is evidence that you or others want to present, that is a different matter, but I cannot see that currently. That is not what the evidence that we can see today shows, and what you can see from this Government is that we have been at pains to be transparent about what has happened, both in terms of the Triples and in terms of our move to assess the super-injunction and then remove it. We have also been transparent in terms of our objective of closing the scheme. I think that is in marked contrast with the previous Government's approach, and it reflects a more joined-up and serious strategic approach from this Government than what I saw when I was scrutinising this in opposition.

Q472 Lincoln Jopp: Minister, you have just said in your evidence to us that you are not able to comment on the circumstances around the original data breach—you have said that in the last five minutes. But according to your written evidence, the main data breach took place despite "officials...following agreed processes". Do you still stand by that statement, or are you now saying that you are not able to comment on the original data breach?

Luke Pollard: I was not the Minister at the time.

Lincoln Jopp: No, clearly.

Luke Pollard: If it happened today and I was the Minister responsible, that would be a different thing, because I would have been in the room when those decisions were being taken. I am better able to comment on something that is happening today, rather than on something that happened when I was not the Minister and was not privy to the actions at

the time. That is why I am not able to comment in the detail that I think the Committee is looking for.

Q473 Lincoln Jopp: But you have said in your written evidence that the data breach took place despite “officials...following agreed processes”. Do you stand by that statement?

Luke Pollard: The written evidence is the Government’s position on this.

Q474 Lincoln Jopp: Okay. We now have a bit of a problem, because, as you know, the main data breach was not the first; there was a prior data breach. It was brought to the Secretary of State for Defence’s attention, and he put in place additional protocols that were to be enacted. Specifically, all data was meant to be checked by two superiors before being released externally. That is what Ben Wallace said when he came in front of us. He said, “I gave a new instruction to the Department—they’s the rules.” That clearly did not happen, so your statement that the data breach took place despite officials following agreed processes cannot be true, because it would mean that the main data breach had two superiors both saying, “Yes, you can send that out.” Where does the truth lie? What happened to Sir Ben Wallace’s instruction to the Department? Did they just say, “Yes, Minister, very fascinating. We’ll just keep on doing what we do,” and then the data breach took place, or did they listen to their Secretary of State, put in place those protocols and then it happened despite officials following agreed processes, which is what you are saying? Where are we meant to find the truth in all this?

Luke Pollard: It seems a fair challenge. I do not know precisely what happened under the last Government, because I was not a Minister at the time, so I will probably invite Dominic to comment on the detail of some of the instructions and the processes—

Q475 Lincoln Jopp: You felt sufficiently empowered to say in your written evidence that the breach took place despite “officials...following agreed processes”.

Dominic Wilson: I think what that formulation is designed to get at is that the sending of details outside the Department was the established process at the time, so that particular aspect was not a systems failure as such. Even if there had been a second check as per the revised process that you just set out, because the database was hidden, that second check would not have discovered it. I think that you can definitely pick at some of the wording, but that is the spirit of what we were trying to say in that memorandum.

Q476 Lincoln Jopp: Sir Ben Wallace’s view was that a certain amount of consent and evade might have gone on, and he said to us that someone clearly “did not do their job” because he had put these new protocols in place. You just said that even if they were followed, they would not have found it. Were they followed or not?

Dominic Wilson: I was not around at the time. I do not know whether they were followed, but even if a second check had been made, it would not have discovered the hidden—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q477 **Lincoln Jopp:** It depends how competent the checker was, what they were looking for and how they were doing it.

Dominic Wilson: My understanding of the incident—as I said, I was not there at the time—is that that is pretty unlikely because it was sort of buried. You would not go looking for it, because you would not expect it to be there—even if you were the second person.

Q478 **Lincoln Jopp:** Okay. Let us take that to its logical conclusion. Have you, either technically or in human processes, put in place a methodology whereby whatever checks you were to do today would be discovered and not released?

Dominic Wilson: What we would do today is not send data out in that way. The advantage of having the database system that we now have, which we did not have at the time of the incident, is that you manage access to data in a very different way. As I think David and Paul probably said, steps were in hand, as I understand it, to introduce that kind of system; it had just not quite got there. Those kinds of protocols just would not happen. You would not be able to attach a database of the size in this case because—

Q479 **Lincoln Jopp:** Do you now have a process and systems in place so that every person sending out data to third parties knows exactly what they are sending out?

Dominic Wilson: Yes.

Q480 **Mike Martin:** General Ben, it is good to see you again. Thank you for coming. How long have you been in post?

Major General Cattermole: Since July last year.

Q481 **Mike Martin:** We have had the McIvor review, and DARR has done its own internal lessons-learned process around data protection. Can you talk me through in detail, so we have it on the record, what changes you have made to the data protection process over the last 12 months?

Major General Cattermole: Over the past 12 months, in terms of data protection, to be honest most of the improvements had been made before I arrived: as Dominic mentioned, the DAIC system; or a piece of software, Egress, which allows the transfer of personally sensitive data between Government Departments and with other organisations like IOM3, local authorities and so on. Those had all been put in place before I came.

Q482 **Mr Bailey:** Sorry to head back to the line of questioning we started earlier. Mr Wilson, the changes to the core elements of the management of the programme took some time to bring about. Can you talk to us about those elements that were highlighted in the NAO report in March 2026? It identified that there was no programme plan and that KPIs were not in place, among other things.

Dominic Wilson: Sure. Would it be helpful if I reflected briefly on what happened when I arrived, what it looked like and what happened next?

Mr Bailey: Sure.

Dominic Wilson: I arrived in May 2024 as the new cross-Government SRO—the first cross-Government SRO. I think it was fair to say that the system was still shellshocked by what had happened with the data breach, even though it had been discovered the previous August. The team were under an enormous amount of pressure, an enormous amount of stress, and they genuinely felt that something very badly wrong had happened here. They had an assessment that said that the consequences of what had gone wrong were awful. That was the first thing.

The second thing was that we were, as a result, managing the problem as a crisis. It still felt like we were in crisis management mode. As you will know from your previous service, if it is six months after the event and it still feels like it is a crisis, you probably have not settled the system down a bit. The task that I felt that I faced was, first, to settle that down and, secondly, to make sure that if the knowledge of the breach became public—“break glass”, as it became known—we had the right systems in place to respond effectively. A lot of good work had happened on that, but there was still quite a bit to do.

You might recall that we also had a programme that at that point was largely based on the Defence estate. The MOD had leaned into the problem in the previous autumn. Op LAZURITE machinery had been set up, so that this felt like a Defence-owned issue, and yet we had a potential problem, in that it was not realistically going to be able to be delivered by the MOD estate, so that needed reshaping.

The first task was to calm everyone, the second was to be ready to respond to contingencies when—if—they arise, and the third was to make it feel a little more cross-Government. There are softer ways of doing that than hard programme management. The fourth thing to do was make the current plan work in practice.

As you will probably have observed in other Committee sessions, there is a habit in Government sometimes: once you have a strategy, you have a plan, but then, rather than implement the plan, you decide that you might revisit the strategy. I was keen that we just made sure that eligibility was being done properly, that we were getting letters out to people and that we were starting to get into the cohort. To be honest, the programme management niceties of that were not the top of my list, and I do not think that they should have been.

As part of that, of course, in the meantime, we did not really have a sustainable plan for how we would cope with all those people, because it certainly was not going to be done through the Defence estate. By the autumn, at the time when the HEA were meeting in October, we had a much better sense of a plan. We had the new Government’s agreement on what the ARP should consist of and what it should look like. At that point, we started to put the programmatics in place. We then started to have a much more cross-Government effort. Although I was the SRO, at the time there were—and there still are—three core strands to the programme.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There is eligibility, led by the Ministry of Defence; relocation, led by a combination of the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office; and there is resettlement, which is very clearly led by a programme director in the Home Office and MHCLG.

We started to put that machinery—that architecture—in place, but it is only recently that we have been able to really start to put the programmatics into it. That means ensuring that we have the right management information, the right data and the right set of milestones. As I say, earlier in that period we were just trying to make the thing work rather than trying to make it organised. Sorry, that is a long-winded answer.

Q483 Mr Bailey: That is fine; it is useful colour. Can you confirm that all the appropriate arrangements, as identified by the NAO, have now been put in place?

Dominic Wilson: Yes. They are not perfect—I would still like some of the machinery to be better—but they are certainly much better than they were. At the time of the NAO report, which I seem to remember was autumn of last year, my sense was that we were still red or amber/red. We are now significantly better on the programmatics than that.

Q484 Mr Bailey: Where are we on that RAG rating?

Dominic Wilson: I would say that we are now at amber. That reflects as much the challenge that the programme faces as the machinery around it. This is not straightforward.

Q485 Mr Bailey: Can you explain what amber means in terms of the programme?

Dominic Wilson: It means that there are some weaknesses in delivery. The most obvious one is the unreliability of the pipeline, which comes and goes. The second is the availability of settled accommodation and our ability to meet the assumptions underpinning the programme—you may want to come on to this later—about how much accommodation is provided through Government and local authority sources and how much is provided by individuals finding their own. Those kinds of targets that we have set ourselves are really challenging to deliver.

Q486 Mr Bailey: How long has the programme been amber for and when will it go green?

Dominic Wilson: I think it has probably been amber since the beginning of the year. If I am being honest, the nature of it means that I do not know whether it will ever be entirely green.

Q487 Mr Bailey: That means that the amber rating is an irrelevant rating. Who has the controls to be able to turn it green? If the situation you are in is that the programme is inherently flawed, is that something that you have passed up?

Dominic Wilson: It is not inherently flawed.

Q488 **Mr Bailey:** You cannot turn it green.

Dominic Wilson: It contains some inherent challenges. To be honest, not all of those are entirely under our control, given the nature of some of the overseas aspects of it and the fact that we are dealing with human beings who will make their own choices in many cases.

Q489 **Mr Bailey:** Do you accept that this is largely a problem with the programmes that we are presented by the Department? We see ambers existing for decades and receive meaningless reports about how those programmes are being managed with the knowledge that they can never be turned green. That is largely a pointless rating.

Dominic Wilson: If the question is whether I think that the fundamental strategic objectives in the programme will be achieved, which are to complete it in this Parliament with a number of milestones on the way in terms of when casework is done and when movements are done, then yes, I do think that.

Q490 **Mr Bailey:** So it is green?

Dominic Wilson: Do I think we will achieve that in every aspect, including meeting the sub-targets below it? Do I think we will live up to our aspiration of families finding their own accommodation rather than relying on local authorities? No, I think we will probably not make it in every aspect. But fundamentally, I think we will deliver in terms of the ultimate milestone.

Q491 **Chair:** I have a quick question for you on this, Minister, in terms of everything being green in future. The Defence Committee recently visited a hotel housing resettled Afghans. The Government has announced its plan and programme to close down migrant hotels. Do you have a similar plan to close down hotels housing Afghans?

Luke Pollard: Yes, broadly. Since we made the decision around the pipeline, we have been able to close two hotels we were using for Afghan transitional accommodation: one in Scotland, and one in south Wales, which I believe closed only a few days ago. We have also been able to exit transitional accommodation from the Defence estate, which was an important milestone that we achieved last year. All this is part of the clear objective to close down the programme.

As we have moved to self-moves, we will need to manage the relocation of individuals to the United Kingdom. With our colleagues in MHCLG and across local authorities, we have pioneered the dispersed accommodation model, which is producing not only better, more cost-effective results but results delivered in greater partnership. That is producing a better outcome for the programme than having Afghan transitional accommodation in hotels. Our clear intention is to end the use of hotels for all of this as we seek to close down the scheme.

Q492 **Chair:** By any particular date? Can you give us a date?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Luke Pollard: We have closed two and we have only a very small number left. We intend to exit out of all hotels as part of the close-down programme before the end of this Parliament.

Q493 **Emma Lewell:** Although I understand that ARAP and ACRS were only meant to be time-limited schemes, why did you choose to close them to new applicants before the super-injunction was lifted?

Luke Pollard: There are a number of reasons for that. First, it reflects the objective to complete the programme by the end of the Parliament. We had to close them at some point during that period if we wanted to achieve that. Working back from the end of the Parliament, when you have relocations and the caseworking period, including the period for appeals, that broadly took us to the period when we closed them.

Also, we know from the data that, based on the numbers that we are seeing, very few applications still in our application pipeline will be found to be eligible. Certainly, the strongest cases were dealt with in the initial round of applications, and we are now seeing ones that are not eligible, so we could have confidence that we could close those schemes.

Anecdotally, it has been important to me personally that where we can report to Parliament, we should. That partly reflects the concerns around the super-injunction. Where we have seen reports to Parliament, such as in the early days of Government when I made an oral statement, we have seen a spike in applications afterwards, but we know that that spike will probably be people who will ultimately be found to be ineligible in this period.

Taken together with the assessment of risk in the Rimmer review, the pipeline and the intent to close them down, it was right that we took steps to close down the schemes. We closed ARAP and ACRS on 1 July last year, and it was agreed that the ARR scheme would be closed on 4 July, ahead of the "break glass" moment the week later.

Q494 **Emma Lewell:** The original ARR policy was for the route to remain open for six months after "break glass", but it was closed immediately after the super-injunction was lifted. Was that decision based purely on the Rimmer review?

Luke Pollard: The decision was taken by the Secretary of State to close the schemes with immediate notice, based on the information we had available to us at the time, which would have been informed by the Rimmer review. The review not only looked at the implications for the individuals on the dataset but gave an assessment of risk in Afghanistan for those individuals who were broadly affected and were covered by the ARAP scheme. That enables us to take decisions.

Q495 **Emma Lewell:** Sorry, Minister, can I just come on to that risk? We have heard evidence that the Rimmer review underestimated the danger to Afghans in that it did not take into account the extent of extrajudicial killings or reprisals. Do you think the Rimmer review was robust enough to rely on in deciding to close down the ARR immediately?



Luke Pollard: I do think it is a robust review. Afghanistan remains a difficult place because of the policies that the Taliban are pursuing. The key question from the Rimmer review was: does being on the dataset present additional risks above and beyond those that already exist in Afghanistan today? The Rimmer review concluded that it does not, which helped to inform the Secretary of State's decision about applying to the courts to not renew the super-injunction, and the decisions we took on closing schemes, including the ARR.

Q496 **Emma Lewell:** Minister, you said that the Rimmer review helped to inform. What else helped to inform? If it was not based purely on the Rimmer review, what else was the Secretary of State's decision based on?

Luke Pollard: The Rimmer review is by far one of the key elements, because we needed to understand the risk nature.

Q497 **Emma Lewell:** What were the other elements, though? You keep saying it was partly the Rimmer review, so what else was it?

Luke Pollard: As I set out previously, we have an ambition to look at how we address all the schemes, including where we are on what honouring the obligation fully means, but the Rimmer review was absolutely essential and vital. It was the main piece of evidence that we were able to use to assess whether there was an increased risk of being on the dataset for those individuals in Afghanistan. The Rimmer review concluded that there was not an increased risk, which enabled us to make the decisions that were put in place.

The Rimmer review could have concluded something else. If it had concluded something else, that would have been part of our response to it. It did not, so based on the Rimmer review and other factors, of which the Rimmer review is by far the most important, we were able to make the decision to close those schemes.

We could also assess what the data was showing us on the eligibility decisions that we were assessing. The eligibility decisions were clearly showing a very, very small number of people being found eligible against the applications that we had in our pipeline at that point. The data from that, in addition to the Rimmer review, helped to inform the Secretary of State's decision to bring the schemes to a close.

Q498 **Ian Roome:** Minister, we have heard some pretty damning evidence from some witnesses who gave testimony earlier in our inquiry. One of them suggested that when the super-injunction was lifted, they had no communication at all. In fact, person A, who gave evidence to the Committee, said that their mobile phone had 5,000 WhatsApp messages because Afghans were in sheer panic about what was happening. We heard from a journalist who told us that they were receiving messages from those in Afghanistan asking, "Are we now more at risk?", and, "Are we going to be rescued?" He said, "There was absolutely no information coming to them from the areas they thought it should be coming from." In terms of the impact on potentially affected Afghans, what objectives did you set for communications when the injunction was lifted and what did



you learn from how those communications landed?

Luke Pollard: I will let Dominic talk about the full details, but our main objective in a planned lifting of the super-injunction—distinct from the “break glass” moment that Dominic spoke about earlier, where we would not be in control—was to be transparent about what had happened, to be clear with the affected individuals on the dataset so they could be informed about their inclusion on it and be given protective advice, and to be able to present that clearly to them.

In order to do that, we established a digital presence with a self-checker so that people could see their ARAP or other Afghan relocation reference numbers—because it was not just the ARAP scheme but a number of other schemes affected by the data release in 2022—and whether they were affected. If they were affected, they were moved to a webpage where they were given protective advice. Emails were sent to the email addresses on the dataset that we had for the individuals who were involved.

We also established an information services centre—a call centre, as such—for people to be able to phone and get information, although we gave sufficient caveats that it is not always recommended for people in certain locations to access +44 numbers, for instance. We translated that information into the relevant local languages for the cohorts we were dealing with, and we monitored the response from the channels that we had set out. The Defence Secretary and I felt very strongly that we needed to have the ability for people to call. We did not get many calls, I think it is fair to say.

Q499 **Ian Roome:** Taking you back, Minister, many Afghans complained about the self-checker. Apparently, they were complaining that it gave over-generalised statements; it did not give them any detail. That just added to the panic and concern that they had, because the self-checker was too generalised. What do you say to that?

Luke Pollard: I think that implementing the self-checker was an important moment, where individuals—including those people on the dataset and those who were part of the Afghan relocation scheme but were not on the dataset—were able to get reassurance: were they affected or were they not? That was the purpose of the self-checker. It was also one of a number of measures that we put in place to inform individuals who might have been on the dataset whether they were on there or not.

The correspondence that we sent was a key part of that. The self-checker enabled people to get assurance on it. Certainly, as a constituency MP, I know of a number of people who checked to see whether they were on there, and they were not. That reassurance that they were not on the dataset was also important for that wider Afghan cohort.

But the purpose of the self-checker was to say, “Were you affected or not?” It was not to provide additional information beyond the question of, “How much information would be exposed?” That was part of saying, “Are you affected?”, so we could provide the correct protective advice and

inform people of what had happened. We were then able to do that—which we weren't previously because of the presence of the super-injunction.

Dominic Wilson: I am not sure of the specific complaints, really, because, as the Minister says, the system was there so individuals could be notified, and notified in as secure a way as possible. We did that in advance of the injunction being lifted, using techniques that meant that it was reasonably secure. As the Minister said, that included some broad security advice, the ability to self-check, and then the email and the telephony service.

Our experience was that the system that was set up actually did not attract an enormous amount of business, to be honest. We thought that the business would be greater than it was. The Minister referred to the telephony part of it; I think there were fewer than 500 calls received. For emails, it was something like 3,000, or perhaps a few more.

Q500 **Ian Roome:** In a statement to the House last July, the Secretary of State announced that the MOD had established a “dedicated Information Services Centre” for anyone who may have been affected. Yet representatives of Afghans have told us that that has failed to materialise; in practice, it offered only a very limited call-handling capability. Why were you unable to meet expectations?

Luke Pollard: We did establish the information centre—the call centre. We did not get many calls to it. It was able to refer people to the correct information available. It was one measure, as part of a number of responses that we had, to enable people to check whether they were affected by the breach or not. As Dominic set out, I think our initial expectation was that we would get a greater number of calls than we did, but we felt it was important that there was the ability for people to call, as well as to email and to check on the website. That was a prudent response, which we stood up, to deal with what we expected to be a much greater level of correspondence back to us than we actually received.

Q501 **Ian Roome:** In conclusion, taking it back to my original question, what could we have done better, once the super-injunction had been lifted, to communicate this to other agencies—either voluntary or other agencies—that were working on the ground in Afghanistan, to make sure that that communication got through to those who were affected?

Luke Pollard: It is perhaps worth Dominic saying how we communicated to the other agencies and other partners that we worked with. I have just spoken about how we communicated to the individuals on the dataset, but perhaps he could cover the other partners.

Dominic Wilson: We had, as you would imagine, a full communications plan that was both UK-based and overseas, largely delivered through the FCDO's network and contacts, and some other partners. Of course, it was of significant profile in international news as well as here in the UK, so I am not really sure there would have been that much more that we could have done, if I am being honest.

Q502 **Ian Roome:** There is nothing that you could have learned from the processes we have gone through?

Dominic Wilson: Unless Ben has other sources, I personally have not heard a large number of complaints along the lines that you are setting out—that there was something inadequate about the service. As I say, the business was relatively steady, and we kept it running until, I think, the end of October before we closed down the telephony and the emails, because it was not good value for money. I am very happy to hear any observations on that, but I am not sure there is much more we could have done.

Q503 **Fred Thomas:** Minister, you spoke about people having some success with self-moves. There are some people in-country who have been deemed to have the right to come to the UK, but it would appear from a distance that they are not able to do a self-move, for whatever reason. What is the advice to those people? What do you think they should do?

Luke Pollard: We set out very clearly that the model for moving people ended the facilitation model of using a third party to do so. That is partly because we can see an increase in self-move already, and partly because we believe the risk profile of the cohort we are dealing with has now changed, based on the assessment in the Rimmer review. Three weeks into this, the majority of the people we have corresponded with to inform them of the self-move and the necessity to get to a visa application centre within 12 months have indicated that that is what they will do. We of course keep the policy under review to understand what needs to be done there, but so far it seems to be delivering as intended.

Q504 **Fred Thomas:** But do you accept that, for whatever reason, there are some people for whom the physical risk might be too great for them to move around the country to get to Pakistan or whatever it is? Do you accept that some people will be slightly stranded by that, or do you think that everyone will be able to get out?

Luke Pollard: Against this, not everyone has responded so far. We also know that within the cohort of eligible people, there is a cohort of people who I think we call non-progressives, in terms of not moving forward in the chain, who we have granted eligibility to but who are no longer corresponding with the Ministry of Defence. We have put policies in place as to how we deal with that particular cohort of individuals. We are three weeks into the self-move model. The majority of people who have responded to our correspondence have indicated that they will self-move. We are at the early stages of that at the moment, but I am expecting it to broadly be a success.

We cannot keep this system in place forever. It is right that, as a Government, we have set a clear deadline as to when we will stand this down. That is partly because the scheme the United Kingdom has is the most generous of any in the nations that were present in Afghanistan—considerably more generous—and is still processing people, unlike some of the schemes of our close partners, which have now closed and stopped processing applications.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

As part of that, it is right that we set a very clear timetable to enable people to take up the eligibility and the support we have set in place. The timetable between now and the end of this Parliament is reasonable; it provides the ability for us to say, "Yes we have honoured that obligation in a fair and decent way," but it also reflects the fact that the situation has changed—a large period of time has elapsed since Op PITTING—and the risk profile to those individuals, we assess, has also changed. So we think self-moves are the right option.

Q505 Fred Thomas: As you said, it has only been quite recent—the last few weeks. Who made the decision to stop providing the assistance that we were providing and to rely on this self-move model?

Luke Pollard: As with all decisions on ARAP schemes, it would be made by me initially, and large decisions would then also be taken by the Secretary of State. Both John and I have made this decision to move to self-move, based on the assessment and recommendations of the teams working in this space. That partly reflects the reality that the facilitated model was paused ahead of the lifting of the super-injunction. We briefed the Committee on elements around this. But we are seeing individuals self-moving, so this is not a decision that has been taken without evidence that shows that this is already taking place. We know from the ACRS, which has shifted roughly half the ACRS cohort via self-moves, that this is a scheme that works.

Q506 Jesse Norman: Mr Wilson, in view of what the Minister has just said about the generosity of the scheme and the availability of it now, compared with some of the alternatives, could you comment on the number you have given, which is that the remaining 17,000 applications will be processed by spring of next year? At the moment, how many are you doing a month at the moment?

Dominic Wilson: Ben may correct me, but I think we are down to 16,000 remaining applications.

Q507 Jesse Norman: Sixteen thousand?

Dominic Wilson: Yes.

Q508 Jesse Norman: So the number has been revised down by 1,000?

Dominic Wilson: Yes. So, it is 16,000. Ben may be able to comment on how many we do a month, but I think that in the last six months it has gone down by about 5,000. We have significantly increased the number of caseworkers taking the eligibility decisions; I think that we are now up to 150.

Q509 Jesse Norman: You have been at 800 a month for the last six months.

Dominic Wilson: The Minister will write to you on the detail of that. I am sure we have those statements, but I do not have them to hand.

Q510 Jesse Norman: Eight hundred to 1,000 is the kind of number you are gesturing to for the last six months, if you have done 5,000 in that period.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Major General Cattermole: It comprises different kinds of casework that we have to work through. Some of them are initial applications, some are reapplications, some are reviews that the applicant has requested, and some are additional family member applications and reviews. I cannot put a macro figure on all of it. What I can say is that, on current modelling, we are confident that all principal applicant decisions will be complete by August this year and that by March of next year the current caseload—the 16,000—will be complete. That does not mean that we will not have casework to continue, because there may well be a follow-on review; it could come from the courts, or whatever. However, we are confident that the current caseload will be complete by March of next year.

Q511 **Jesse Norman:** That is extremely helpful. The clarification there is that spring is actually spring—please inform the Treasury. Spring is spring; we like that very much. It will be March.

One would have a worry that if you were operating at roughly 1,000 a month, it would take 16 months from now, and therefore well into the end of the summer of next year. You are saying that that is not the case and that you are going to up the rate so that you finish by March of next year.

Major General Cattermole: I am confident on current modelling—and this is modelling—that with the increased resource that Dominic and the Minister directed and that we have now within our casework team, with their increased performance and with the Minister-directed KPIs that hold us to account to improve, that performance of turning around decisions is improving on a monthly basis. That is why I would not want to say that it is 1,000 per month, because—

Q512 **Jesse Norman:** Even if that was the rough, or even somewhat generous, interpretation of the last five months, you think it will be going much faster from now, and it has to in order to hit the March deadline?

Witnesses indicated assent.

Q513 **Jesse Norman:** Can you comment for a second, General Ben, on the composition of the last 16,000? Obviously, you could have all the tough nuts being left to the last minute, or they could have been cracked early and it could be relatively smooth sailing. How is that working?

Major General Cattermole: I guess that one does not know until one lifts the lid. One does not know—

Q514 **Jesse Norman:** You will have a sense, though, because you will have been sampling and you will know what the breakdown of application types is, won't you?

Major General Cattermole: If I focus on the principal applicants, there are some complex cases in there, meaning those who may, for example, have been dismissed under UK Government employ, and we need to go to the Minister. Category 4 decisions all go to the Minister for his consideration, as well as those decisions that require significant enrichment.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

What I can say—the Minister alluded to this figure earlier—is that until July last year we were looking at around a 5% grant rate. I think we have had about 190,000 pieces of casework come into DARR over the years—

Jesse Norman: It sounds like my caseload in my constituency.

Major General Cattermole: You can imagine that the statistics would show us that the grant rate was higher for those who applied early than for those who applied at the very end of the programme. We saw a spike at the end of last year, and as we work through those cases—I would rather not expose the figure in detail—we are seeing a lower grant rate in the cases that have come through at the tail end. Each one gets the same consideration as a grant, but the simple answer to your question is: yes, there are more complex cases at the end of any programme, but we are still confident in our modelling of a spring timeline.

Q515 **Jesse Norman:** Just to be clear, as an operational matter, there is no suggestion that any pressure is being applied to deny cases that would otherwise receive grants.

Major General Cattermole: No, absolutely not.

Q516 **Jesse Norman:** You are content that the procedure is still as robust, if not more robust, than it started out being.

Major General Cattermole: Absolutely. There is the right to review, and we also have assurance processes in place, so there is no pressure at all.

Q517 **Jesse Norman:** That is very helpful. You talked about principal applicants, but what is the status of the non-principal applicants? How many are there and what timetable is associated with them?

Major General Cattermole: In my terminology, the principal applicant is the person on whom the eligibility would rest or fall. That principal applicant will then have immediate family members whom he or she is entitled to bring with them. It is the additional family members who may then apply afterwards to be granted eligibility. So principal applicants by late summer, and the current caseload by spring next year.

Luke Pollard: That is part of the reason why I instructed the introduction of KPIs. As a Minister who signs off letters to people chasing up casework, I did not feel it was acceptable that we were saying to people—especially those with complex cases who have been waiting many years for a decision—that they did not know where in the process they were.

The introduction of KPIs is designed to help individuals—and the Members of Parliament advocating on their behalf—to understand where they are in the process. We have set out KPIs for complex and non-complex cases, and we have also set out stages, so that people can understand whether they are at stage 1 or stage 3 of a five-stage process. That helps them understand where they are in the processing.

In my mind, that is all part of stabilising the schemes and building a scheme that is more sustainable, so that people can understand how we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are shutting it down. If it is useful, Chair, I am happy to correspond privately about some of those figures, so that we can give a sense of the progress we are aiming for during this period, but we are aiming to finish casework by spring next year.

Chair: Thank you; that would be very helpful.

Q518 **Jesse Norman:** That would be very helpful. To pick up General Ben's point, it would help us if you could comment privately on the wait for grant now, and the factors affecting that. To follow up on your point, Minister, are all aspects of the programme compliant with the KPIs that have been set?

Luke Pollard: I would like us to be delivering against every KPI, but we are not yet there on all of them. One of the reasons why I feel strongly about us publishing them is that we should be honest about performance against them. That is one of the reasons we have instructed that there should be additional resource applied to the casework, because I was not comfortable with the massive backlog that we inherited, nor was I comfortable with the fact that it was hard to get visibility of that backlog. We are effectively running an immigration scheme that should have an element of transparency, and that was not there in July '24. We have included that transparency with the clarity on the phases between now and 2029, the KPIs and the individual self-checker.

That self-checker is not for those affected by the data breach in 2022; it is now on the MOD website to enable people to insert their ARAP or other reference numbers to see for themselves where they are in the process. That has, anecdotally, changed some of the casework that Members of Parliament are receiving, because it is quite legitimate for someone to say, "I applied many moons ago, but I have no idea where I am. Can you find out?" That is an entirely fair challenge that we were not previously able to answer. Since we have introduced these KPIs, as part of stabilising the schemes, we are now able to answer that question, which seems a reasonable answer for anyone who has applied to get.

Q519 **Jesse Norman:** You have introduced a KPI in relation to casework, because you were worried about it not running fast enough. Which are the other KPIs that you are not meeting at the moment?

Luke Pollard: We published the KPIs, and the data is now aligned with the Home Office immigration publication, which I do not think is many days away in terms of the next set being published. Against all of those we are prioritising the principal applicants. We are performing better against principal applicants than we perhaps are against some of the additional family members—normally, beyond the principals, it would be the immediate family members and then the additional family members. That is right because it gives us the clearest sense of the pipeline afterwards. I want to clear this pipeline to close this programme, and that is why we are focusing on principals first.

Q520 **Jesse Norman:** General Ben, which of the KPIs are you not meeting at the moment?



Major General Cattermole: In terms of eligibility casework?

Q521 **Jesse Norman:** In terms of any KPIs that have been published in relation to the scheme.

Major General Cattermole: The KPIs that are published are the eligibility casework. They are online. I'll be honest: I think we are not meeting enough of them. But as the Minister said—

Q522 **Jesse Norman:** Could you name some so that we have them on the record and we know which ones to look at and think about, and which you are thinking about?

Luke Pollard: I will look at—

Q523 **Jesse Norman:** Stop for a second, Minister. I am talking to the major general because I want him to give me an operational answer to the question of what KPIs are not being met.

Luke Pollard: I was going to give you the answer to that question, but give it a go.

Q524 **Jesse Norman:** By all means, come in after that. I just want to get a sense of what is not being met from an operational standpoint.

Major General Cattermole: If I can give an example, we are not meeting some of the KPIs on how many complex cases we still have that have not been resolved for over 24 months. There is an understandable logic to that, because if they came into the system a period of time ago, there is a time lag, so it will always sit there.

The important point I would like to make is that this drives changes in behaviour. I inherited the casework team a few months ago, and this allows me to have that management information and to have the conversation with the senior civil servant who runs that team. They can then make evidence-based judgments, and we can make evidence-based judgments, about where more resource is required and where we need to reprioritise.

Q525 **Jesse Norman:** Will you write to us on the KPIs that are being missed at the moment and give us a sentence or two on why that is happening? The other question is, where you are missing them, is your strategy going to be to change the KPI or change the plan?

Luke Pollard: That is probably a "me" question, rather than a "Ben" question. We will publish the KPIs; it is one of the key parts of the instruction that I have given that we should be transparent about the performance—it is not where I would like it to be, but it is a lot better than we inherited in July '24. That is designed to show people the improvement and the accountability of this process. Those will be published alongside the Home Office stats, so that we are aligned effectively against those numbers. That is the right place for us to be. I am happy to provide a little more commentary to the Committee to help inform it.

Q526 **Jesse Norman:** So we will get those in the next week or two, or

whenever it is, and then you will write to us.

Luke Pollard: Absolutely. And I am happy to provide some narrative—

Q527 **Jesse Norman:** And you will respond to the question in each case as to whether you are going to vary the KPI or hit the plan.

Luke Pollard: We are not varying the KPIs. That is one of the reasons we have added the additional resourcing that Dominic mentioned—the additional caseworkers. I wanted to be clear about the expectation that people should have about how many we can process in the time. If we are not hitting those KPIs in what we felt was a reasonable amount of time for the casework to take, we have additionally resourced it to try and get after that problem.

Q528 **Chair:** How will ending in-country assistance for movements out of Afghanistan affect the programme delivery milestones and costs? Have you calculated that?

Major General Cattermole: We are taking it to Dominic and the programme board in a couple of months. The regional security dynamics in Afghanistan and the region have an impact on the influence of the United Kingdom. It is not just about the flow rate; it is the volume of EPs we now anticipate, which you will appreciate is fewer than it was six months ago. We are now talking about fewer than 9,000. Those two big factors—flow rate and volume—and the uncertainty of that flow rate, which we will probably develop greater certainty over in the coming weeks and months as we monitor eligible person behaviour, will inform the strategic options that we will be taking to Dominic and then to the Minister as to our wider resettlement strategy, and the Minister spoke about local authority-led hotels and what options exist. That then informs a re-baselining of the overall cost over the next few years.

Luke Pollard: Chair, to answer broadly, we have spent roughly £3.3 billion to date. Our estimate for completing this mission by 2029 is between £5.5 billion and £6 billion for total cross-Government spend, not just MOD spend. Clearly, a self-move has a different inherent baseline cost than a facilitated move. That may involve slight changes to that budget but, to manage expectations, they would be only slight changes. We re-baseline that budget regularly and have a clear expectation, but I would expect it to still lie broadly between £5.5 billion and £6 billion.

Q529 **Chair:** The major general said that he will provide the information to Mr Wilson's team. Could that also be provided to our Committee before we publish our report so that we can use some of it?

Luke Pollard: I am happy to look at what that information is to check if it is appropriate for us to publish and share it with you. I will check if it is the right classification. I am happy to take that away.

Chair: Brilliant. Thank you very much.

Q530 **Mr Bailey:** What main indicators are you using to assess whether resettlement support is working in practice, and what changes have you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

made based on feedback from the Afghans and the local delivery partners? I ask that on the basis that we recently had a visit that was incredibly powerful. We can perhaps come on to what we learned from that. Those of us who attended will say that it is an excellent set-up.

Major General Cattermole: Thank you. Of the indicators to show that resettlements are working well, I suppose the principal indicator is a lead indicator rather than a final, substantive one. It is how long people spend in transitional accommodation. I believe you visited the Grange in Bracknell. There, I think, we average between 90 and 120 days' time of flight. The longer you spend in transitional accommodation, the greater the risk to your onward integration, so that is the principal indicator.

The second indicator is one on which we work with our Home Office colleagues. They have responsibility for integration across all asylum and resettlement schemes. We work with them at their quarterly integration board. They are developing a scheme narrowly focused on those people who are on resettlement schemes, including the Afghan resettlement programme, rather than on asylum schemes. They measure employment, language, education and so on, but of course that data is a lag indicator because it takes several years. One of the recent publications of the Home Office covered a 10-year period: it takes that long to get the longitudinal data.

The lead indicator is time in transitional accommodation. There are assurance visits by me, Dominic and yourselves to see how brilliantly the local authorities are working with the Home Office liaison officers and with NGOs on the ground. They always help us to understand what is working or not.

Q531 **Mr Bailey:** The NAO report is cross-Government. I reiterate that this situation is something that the MOD should never have invited upon itself, but it is quite obvious when you are in the room with the cross-Government professionals that they have managed to make a number of systems work that do not normally work. How are we communicating to the rest of Government the lessons that you are taking away from there, because this looks like a system that would work for a broader Government problem?

Major General Cattermole: The Ministry of Defence's role in the hotels is that we procure them and provide security. What happens within the hotel and what you witnessed when you visited is very much down to Home Office and MHCLG colleagues working together. I would assume—and this is an assumption—that they are bringing in their own best practice from what they have done in similar resettlement and asylum schemes.

Q532 **Mr Bailey:** We saw people working alongside each other, not having Babel fish speaking between different computer systems. Leadership is one part of it, but there is something obvious happening there that is not normal across the rest of Government. Some of it is highlighted in the NAO report, such as the use of the e-visa and the coupling of data across Government Departments. It is something that we must not pass up. Minister, how is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that being captured and put forward as best practice for Government more broadly?

Luke Pollard: The process of bringing everyone together in the ARP, rather than having them separate, has been a success. We see improvements in outcomes, and the partnership arrangement that we piloted with local authorities—that was an MHCLG pilot that we are now rolling out and encouraging others to use—has been about sharing that experience.

I have certainly been in a number of large meetings with local authority leaders and local authorities where colleagues from Home Office and MHCLG are effectively sharing some of that work. I agree with you that where there is best practice here, we should be sharing it. That is something that we are seeing.

If I take the example of the hotel that has just been closed in south Wales, the Vale of Glamorgan council has been absolutely superb. They have taken the experience that they have learned with Afghans and applied it to the asylum populations and vice versa. It is not just cross-Government that we have to learn from the benefits here.

I think there is some absolutely extraordinary work taking place at a local level, often by councils who do not get any credit for it, and indeed are often attacked, sometimes quite personally. There are amazing people on the ground doing really good work supporting our Afghan friends.

One of the lessons I take from having visited Afghan accommodation is that there is an understanding from lots of local communities that the Afghans that we are supporting here are people who served alongside our troops. They are people who supported our mission in Afghanistan over 20 years.

That support and understanding has made a substantial difference in terms of how smoothly some of this process can go and how many people feel strongly committed. Certainly, the work that I have seen of veterans' groups stepping up and helping—often without a fanfare, often without press releases and media coverage—and saying, "These people served alongside us; we will support them," is really to be commended. We are trying to capture that with our Home Office and MHCLG colleagues.

Q533 Mr Bailey: What I would offer from someone who has sat there with multiple computer systems, trying to communicate, is that you don't see that in that room. These are broader Government lessons that should be captured by the Cabinet Office, because it speaks to the linkage of data across the Government.

The reason that we are here is that a large amount of data was shared externally. You have four different Government Departments sharing data across a room, at similar volumes and similar amounts. They are seemingly able to do that now, using tokens and other things, in a way that perhaps does not expose us to those risks.

Unless that is captured by Government properly and in a way that is

recognised in the NAO report, then that is a miss. That is probably for us to communicate out in our report.

Just to finish, before the Chair gets upset with me, what does success look like in 2029 and who is accountable for that?

Luke Pollard: On the answer to the previous question, I would welcome a recommendation about how we capture more of this cross-Government. I think that work is ongoing, but clarity in the report would be welcome. That is the reason, as Dominic set out earlier, that we are deliberately holding our lessons-learned work until after the Committee publishes its report so that we can take on board any recommendations that the Committee may have in that respect. I absolutely welcome the careful eye on that.

By 2029, I want to see the closure of this scheme. I want to see us having completed all the casework, and having the eligible persons and their eligible family members in the UK.

The process of integration is clearly going to take longer than the 2029 closure of this scheme, and that means that there will be ongoing work with the Afghans who served alongside our forces and their families in the UK for many years to come, but I want us to effectively reallocate the resources that the MOD has on the DARR team. I would like them to be focused on warfighting readiness—that is our broader mission as a Department. That is the reason that we are looking broadly across non-core activities as to where we can reallocate personnel forces back.

I want us to be proud of what we have achieved here. Notwithstanding the quite considerable and serious data leaks that we have spoken about today, there are an enormous number of people across defence, local authorities, the devolved Administrations and other Government Departments who have substantially stood up and helped people because they helped us.

For me, at a time when there is great division in our society and people are deliberately weaponising migration, the Afghan relocation scheme is something that Britain should be proud of. Yes, we should learn the lessons where we have not got it right, but it is something where we can see we stood by our friends, who stood by us. That means proper caseworking, confidence in eligibility decisions, proper support and integration and a progressive shutting down of the stages of this scheme that is appropriate, transparent and clear for everyone involved, so there are no surprises in the process. To do that, we will develop further activities as we get towards each of those milestones. I am aware of the Committee's interest in this, and I am happy to continue our engagement with the Committee outside this inquiry, so that you can see and scrutinise us during the process, but by the end of this Parliament.

I do not want to be handing this over at the next general election to a successor Labour or any Government who might follow, with the scheme still as it is today, as we were handed over a scheme that was, frankly, in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a much more chaotic situation in July 2024. The obligation that I and my colleagues feel personally to this is serious, which is why completing it by the end of this Parliament is not just the right political answer—it is the right moral answer to fulfilling the obligation we have given to our Afghan friends.

Q534 Mr Bailey: There is one thing I would like to ask before I let you go. Would you write to us in detail or speak to us now on how the early application of support for those people we are resettling has material outcomes for their integration? It is obvious in the evidence we have seen. Maybe that is something any of you could speak to. There are lots of nodding heads behind you. Maybe you could offer some comment on that now or write to us, because that was quite overwhelming on the day.

Luke Pollard: Much of that information is held by other Government Departments, so we can see how that is going. The Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and their partners are responsible for that integration work. However, let's see if we can collate some of that together, because there are powerful experiences when you visit this work. The enduring obligation about integration will persist long after these programmes have formally closed. That is worth continuing to track across Government, although the responsibility for that necessarily moves to those Departments that have the expertise.

Mr Bailey: We will need to get in other Ministers.

Q535 Emma Lewell: Minister, did you say you had visited some of the hotels?

Luke Pollard: Some of the transitional accommodation, yes.

Q536 Emma Lewell: So you visited some of the hotels?

Luke Pollard: Largely the military bases that we have been phasing out and the Defence estate, but I receive regular updates from the hotels.

Q537 Emma Lewell: One thing we picked up, which may not be for today but just something to take away, is, as you will have experienced, there are lots of families there who are distressed about their loved ones who are eligible and still stuck in Afghanistan or third countries. They were told they need to go through their MOD caseworker. Although there is lots of support on site at the hotel, the MOD caseworker is not there, yet that is the main thing that is causing distress for the Afghans in the hotels. Is that something that can be taken forward and looked at?

Major General Cattermole: We absolutely will. It links to the earlier question about our KPIs. We know there are still additional family member decisions to be taken. The Minister has been absolutely clear about getting this done as quickly and effectively as possible, but without making mistakes. We recognise that causes distress and we will try to improve those links.

Q538 Emma Lewell: It seems really simple to me. Can the MOD caseworker not just go and talk to them? When we were there, straightaway the main thing was that everybody was talking about additional family members. It



HOUSE OF COMMONS

struck me that there is lots of support in the accommodation for Afghans, but the main support they want isn't there. They want to know about their family members.

Major General Cattermole: I absolutely understand and will take that away and have a look at it.

Emma Lewell: Thanks. That's it, Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you, gents, for your invaluable input and contributions today. That concludes our public evidence sessions on our inquiry into the Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes. We anticipate publishing the report soon. I look forward, Minister, to receiving that written information within a month, because it is crucial that we receive that in a timely manner. With that, I bring today's proceedings to a close.