

Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: Home Office recall/Windrush compensation scheme, HC 174

Monday 7 June 2021

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Members present: Meg Hillier (Chair); Gareth Bacon; Shaun Bailey; Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown; Peter Grant; James Wild; and Antony Higginbotham.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General, Tom McDonald, Director, National Audit Office, and Marius Gallaher, Alternate Treasury Officer of Accounts, were in attendance.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

Investigation into the Windrush

Compensation Scheme (HC 65)

Questions 1-157

Witnesses

I: Charu Gorasia, Director General, Capabilities and Resources, Home Office; Tom Greig, Deputy Director of Windrush Compensation Scheme, Home Office; Paul Lincoln, Director General, Border Force, Home Office; and Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Charu Gorasia, Tom Greig, Paul Lincoln and Matthew Rycroft.

Chair: Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee on Monday 7 June 2021.

We will hear an update from the Home Office on a number of its projects, focusing in particular at the beginning on the Windrush compensation scheme, which apparently was designed with speed in mind, but to date has paid only a fraction of the claimants since it was launched two years ago. We will look at it with the help and support of the National Audit Office's recent investigation into that work. We have also had ongoing concerns about delays to the Emergency Services Network, which is to replace our emergency services communications system; other efforts by the Home Office to upgrade aspects of the UK's digital infrastructure, in particular at the border; and how the Home Office is supporting asylum seekers, an issue we have looked at a number of times.

I welcome our witnesses: the permanent secretary at the Home Office, Matthew Rycroft, who is in the room with us; Charu Gorasia, the director-general for capabilities and resources at the Home Office, which I think, Ms Gorasia, makes you the money woman, among other things; and in virtual attendance, Paul Lincoln, the man in the uniform, the director-general of the Border Force at the Home Office; and Tom Greig, the deputy director of the Windrush compensation scheme at the Home Office, who is very immersed in the scheme and I am sure will be able to answer our detailed questions. We are also pleased to welcome officials from the Home Office in the Public Gallery for the first time in 14 months—we are beginning to get back to normal.

Talking of normal, I now bring in Peter Grant, MP, to ask you some questions, Mr Rycroft, about the latest on the barracks.

Q1 **Peter Grant:** Good afternoon, Mr Rycroft. I want to ask about last week's court decision that the use of the Napier barracks in Kent to house asylum seekers is unlawful. What is the Home Office's response to that judgment?

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you, Mr Grant and Chair. The first thing to say is that the Home Office of course has a statutory obligation to house



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asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. We fulfil that obligation, even at the height of the pandemic.

We had many more people coming into that asylum accommodation system than were leaving it—almost no one was leaving the system during the pandemic—and so, as a result, we needed additional accommodation on top of that which we had previously used. In addition to using hotels for that extra accommodation, we used two military barracks, including Napier.

It was a rush to get the facility ready for people, but get it ready we did. We then made significant improvements to it, including in the past couple of months, so it is disappointing that the judgment was really a judgment about what the facility had been like earlier in the year, rather than what it is like now. But of course we accept and acknowledge the judgment, are studying it carefully and will work out what it means for our ongoing use of the barracks.

Q2 Peter Grant: Do you envisage continuing to use those premises as a long-term solution?

Matthew Rycroft: I don't think it was ever intended to be a long-term solution. We envisaged using it in the first instance for a year, from September 2020 to September 2021. In the run-up to September 2021, Ministers will decide whether we should use it beyond that date.

Q3 Peter Grant: What contingency plans do you have, if the decision is taken to close it down? What happens to the 200 or so people I understand are still there?

Matthew Rycroft: There are about 60,000 people in total receiving accommodation support from the Home Office in the whole system, and Ministers have announced plans to modernise the whole of the asylum system, so that number is not static; there are people coming in and leaving the system every day. We will make sure that whatever happens, we will uphold our statutory obligation to provide those people with that accommodation, if they would otherwise be destitute.

Q4 Peter Grant: But the fact remains that the Home Office failed to comply with other statutory obligations regarding the kind of accommodation that people were kept in. Do you accept responsibility for that failure, as permanent secretary of the Home Office?

Matthew Rycroft: We ensure that everyone who is entitled to that accommodation receives accommodation that is safe, secure, warm, and provides them with three meals a day. In the case of the Napier barracks, it also provides them with communal facilities such as a prayer room. I saw for myself on a recent visit the improvements that had been made to the site. Sporting facilities are available for people who want them. We will of course act on the judgments, learn lessons from them, and make sure that we can continue to provide accommodation as required for everyone who is entitled to it.

Q5 Peter Grant: The fact remains, doesn't it, that the Home Office didn't



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comply with its obligation to provide a safe place, because there were occasions when that facility was unsafe. For example, fire precautions were not properly—[*Inaudible.*] Who is responsible for requiring people to live in accommodation that is unsafe and was probably unfit for human habitation? Is anyone responsible?

Matthew Rycroft: The judgment was not that it was unfit for human habitation. Far from it. It is a clean set of accommodation that has recently been used by members of our armed forces. The judgment was about the extent to which we had followed PHE advice in order to make it covid-secure. We believed that we had taken reasonable steps to follow that advice, but of course we are looking at the judgment to ensure that we do whatever else needs to be done.

Peter Grant: You may be aware of the comments that this Committee has previously made about the standard of accommodation that the MOD provides for our soldiers, but that is a question for another day. Thank you for that.

Q6 **Chair:** Are you planning to appeal, Mr Rycroft?

Matthew Rycroft: That is a decision for the Home Secretary.

Q7 **Chair:** What is the timeframe that you have to make a decision on appeal?

Matthew Rycroft: Imminent.

Q8 **Chair:** So next week we will know.

Matthew Rycroft: Something like that, yes.

Q9 **Chair:** Okay. Days, not weeks. In the risk assessment that you did about covid, it would surely have been apparent that curtains between cubicles would not have been enough to meet PHE standards, so who did your public health assessment? Was it someone who had professional expertise in this area?

Matthew Rycroft: We had continual engagement with public health officials all the way from the decision to set up the site to its actual set-up, and through that time as well, because, as you will remember, through last year the situation on covid was changing. As I say, we believed that we had taken reasonable steps to act on the advice of Public Health England colleagues in order to make that site covid-secure.

Q10 **Chair:** I would reiterate Mr Grant's point and urge you to look at our Report on single living accommodation in the MOD, and the work of a new member of the Committee who has also done some work on this. It is not actually good enough for many of our armed forces, so I would be wary, if I were you, if the Home Office repeats the line that it is acceptable for them, because in many cases it is not. Sir Geoffrey, do you want to come in?

Q11 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** May I ask a question on a different subject? As travel opens up, are you absolutely confident that Border Force has



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sufficient resources to be able to deal with the very large number of people that will travel once the whole thing is opened up? It would be really bad if the airports had got themselves geared up to deal with ticketing and everything else, and yet Border Force was causing several hours of queues, as has happened already fairly recently. Can you give us an update on that?

Matthew Rycroft: Of course, Sir Geoffrey. We should bring in Paul Lincoln as the head of Border Force to give a fuller answer, but the short version is yes.

Paul Lincoln: As I set out in a statement on 7 May, as international travel opens up, travel will be different. People might need to expect to wait for longer as they move through airports, as Ministers have required us, quite rightly, to undertake 100% checks. We will continue to do that to protect the vaccine roll-out and the hard-fought sacrifices that have been made by this country to date. In doing that, we have undertaken three different measures to try and improve that process. The first is to simplify the passenger locator form to make it easier for people to fill in and easier for carriers and others to check. The second one is to build automation into our processes so that those forms will be digitally checked, including through e-gates. Thirdly, we are bringing in additional Border Force officers during the summer to ensure that those three measures put together will mitigate the potential for lengthy queues.

Q12 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Mr Lincoln, could you give us an idea of what you think the maximum acceptable wait is to get through an airport such as Heathrow on immigration matters?

Paul Lincoln: I am not going to give a specific figure. What I will say is that we have standard service level agreements with the airports, which we have said that we may exceed. The longest period of time that we have seen during the course of this year was caused predominantly by us having to deal with non-compliant passengers, who had not completed all the tests that they should have done before boarding an aircraft. Ultimately, it should have been the carriers who undertook the checks on those people coming through beforehand. The Civil Aviation Authority have followed up with those carriers, and they have now issued over £1 million-worth of fines in total.

It is also probably worth saying that some of the figures that you have heard about in the public domain for queue times are rather speculative and that the average time this year for anyone travelling through Heathrow has been under 30 minutes.

Q13 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Finally, the most important thing, if you are going to catch a plane, is to know how long you are likely to have to wait. Will your various social media sites give a fairly timely, up-to-date analysis of a particular situation on a particular day, so that passengers can know how long they need to arrive in advance?

Paul Lincoln: Individual ports and airports do sometimes publish the data. Heathrow, for example, does publish on its own website the



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maximum queue times that it has seen. I would encourage people to look at those sites if they wish to understand that.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: That is very helpful; thank you.

Q14 **Chair:** You have said, Mr Lincoln, that you are going to be deploying more Border Force staff. Does that mean you are recruiting more Border Force staff and training them up? Where are you getting those people from?

Paul Lincoln: The start point is that we are redeploying some of our existing staff. We have, of course, brought back now some of our clinically extremely vulnerable persons as the vaccine roll-out has taken place, as per the rest of the workplace. We have got additional seasonal workforce, and we have got additional HMRC surge staff as our prime components of that.

Q15 **Chair:** So you are not having to recruit and train people; those are people ready to go right now.

Paul Lincoln: We are also considering some external recruitment on top of that. That is in addition to the recruitment that we are doing, as you will recall, Chair, for the end of the next step of the transition period, as we bring in full import controls.

Q16 **Chair:** Will they be fully qualified Border Force staff? Will they be specifically tasked with some of the day-to-day admin tasks and at the frontline at the airports?

Paul Lincoln: There will be a variety of roles that we will train people for—some in terms of looking at triaging people coming through. Others will be fully trained—people like the HMRC surge staff we routinely bring back; they have a shorter training period as a result.

Chair: I am sure we will come back to this.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Chairman. Peter has just told us that I was virtually inaudible. I don't know whether others are having difficulty hearing everybody else.

Q17 **Chair:** I thank my deputy chair very much. Can people hear us here in the Grimond Room? Okay, those of us who are in the room will all need to lean into the microphones. Thank you for alerting us to that.

We need to move on to the Windrush compensation scheme. I again record my thanks to the National Audit Office for their continuing excellent work holding the Government's feet to the fire on this issue, as indeed we are, but I want to pull out a bit and go further or higher up, if you like, than the investigation that the National Audit Office have just recently completed. Mr Rycroft, when we last met, or the time before, you and the Home Secretary indeed made much play of changing the wider Home Office culture. She spoke very movingly in the House about how this scandal was a sign of a wrong culture in the Home Office, and you came in to change that culture around, so how is that going?



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Matthew Rycroft: The Home Secretary and I are jointly leading the transformation programme, which seeks to create, as we call it, One Home Office, pulling together the Department, updating the culture and learning the lessons of the Windrush scandal to ensure that something like that can never happen again.

Q18 **Chair:** That is lots of words—

Matthew Rycroft: That is what we are doing.

Chair: But what practically is happening? If you are a civil servant working at Lunar House in Croydon, for example, what is changing in your life that is changing the culture of the way that organisation works?

Matthew Rycroft: I should preface this by saying that—as you know—culture change does take time. I don't want to pretend to anyone that this is going to be overnight; this is a multi-year programme. But there are things that we have done already. First of all, we have set out a single mission for the Home Office, which is to help create a safer, fairer and more prosperous UK. Secondly, we have set out a series of values, which were built bottom up, if I may say so, through consultation with staff. Those values are for the Department to be respectful, compassionate, collaborative and courageous. Thirdly, we have begun a structural transformation to seek to break down the silos of the Department. As you may recall from your time as a Minister, there are a lot of vertical silos. What we are seeking to do is to have more of a matrix where we have some vertical missions—three missions, about migration and the border, public safety, and homeland security—and then move everything else into cross-cutting horizontal capabilities, such as the caseworking function or the work that Paul Lincoln leads in Border Force, across the whole of those missions. Fourthly, we are setting out in very clear terms the sort of openness that we need as a Department to learn the lessons from the Windrush scandal, using Wendy Williams' hard-hitting 30 recommendations to measure our progress.

Q19 **Chair:** That is lots of management speak, if I may say. If you are an average civil servant on the ground, you could be saying, "Bend over, here it comes again: another lot of management speak." How are you actually going to make sure this makes a difference to the way people work? Particularly, the bit that potentially clicks for me is this being open. Is it really going to be okay now for a junior civil servant working as a caseworker, feeling something is wrong, to report that up the line and get some change?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, they absolutely will, and that goes to the heart of the change that we are making. Openness, for me, is partly about that: about connecting with our staff across the Department. Normally, when something goes wrong, it is not that no one knew what was going on, but that the people who knew what was going on did not have a voice, or did not think they had a voice to raise it. We absolutely have to change that and be open to that feedback from our staff, and make sure that we are



engaging them day in, day out, so they know that they will be supported if they raise those sorts of challenges.

Secondly, openness means being open to people from outside the Department who are directly affected by our policies and our operations. Again, I think there is much, much further to go on both of those things, so that is what we mean, and we are very specific about improving the way that we do external engagements and improving the way that we do training. All of those caseworkers I was talking about will be having what we call the “face behind the case” training, which really does get to this compassionate value that I talked about—really understanding from the individual perspective the face behind the case.

Q20 Chair: So if you are an outside organisation working in this area—perhaps, let’s say, in asylum support—what will it mean now? What is the difference for them?

Matthew Rycroft: It will mean that in each individual case, there will be a caseworker who will be expert in that case, who will be thinking about things from the perspective of the applicant—the person on the other side. Depending on what the route is, they might follow that person through the journey to get that stronger relationship, or if it is a different sort of route, there will be greater emphasis on engagement with that person.

Q21 Chair: So actually someone who an applicant or their representative can speak to directly. If that can happen, as one of the top 10 customers to your Department as a constituency MP, I would welcome that step.

The other thing is that you talk again about engagement, but we know that the promotion structure in the civil service is not often about looking down: it is about impressing upwards. How are you going to make sure that you reflect the implementation of this culture change in how you then reward people with promotions?

Matthew Rycroft: One of the things that we have changed—it has been very specific over the past year—is to create a new performance management system. This is one of the things that, as you know, really drives incentives in a Department, and I felt soon after I arrived that I was getting a lot of feedback, particularly from our black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues, that the performance management system in place at the time was biased against them. We used that as a reason to deeply dive into that system and look at improvements. We have now introduced a new system, which will be much more about continual conversations between each person and their line manager, so that we have robust performance management throughout the appraisal year, and we will be able to see this time next year whether we have made a difference in terms of the percentage of different people from different backgrounds who receive the top, the middle and the lower box markings.

Q22 Chair: Ms Gorasia, you were nodding there. Is there anything that you wanted to add?



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Charu Gorasia: Thank you, Chair. I would just say, along with what Matthew has said, the other thing we are strengthening in the Home Office is our guidance and toolkit for line managers on bullying, harassment and discrimination, so that people feel we are creating the open culture where people can raise issues with us straight away.

Q23 **Chair:** I think we would all welcome a Home Office that looked more diverse and listened to the diverse population, because they would probably have been able to alert you more to what was going on with Windrush. On Windrush generally, the design of the scheme left something to be desired, but every time you have been in front of us or, indeed, other Committees—and Ministers are the same—all the planning expectations and assumptions have just been proved wrong. Why do you think that is, Mr Rycroft?

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, my heart goes out to everyone who was caught up in the Windrush scandal. We are absolutely determined to right the wrongs of the past, and the compensation scheme is a really important part of that, so getting that right is absolutely essential.

Q24 **Chair:** But it is not going so well so far.

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, it is a complex scheme. There are 13 different headings that people can apply against, so obviously it does take time to get to the bottom of each individual circumstance. Life is complicated, and this is seeking to compensate people for the impact that the Windrush scandal had on all sorts of different aspects of their life.

Q25 **Chair:** Were you, or your predecessors in the Department, too optimistic at the beginning in setting out those targets when the scheme was designed, as though it was going to be quick, easy and successful?

Matthew Rycroft: One thing that was definitely wrong, with the benefit of hindsight, was the numbers. At the time, we thought that there would be 15,000 applicants. We then reduced that to 11,500, and we are about to reduce it again, because it looks as though we will not be near that figure either, given that we have so far had 2,369. On that issue, the analysis, which was based on the previous census and a lot of analysis inside the Home Office, turns out to have been an overestimate.

The other thing to say is that, whenever someone applies for the scheme, we are absolutely determined that we are on their side, so to speak, and that we work with them to ensure that they get the maximum amount of compensation to which they are entitled. That is not always quick. We have tried to speed things up, particularly since the reset that the Home Secretary announced in December. Mr Greig, who is in charge of the scheme, can give details about the impact of those changes. We are determined to carry on learning from the experience and to make sure that people who apply get what they are entitled to.

Q26 **Chair:** Mr Greig, you have been very closely involved in this. It is a pleasure to welcome you here, because we want to hear about the detail. Do you think that the Department's scheme was just too complicated and



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difficult for the people to engage with?

Tom Greig: Thank you, Matt, and thank you, Chair. I think there will always be an issue in trying to balance a scheme that is as comprehensive as possible against a scheme that is easy for people to understand and apply to. I think we have recognised, in some of the changes that we have made and in some of the changes we are going to make, that we need constantly to evolve how we strike that balance going forward. While I think elements of the scheme can be explained better—for example, the rules around employment, which we changed in December, were too complex—you can only do that in a way that still allows you to comprehensively compensate people. So yes, in retrospect, I think we could have done some things differently at the beginning, and yes, there are now lots of things that we plan to do to make significant changes to how the scheme operates. However, as I say, inherent in trying to do this right is a tension between simplicity and being comprehensive.

Q27 **Chair:** Okay, but it has been a couple of years now and there are still challenges. We have had some updated figures from your statistical update in the last few days. With 2,369 claims, even if you downgrade that 11,500 applications figure, you have a big gap, and I think only 687 payments have been made so far. Is that your up-to-date figure, Mr Greig?

Tom Greig: Yes. Those 687 payments include preliminary payments.

Q28 **Chair:** That is exactly my point. If that includes the preliminary payments—for those who are perhaps not following every twist and turn, when someone has been assessed as eligible, they now get some money up front before the full details are assessed, which is a welcome move. However, that means that even those 687 have not all gone through the full, detailed system. In simple terms, why is it taking so long to deliver on this when this is a very defined group of people? You cannot pretend you were a victim of Windrush, because there will be some very clear evidence that will be obvious and, even with the challenges of paperwork, relatively easy to prove, so why has it taken so long to get to only 687 payments being made?

Tom Greig: If it is okay, Chair, perhaps I could run through some of the top-line numbers, and then I will come back to that.

Chair: That would be helpful, thank you.

Tom Greig: As the permanent secretary said, we have received around 2,300 applications as at the end of April. Of those, we have made what we would term a final decision on 900 cases, and that person has either received a full and final offer or has been told that they are not eligible for compensation under the scheme. Of those, I think just over 400 have received a full and final payment. We consider 680 to be concluded—people have either received that final payment or have been told that they are not eligible and have not sought a review of that decision within two months. That is how I would characterise it: 2,300 applications, 900 decisions, 680 concluded and 412 final payments.



Q29 **Chair:** So why the disparity in numbers? What are the main brakes, Mr Greig, in getting people to the final decision? What are the problems you are coming across?

Tom Greig: As the permanent secretary reflected, in some cases these are very complex claims. Often, when an applicant comes to us—this is how the scheme is designed—they will not have a lot of the documentation, or, in some cases, any documentation. We will need to work with them to seek to obtain that documentation and to seek to obtain it from other Government Departments, such as HMRC and DWP.

We do that a lot, so it can take a period to obtain that information, which means it can take some time for us to get to a stage when we can make a full and final offer on a case. As the perm sec says, that is primarily because we are seeking to offer the maximum amount that we can under the terms of the scheme, while also ensuring that we are paying only to people who are eligible and entitled to compensation.

Alongside that, as the NAO Report reflects, we took longer than we would have wanted to get going on people's claims. We are doing more to simplify the process and to bring in more decision-making staff, in order that we can move claims through the process as quickly as possible, even if they are complex, and we can ensure that as many of our team as we need are available to casework cases and get them moving through the process.

Q30 **Chair:** The NAO says you had 53 caseworkers at the end of March, when it did its Report. What is the latest figure?

Tom Greig: We had 53 caseworkers, and at the time we spoke to the NAO we had plans to recruit another 10. We have added plans to recruit another 15 caseworkers, of whom five have arrived. Five additional caseworkers are now in training and another 20 are in the pipeline to arrive. We are also exploring whether there are options to obtain additional caseworking support from elsewhere in the Department.

Q31 **Chair:** How did it get so wrong? There was an assumption about how many hours it would take to deal with a case. If you had talked to any constituency MP with a high immigration caseload, we would have told you that was optimistic; in fact, some did. Why were the numbers so out of kilter? Were you cutting the programme according to the cloth you had and are you now putting in the resources you need to deliver in a reasonable timeframe?

Tom Greig: I can only reflect on what has happened in the last six months since I took over. I was not party to those decisions or those assessments, although I have obviously read and looked at them. To be fair to the decisions made at the time, which were all made with the best of intentions, the compensation scheme was an unprecedented thing for us to do in the Home Office and quite an unprecedented thing for Government to do. While we took the best information—

Q32 **Chair:** You say that it is unprecedented, but some of us remember the



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family amnesty—the Home Office never likes to use the word “amnesty”; the family settlement programme—for those who had been knocking around the immigration system for a long period of time. That didn’t involve compensation, but it did involve getting large numbers of people through the immigration system with a very long tail, so there was some precedent in the Department. That is just one example—I am sure I could think of more—where a time and motion study could be done about how long it took to get those people through the system. The EU settlement scheme is another time and motion exercise. From the reading you have done, and maybe other witnesses can come in, did anyone look at what had gone on before, to try and estimate how much resource you needed to put in to deliver this in a reasonable timeframe?

Tom Greig: Other witnesses may wish to comment, but I am afraid I don’t know the answer to that. I have not seen it in any of the documentation I have seen. I know we spoke to representatives of other compensation schemes across Government, which have different elements to them, but I do not know whether we compared it specifically to those programmes.

Q33 **Chair:** Talking about silos, there are silos of time as well as of subject. Mr Rycroft, was there anything you wanted to add? Then I will go to Mr Grant.

Matthew Rycroft: Just to say that different schemes and different routes are very different in nature. The EU settlement scheme, which you referred to, has had 5.2 million applicants, of whom 4.98 million have had a decision. Almost all of that has been totally digital and very smooth—

Chair: Higher volume of a simpler system.

Matthew Rycroft: Exactly. Whereas this, by its nature, is a much smaller volume, but each case is incredibly complicated and hard to get right. We have been learning. I want to underline that the changes we made in December have had a big improvement. We have paid out six times as much since December as in all the time up to December, and we will carry on adapting if necessary. If there are other changes to the system that we can make, whether in terms of the workforce, the training they receive or the guidance that we send out to applicants, then we will make those changes, because we want to get this right for the people who deserve and are entitled to this compensation.

Q34 **Chair:** Is there a limit on the money that you are prepared to spend?

Matthew Rycroft: There is no limit. Obviously—of course, I should say this in front of the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office—everything has to be value for money, but this is money to which people are entitled, and they deserve—

Q35 **Chair:** You will put the resources in that are necessary?



Matthew Rycroft: We will absolutely put the resources in.

Chair: Right. I am going to go to Mr Grant, but I just want to highlight that people are dying waiting for this. It is all very well talking about time and saying, "We are learning," but people have died waiting for this.

Q36 **Peter Grant:** Mr Greig, can I come back to you for clarification on some of the figures that you gave us earlier? You gave a figure, I think, of 680, which you described as having had a final decision. How many of those are still subject to appeal? Are any of them still subject to appeal?

Tom Greig: Sorry, that was 900 cases that have had a final decision. The current number of cases that we have pending a review is 106.

Q37 **Peter Grant:** Okay. I am sure you gave a figure of 680 that had concluded in total. Did I get that wrong?

Tom Greig: Sorry, that was my mistake. It is 626.

Q38 **Chair:** That was concluded cases, I think.

Tom Greig: Yes, 626 concluded cases.

Q39 **Peter Grant:** So "concluded" means that there is no further appeal. Either the appeal has been dismissed or it has expired. Is that correct?

Tom Greig: Either the appeal has been dismissed or, where we have told someone they are not entitled or eligible, they have not appealed within two months. That doesn't mean that they can't, but they haven't. We use that as a benchmark for administrative reasons.

Q40 **Peter Grant:** Okay. Thank you. In one of your earlier answers, you mentioned the requirements that there were initially on people who wanted to claim loss of earnings as a result of the Windrush scandal. Given that the whole problem arose essentially because the Home Office had completely unrealistic expectations of what documentation people would have with them, why did you then design a compensation scheme that placed such onerous requirements on them to have documentation about previous employment and loss of earnings?

Tom Greig: Again, I can only comment by way of what I have read about decisions that were made at the beginning of the scheme. As ever, the approach was designed to minimise the amount of evidence that was required. Whether it achieved that at all times or not is a matter that people can comment on, but it was designed to minimise the amount of evidence that was required, and to ensure that people who were eligible were entitled to compensation.

We recognise that, for the reasons you set out, it is obviously going to be very difficult in some cases to obtain documentary evidence to support every point of someone's case. As I say, we work with DWP and HMRC to try to obtain the information to support claims. We also contact former employers for people. Our teams can and do do that on a very regular basis. Where an individual does not have the documentation themselves, we will seek to get it.



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Alongside that, as I say, we are constantly looking at whether there is more that we need to do. I know that many of the people who have applied to the scheme think that it still requires too much documentation and asks for too much information that isn't available. We are currently reviewing all our forms, guidance and training to absolutely ensure that we are getting that balance right and make sure we can evidence people's entitlements alongside not asking them for things they have not got and not asking them for information in a way that is difficult for them. I recognise that there have been issues in the past, and we will continue to do that. I am hopeful that some of the fruits of that review, in terms of new guidance and application forms, will be live very soon.

- Q41 **Peter Grant:** Can you give us some examples of what is required now? For example, if somebody claims that they lost their job because the Windrush fiasco meant that they were unable to demonstrate that they had the right to live and work in the United Kingdom, what documentation would they need to produce in order for you to accept that that was why they lost their job?

Tom Greig: Again, it would not necessarily be for someone to produce it themselves. We would contact any former employers. We would seek information from them to show the reason that someone lost their job or the reason that someone's employment was terminated if the person who was applying did not have that information themselves.

- Q42 **Peter Grant:** How realistic is it to expect employers to have retained that information, especially if the employing business has gone out of business in the meantime?

Tom Greig: In many cases they do. Alongside that, again, we are currently looking at whether there is more we can do to make sure our guidance is as clear as possible on this. We need to be in a position where we can look at other supporting evidence to try to allow us to make that decision, even if an employer has not been able to provide the information we need. That is where DWP and HMRC checks, and looking other evidence that is available to us, should allow us to make a decision in those types of situations.

- Q43 **Peter Grant:** Do you accept the suggestion that there will be people who are entitled to compensation will not get it, either because the documentary evidence no longer exists, or because a former employer who has the information chooses not to provide it to you. Is that something you think acceptable?

Tom Greig: I will make a couple of points on that. Again, the evidence required is not a prescriptive list and it really depends on the circumstances. Caseworkers absolutely should consider things holistically and look at all the evidence in the round.

I would not necessarily accept your original premise that people will have suffered that detriment and we will not be able to prove it collectively. My aspiration for the scheme is that that should not be the case and that we should continue, as I say, to get information from former employers, the



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DWP, HMRC and/or other evidence available to us, and look holistically at the applicant's entire claim and, on that basis, make a decision that allows us to make an offer under as many categories of compensation as possible. As the permanent secretary said earlier, we are very clear to our caseworkers—indeed, this comes across in the NAO Report—about what they should be doing, and they understand that absolutely and are committed to maximising the level of compensation they can offer someone within the requirements of the scheme.

Q44 Chair: I just want to go back to the previous schemes that you could have benchmarked against. Obviously, you did look at some of the ombudsman schemes, in particular. In the Home Office, you have the Passport Service. I know a lot of clever work is done in certain specialist teams there to help verify identity for people who do not have a paper track record for their first passports. I do not know whether Mr Greig or Mr Rycroft wants to take this question: did you talk to colleagues in the Passport Service?

Matthew Rycroft: I am not aware of the ins and outs of the preparation for the scheme before I started. Suffice to say that at the time we were very, very keen to get it up and running. Once it was up and running, we obviously decided that it was better to allow people to apply to the scheme even as it was being set up, as from April 2019.

Secondly, just going back to what I said earlier in answer to your question about the culture and the structure of the Home Office, one of the things that we are doing is to turn all the caseworking functions into a single family of jobs, if you like, which is specifically designed to make it easier to learn lessons from different schemes—for instance, from the passport office—and apply them in this part of the Windrush follow-up.

Q45 Chair: So the summary of that is that if there is another scandal, it will be better than Windrush—I am perhaps being a bit facetious. Equitable Life was an example of a scheme from the Treasury where, similarly, there was compensation because of a then regulatory failure, and a scheme was worked up there. Did anyone consider looking at that? The ombudsman schemes are a bit different because they are set statutory bodies. Do you know if anyone looked at that?

Matthew Rycroft: We will probably have to write to you on that, Chair, because I do not think—

Q46 Chair: If you have a list, even if it were only half-considered. I think there are lessons to be learned across Whitehall for this. While are concerned right now about current Windrush victims, there is a wider lesson here because, with the best will in the world, the Government may well make mistakes in the future. I would not want to be a pessimist about Government, but if I were an optimist, I would not be doing this job.

On the issue of people who are not from the Caribbean but are other Commonwealth citizens—like a large number of my constituents, for whom I probably have more casework, or at least as much—how are you reaching out to them, and what are the numbers like?



Tom Greig: Perhaps I can start and then the permanent secretary may wish to add something on this. I am not personally responsible for the outreach we do, although I am heavily personally involved in undertaking those activities. We have done a lot of work, both through our ambassadors programme, where we used community members to promote the scheme, and through the recent work we have just started around the community fund. We are actively looking to ensure that we are spreading information about the scheme into a broader range of communities than perhaps were aware initially that they were eligible. I have personally taken part in events for the west African community, the south Asian community, and we are continuing to try to identify options to do that. The number of people who have applied from those areas is still relatively small.

I would also underline that you do not have to be a Commonwealth citizen to apply for the compensation scheme; you can be a citizen of another country who has suffered a detriment as a result of not being able to demonstrate a lawful status. It is a very broad scheme, in terms of who can apply. We are doing quite a lot at the moment to try to make sure that we make that clear, and that people who potentially are eligible and entitled can apply, but as I say, numbers are still relatively small.

Q47 **Chair:** We have been pushing on this as a Committee since before the last election, and our sister Committee, the Home Affairs Committee, has been pushing on this. There was a lot of talk then about engaging with these communities through particular media and so on, and yet the communities fund was set up only at the end of the last year. Even with covid taken into account, why was that set up so late, Mr Greig, when it was apparent that you are not going to reach some of these groups unless you do it through local community organisations?

Tom Greig: The permanent secretary might be better to answer this question. This is not within my sphere of knowledge or responsibility. As I say, I attend the events. I am part of them, but I am not responsible for the design or implementation of them, so I wonder if the permanent secretary might like to take that question.

Matthew Rycroft: We have done over 180 outreach events. We have worked with local councils, as you know, and with community leaders and high commissions—representatives of other countries in the UK. We have also done a national communications campaign as well as targeted campaigns specifically aimed at media that will reach into these communities. The scheme that you referred to—you criticised it for being launched too late—was at least launched in December, and it is £500,000 that allows grassroots organisations specifically to bid into funding in order to do this. I am very glad that we were able to do that.

Q48 **Chair:** It has happened—it had been talked about—and I think the principle had been broadly accepted much earlier, so why the delay? This is getting money out of the door to local organisations. Possibly you could have used local authorities as a conduit in areas where you knew there were large populations or congregated populations.



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Matthew Rycroft: We certainly are doing all of those things. With the benefit of hindsight, we perhaps could have been quicker off the mark earlier in the scheme, but now that we have seen that there is a need for doing that, we are happy to carry on doing it.

- Q49 **Chair:** I remember that when there were schemes to encourage interpreters to apply, the Home Office—we are talking about a long time ago now—was very nervous when there was an open application for interpreters. I think that was for Iraqi interpreters to come and settle in the UK. There was a feeling that if you opened it too much, it would open up the floodgates—these were words that were used around the Home Office. Is this a worry that drove your not reaching out to communities, because you were worried that too many people would apply?

Matthew Rycroft: No, not at all—absolutely not. I want to assure everyone on the Committee, or anyone who is worried about this, that we want to maximise the number of people who apply to the scheme. Once applied, we want to maximise the amount that each person receives, subject to what they are entitled to.

Chair: I think 650 MPs will be reminded this week that they need to go out and remind their communities to apply, so you may get a bit busier, Mr Greig.

- Q50 **Shaun Bailey:** Mr Greig, I want to carry on with the line that the Chair was discussing with you. Given that some of your caseworkers are now back on spreadsheets, how confident are you that your management information is as good as it could be? Given how wide your planning assumptions have been, is it just a case of not knowing? How are you making sure that your data is as accurate as possible?

Tom Greig: First, on the question that we have, or we had at the time that the NAO were with us—using spreadsheets to gather some of our management information—I can give a bit of history around that. The Windrush compensation scheme works off a computer system that is based on the Home Office correspondence system. At the time that the scheme was set up, a decision was made not to use the mainstream Home Office caseworking system, which I am sure you are aware is called CID. Part of that was in order to try to protect people's details and information. We wanted to be clear that compensation claims were separate from everything else. That system has evolved and has been improved over time, but it does not provide the level of functionality that we would want, to do everything we want to do, and MI is one of the areas where it falls short.

We have considered whether it was potentially sensible to move on to a new system. Indeed, we had some consultants in towards the back-end of last year who looked at that for us. Our conclusion was that the disruption that would be caused by moving all our work on to a new system and training all our caseworkers to use it was not commensurate with the benefit that we would receive from doing that. So what we are now doing



is focusing on improvements that we can make to that system, and we have a team of Home Office developers working with us on that—

- Q51 Shaun Bailey:** Mr Greig, sorry—I just want to focus you on the question. My question was this: how confident are you that your MI is accurate, given where you are with your system at the moment? Can you say categorically that it is as accurate as it should be?

Tom Greig: I can say confidently that our MI is as accurate as it should be, yes, but that requires a lot of very careful cross-referencing of systems and auditing of information to get it right. However, we do that— we manually audit one system against another to make sure they are correct. So, yes, I would say that I am confident that our MI is correct, but it is sometimes a bit harder work than it should be to get to it.

- Q52 Shaun Bailey:** Okay. Staying on this vein of systems and personnel, obviously when the scheme launched you said that you needed 125 caseworkers. Obviously, you had six when the scheme first started; now you are at 53. I am just wondering, given that you obviously have not processed as many claims as you thought, how you are formulating these the staffing numbers? Again, have you had to do any review in terms of what that looks like?

Tom Greig: Yes. Since October or November time, we have revised our capacity planning for the scheme. In effect, we have entirely rebuilt our capacity plan, to assure ourselves that it is correct. And what you see in the NAO Report, particularly in terms of some of the staffing numbers that we think we require and things like that, are based on that new plan. That is a model, in effect, that looks at applications received to date, productivity utilisation and all those kinds of things.

- Q53 Shaun Bailey:** On training and development, I know that the NAO highlighted when it was reviewing some of the case files that four out of five case files were returned to caseworkers before an award was offered. In terms of how you are doing training and development, and in particular ensuring accuracy around work that is being done, what support is available there for staff? How do you ensure that staff are getting that full level of support, so that these processes are as seamless as they should be?

Tom Greig: That is a good question. There are a couple of things to say. First of all, sometimes cases are returned because a more experienced decision-maker that looked at them says, “Actually, you might want to look at making an offer under this category”, or, “There might be something additional you can do for that claimant”. I think that will continue to happen and it is right that it happens when we are trying to maximise compensation.

Equally, we want to reduce the number of cases that are returned for further changes, and we have a programme of work in place to ensure that when that happens we are gathering the good reasons for it, or the reasons for it, and we are making sure that those are fed back to



caseworkers and built into future caseworker training and the guidance that caseworkers are being given.

We are also trying to encourage the people who do the quality assurance—indeed, we have asked them to, and it is absolutely right to do so and Tim entirely supports this—that they discuss every case with the caseworker when it is returned, so that caseworkers can fully understand why things are being sent back to them, and those kinds of things. We are seeking to learn the lessons as we go along.

However, just alongside that I mentioned earlier reviewing forms guidance processes, so that processes, guidance and all those kinds of things are simpler, so that there is less opportunity for errors to be made.

- Q54 Shaun Bailey:** That is helpful, Mr Greig. The NAO has noted in its Report, for example, that one of the big errors was calculating income tax on calendar years as opposed to tax years. Surely, with situations like that, is it not something that you are working with caseworkers on from the outset, as part of your basic guidance?

I mean, if I turned up—let's say—working on day 1 as a caseworker. Would I not get this as part of my induction? How would that work?

Tom Greig: Yes, I am sure that you would get it as part of your induction. There is a fairly lengthy and comprehensive training course for caseworkers, followed by a period of mentoring. So, yes, absolutely.

I would have to look again at the NAO Report. It pointed out that that has been one of the errors they had come across. I am not sure how regularly that error occurs, but obviously, yes, caseworkers are trained in how to formulate employment awards.

- Q55 Shaun Bailey:** Why is it taking five times longer than expected to process claims? Your Department says that it should take about 30 hours; we know that it is taking around 150. How much is that costing—that increase in how long it is taking to process these claims?

Tom Greig: As I think the permanent secretary reflected, and I would reflect as well, possibly that original assumption at the beginning of the scheme misunderstood how complex some cases can be and misunderstood how long it might take for us to gather information on behalf of claimants. I think that there is more that we can do to refine our processes to make sure that cases move more quickly through it.

In terms of how much that is costing, as the NAO Report reflects, we have underspent our budget for the first 18 months of operation. I do not know that I could quantify a number for how much extra cost the cases take—it quotes 140 hours rather than 30. I could certainly seek to write to you on that. Obviously, it is the case that the process takes longer under those circumstances than under the initial assumptions.

- Q56 Shaun Bailey:** On the quality assurance side of things, what are you doing around a cost analysis? The NAO Report's flow diagram shows that that is a huge part of it. What are you doing to balance those costs and



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ensure that we get that quality but we are not spiralling out of control?

Tom Greig: Do you mean overall costs of the scheme in terms of how much we are offering?

Q57 **Shaun Bailey:** More specifically when you are costing out, in terms of quality assurance. As part of that, you drill down into the cost impacts of that, because obviously there will be a cost to ensuring that this is done properly. How are you ensuring that the cost of quality assurance is value for money?

Tom Greig: As I say, I think that where we look at quality assurance, it needs to add value to the process and ensure that people are getting the maximum compensation that they are entitled to. The cost of the quality assurance team is relatively low in comparison to the overall cost of the scheme. They are a relatively small team within the total 150 people we employ. As with any other element of the scheme, if we thought increasing numbers or increasing the cost of that team would be helpful, we absolutely would do so. Unusually in the circumstances, both the Permanent Secretary and the Home Secretary have been really clear that caseworking costs should not be a barrier to our doing our jobs properly. Whatever funding we require is available for us to do the job properly.

Q58 **Shaun Bailey:** You set a target to pay out 90% of claims submitted by the end of 2020 by August this year. Are you on track to meet that?

Tom Greig: That is a challenging target. We are currently on track to meet it, but it requires a significant uplift in output and productivity in the next three months to do so.

Q59 **Shaun Bailey:** What does that uplift look like for you? How are you ensuring that you have that capacity?

Tom Greig: As I mentioned, additional caseworkers—that capacity also builds in a group of caseworkers who had already been employed and were already working in the scheme, but were being trained and mentored at the time that the NAO was there. They are now fully online and starting to decide cases. There is additional casework productivity. We are looking to review processes, and we hope to soon issue some new guidance around evidential requirements and what information caseworkers should ask for, which will further streamline the process.

We are working with quality assurance to ensure that cases pass through that bit of the process as quickly as possible. It is a mixture of additional resource and process improvement. The other thing that we are doing that is really important is investing more time and people at the front end of the process. We are seeking to use what we call our ICT—initial consideration team—to contact applicants as soon as their case has come in, to start gathering information at that stage where they can, and to start making sure as far as possible that when a case comes to a decision-making caseworker, as much of the evidence and information gathering has been done as possible.



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We are continuing to interrogate ourselves to ensure that we are doing all that is possible, and we will continue to add resource and change process until we can significantly reduce the amount of time it takes between someone submitting an application and us making a decision.

- Q60 **Shaun Bailey:** Finally, what would you say is an acceptable time period? At the moment, it stands at around 177 days to process claims. Where do you want to be? We have heard roughly what you think, but how long should it take the Department?

Tom Greig: I do not think it is sensible to—we have always resisted giving a timeframe or time target for making decisions. Because cases can vary in how complicated they are and how long it takes us to gather information, we do not want to get to a position where we are creating perverse incentives for people to decide cases more quickly, when there is more that they could do to maximise the outcome for the applicant.

I think we said in the information that we provided to the NAO, which is in the Report, that holding approximately six months'-worth of cases is about the right number of cases for us ever to have in the scheme. We aim to get to that towards the end of the year, but there is no timeframe inherent in that—it does not mean trying to do things within six months, but hopefully doing some things quicker and some things taking a bit longer.

- Q61 **Shaun Bailey:** What are caseworkers paid? What is the average salary of a caseworker at the moment?

Tom Greig: I would have to write to you to be accurate. These are executive officer-grade caseworkers, based in various places. I would have to write to you to be accurate. I could give a rough idea, but it probably would not be helpful at this stage.

- Q62 **Shaun Bailey:** Okay. I am conscious that a lot of what you said previously has been based on the fact that you are recruiting new people, but also retaining people with that knowledge, so when you formulate remuneration packages, how are you doing that? What are the metrics? How are you ensuring that you have got both new people coming in and a consistency of knowledge, which can be utilised to deal with the problem?

Tom Greig: Broadly, we are bound by the general civil service pay and the location we are in, which is mainly Leeds and Sheffield. We seek to offer staff additional reward where we can, but not—

- Q63 **Shaun Bailey:** Am I right in thinking that, if I came in as a caseworker, I would be at the lower end of that pay rate?

Tom Greig: You would be, yes. You would get the lower end—well, depending on where you came from. Some of our caseworkers come from other Departments, so their place on the pay rate would depend on what their previous salary was.

- Q64 **Shaun Bailey:** I assume that you are paying people the living wage.

Tom Greig: Yes.



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Q65 Shaun Bailey: On the profile of the people coming forward for these roles, am I to assume that they are people in first jobs—are they graduates or school leavers? Who are the people coming forward for these roles?

Tom Greig: It is a mixture. Many are people who have previously worked in other Departments, in fact, so many of our team are people who have worked previously in DWP, HMRC or elsewhere in Government.

Q66 Shaun Bailey: In terms of incentives and progression, what does that look like, trying to structure it going forward? As you said, you want to use the existing knowledge pool, so how are you retaining it?

Tom Greig: That is something that I have been discussing with my team a considerable amount recently. Often, in my experience, in caseworking, after about two years people look to move on and to progress from caseworking roles, so we are looking at where, as we expand the scheme, that offers a greater number of opportunities at managerial level. We would certainly look to promote from within where we can. It is something we are giving a lot of thought to at the moment, because we want to retain our people.

By and large, many—or all—of the people who have applied to work in this scheme are deeply committed to doing the best they can for the people who have applied. Many of them want to stay, but they then start to make those personal decisions of wanting to stay versus what potentially could happen elsewhere. It is something we are doing a bit of work on, as I say. Hopefully, as the scheme increases slightly in numbers, there will be more of those opportunities.

Q67 Shaun Bailey: It sounds to me, Mr Greig, that you are suffering, potentially, the real risk of losing a lot of that knowledge that has been built up, through people going. Am I to understand that at the moment that is a real risk for the Department? There seems to be a haemorrhage of knowledge. Is that fair?

Tom Greig: It is one of the top five risks on our risk register. It is something that I have discussed personally with caseworkers when I have spoken to them recently. As I say, it is something that I think we need to continue to do work on, because people want to progress in their career, but they are committed to the work that we are doing and we need to try to reward that effectively.

Q68 Chair: On the point of experience and pay, Mr Rycroft, the Home Office has traditionally been a lower-paid Department at the junior level—at the senior level, you are all fine, but the junior level is seriously lower paid than others. Is that a concern that is on your risk register as well, in terms of retention of staff?

Matthew Rycroft: It is. As Mr Greig said, it is crucial for us to have a good flow of people coming into the Department, including for those caseworking functions. I pay tribute to them for the work that they do. They know that they have significant responsibilities and that they are making decisions that are literally life-changing for the people who are



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applying not just to this scheme, but to other schemes—for example, on the asylum and immigration side of the Department. That is why they do it. It is fascinating and crucial work. We need to get a good flow of people coming into the Department and to stay. When we look at the numbers, we do not have too much of a problem with recruitment; the issue is retention, including retaining people who have built up those skills. That is yet another reason why we want to turn the caseworking function into a career structure of its own, within the Department.

Q69 **Chair:** How are the discussions with the trade unions going on that?

Matthew Rycroft: Well, they would love us to be able to pay more than we can. As Mr Greig has said, we have to live within the wider civil service framework, and we do.

Q70 **Chair:** I do not want to cast feelings on Mr Greig that I am not aware of, but there seems to be a sense of frustration that you are wedded to the Home Office executive-grade structure, so you have executive officers and administrative officers at different levels. Is there anything that you can do as permanent secretary, Mr Rycroft, to adjust that set of pay scales?

Matthew Rycroft: We cannot adjust pay scales, but we can make sure that first of all, we are operating more and more in varied parts of the country. You might have heard our announcement recently that we will be creating a north-west campus covering a new facility in Stoke, as well as further jobs in Salford and Manchester. That is in addition to other moves that we are making to ensure that there are more and more jobs out of London and the south-east.

Q71 **Chair:** That is not a new thing for the Home Office. The Home Office has been doing that for a while, but I appreciate that you have to say your bit, because that is a recent Government priority again. So you are wedded to the pay scales?

Matthew Rycroft: It is wedded to the pay scales, but within the pay scales, there is more and more that we can do in order to ensure that we are attracting talent from across the country, and that is what we are committed to doing.

Q72 **Chair:** We would find it helpful if, when you do write to us between you, Mr Rycroft and Mr Greig, you could detail what, for instance, a senior decision maker is paid compared with a caseworker, because even those jobs have not always been very well paid. We do not want to get into a discussion about pay, because obviously it is not just about that, but about the outputs that you get and the efficiency of the system, which can be better if you have a higher-level person making that initial decision in the first place.

I particularly want to talk briefly about the settlement of estate claims, Mr Greig. This is quite a challenging area at the easiest of times, but when you have people who have died and their family are waiting for this, it is another reason to move it along fast, although there are quite interesting, important legal issues to get around. Do you think you have



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the resource that you need to help that through, Mr Greig? I notice that in the NAO Report, paragraph 4.8 on page 35 says, "More than one-third of estate claims (34%) had not moved past the first registration stage of the compensation process." Do you want to give a little bit more detail about why that is, and what you are doing to resolve that?

Tom Greig: Absolutely. More often than not, the issue is where someone applying on behalf of someone who has sadly passed away has not obtained probate or a letter of authority in order to make that application. Often, in fact, they will not have needed to, because there will not previously have been an estate for which they needed probate or a letter of administration. Indeed, in some cases, they have approached the probate office, and the probate office has told them that they do not require a grant of probate, so they get stuck in a situation where the claim cannot be progressed because we cannot confirm that that person has that authority. Legally, that is required: we have tested that with our legal advisers.

We are shortly to bring forward a range of measures that we hope will seek to resolve some of these issues. We have been talking to the probate office and to various other people who potentially could offer assistance to people to seek that grant of probate. You are right: many of our oldest cases are those types of cases. Many of them have not made much progress for the reasons I have just set out, and we are very alive to that. As I say, I think that shortly, we will be able to bring a package forward for people in that situation—in that circumstance—that will allow us to support them through that process alongside the probate office, so they can obtain the relevant legal documentation before we decide the claim.

Q73 **Chair:** Will that be for a junior caseworker, or will you have more senior people trained up to do this very specific piece of work?

Tom Greig: The casework element of it is not actually that different. What we need to be able to do, effectively, is to put people into the probate office with people there who understand their circumstances and can support them. We are also looking at whether there is an option for us to get external parties to provide support as well at that stage, which we will arrange. I do not want to talk too clearly about it—those arrangements have not been finalised—but it is something that we will not use our caseworkers to do. We will find the experts in the relevant Departments and ensure that they understand the circumstances of the people they are dealing with.

Q74 **Chair:** Mr Greig, before we move on to other issues in the Home Office and give you a bit of a break, what keeps you awake at night in terms of getting this delivered? It has gone on a long time now. We call you back regularly, as does the Home Affairs Select Committee, and it is raised frequently in Parliament. People are dying waiting for this fund, and you said that everyone tried to set this up with all the best intentions—well, many things have been set up with the best of intentions and have not delivered. This is not yet delivering, so what can you say to people now who are waiting? What is on your wish list that could help you deliver?



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You mentioned probate. What else do you need to help you deliver this quicker?

Tom Greig: We have made some good progress in the last six months. The amounts that we are offering and the fact that we are offering preliminary payments have made a big difference to some applicants. As I have said before to many of the people we talk to on calls that we have with community groups and stakeholders, we have not done enough yet. We need to reduce the time between submission of claim and decision. I think we have the right plans in place to do that now. We are very strongly supported by our seniors and Ministers to do it. I am confident that what we have in place will start to make the scheme quicker, and will also make it easier to navigate the scheme and make sure we are only asking for the absolute minimum that we need from people to make decisions.

We will continue to evaluate it. If that is not the case, we will continue to do more and put more into it. We are absolutely committed to getting this right, from me, the permanent secretary and Ministers down to every single person on my team. We will continue doing that and continue evaluating our progress. Hopefully, the people who have applied to the scheme will start to see more of a difference being made over the coming weeks and months. As I say, we have already made some real strides, but even more of a difference is being made.

Q75 **Chair:** We will hold you to that. It is very likely that you will be back before us, or indeed our sister Committee, again. Thank you very much, Mr Greig. We probably don't need to come back to you again. It is up to you whether you wish to stay on the call.

I want to turn now to the ESN programme, which is the programme to replace our emergency services' ability to communicate with one another. The Emergency Services Network, as it is called, is the programme to replace Airwave, which was supposed to be turned off by the absolute latest in 2025. The letter that you wrote to me in April, Mr Rycroft, tells us that you are expecting to deliver it at the end of 2026, which I remind you is seven years later than the original target. We have also been told repeatedly that 2025 was the absolute cut-off date for Airwave. How are you squaring a 2026 delivery with Airwave going in 2025? I will come to the costs with Ms Gorasia in a moment.

Matthew Rycroft: First, you are right that the end of the implementation of the programme is much later than it was previously going to be, but the programme can extend on into the future beyond the original—

Chair: We are getting an odd echo, Mr Rycroft. I don't know whether we need to pause for a minute. Okay, carry on. I think it is probably affecting us more in the room than outside.

Matthew Rycroft: Of course, we want to ensure that we are not paying for both the current Airwave system and the future system for a day longer than necessary, so we are determined to implement this as fast as we can. However, we have also learned that if we seek to do that without



the users—the emergency services themselves—being involved in the programme, that is a false economy; that is an acceleration that is not going to work. What we have done, particularly since our new SRO came in—Simon Parr, formerly the chief of Cambridgeshire police—is really work with the future users of the scheme to ensure that they, our suppliers and everyone else involved are all part of the picture. The timeline that I set out in that letter is significantly longer and slower than before, but it is one that we can have much more confidence in sticking to because for the first time we have a timetable that the users can see is the right one.

Q76 Chair: Except that one of the reasons that the users began to be less enamoured of the project is that, as it got delayed, they just didn't trust it to deliver. They were having to invest in old kit, and therefore were much more reluctant to pay the cost to move over. You are parading it as a success, but isn't it a sign of previous failures that people on the ground—the police, ambulances, firefighters and so on—were not included properly in discussions then about the practical realities?

Matthew Rycroft: I am very confident that users now are properly involved in the programme. That is where they need to be.

Q77 Chair: Don't you think that if it had been done a bit sooner, it would have saved money along the line?

Matthew Rycroft: From where we are now, the right thing to do is to have the users on the inside working with us collaboratively. They are encouraging us to get on with this, and that is what we want to do as well. We are already delivering parts of this programme: 70% of it has already been delivered, and the masts are already going up.

Q78 Chair: This is the network, but not necessarily the kit.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely, but the kit is there as well. It is in trial. Our colleagues in Immigration Enforcement are using a version of the kit. There is an inevitability about this programme. The current Airwave system will be obsolete not by 2024 or '25 but certainly by 2030, so we need to make sure that we move to a new system before that. All the other comparable countries around the world that the independent assessors looked at are all doing something similar to our programme. This is the right way to go, and we will stick at it. It makes sense from a financial perspective as well.

Q79 Chair: We will get on to the money in a minute, although I am tempted to go down that route now. You first came to us in July last year, when you were recently appointed, and you were very, I have to say, gung ho—a new boy's enthusiasm—for a project that I was slightly worried you had not looked into the detail of, and you were committing yourself to things. Since that date, you have given us four different dates for it to be completed by between 2023 and 2026. How can we trust that the dates that you are giving us now are accurate?

Matthew Rycroft: Because we have taken the time with this one to do a full business case with the future users and suppliers, to have some very robust conversations with users and suppliers and to come up with a plan



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that everyone can see is the right one. There will be further bumps in the road, inevitably—it is a complex programme—but there is contingency built into that timetable, which we are determined to meet. It is a complex programme. I absolutely accept that you and others will have heard different versions of this in the past, but we have reset the programme, and we have a programme that is—

- Q80 **Chair:** I think it is the 14th outing—we were trying to work out whether it is the 13th, 14th or 15th; let us settle on 14th—of the Home Office on this subject just to this Committee. We do not expect things to keep going so badly wrong time after time. You told us in September that you felt the programme had turned a corner, and you sound very positive today. Can you tell us precisely what has changed, apart from the engagement with users—we will see whether they agree with that—to make you confident that you have turned a corner on this?

Matthew Rycroft: We had a whole series of advice from the NAO, the independent assurance panel, the Cabinet Office and Treasury and others, and from policing as well, about how to do this, and we have followed that advice.

- Q81 **Chair:** The police put people on the board—I am losing track of time now, but it was several years ago—when they realised that it was not going to go very well and they would have to stump up the cost. The Met, I think, funded somebody to come on to the board, so they have been involved from quite early on.

Matthew Rycroft: They have been involved, but certainly, in the first months of my involvement, I was struck that they were not sounding as though they were inside the tent, if I can put it that way.

Chair: I think, by that point, they had probably walked out of the tent.

Matthew Rycroft: I think they had, and therefore what we have done over recent months is to bring them back into the tent, partly by moving the tent and partly by expanding it and making it bigger so that there is space for more users, because they need this protect.

- Q82 **Chair:** I am just trying to think of a riff on tents. I am sure there is some significance of tents in the Home Office. Probably not. I could make a comment about our earlier discussion. I am slightly worried that we are getting simple answers here, whereas actually it is a very complex project.

Matthew Rycroft: It is a very complex project, and you don't only need to rely on my word for that. If you ask the future users, they will give you the same answer, which is that they now have confidence in the business case because we have spent the time and effort going through it with them. We brought in an SRO from policing. That is a very deliberate move that goes way beyond the sort of panel that you were talking about earlier.

- Q83 **Chair:** We have had business cases promised before. It should be automatic for projects like this. You will have read back through the



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papers in the nearly a year that you have been there. What do you think has gone wrong in the past?

Matthew Rycroft: It is actually just over a year now. With the benefit of hindsight, you can see that, on this programme, in the early days, the Government sought to be really at the cutting edge of technology. Overall, my personal view is that that is not a great place for the Government to be.

Chair: I agree on that.

Matthew Rycroft: It is better to be a fast follower. It is better to allow others to be really entrepreneurial and for the Government to then come in quickly, but not to be absolutely in that leading wave. Because of the time that has passed, we are now back in that sort of position. As I said, other countries are pursuing this sort of technology at the same sort of scale as us, whereas previously we were way ahead of them. This is an idea whose time has come, which is why, as I say, we have already delivered 70% of this programme. There are already two hundred 999 calls per month that could not previously have been made as a result of the masts that are going up. That is already a benefit, in terms of saving lives.

Q84 **Chair:** We will come back to that in a moment. I turn to Ms Gorasia on the cost of this. What does the delay to 2026 mean for the overall cost of the programme?

Charu Gorasia: The whole-life cost of the programme now stands at £11.2 billion.

Q85 **Chair:** That reminds us that, before covid, that was a lot of money. In comparison with covid, it seems to pale, but it is significant. We have heard that users are on board. How much of that cost will they have to pay? Is the Home Office going to pay users to implement this? One of the breakdowns in relationships with end users has been that they have had to fund the old scheme while waiting for the new scheme. They have got quite fed up with having to have contingencies in their budgets, which they are not able to do anything with. Will the Home Office be funding police, fire and ambulance?

Charu Gorasia: We are working with all three emergency services and assessing their costs as we have produced the final full business case for this programme. If there are significant additional costs, we would like to make sure that we are covering all of those. At the moment, we have not heard that there are significant additional costs that the three emergency services will incur. As they come to us and give us new estimates, we are very happy to review them as part of finalising the full business case.

Q86 **Chair:** A number of them are already investing in updating Airwave kit and robbing bits of old kit to keep kit going, so they will be spending money on that. There will be a point in 2026 at which they have all got to move over, and it will not always be a clean line from one to the other. Are you looking at funding transitional costs to make sure that all can move over and that that end date is absolutely met?



Charu Gorasia: One of the things, as you say, Chair, that is quite important for this is to ensure that all the emergency services are able to do the cut-off and are able to integrate the new technology into the operational brief. In order to incentivise the users to switch to the new technology, we will be looking at other financial incentives that we ought to be thinking about. Of course, we have managing public money rules to live within, so whatever is feasible within that and within the full business case we will review and look at it.

Q87 **Chair:** And Airwave devices will just get more and more costly to maintain during the course of this programme because they are now very old. I am sure you will be lobbied about that. Motorola has got a foot in both camps and is doing rather well out of this delay. How much money will Motorola make as a result of the delay to 2026?

Charu Gorasia: I do not have Motorola's figures, but I can tell you how much we pay on Airwave every year. It is about £450 million per annum for Airwave. When we switch to ESN, it will be £250 million. If you exclude all the programme team costs, the annual savings for the taxpayer will be £250 million from switching from Airwave to ESN.

Q88 **Chair:** That is money that has been promised, as you say, for a while. Just to reiterate, at the moment we are spending £450 million a year on the old system, when by now we should have been moving to spending less on the new system.

Matthew Rycroft: If I can jump in in relation to Motorola, that is a conversation that I have had with the chief executive of Motorola and that others on the team have with others in Motorola very regularly. We need to ensure that they are putting their very best people on to this programme to ensure that no one could make the allegation that you have hinted at, which is that they are seeking to go slower than they might because they are making money out of delay. It is really important that they demonstrate that that is not the case.

Q89 **Chair:** It will be interesting to see how you can prove that as they have a foot in both camps. You have given us the figure of 70% implemented, but we have heard this before. We have had very positive talk about pilots on handsets and then we have discovered it is actually about a relative handful. We have heard about mast coverage. Can you be clear? What does that 70% roll-out cover? What does it look like on the ground?

Matthew Rycroft: It means that we have the push to talk in the handsets and that we are using those in immigration enforcement.

Q90 **Chair:** Just in immigration enforcement, to be clear.

Matthew Rycroft: That is the starting point, but then we will roll it out. We have more than 600 new masts in service, which is why those extra 999 calls are available. We have demonstrated control room integration, which is an absolutely crucial part of this programme, and we have proven the air-to-ground connectivity. All of the other aspects such as the work in the London underground and elsewhere are continuing, so this will be a service that is available on the land, above the land and underground.



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Q91 **Chair:** I am puzzled. Is that 70% a cost or is it 70% of a network? Not 70% of emergency workers have kit out there.

Matthew Rycroft: No, it is the total amount of the programme: how much has been delivered and how much further there is to go.

Q92 **Chair:** In terms of money.

Matthew Rycroft: I do not think it is in terms of money. I can write to you with a breakdown of the 70%.

Q93 **Chair:** Yes, I think we need a real breakdown. So how many people? Is it just Border Force that have bits of kit in their hands?

Matthew Rycroft: It is immigration enforcement, and some ambulance services are using it as well.

Q94 **Chair:** But not completely. They are using it alongside Airwave, aren't they?

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely. Again, I would not want to pretend that we are nearly there. We are not. That is why my letter was very clear that this will go on until the end of 2026. But we are making progress, and we will keep you updated with significant milestones.

Q95 **Chair:** Have things changed a bit? We have seen the technology improve from day to day, and the average citizen has a map and computer in their pocket. Obviously, bits of this need to be absolutely secure, but a map for an ambulance does not necessarily have to be secure.

We have heard a lot of stories of staff using their own devices alongside Airwave and whatever they might be testing, if they are among the handful of people who are testing ESN. How is it going with making sure that it is the go-to product? Is it still going to be the go-to product? You talk about the cutting edge of technology. Is it still cutting-edge?

Matthew Rycroft: It is based on 4G technology, but it is designed so that it will be constantly updated as different technological revolutions take place in the future. Therefore, we anticipate it being in service until, let's say, 2044.

Q96 **Chair:** There is nothing to stop someone from using their own map on their own iPhone. In most public services, people whip out their own telephone to do lots of things. They do not all necessarily need to be as secure as they do for the emergency services, but there are elements of emergency services work—your satnav, which can get an ambulance from A to B.

Matthew Rycroft: Obviously, we are getting quite close to the line in terms of operational independence, and I would not want to tread into the space, because the police and others need to—

Q97 **Chair:** No, this is about the practicalities of how you are going to roll out this kit and who is taking it up. We have had witnesses in front of us before, particularly predecessors of yours—you are now the third permanent secretary dealing with this project; we have probably been



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involved longer than you, individually. That is not a criticism; it is the reality. We have heard examples of people who have their own personal phone and an Airwave phone, and who might be testing a very narrow function of ESN. They can have lots and lots of handsets, but that does not really prove that it is actually working and that they are not reverting to the one that they know best of all, which might be their own personal contract.

Matthew Rycroft: I accept all of that, and I have heard similar things on my travels out and about, but I go back to the main point: there is an inevitability about this programme. We have to move off Airwave in the long run, because that technology will be obsolete by the end of the decade and we need a technology, based on 4G, that will provide the whole of that service—for data and for voice—in a single system.

Q98 **Chair:** I notice that you slipped in there, “by the end of the decade.” We were told that 2025 was the absolute cut-off for Airwave.

Matthew Rycroft: That was for when Airwave will go obsolete.

Q99 **Chair:** Yes, at the end of this decade, so you mean 2030. But we heard that Airwave could not go beyond 2025. We now have a 2026 deadline. Are you giving yourself wriggle room by saying, “the end of the decade”?

Matthew Rycroft: I am saying that Airwave will go obsolete at some point in the future, and 2030 is our current estimate.

Q100 **Chair:** I was just wondering whether there was a mandarin code in there.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely not.

Chair: Expert at interpreting mandarin code is Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Q101 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Probably the most important question, Mr Rycroft, is about the users having absolute confidence that the system is going to work. Are you absolutely confident that there will be no notspots anywhere—there are considerable notspots with mobile phones at the moment—whether above the ground, below the ground in tunnels, below the water level in reservoirs or whatever? Are you absolutely sure that this thing is going to work everywhere?

Matthew Rycroft: I cannot give you that absolute assurance. What I can tell you is that it will work in significantly more places than the current system does, and that that alone will save lives—probably hundreds per year. That is a very significant rationale for continuing at pace with this programme.

Q102 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** An expert has said to me that it would have been far better to have contracted with the four major suppliers rather than just one, because, taken together, all the four major suppliers have much better country-wide coverage than just the one does. Do you have any comments on that?

Matthew Rycroft: It is an interesting suggestion. Again, with the benefit of hindsight, there are all sorts of things, commercially, that could have



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been done differently, but we are where we are, and we are seeking to make the most of the relationships we have with the existing suppliers. Part of that is to ensure that, rather than just concentrating on what Motorola can do themselves, we work with Motorola to partner with other organisations—for instance, to fill areas of capability where they are perhaps not as strong as they are on the core basics of delivering this programme.

Q103 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: The year 2026 is not far off. Have you been in touch with all the emergency services to make sure that they have a financial plan to be able to purchase the devices to be able to use them on the system?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, the programme is in constant touch with the users, and there are systems within the user community—police, ambulance, fire and others—to do that sort of outreach.

Q104 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: The NAO makes clear—Ms Gorasia might like to come in on this—that every year we are delaying is costing us £650 million. Are you absolutely certain that you are going to bring it into operation in 2026? I ask because otherwise the figure that Ms Gorasia has given us of an £11 billion cost, or whatever it is, is going to continue to escalate quite quickly.

Matthew Rycroft: I will hand over to Charu in a moment. I just want to repeat that this is not a reason for a delay, but even if there is a further delay, this is still value for money; there is still a positive net present social value over this programme. And of course the disbenefits that we are getting now are replaced by benefits that we get later, so the whole thing is shifting to the right, including the end point of the programme.

Q105 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Before we get on to finance, may I just ask about one other point, which the Chair was asking about? If you don't absolutely set a deadline for when Airwave is going to be switched off, isn't there going to be this tendency? If I were a chief constable running a very tight budget, I would say, "Actually, I think my machines might last another five years." What is the incentive for me to want to buy the new machines when I know that I can keep going with the old ones?

Matthew Rycroft: It is a very good question. We have done a lot of work on the incentives and on the cutover. Of course, that is some way off, so there is further to go, but we do need to make sure that once the system is proven and once we know for sure that the emergency services are getting a product and a network that they can be comfortable with, the incentives will all be stacked up in favour of each force getting on board.

Q106 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am a little bit confused now, and I think perhaps the Chair was as well. If you are so confident that this thing is going to work in 2026, why are you saying that you are still prepared to delay the Airwave cut-off till 2030? That is an awfully big time difference, isn't it?

Matthew Rycroft: Just to be clear, I didn't say that. What I said was that it would be technically obsolete and our latest estimate for when that will



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be is about 2030. But we are planning to turn it off by the end of 2026, as I said in my letter.

Q107 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** You are still planning to turn it off in 2026.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely.

Q108 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** So every chief constable, every emergency services user, should be well aware of that.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely.

Q109 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Given that confidence, Ms Gorasia, are we going to pay this £650 million each year hopefully only for another four or five years?

Charu Gorasia: Sorry, could you say where the £650-million figure has come from? The Airwave annual cost at the moment is £450 million. ESN, the new technology, will cost us £250 million per annum. And when we switch, the saving for the taxpayer annually is £250 million. So I am not quite sure where the £650-million figure comes from.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: This is presumably from delays in getting from Airwave to the new system. It does come somewhere in the Report; I'm afraid I can't just put my finger on it. Perhaps our NAO colleagues could help us.

Q110 **Chair:** While we are waiting for that, I will say that the overall cost, of course, has gone up by just about £2 billion, a bit over £2 billion, or just under £2 billion—sorry—in the last two years. Do you want to explain that to us, Ms Gorasia?

Charu Gorasia: The original cost, about two years ago, at the Home Office was about £10 billion as the whole-life cost. It's now £11.2 billion, so it has gone up by £1.2 billion, not £2 billion. And as the permanent secretary was saying, the net present social value of the latest full business case is still very positive, at £773 million.

Matthew Rycroft: Just to add one thing, that is assuming that we run the programme only to 2036, which was the original date for the end of the programme. If we add on another eight years at the end to, if you like, make up for the fact that we have lost eight years at the beginning, that runs us to 2044, by which time there would be a net present social value of £2 billion.

Q111 **Chair:** Well, let's not jump ahead of ourselves. I think that's optimistic, potentially, given where we're at. Can you just be clear? The current cost is £11.2 billion—

Charu Gorasia: The £11.2 billion is the whole-life cost of the entire programme.

Q112 **Chair:** From the beginning—

Charu Gorasia: From beginning to end, as we anticipate today.



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Q113 Chair: What are you doing, Ms Gorasia, to hold everyone to account on the money management of this? We have seen money pour through this. We are hearing that it may be delivering a little bit now, but it has delivered very little in the times that we have been looking at it. How are you holding their feet to the fire? Do you have star chamber sessions when they have to come and present to you? What are you doing to make sure they are watching taxpayers' money?

Charu Gorasia: We do two things, Chair. It is something that keeps me awake and it is our largest programme.

Chair: We like it that you worry about it on behalf of our taxpayers; that is good.

Charu Gorasia: I should be worried. It is our largest programme. As you have said, the timescales have slipped in the past. I chair what is called the finance investment committee at the Home Office, where the SRO and the programme director come regularly. We have also introduced stage gate approvals as a new process, which means only if they meet certain milestones do we release the funding for the next lot.

Q114 Chair: Is that a new process? There used to be similar processes in the past.

Charu Gorasia: It is a new process that I instigated about seven months ago when I saw that the milestones in some of the major programmes had started slipping. Now, even if we get the full settlement in the spending round for the entire programme, which we normally don't on annual settlements at the moment, I don't release the funding until every milestone is met along the way.

Q115 Chair: On the cost, you talked about the increase in costs from last year. We were talking about the increase in whole-life cost since the original estimate. Can you give us that figure?

Charu Gorasia: I do not have it from the original estimate; I have it from the last business case that we were preparing. At that stage it was £10 billion, which was about a year and a half ago, and now it is at £11.2 billion, because the end date has shifted to the right. Because Airwave is more expensive than ESN, every time the date shifts, we are losing about £250 million per annum.

Q116 Chair: We'll just keep repeating that: £250 million per annum lost to the taxpayer. Sir Geoffrey, do you want to come back?

Q117 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Ms Gorasia, I would like a bit of clarification. When Joanna Davinson came before the Committee in September 2020, she said that the annual cost of delay to the ESN programme is likely to be in excess of £650 million. Are you saying that is not right and it is now down to £450 million? I would like a little bit of clarification, please.

Charu Gorasia: I can go back, check and write to you properly, rather than give you the numbers on the spot, but my assumption is that Joanna



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Davinson was referring not just to the annual cost of the delay, but that we have to keep the programme team in place and all the emergency services have to keep their own programme teams in place. She was probably adding up all the costs when she was coming up with those figures. Can I write to you with the details?

Q118 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: That would be very helpful. Are these costs of £11.2 billion net present value costs? Are they in accordance with your business plan, which hasn't yet been approved? Is that correct?

Charu Gorasia: That is right. The full business case has gone through internal governance within the Home Office. The next stage is that it goes through MPRG, the major projects review group, in July. Once that is passed, the full business case becomes set in stone. The numbers that I have quoted today are all from our internal governance processes for the full business case.

Q119 Chair: We will keep a close eye on this and will welcome regular updates from you. We will correspond about what we would like to see in those updates. I am very heartened, Ms Gorasia, that you are holding star chamber events. We need to see more of that in the civil service generally, and certainly in the Home Office.

You wrote a detailed letter to us, which got held up in the system and which we only saw this morning, about the various technology programmes within the Home Office portfolio. We do not have time to go into all of that today. It is fair enough that lots of big projects will be amber, but a lot of these are amber/red. Indeed, they are all amber or amber/red. In fact, the national law enforcement data programme is red. I won't go through them all, but it is a helpful letter, which we will put on the website and which we will want to talk to you about in due course.

I want to bring in Tom McDonald from the National Audit Office, because we were trying to bottom out these figures.

Tom McDonald: Just to confirm, the £650 million figure was what Joanna Davinson said to the Committee last year, but it would be helpful to have the Home Office clarify how that fits with the annual figures it is now quoting.

On the overall whole-life costs, in 2015 ESN was supposed to cost £6.2 billion and in our 2019 Report that had risen to £9.3 billion. So, the revised figure of over £11 billion is a very significant increase over the original 2015 amount.

Chair: We should be clear to people watching that we have the same baseline figures. But perhaps it has not just gone up with inflation—put it that way.

We now move on to another topic. Peter Grant, over to you.

Q120 Peter Grant: Mr Rycroft, I wanted to ask you about the attempted arrest and deportation of two gentlemen from Glasgow on 13 May—in particular the decision to carry out that operation on the feast of Eid al-Fitr, one of



the most important days in the Islamic religious calendar.

I appreciate that you cannot possibly go into the operational decisions around that particular action, but what guidance is given to Home Office enforcement teams about the sensitivities of particular days to believers of different faiths and to cultural sensitivities in what, certainly in the case of Pollokshields, was a very diverse community? Should the enforcement officer have registered whether or not that was an appropriate date to launch an action?

Matthew Rycroft: The answer is that immigration enforcement colleagues receive a lot of guidance on precisely that set of questions and they take into account local sensitivities, and national and global sensitivities, in their planning of operations.

This operation was well planned and executed. It was routine and lawful, and it had been done in the normal way, having notified Police Scotland. Although, as you say, it was an important day in the Islamic calendar, the people who the operation was against are in fact Sikhs, so I think it was reasonable for immigration enforcement to consider in advance that it was okay to go ahead with that operation. Of course, whenever we have instances like this, we seek to learn the lessons. We are reviewing the circumstances of the operation with that in mind.

Q121 **Peter Grant:** In previous correspondence to the Committee when we have been looking at immigration enforcement, you have indicated that you wanted to be able to have a much clearer assessment of harm—first, what you described as the harm done by illegal immigration generally, and then to refine that down to be able to assess the harm that individuals were creating by being here illegally.

It has been reported in some of the media that one of the gentlemen arrested and detained for a while in Pollokshields that day has lived in Scotland for 13 years—presumably without doing any harm to anybody; otherwise, the police would have arrested him while he was there. Is it your intention that future enforcement action will take account not of the theoretical harm that somebody might have done simply because they do not have official immigration status, but of the fact that someone has possibly lived in the community, become an established and respected member of the community and is not doing any harm to anybody? Can you foresee a day when the Home Office will take that into account before they barge in and knock somebody's door down to try and arrest him?

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, Mr Grant, I will not offer any comment on any particular case. Secondly, you are absolutely right that we are working to get better and better at measuring harm and using those measurements to guide prioritisation decision making. Thirdly, we have a duty—a statutory obligation—to ensure that people who do not have a legal right to reside in this country are no longer here. That is what immigration enforcement's job is, and that is what they were doing on that day.



Q122 Peter Grant: Again, one of my colleagues in Glasgow alerted me to this. Asylum seekers have payment cards, which give them a very small sum of money every week to buy household essentials—food and so on. Towards the end of May, there was an entire weekend when most asylum seekers were unable to access any money through that card at all. Why did you allow a situation to arise in which thousands of vulnerable people were left without any access to cash whatsoever?

Matthew Rycroft: I think the answer—if others know more than I do, they are welcome to join in—is that there was an error on the card that lasted for a short period of time, for instance a weekend, but that has now been resolved.

Q123 Peter Grant: You make it sound as if it was a fairly minor hitch, permanent secretary, but it is likely that tens of thousands of people, who are not allowed to work, as you will remember, were affected. That small amount of money each week was very often their only means of support. It is not enough money for them to build up savings, so they could not go without it for few extra days. Do you think that it would be acceptable, for example, for a bank just to turn off its payment card facilities for all its customers and leave them all with no way of getting cash for an entire weekend?

Matthew Rycroft: No, it is certainly not acceptable. If I am right about what happened—I am not seeking to excuse it; I am just explaining it—there was an error on the cards for that period of time, which did prevent some people receiving the funds to which they were entitled. That was very regrettable, but I am glad to say that it was for a relatively short period of time. I also think that it does make sense for us to be using those sorts of methods of payment wherever we can. Mr Lincoln might want to add more.

Paul Lincoln: My recollection of this particular issue is that it might have been known about in advance, and actually the providers of the card were pre-warning users that this might be the case, and working with them to try to minimise any impact there might have been. If that is wrong, I am sure that we can write to the Committee to explain further.

Chair: I suggest that we just get a write-out of what happened and what you have done, if there were any issues that needed to be resolved long term, so that it does not happen again, if it was not routine, as you suggest, Mr Lincoln.

Peter Grant: If the Department could write to us, setting out the circumstances, that would be very helpful.

Q124 Chair: I just want to get an update from you, Mr Lincoln, on digital services at the border. When we last spoke, we were in a quite heavy lockdown—we thought that things might be lifting, but perhaps not so much. You have had time, without so many passengers, to test the system. How is it going, who is using it, and how are you planning for restrictions being lifted more fully?



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Paul Lincoln: The programme is progressing well. We are now at 34 of the 56 locations that we are due to roll this out to. Having been completed, that represents over 80% of the passenger volumes. The remainder of those locations are relatively—

Q125 **Chair:** Sorry—80% of what passenger volumes? What is your baseline?

Paul Lincoln: The baseline is against any passenger volume—2018-19. It is the ports that have the bigger passenger volumes that would normally go through them. It is based on those, rather than the small number of passengers, comparatively, that we are seeing at the moment. We are on track to deliver the remainder by the end of June, which is the target that we put in place in terms of milestones for that programme. In terms of the actual number of passengers who have been through the system, we are now at about 1 million, and the system has been performing in accordance with the expectations that we set out previously.

Q126 **Chair:** Okay. You were also going to be training over 4,000 users on the system. Has that all gone well? Are they all trained up?

Paul Lincoln: Yes, we have approximately 4,000 users at the moment, which is where we should be in the roll-out.

Q127 **Chair:** You were also going to make sure that the service was available 99.93% of the time—a very precise figure. There have been problems, as when we last spoke to you it was working only at certain times of the day. Is it now available to your frontline staff at all times?

Paul Lincoln: Yes. Previously it was deliberately not being run 24/7, but in those locations it is now being run 24 hours a day. The feedback from the frontline has been very positive.

Q128 **Chair:** How quick is it? How long does it take to do a transaction? If I were travelling through and you had cause to check me through the list, how long would that take? Would a passenger see a delay, or is it now going smoothly? Do you think that won't happen, even with more numbers?

Paul Lincoln: This has actually improved the passenger processing time, in comparison with the previous system, so we are now talking, in most cases, about fractions of a second for this to process someone coming through. Of course, there are other procedures that we might need to take. For someone going to the primary control point, we might need to question them. But this is not therefore the critical path element of that processing.

Q129 **Chair:** What about the warnings index system, Mr Rycroft? When will you be confident enough that you can switch that off?

Matthew Rycroft: Mr Lincoln might want to take that question too.

Paul Lincoln: As we set out for the Committee last time, the date for turning that off is in April next year. In response to the NAO's and the Committee's recommendations, we set out the detailed milestone dependencies for that. We are confident that we can deliver that. You may



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also recall, though, that we did have a contingency plan, which was extensions of those contracts if necessary. But at the moment we are on track to deliver what we said.

Q130 **Chair:** In terms of the costs, are you confident in the figures that you last quoted to us—around £173 million in additional lifetime cost of the programme?

Paul Lincoln: Yes, and in terms of expenditure for last year, we hit the major milestones, and it was within 1% of the forecast expenditure.

Q131 **Chair:** I see Ms Gorasia nodding, so there seems to be harmony between Mr Lincoln and the money woman at the Department, which always pleases us on the Committee. Do you want to add anything, Ms Gorasia?

Charu Gorasia: Since Mr Lincoln did a review and reset, DSAB is definitely on the right track and delivering, including starting to hit all the milestones. When I chair the investment committee, I am able to release the funding quite regularly—

Q132 **Chair:** So Mr Lincoln appears in front of your Star Chamber, also known as the investment committee.

Charu Gorasia: His SRO on DSAB does quite regularly, but I talk to Mr Lincoln every time I see a red flag appearing.

Chair: Well, Mr Lincoln, with Ms Gorasia on your back I have some confidence that we might be getting somewhere finally on this programme as well. It is always good to have someone to hold the whip hand. Thank you very much for that, and we will come back to this: we are having a bit of a canter through some of the projects of concern to us.

Talking of projects of concern to us, Mr Shaun Bailey has another one to raise. There is quite a lot of choice in the Home Office. What are you going to go on, Mr Bailey?

Q133 **Shaun Bailey:** Mr Lincoln, I am conscious that the Committee has looked at this previously, but one of the big things that has come out before is the dearth of information that is available on the numbers of people who are here illegally. What measures have been put in place to try to drill down into that data, get more data and try to make things a little bit more accurate? The dearth of information is slightly concerning.

Paul Lincoln: I think that is primarily a responsibility in terms of immigration enforcement and the work that the NAO set out. A number of steps are being taken by the Department to try to refine their understanding of this, including working with the Office for National Statistics, and of course next year's census data will also prove very helpful in trying to work through some of the issues.

Q134 **Shaun Bailey:** That is helpful. Is it fair to say, given that you are having to make operational costing decisions with this lack of data, that we are all sat on a bit of a runaway train here, wondering where it is going to go, in terms of how you are making these operational decisions? How can



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you do that without this data?

Paul Lincoln: The operational decisions that we make at the border will be related to whether or not somebody has a right to come and work or visit the country, rather than whether or not someone will later be here as part of that, so that is the prime focus we have.

Q135 **Shaun Bailey:** Looking at the broader Brexit impact, how are you finding co-operation with our European partners? What additional steps have you had to take operationally as a result of Brexit and how are you finding the implementation of those measures?

Paul Lincoln: We have had very good relations with our European partners on this and, in particular, with our colleagues in France, where myself and Préfet Lalande, the préfet of Calais and the Nord region, have set in place a series of working groups, where we talk through operational issues, and we work those through with technical experts, including the ports and carriers, such as Eurostar and Eurotunnel, to make sure that we are operating very collaboratively and to try to make sure that the border runs as smoothly as possible between our countries.

Q136 **Shaun Bailey:** But are you confident that the gaps that are there as a result of Brexit—for example, we are obviously now outside the Dublin regulations—are being plugged? Is co-operation the key in all of this—to ensure that we will co-operate to ensure that people go back to where they need to go, and that that can be done effectively?

Paul Lincoln: That might be one that the permanent secretary might want to refer to in terms of the wider Home Office perspective but, as I say, certainly from an operational perspective, we work very closely with our French colleagues on the other side of the Channel.

Matthew Rycroft: I very much agree with what Mr Lincoln was saying, and more broadly we are very keen at ministerial and official level in the Home Office to maintain relationships with all of our crucial European opposite numbers. I would pick out Ireland and Germany as particularly important, and also France, and we have discussions with them on other issues we have not talked about today, including future returns agreements and so on.

Chair: I just want to touch on a couple of issues, and go back to Mr Lincoln on the issue of Digital Services at the Border. You talked about 34 ports being ready. The letter we received from the permanent secretary dated 3 June—item 2 in the annex—talked about 15 at the end of March 2021. Just to be absolutely clear: as at 7 June 2021, it is 34.

Paul Lincoln: Yes. Anything other than that, and we will come back to you. Obviously, we are making significant progress.

Q137 **Chair:** That is quite significant progress—it is quite fast. What has helped it go that quickly and how long will it take to get to the final?

Paul Lincoln: One of the things that we set out in the last Committee was that we had learned a series of lessons from the previous trials of Border



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Crossing, that would help us speed up the roll-out. We have built that in, and it has done. The remaining sites are due to be deployed by 30 June.

Q138 **Chair:** Okay; thank you. It is worth highlighting that of the subjects that we have covered today, Digital Services at the Border is amber as at March 2021—these are all March 2021 dates; emergency services network or, as it is now called, emergency services mobile communications programme, is amber/red on delivery confidence assessment; and the immigration platform technology is amber/red.

Mr Rycroft, you have quite a lot on your plate: big projects that are challenging—very challenging for the security of the nation—if they go wrong. Which ones keep you most awake at night?

Matthew Rycroft: It is a very significant portfolio, and I am glad that you found that letter helpful. If it is useful, we could repeat that at regular intervals.

Chair: We would like to get regular updates. Hopefully, we will see progress.

Matthew Rycroft: Exactly. We do manage it as a portfolio. What I have learned from it so far is, first of all, the importance of prioritisation—making sure that the most important programmes are getting the resource that they need.

Q139 **Chair:** By “resource”, do you mean people or money?

Matthew Rycroft: Mainly it is a people issue. That is usually where the constraints are in this world; I think Ms Gorasia is agreeing.

Secondly, there is the importance of aligning all our programmes with the strategy. That might sound obvious, but if there is a programme that is less important now than previously or is getting more important, we need to take account of that in our prioritisation. We have a framework to do that.

Thirdly, there is a skills and capability issue across the whole Department—so bringing in expertise and training up the people here already. Then there is forensically looking at the programmes that are the most red, or have the risk of dropping back down into red—you have highlighted some of those.

In specific answer to your question, the one that is probably most worrying just at the moment is the successor to the police national computer—the national law enforcement programme. We are just in the middle of a reset for that; that is why that is at the red end of the spectrum. But the portfolio as a whole is very red, despite the efforts that we have made and which we will carry on making.

Q140 **Chair:** Ms Gorasia, you are chairing the investment committee; presumably, you are looking at all these very regularly.

Charu Gorasia: I look at them at least twice a week, if it is any consolation. As the permanent secretary has been saying, we are not just



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looking at the money aspect of this but at people and capability and moving the resources around. That has been probably the trickiest thing for us.

Q141 **Chair:** I would agree with your analysis. What is interesting is who you are bringing in to do this—what capability do you have at hand to put into projects such as this?

Charu Gorasia: We recently ran a major campaign to bring in project managers and programme directors at every level. We ran a big campaign to bring in about 200 people, but every Government Department is competing for the same type of resource, so it has been tricky. But we are making sure that most programmes, particularly the most high-profile ones, have the right resources where they are starting to slip.

Q142 **Chair:** Where are those people coming from?

Charu Gorasia: Many of them come from the outside world, particularly as many of the Home Office programmes involve a lot of technology changes and digitisation. Some come from other Government Departments when their programmes are ending and they wish to move. For example, my chief portfolio officer came having delivered a successful programme at HMRC.

Q143 **Chair:** That is heartening because we are very keen on the right skills in the right place, but there is still a long way to go.

Matthew Rycroft: This Committee and the National Audit Office rightly focus on the most red parts of the portfolio.

Q144 **Chair:** For balance, you are going to give us success stories, are you?

Matthew Rycroft: I think it is important that the Committee does also recognise that there are some programmes in the Home Office that go well. The first phase of the Future Border and Immigration system was green because it was implemented. The EU settlement scheme is a second example, and a third is the police uplift programme—the recruitment of 20,000 police officers. Those are examples of programmes being very well run—

Q145 **Chair:** But who recruited the police officers? It was not actually the Home Office, it was the police—

Matthew Rycroft: Well, it was a programme run by the Home Office, just as these IT programmes are—

Q146 **Chair:** I think some of the chief constables and police and crime commissioners might want to claim some credit for that.

My final questions are about asylum accommodation. We had in front of us some of your officials on this issue, and I have to say that as a Committee I do not think we have ever seen so many letters from Members—cross-party across the House—concerned that they had not been consulted about people being housed in hotels in their city centres as a result of covid. We all recognise the huge effort that went in to get people housed



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in safe situations and to try to keep them safe during covid, but without proper contact with the communities that they were being housed in.

What is the situation now with people being housed? We touched on the barracks earlier, so leave that aside for one moment. How many people are still in hotels? Can you give us a figure?

Matthew Rycroft: I mentioned earlier that about 60,000 people are receiving accommodation support—

Chair: Some will be in settled accommodation—

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely. The total in hotels is 7,300, down from about 10,000 at the peak back in September. We have a programme to reduce that eventually down to zero out of hotels, obviously for value for money reasons—

Q147 **Chair:** We were talking to you then about moving people on to better accommodation. Of the 10,000 or so at peak, have they moved on to other accommodation? Presumably none of them have been deported because of the restrictions on the borders.

Matthew Rycroft: The number of returns has been very low. I would have to write to you with the detail about where the people have moved on to, now that they have left hotels. That is part of a programme that will continue as we reduce the reliance on hotels.

Chair: But you have still got a large number of people, so there will be a backlog of cases. With the best will in the world, some people will face deportation and return because they do not legally qualify to be here, which is a fact and a reality. How are you going to manage the backlog and what have you put in place to deal with that? Because it is not just down to you—it will be down to tribunals, access to lawyers and so on. There will be a big bottleneck.

Matthew Rycroft: This is a very live issue, particularly for the summer when we anticipate that more people will, sadly, risk their lives coming across the Channel in small boats or coming into the country in other ways. Obviously, our top priority is to prevent that from happening and to reduce the risk of loss of life at sea upstream, working closely with our French partners and others to prevent people from making those crossings.

Once people have come into this country they are adding to the complexity of the issue, and there is a risk of us not being able to reduce our reliance on hotels as fast as we would like. We need to make sure that we have options in place to ensure that, when people do come into the country, we are able to fulfil our obligation and ensure that they have accommodation.

Q148 **Chair:** You have been giving some information that may be helpful. Obviously, there is going to be a challenge for people who perhaps have not even been able to access a lawyer in that time, or have had to rely at



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best on internet access. It has been a long-term challenge for the Home Office that often there is not a wealth of good legal advice; certainly in parts of the country or certain nations of the UK there are whole deserts of such advice. Is it something that the Home Office will consider—that it would be more cost-effective to make sure that there is certain legal support available, so that the backlog does not just get gummed up at the next stage when people start trying to find legal advice as they hit certain crunch points in the system?

Matthew Rycroft: Ministers have set out the new plan for immigration, which is an end-to-end look at the whole of the asylum system, in order to shake it up and to reform it—

Chair: That is for the future. What about these people right now?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, that will be the longer-term answer, after its parliamentary passage.

Q149 **Chair:** But if these people are facing a potential return, it could be by next summer, when one would hope the borders might be more open and there would be no practical barrier of that kind on return. For these people now the backlog will just keep bulging through the system, won't it?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, we face a very busy summer at all the different stages of the process, but we will carry on working with people and their representatives, lawyers and others, on each individual case.

Chair: There are lot of individual cases, but there is an issue of time and flow management as well, notwithstanding that people have individual circumstances.

Matthew Rycroft: There is also an issue in relation to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in particular—

Chair: I was going to mention that. It is not the first time that Kent has raised this as an issue. In the past, of course, Hillingdon has had issues because of Heathrow. I remember many years ago—over two decades ago—we had a lot of children, when I was a councillor in Islington, arriving unaccompanied and found on Holloway Road. So there are certain boroughs that become magnets for whatever reason, and there is a burden for those boroughs, and it comes back perennially. Has the Home Office got a plan this time around?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes. The Home Secretary and the Education Secretary have been working closely together and consulting local authorities, and they will make an announcement shortly on what the arrangements will be for the future of the national transfer scheme. We are extremely grateful to Kent County Council and to others that you have mentioned for the way that they have taken a really disproportionate share in terms of looking after these children as they come into our country, and we would encourage other counties and other local authorities to reach their levels of generosity and to spread that task across the country a bit more evenly.



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Chair: There is too much to get into in massive detail. Sir Geoffrey wants to come in.

Q150 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** It seems as though we are faced with a situation where, as you alluded to, the number of people coming in in good weather in the summer is getting greater and greater almost by the day, because the weather is getting better. You have said yourself the returns are very small. Presumably you will need to house more children and adults. What provision are you making for this? How many extra this year, for example? Can you give the Committee any idea of where the system is going to?

Matthew Rycroft: The first thing to say is that we hope that people will be leaving the system in greater numbers than they have been during the pandemic. We have paused what we call the cessations of support. We have paused that, so people, even if they had exhausted all of their rights to appeal and so on, and even if in normal terms they would have been—

Q151 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** To be very clear, you have paused or you are going to pause?

Matthew Rycroft: We did pause, and we are about to unpause.

Q152 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Imminently?

Matthew Rycroft: Imminently. Obviously, depending on the fourth stage of the Prime Minister's roadmap, on 21 June—if it is on 21 June—that will be a moment when we can unpause the cessations of support, and that means that people will be flowing through the system more than they previously were. In terms of actual numbers, that will help significantly. But you are absolutely right that we are preparing for all plausible eventualities, including modelling about what the total numbers would look like and what that would mean for the different stages of the journey, if I can put it that way, including those who would need support in terms of accommodation.

Q153 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Are you prepared to give the Committee an idea of what that modelling shows in terms of net increase this year in terms of adults and children?

Matthew Rycroft: We are certainly ready for all plausible scenarios, including ones where there are more people coming into this country than there were last year.

Q154 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I asked you precisely: are you prepared to share with the Committee what those numbers look like?

Matthew Rycroft: I will happily write with more detail on this.

Q155 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Thank you. Is there anything other than the pandemic that is slowing the system down? People coming into this country either claim asylum and they are entitled to it, or they are not entitled to it. What is the Home Office going to do to speed up this due process to make sure that people are processed quicker?

Matthew Rycroft: The longer-term answer to that question is the same as the one I gave earlier to the Chair, which is the new plan for immigration that Ministers have set out.

Q156 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** How long will the new plan take?

Matthew Rycroft: It will depend on parliamentary passage—

Chair: Quite a long time.

Matthew Rycroft: We are introducing it in the coming weeks. In the meantime we will carry on doing all the things that we have been doing, including seeking to prevent people from risking their lives crossing the Channel in the first place, working with our providers of accommodation to ensure that we have flexible amounts of accommodation, and securing future returns agreements so that we can return people to countries of origin, or countries that they have passed through, in the future.

Q157 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** How are discussions going with the French, the Libyans and all the other frontline states where these boats come from? It is a highly unsatisfactory system in which they risk their lives. How are the discussions going and what effect is that having?

Matthew Rycroft: We are in intense discussions with our French partners on this issue and on many other issues as well. We have very close collaboration with them. We want to ensure that they do what they can to prevent crossings. Some 4,000 crossings have already been prevented so far this year—double the same point last year—but a lot of people are getting across nevertheless, so there is more that we need to do. We want to work with our French colleagues on their technological solutions, as well as on sharing information and so on, and all of that will continue.

Chair: I thank our witnesses very much. We lost Tom Greig earlier, but thank you to him, and thank you to Paul Lincoln, Charu Gorasia and Matthew Rycroft, the permanent secretary. We will put our thoughts into a Report on the main issue of the Windrush and will probably write to you about some of the other issues. I thank you for your time. The transcript will be up on the website in the next couple of days, uncorrected.