



Justice and Home Affairs Committee

Uncorrected oral evidence: Oral evidence session with the Home Secretary

Wednesday 27 October 2021

10.30 am

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

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 15

Witnesses

[|](#): Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary; Tricia Hayes, Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office.

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Examination of witnesses

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP and Tricia Hayes.

Q1 **The Chair:** Good morning to the Home Secretary and to the committee. Welcome to the first of what I hope will be regular and frequent meetings with you, Home Secretary. Our remit is both justice and home affairs, and there is an awful lot in both areas to talk about. Welcome, too, to Tricia Hayes, the Second Permanent Secretary. Our questions are policy questions, and I am sure you understand that. Of course, if there are technical matters, we understand that you will want to bring in your official. Shall we just get started?

Priti Patel: Let us give it a go.

The Chair: We wanted to start by asking you about refugees and integration. You have been quoted in a press release announcing Operation Warm Welcome talking about the importance of integration, which is a view we share. We know it is important for people coming from anywhere, including Hong Kong for instance. Can you tell us what the integration programme will entail?

Priti Patel: Good morning to the committee. Thank you for this opportunity. There are a number of points that I would like to make about the resettlement of those we bring to the United Kingdom. I would like to put this within context.

In terms of Afghanistan, we have brought people over. We have evacuated 15,000 people, many of whom, by the way, are British nationals as well. We are committed to the resettlement of those we have evacuated. We do not hold the view that they are refugees. These are people who have a bond to our country through a lot of the work that they have done over 20 years by supporting, quite frankly, the rebuilding of Afghanistan's civil society and all of that. We are all familiar with that background.

Then we have the wider piece around refugees. I am sure the committee is familiar with the work we have done on BNOs, for example, and people from Hong Kong—those who are basically fleeing persecution and suffering oppression.

Afghanistan has been challenging. We should be under no illusions about how difficult this has been. We had Op Pitting, which was an incredible operation. As a Secretary of State, along with our incredible officials and colleagues in the MoD, I worked in the department 24/7, night and day, on the evacuation. We also knew that we had a duty of care and a responsibility to those we were evacuating.

You have asked about the resettlement and what that consists of. It has taken time, but it consists of a number of key component parts. The first is welfare and accommodation. Our department and our colleagues in the MoD witnessed the sheer trauma of being evacuated. It would bring tears to your eyes to hear the harrowing tales of what I call the "lift and shift" operation, getting people through processes and security checks, on to a plane, et cetera. There were young, young children. I have been to Heathrow many times to receive them and to talk to them.

Welfare support—a place and a roof over their heads—has always been front and centre. It is a fact that we have put people in hotels for two reasons. One was for the quarantine purpose. We are living with Covid; it has been the backdrop for the hotel accommodation; quarantining. While people have been in hotels, welfare support and financial support have been put in place. This is not all the Home Office; this is across government. We have been

the co-ordinators doing the dot matrix of joining things up. Along with that is educational support for children. With DWP in particular, we have been looking at how we can start to match people up to employment, given their skills.

I can even speak, just on Afghanistan, about the distribution of the 15,000 people nationwide. We have a majority of them in London. There is a lot of cross government work, which is why it is called Operation Warm Welcome, with other departments coming together to provide the support that is needed. This is long term. None of this changes people's circumstances overnight.

We are then in a process, with the new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities—formerly the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government—of working with local authorities, which have been given financial support to match families up and give them permanent accommodation. That is challenging for a number of reasons. Accommodation is in short supply, as are the right types of homes, particularly for large families.

The Chair: There is so much that is needed, as we all recognise. I understand that Germany supplies 600 hours for each refugee on language and orientation. In France it is 200. There are all sorts of personal and individual obstacles. Where the lessons, classes or whatever are provided, it is much harder for women to get to them, because the men assume the women will stay home with the children. The men can access the integration programmes. How are we going to make sure that the programmes are available to everyone? Very specifically, will childcare be made available so there is real access?

Priti Patel: Look, none of us in this room would dispute the fact that access should be for everybody—men and women. That is clearly our objective. I will be very, very candid. While we have people accommodated in hotels, the logistics and infrastructure for providing support are challenging. I am very, very honest about this.

The Chair: What about looking further ahead?

Priti Patel: We are settling people into what will be their new communities where they can rebuild or restart their lives. I look at this through the lens of restarting their lives. That means, for children, first making sure that they are in school.

There are plenty of discussions taking place. If you will forgive me, I am not leading all these discussions. We have a Minister responsible for the resettlement scheme, who is leading this work. Education is a very, very good example. The Department for Education has identified places within schools where it wants the children who have been with these evacuated families who are in the United Kingdom, in England and Wales in particular, to go into school. That basis gives stability, and then we can start working with the parents on access to language and to skills training. Then, of course, that leads to the next foundation, which is access to employment.

My colleagues and I would be very happy in future to come back and explain how this comes together, but these are early days. In all honesty, we are not at the stage when we can yet say, "Components A, B and C are leading to the following outcomes". That does not mean work is not taking place. There is extensive work taking place across the whole panoply of government.

The Chair: Perhaps we can leave it with a request that that sort of detail will enable women

not to be in a position where they are relying on children to interpret for them.

Q2 **Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** Home Secretary, I wanted to commend the department on the work you have just described, which is quite extraordinary. I have been working on getting women judges and lawyers out of the country, and I think you might know a little bit about that work. We have now got 103 women judges out. Of those, there are something like 80 women judges and their families waiting in Athens. Of course, I am operating on a global scale.

I wanted to ask this. If I were able to secure, for example, academic posts here in the UK for some of those very accomplished women judges, and if they were offered jobs so that they were coming here as skilled and talented people, would that facilitate and expedite applications?

Priti Patel: Thank you for raising this. I am aware of the women judges in Athens. I have spoken to the Greek Immigration Minister about this just this week. It is important to put some context around this. Evacuation and moving people out was always our priority, clearly. Post evacuation, we have a scheme, the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, which is one of the most ambitious in the world. We are not able to operationalise that scheme. Think about the discussion we have just had. We simply do not have the infrastructure or the accommodation.

In fact, when I announced that scheme I made it quite clear that we had to be assured, as with the Syrian resettlement scheme, that we could bring people over and, when we did, they would have accommodation and jobs to go to. This is basically our thinking on how we work going forward.

The short answer is yes. These are accomplished people; they are skilled, professional individuals. Why would we not want to bring them over? Plus, we have to think about their safety and security in light of the regime that we know about in Afghanistan. It is, however, a case of actually following this through and ensuring that we have all the various connections.

There are other examples that you will have seen. The most recent one is the Afghan female football team, who have been sponsored by teams in the UK. We still have a duty of care to them in terms of accommodation and the wider resourcing that goes with that, which is why we are looking at everything on a case-by-case basis right now.

My final comment on this is that this is simply not a Home Office decision. This cuts across the Foreign Office in terms of those we would seek to bring into the United Kingdom and leave outside the rules as they currently stand, and then how we would bring them over. There is this very difficult and sensitive issue. I appreciate that the judges are in Athens right now. You all know of the journey they have had to get to Athens. That is not straightforward. We still have to think about threat to life, the risk to them all and how we can ensure we are safeguarding them in the right way and not putting them at greater risk.

Q3 **The Chair:** Let us move on to immigration, on which we have a number of questions. In the new plan for immigration, you have explained that the return of inadmissible asylum seekers is contingent on securing returns agreements with safe third countries. Could you update us on the plans to secure return agreements?

Priti Patel: Let me do so. With the new plan for immigration, the premise of the policy is for fundamental reform of our asylum system. I am very conscious that Lord Blunkett is here as

well. He will completely understand the trials and tribulations of asylum policy, over not just recent years but decades, and how we process cases. The point about the new plan for immigration is to introduce an expedited process, particularly for claims and appeals. For those who have no legal basis to stay in the United Kingdom, we absolutely want to return them to their own country.

I would like to emphasise that we have put our legislation and policies together. We are working on returns agreements and dialogues. We are removing and returning people. We have been doing this through a pandemic, which has been very difficult for all the obvious reasons that I do not need to unpack right now.

The most significant returns agreement we have had thus far is with India, which is part of a migration agreement deal that I struck with India earlier this year. India is significant, because the highest number of people who have no legal basis to be in the United Kingdom are Indian nationals. That means we are working with them on charter flight removals to India, and that is work directly Government to Government.

The second country where we have negotiated a returns agreement is Albania, for a very good reason. The highest number of foreign national offenders in our prisons are from Albania. We also have people from Albania entering our country illegally through various routes, more prominently right now with small boats, on which we are seeing a lot of Albanian nationals coming to our country illegally.

These are significant returns agreements. There is work taking place with other countries as well. At the same time, it would be remiss of me not to touch on EU member states. I recently hosted the G7 in September, where we are in active discussions with, for example, France. We have a lot of work taking place with France on small boats and illegal migration. It is a really big problem, and it is a joint problem. Of course, there are other countries in the EU. Returns agreements are clearly becoming a much wider topic within EU member states, and there is a recognition that we all need to work together in this space.

The Chair: In the policy document, the suggestion is made that for countries that do not co-operate on taking returnees, if I can call them that, there might be a sanction by controlling the issue of visas. Is the problem not really about the safety of the place where people might return? Is this an appropriate method of securing a workable system?

Priti Patel: This is an important point. We are alluding to visa sanctions with countries that do not co-operate in taking back their own nationals. We should emphasise that these are their own nationals. That is not an unreasonable position to take. This is part of foreign policy and diplomacy. 'Can you please open up your visa waivers to us as a country?' It is right that we have these dialogues with countries. It is not just about returns agreements, but about making sure that they are actively taking back their own nationals.

You have asked very specifically about the safety of these countries. We have very clear laws and rules in place on the type of countries we would remove and return people to, including own nationals. These countries have to be safe. They have to have a strong human rights record and our policies are all predicated on that. All our actions are legal, but at the same time it is right that we have these bilateral discussions, country by country. We have a very significant list of countries that are very slow at taking back or accepting their own nationals. It is right that we pursue, in an active way, dialogues with many of these countries.

The Chair: I had better keep moving on. There is a lot to talk about there. You have trailed Lord Blunkett's intervention.

Q4 **Lord Blunkett:** Home Secretary, thanks for making time for us. Yes, I remember very well appearing before Select Committees using much the same sort of language that you are using. Could I make it clear that all of us understand that we want to clamp down on organised criminality in terms of trafficking? It is a given. The question is how we do it.

The UNHCR has suggested that the new immigration policy threatens to create a 'discriminatory two-tier asylum system'. To begin with, I wondered whether you would like to comment on that.

Priti Patel: I would, absolutely. For the benefit of the committee, we are working with UNHCR. It is a very, very important partner for us. Let me just be clear about that. I have a professional history working with UNHCR in previous roles that I have held in government. It is an absolutely incredible organisation. Coming back to the discussion we had on Afghanistan, it is a partner with us in the work we do.

I would characterise our approach as a differentiated approach, which is to deter illegal entry to the United Kingdom by those with the ability to pay people smugglers. Lord Blunkett, this goes back to your original point about organised crime. Perhaps as Home Secretary I see organised crime and criminality, people trafficking and people smuggling now through a much more intensive lens, but the scale at which we see organised criminality is appalling, abhorrent and shocking. It is not just in France; it is across the whole of the EU and further afield. I say this as a former Secretary of State for DFID. Go to the Sahel, go to Africa, go to various countries. We have a fundamental problem with people trafficking.

I believe our differentiated approach is justified and proportionate, because it seeks to uphold the commitments of all countries when it comes to protecting the vulnerable. We all believe in protecting vulnerable people. The wider work that now sits with the FCDO on investment, economic development and upstreaming is vital, but the crucial thing for us—I say this as Home Secretary—is the work that we do with law enforcement.

Lord Blunkett, you asked how we deal with criminality and organised criminal gangs. It is through the very strong systems that we have, which you will also be familiar with: the National Crime Agency, intelligence partners, prosecution pathways, surveillance activities—our drones and footage—where we are working with third countries such as France, and ANPR. We are actively using these tools to home in on these gangs. I do not have the figures with me today, but we have had a number of successful prosecutions year on year.

The other point to make about the new plan for immigration is that we will toughen the penalties, the sanctions, the consequences, for these people smugglers. Currently, the criminal justice system is just too soft when it comes to the sentencing of these people.

Lord Blunkett: We all take the point, as we did a moment or two ago, about the importance of what we used to call the Gateway Protection Programme—you have renamed it—with the UN. That applies to Afghanistan as it does, separately, to what we are doing with Hong Kong. I would just like to try to get a little more granular, because I still do not understand the admissibility issue.

Maybe I could just ask you this to start with. Is admissibility based on those who come with

legitimate passports and documentation through what we would describe as legitimate routes—by air from a third country or by ship through the legitimate purchase of a travel arrangement? Is that where people are admissible for asylum claims?

Priti Patel: If I could just speak about the wider changes that have taken place on immigration, we have our legal routes, clearly. We have the legal system of coming to the United Kingdom, which is all about legal routes, documentation and showing that you have your visas. All of that is absolutely the right and proper way.

Inadmissibility is about those who enter our country illegally without documentation. Look at, for example, small boats or people being smuggled in the back of lorries. They have come through dangerous means, literally, by coming on boats and lorries in the hands of criminals, but they have travelled through safe third countries where they could and should have claimed asylum, if they are asylum seekers who are fleeing persecution and suffering a serious threat to life.

We see—all the data and evidence has shown this—that in the last 12 months alone 70% of the individuals who have come to our country illegally via small boats are single men, who are effectively economic migrants. They are not genuine asylum seekers. They are able to pay the smugglers and get in contact with the gangs, whether they are in northern France or Germany. These are the ones who are elbowing out the women and children, who are at risk and fleeing persecution.

The admissible route on asylum is working with third parties such as UNHCR and IOM to create safe and legal routes. That is where we are concentrating our efforts on asylum and creating safe passage for genuine refugees.

Lord Blunkett: I will not keep you, because other people have questions relating to this, but can I try to find a way of understanding, apart from the work with the UNHCR, which we are all fully aware and supportive of, how someone claims asylum if they have a passport, a visa and a legitimate route from their country? How do they claim that they are persecuted in those circumstances, when we all know that the people who are persecuted are often the ones who are without documentation, without a passport and without the permission of their country to leave?

Priti Patel: You mentioned them having visas or legal documentation. We have clear processes around asylum, and they are going to change in the new plan for immigration. Our focus has to be on those we want and need to give support to, who are fleeing persecution and are undocumented. We recognise that they are undocumented.

You will be familiar with many of the previous asylum processes. This is about how we now change our interview processes and ensure that we are granting asylum to those who are genuine asylum seekers, not those who turn up at primary control points at our airports and require special case working through Border Force by saying, 'Here I am with all my documentation, and I am seeking asylum'. That is simply not right.

That is why we are having these new processes and new filters. We as a country are warm, generous and welcoming, particularly to those who are fleeing persecution and who need our help. That is where we are concentrating our efforts through the new plan for immigration.

Lord Blunkett: I am sure there will be lots of time to come back to this, but I just get the

impression that if you are properly documented and have been able to come, in your terms legally, Home Secretary, you will not be granted asylum because you are clearly not at risk. If you are at risk and you have escaped, and you do not have the documentation, you will not be admissible and you will get temporary permission to be here. We will come back to it.

The Chair: We will indeed. Most of us approach this from the other end, which is how, if you are trying to get out of a country that is a conflict zone, you are able to get on a regular means of transport.

Home Secretary, I understand that there is a document outside that needs your signature.

Priti Patel: That is right, yes.

Lord Blunkett: It is a good moment to regroup.

Priti Patel: I will be very quick.

The Chair: We might be able to get started, Tricia, if you are okay with this, on the next question.

Q5 **Baroness Pidding:** The Home Secretary has already touched on part of this, but I will follow it up, on the meritorious claims, how they are going to be filtered and how that process accounts for the difficulties that some claimants may have in engaging with the asylum process.

Tricia Hayes: We are really keen to improve the quality of service that we can offer people who are engaging with our asylum system. We are in the middle of putting in place an agenda of reforms to deal with claims more quickly by making sure that we have the right information to filter them into the right kind of decision processes with decision-makers who have the right kinds of skills to deal with them.

We have developed a transformation programme for our asylum caseworkers that allows for more specialisation within the case working teams, so they bring to their work more expert knowledge of individual countries. We have set them up to work in teams rather than on an individual basis, so they can give each other more peer support in making sure that they have the right information to take decisions. We have also given them access to an external source of advice and support that is not in their line management chain. If they are anxious about the quality of the evidence they are being provided or the ethical considerations they are facing, they have somebody who is independent to their team to whom they can look for further advice and support.

We have a fairly long way to go on that journey. I would not say that, at the minute, we are happy with either the volumes of asylum cases that we are dealing with or the productivity of our individual asylum decision-makers, but over the next year or so we have strong plans to bring more people into the team, to change the working model, to bring in more specialisation and to roll out team working. If we were sitting here next year, we would be able to describe a better and more effective service that we are offering.

Q6 **Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws:** It will not surprise you, but I am going to ask you about legal advice and access to lawyers. It has been said that legal advice will be made available to claimants at the very beginning of the process. I just wanted to know what practical arrangements there were for that.

Priti Patel: Shall I come in on that? That is absolutely right. We believe that it is important to have legal advice up front.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: As soon as possible, yes.

Priti Patel: Yes, as soon as possible. There has been a great deal of consultation, as I am sure all members will appreciate and recognise, because of the type of asylum claims that come forward. I do not need to spell this out to the committee. Asylum is a deeply, deeply complicated area.

If I could just put this into some kind of context, in the year ending March this year the UK received the fourth largest number of asylum applications compared with EU member states. That is 33,000 asylum applications. In terms of legal support, members will be familiar with the right of appeal: not just once, not twice, but several times. We believe that access to legal aid as early as possible in the process—legal aid is already there—will help not just to triage but to assess the needs and background of the individual. That is absolutely important. Of course, we all believe in doing right by those who need help and support, for example fleeing persecution, and giving people all the support they need, rather than dragging out claims, which is suboptimal for everybody in terms of outcomes.

This is policy work in progress, but we are looking at practical applications of our policy in terms of the arrangements and the amount of time taken, because time is important as well for claimants, particularly if they have specialist needs. One particular specialist area is modern day slavery. It is a highly, highly complicated area. Knowing that Members here are incredibly learned, many of you will be familiar with some modern day slavery claims, but they vary case by case; they are very individual. It would not be right for me or anyone in government to sit and opine or generalise about what a claim could look like.

We are in the process of scoping out how that comes together, how the triaging takes place and how the access comes together for individuals. That will take place very early on, almost as soon as people claim asylum, and then of course there is the triaging process that takes place from there.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: What became clear from most of the research is that you were getting appeals because of the absence of really good decision-making at an early stage. If lawyers can be involved at an early stage, you get better decision-making at the early stage and it means less appealing. The success of the appeal rate was not because judges have developed soft hearts; it was because they were seeing that the original decisions were poor and that there had not been adequate legal advice early on.

Priti Patel: We recognise that. I myself have spent time with external counsel and various QCs just, again, to listen and hear. When you think about immigration courts and tribunals, backlogs, for example, which will be another subject for a different department, have a huge impact on individuals. There are 33,000 new applications, bottlenecks in the system, Covid and slower decision-making. This drives terrible outcomes for people. That is what we are seeking to change and reform.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: It is really good to hear you say that.

The Chair: Can I just come in before you go on? I hope the discussions about what it is really like for asylum seekers have included a trauma-informed approach. We must all know that people who have been through these situations cannot begin to discuss them—I cannot

click my fingers—just like that. It takes some investigation.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: Yes, particularly if it has been of a sexual nature, for example for women. It often takes time for them to be confident enough and trusting enough of the individuals who are questioning them before they will disclose the full detail of what has happened to them.

Priti Patel: You are both absolutely right. We are bringing in very significant reforms. Quite frankly, we have all sorts of issues in our system to do with processing but also why people come here illegally and then claim asylum. We want to do the right thing by the right people, but I have been very cognisant and reflective. I have spent time understanding cases and spent time with people—human beings. The trauma is extraordinary. It is wrong of us to make generalisations in those early stages. It is therefore right that we put the right measures in place.

I would like to emphasise this point, and I appreciate that this will come up for further discussion in the Committee stages with the new plan for immigration, on the Floor of the House and in the Lords. One of the starkest areas for me—in fact, I have spoken to one of my predecessors about this, the former Prime Minister Theresa May—is modern day slavery and bonded labour claims. They are absolutely astonishing. People are so shattered and traumatised. The system will automatically just make assumptions when that individual could be pretty pivotal to a police investigation that could lead to prosecutions. How do we support them on that journey?

There are many, many considerations. Therefore, I am spending some time with colleagues in the House asking not to generalise, overstate and say that it can all be done through binary solutions. It cannot be. We have to work with many of the tools that we are articulating and trying to advance.

Q7 Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: That leads very readily into the next matter that I wanted to raise with you. Wendy Williams conducted a review, which you have accepted in full. She attributed the Windrush scandal to a culture of disbelief inside the Home Office. It is something that many of us involved with the law have been aware of for rather a long time. We are talking about decades, really.

You are designing this new plan, and I just wondered how you avoid risking a perpetuation of that. One of the problems here—you were talking about not generalising—is that business of automatically assuming that people are going to lie. Starting with that point is problematic.

Priti Patel: We are not starting from that premise at all. I will come on to the wider point in a minute, but, if I think about Windrush, I walked into a department just as the lessons learned report from Windrush was due to come out. I have my own views, quite frankly. I am an ethnic minority and a Home Secretary coming into a department where it did not feel that comfortable. I am very up front and honest about that.

I met with Wendy last week. I have invited her back into the department, because I fundamentally believe that is the right approach. Departments get institutionalised in their thinking and ways of working, and that happens everywhere. There is no excuse for forgetting that my department deals with human beings; we deal with people.

I do not tire of saying that this Government believe in putting people first. We are politicians democratically elected by the British public. Yes, they want change, yes, they

want reform. But it is also up to us to get under the bonnet and understand the core components of how we can serve people better. That has always been integral to me, my instincts and my line of questioning in the department, which has been challenging. I will be very upfront. It has been difficult. I have had a lot of pushback in many, many quarters.

With that said, the lessons learned report was harrowing. It is very upsetting to read, it really is. It was upsetting for me to read it, knowing that was the department I am serving in and responsible for, in which I am therefore seeking to bring about change. Some big things have happened, which are cultural, but, as Tricia has also said on asylum, it does not happen overnight. This is a long, long haul, it really is. We have to understand, recognise and respect different people, different backgrounds, different faiths and different cultures. It is a statement of the obvious to all of us, but we have to ensure that it is front and centre of people's minds.

It is easy for me to say that. Look at how ethnically diverse I am. I am an internationalist. I have been brought up like that. That speaks to my own personal values and my own family background. But you can see large government departments across government becoming very binary in their thinking and very silo-ed. I walked into all of that, completely.

Changing the culture through Wendy's work has been important. I have been working with both my Permanent Secretaries, who have been excellent on this, recognising that we cannot stand still as an organisation and an institution. I am sure Tricia will come on to speak about some of the work we are doing with staff *et cetera*. Specific to Wendy, we have stakeholder groups and different forums. I am a "bring people in" person. I apologise to no one about that; I quite like people. I have an open door.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: I will come knocking at it. I am seeing this as an invitation.

Priti Patel: No, you should do. For some in politics, that might be anathema, but not in our area. Historically—I know Lord Blunkett will recognise this—we have been seen as a case working department. I am also an elected representative. I do not talk about casework; I talk about people. That is one of the biggest changes in our organisation.

Coming back to your overall point about the new plan for immigration, the culture of disbelief and being challenging of experiences, we have to ask, 'Why are we in court? What is this case telling us? What have we not learned about people's backgrounds? What is the situation or the circumstances that have led to X outcome?' There are lots of errors that still happen, and I will be very candid and upfront about that. Too often we end up in court for the wrong reasons, where we could have been better organisationally as a department.

As I have said, we are learning all the time. These reforms are difficult not just as regards policy and legislation, but—you will appreciate this—working with lawyers. The law can sometimes go down one avenue when we need to think about other factors as well and how we take a much more blended approach.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: We have our own cultural problems.

Priti Patel: At this level, being open and honest, and recognising that, is really important. The easier option would be to say, 'Nothing to see here', or to say, 'We could do a bit of cosmetic stuff'. I do not believe in that, which is why I accepted the recommendations. They are not easy; they are absolutely not easy. It is also a message back across the whole of government that, fundamentally, we represent the people. We serve the people, we are

here for them. We have to take a very different approach going forward, but it is going to take a long time, it really is.

Lord Blunkett: How does the people approach square with treating people who have not come with the right documentation as inadmissible asylum seekers?

Priti Patel: We also have to look at individual circumstances and backgrounds based on what we know about individuals. I come back to my point. We cannot keep taking a binary approach and say, 'That's it. You are in. You are not in'. It is complicated. Lord Blunkett, you will appreciate this and know this from your own work. That is why we put a lot of legal support in.

Look at the work of Border Force but also Immigration Enforcement. There is work across the department, along with, yes, changes to our laws that will come on how we treat people, how we respect them and how we need time to understand their circumstances. If they are here with no legal rights, remove them, I hope back to their own country. If they are here on valid grounds, in the way I have been speaking about, resettle them and start their new life, and everything else goes that way. We have to have efficacy within our system, and that is core to some of the changes we are bringing in.

Tricia Hayes: I wonder whether I could add a few words about that from a purely operational perspective. I would make three points in addition to what the Home Secretary has said. We may come on to this later, but one of the absolute flagship actions that we have taken in response to the Wendy Williams report has been the rollout of the 'face behind the case' learning package, which is now being undertaken by more than 10,000 of our staff, including those who are most involved in looking at individual cases and taking decisions.

We have just done a very rigorous evaluation of that training. It is not complete yet, but we have had incredibly positive feedback from our evaluation about the way in which that training has brought home to the people who are engaging with individuals the need to express themselves using simple language and to try to understand all dimensions of an individual's situation. By far the majority of the people who have gone on that course tell us that they are going to operate and think differently as a consequence of doing that training. That has been a huge push for cultural change across our operational workforces.

I have been in the Home Office for about a year and a half now. From an operational point of view, we have had a cultural push to be more open to external voices and to bring people into the organisation who will say things about what we are doing that are not easy to hear or comfortable. We are almost at the end of Black History Month. We have had an extensive programme of speaker events in the organisation. Not all of those have been particularly comfortable moments, but we have had wide participation. We are very keen for our operational workforces to feel comfortable with the complexity and conflict involved in their work, and to see that not as something that needs to be resisted but as an intrinsic part of the job that we are asking people to do.

The Chair: Wendy Williams's recommendations extended to the internal culture of the Home Office. I attended an online briefing about this fairly early on during lockdown, and we heard about 360-degree appraisals and how those were being introduced. I just wondered how extensive they are and how far up the organisation they have gone. Have you undergone one?

Priti Patel: I have a private sector background and I have been pushing 360 reviews, it is fair to say, from the day I entered the department. I value them and they work across the board, they really do. It is fair to say—Tricia will expand upon this more—we spend a great deal of time—

The Chair: I do not particularly want to spend a lot of time on it, because we have other policy things. I am really interested to know whether you have taken part in this formally.

Priti Patel: I have, because I am constantly under review—

The Chair: Formally?—

Priti Patel: In my own department as well as with colleagues. That is how it works, completely.

Tricia Hayes: From an official's perspective, can I be clear that I have had 360-degree feedback twice a year? Matthew Rycroft is the other Permanent Secretary. We have 360 feedback. It is now a mandatory part of the system for all senior leaders across the whole organisation. Baked into that, I am really keen to tell you, is feedback not just from the people we work with immediately but from our operational workforces. We get feedback twice a year on the quality of our leadership and our delivery of the cultural change we are trying to make. That is very important to us.

Q8 **Lord Dholakia:** Home Secretary, can I come back on the matter of resources and reception centres? The Home Office intends to accommodate asylum seekers who could have sought refuge in some of the safe third countries. The same thing applies in relation to detainees, whose removal is possible within a reasonable time. The question arises: how many people are you expecting to be accommodating or detaining in a typical year, and how much are you expecting that to cost?

Priti Patel: I am looking at reception centres as part of our future accommodation plans. Primarily, it is public knowledge and a well-known fact that we have been housing asylum seekers in hotels. There are a number of reasons for that. One is the pandemic. Tricia can speak much more about the dialogue with Public Health England. Because of Public Health England guidance through the pandemic, we were unable to continue with the type of asylum accommodation that I am sure committee members would be familiar with. We have ended up having to put people into hotel accommodation and I am afraid that is completely suboptimal. It is counterproductive. It has also acted as a pull factor for people to come to the country illegally, thinking that they are going to end up in hotels.

The point about reception centres is that, through the new plan for immigration, we will fundamentally change the way in which we accommodate people. We will provide the right kind of accommodation for people's needs, so they do not end up becoming destitute and so they are fully housed, taken care of, given medical support and given welfare support all under one roof. Importantly, with that, we can process their claims in one place so that they themselves can see how their claims are being processed in a way they cannot right now.

Our reporting centres were unable to function during the pandemic because of lockdown and all those kinds of things. We know for a fact that one of the greatest frustrations of people who claim asylum is that they simply do not hear about their case progression. We want to be able to run all these services, and have an end-to-end approach to asylum case

handling and how asylum seekers are treated, so that they are in one place and their needs are met.

You have asked about numbers. I cannot sit here and tell you numbers right now for obvious reasons. We do not have a reception centre. We are going back to dispersed accommodation now that the guidance on Covid has changed. It takes time to move people on. The system is very sluggish, it is difficult. We have to work with local councils, local authorities and things of that nature. Clearly, that is an operational aspect that the department is working on.

Specifically on reception centres, we are looking at various models. Tricia might want to speak about this, but this will also go through a procurement process in terms of the numbers, how they will be structured and the type of needs that we have to cater for. That is work in progress that will be linked to the new plan for immigration and the legislation we are bringing forward.

The Chair: If you do not mind, I am not going to ask Tricia to come in on this, because that is detail that we can come back to later.

Lord Dholakia: How many of these centres are likely to receive proper health and safety regulations? In the past, you have been criticised very badly for the way people are treated in some of these centres.

Priti Patel: I will be very frank about this. We are talking about new-build centres. I am not even going to say “in line with”; they would be over and above health and safety standards. As I have already referenced, we would have welfare facilities, medical facilities and everything in place.

Lord Dholakia, you are probably referring to Napier barracks. It is not our accommodation; it is an MoD site that we took over. We effectively had to convert it. That was work in progress, and we are very upfront about the changes we have brought in, the investments that have been made and the welfare and support care that has gone in. That was during the pandemic, at a time when we simply did not have accommodation that would meet Covid needs. As we have remarked before, we were working with the guidance from Public Health England throughout all that.

Q9 **Lord Dholakia:** I have a further question on the bilateral arrangements. You mentioned India in your conversation. A number of politicians from India have been in touch with me. They do not accept that there is a bilateral arrangement of the type you mention, because the arrangement says, ‘You take the detainees from this country, who will return and who are illegal in this country, at the expense of those who are qualified people who could be accommodated in the United Kingdom’. Is that the type of arrangement you have?

Priti Patel: That is not the case at all, no. We have a government-to-government mobility partnership. It was signed in May this year with the MEA—the Ministry of External Affairs. We have a youth mobility partnership with India, which is about giving new opportunities for young Indian professionals to come and live and work in the UK. It is a reciprocal arrangement for us as well.

All credit to the Government of India, they recognise that they have a high number of Indian nationals in the United Kingdom with no legal basis to be in the United Kingdom. This was signed by the MEA, but it is led by the Ministry of Home Affairs. They have been very, very clear that they will accept Indian nationals. That is, own nationals, not detained

nationals. We bring them through a process, via Immigration Enforcement, in which we detain them and then remove them. That is collaboration. It is not binary or one way at all. It is joint collaboration with a full commitment to work with the Indian Government, both in India and in the UK through the Indian high commission, on providing travel documentation and authorisations to make sure that people can be returned back to India.

The Chair: I wonder whether Lord Dholakia can be in direct contact with you via correspondence after this. Clearly, he is hearing different tales.

Priti Patel: Sure, I would be happy with that.

Q10 **Baroness Chakrabarti:** Home Secretary, it is quite good in a way to come a little later into the session, because I have been able to listen to your previous answers. I have been very pleasantly struck—I want to say this—by the compassion you have demonstrated in discussion with my colleagues about the Afghan resettlement, victims of modern slavery and so on. That is really important to put down.

At the same time, I am sure you will understand that, to many of us, any attempt to turn around little boats of desperate people in the English Channel is pretty shocking. It is almost the opposite of the Dunkirk spirit. I am conscious that you have talked about all the external meetings you have, taking external counsel, talking to QCs and so on.

What would you say, and crucially what would you do, if you were advised that this kind of action might, for example, risk successful legal challenge as violating human rights law, maritime law and even domestic criminal law? Even more important than the law, it might actually put the human beings you talked about, and human lives, at risk.

Priti Patel: We would never do anything to put the safety of people's lives at risk. I will just start by emphasising that. Pushing boats back in the English Channel is not an idea that has come out of thin air. Extensive work has taken place on this.

It is fair to say that this is also much to the frustration of the English public. On illegal migration, Border Force is picking people up daily to look after their safety and to protect them, which is absolutely important. We do not want to see people dying at sea, and I am very vocal about this. At the same time, I am unapologetic about our determination as a Government to stop the people trafficking and people being put in boats. I have active and pretty vigorous discussions not just with France but with our near neighbour counterparts. We want to prevent them even getting to the shores.

Coming back to your point about turnarounds, everything that is undertaken operationally by Border Force sits within a legal framework. None of this is illegal. Let me emphasise that: none of this is illegal at all. My department has overseen operational work that sits within Border Force. They make the operational decisions. It is not me as Home Secretary saying, 'You must turn a boat back'. These are operational decisions based upon the circumstances in the channel. It could be weather, for example. It could be the conditions at sea. The commanders have to think about so many factors while they themselves are in the channel. No one is going to push boats back when the seas are absolutely torrid and there is a threat to life. It is our responsibility to protect lives. Under SOLAS—the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea—that is explicit. It is very, very clear.

In the work the department has done, I should emphasise that there is a narrow basis for the operationalisation of this tactic. That is literally made by operational commanders at sea. They are the ones who are there every single day and who have to exercise their

judgment. The premise is that they will always do everything in a legal way and a safe way, and will not put lives at risk.

Baroness Chakrabarti: Just to unpack that a little, you talk about operational independence, but Border Force is not like the police. You take ministerial responsibility for these policy decisions about turning boats back. You are indicating that you must have taken legal advice about the legality, in your view, under the refugee convention and under maritime and criminal law. There is no need for any immunities or anything like that, because, as far as you are concerned, this is perfectly lawful activity.

Priti Patel: The policy has been set and there is a legal basis for how that policy is operationalised, but the operational decisions are made by those in Border Force when they are at sea. That is not for me to dictate, and that is right. They have to assess the conditions and the circumstances. They are not under my instruction every single day to say, "Go out there and deploy".

Baroness Chakrabarti: No, but the general policy that we are now turning round little boats of people trying to get—

Priti Patel: There is a legal basis for it.

Baroness Chakrabarti: You are comfortable that you are not putting lives at risk and there is a legal basis for it.

Priti Patel: There is a legal basis. Linked to this, we want to prevent people drowning at sea. I cannot emphasise this enough. Only yesterday there was a loss of life in the channel. We will do everything. Believe you me, I spend a lot of time with my Border Force colleagues at Dover. I have been out on patrols with them. We see the most appalling things in terms of small boats and threats to life. Our presence alone can act as a deterrent, and that is important. We also work with the French authorities. They are telling us about some of the unseaworthy conditions. The key thing is that our policy is based on saving lives and preventing people drowning.

Baroness Chakrabarti: Obviously, you do not want people to be getting into little boats in the first place. My concern is whether, when they are in the little boats, we are going to do anything in turning round those boats to make the boats sink.

Priti Patel: Of course we are not. I have made it quite clear. We are not here to threaten life; we are here to save lives and make sure that people's lives are not put at risk. We are not intervening on boats and putting them in danger. Our job, first of all, is to prevent people getting into the water, but when they are in UK territorial waters we then have a duty of care and a duty of responsibility. That comes down to international law and safety of life at sea.

Q11 **Baroness Chakrabarti:** I am conscious that the Immigration Services Union says that this is unworkable, but no doubt that is a dialogue that you have. I believe that the Government have promised to pay France around £54 million for extra action in the English Channel. I wonder what the French Government committed to do in exchange for that.

Priti Patel: It is not action in the English Channel. Let me just be clear about that. We have long-standing bilateral agreements with my counterpart, the French Interior Minister, and the French Government, from prior to my time as Home Secretary, recognising that illegal migration has been a long-standing issue. The money that has been publicised is based on

results, because we work in very granular detail with the French authorities, my counterparts, Border Force's counterparts, *et cetera*.

There are a number of areas to which this money is aligned. The first is trying to prevent people even getting to the beaches. There are techniques under way that I do not want to disclose in the committee, because it will just give the people smugglers greater workarounds, but this is based on intelligence. It is how we share intelligence; it is how we work together. It is basically working through the various networks.

The second is looking at policing operations not just on the beach, but further upstream. It is looking at the issues around the Belgian-French border, so there is work taking place there. There is work on surveillance, on prosecutions and on technology. We use enhanced technology. That costs money in the deployment of drones, surveillance and geolocation data.

Baroness Chakrabarti: This goes back to Lord Blunkett's earlier line of questioning. You will appreciate that the drafters of the refugee convention understood, for obvious historical reasons, that desperate people fleeing persecution cannot always do so by legal means. That goes to the heart of Lord Blunkett's question.

Priti Patel: I understand that.

Baroness Chakrabarti: It also goes to the heart of all these attempts to prevent people escaping, whether it is further upstream or whether it is in the English Channel. You cite your statistics about single men, but not all single men are fraudsters. You cite an obvious concern about distinguishing between people who are genuine refugees and people who are not, but you have to be really careful not to hit some people who are genuine refugees and, frankly, not to drown people, whether they are genuine refugees or not.

Priti Patel: I have been very clear about safety of life at sea. We will do nothing to harm people at sea, so that is point No. 1. In terms of illegal migration, we have to recognise the reason for so much visibility, for the high small-boat numbers. Quite frankly, throughout the pandemic, aviation was simply not flying in the way it has previously and lorry movements were at a much reduced rate. It does not mean, however, that those means will not restart. They probably will. If you try to clamp down in one area, you see displacement elsewhere. We are all grown up enough to understand that.

The other point on people fleeing persecution is that at the heart of our new plan for immigration is safe and legal routes. We are committed to working upstream with IOM, UNHCR and others to identify people who are at risk. We do not want them to take risky journeys.

My final point on illegal migration is that the migrants who come to our country through illegal clandestine routes more often than not have come through safe countries. They have come through European Union countries. They could have claimed asylum there. They choose to come to the United Kingdom for a range of reasons. We need to change that balance. We want to make sure that those we give asylum to are the individuals we should be protecting and safeguarding for the right reasons.

Linked to that, there are individuals who come to our country from a range of countries, yes, fleeing persecution. We have a high number of economic migrants. We have people

coming from Albania. These are safe countries. We have a returns agreement with Albania. We have to get this balance right.

It is a messy area. Asylum is a very complicated area. There is no single clear-cut solution to this, but I would conclude by saying that it is a system that we are trying to reform. It is not easy to reform it. This system is costing the British taxpayer £1.5 billion a year. We owe it to the public, who are very vocal about this, to try to do the right thing in the right way by making sure that we support those who need our genuine care, compassion and support, and change our system, so that it gives them the support and does not enable those economic migrants who, quite frankly, could claim asylum elsewhere, if they are genuine in that sense.

Baroness Chakrabarti: As the daughter of economic migrants, I do not think that is a dirty word either.

Priti Patel: It is not, but we are changing our system. We are fundamentally changing our system. We have to give greater protection to the people who need it. When we look at the instability around the world, which I am afraid I have seen too often, having been to Afghanistan, Somalia and some of the darkest places in the world, we know that we need to do right by a lot of people. We have to find the right ways of doing it, and the right means and methods.

The Chair: I have a lot of members who would like to come in on this, but we have you here with us only until noon, so we have to move on.

Q12 **Lord Hunt of Wirral:** Home Secretary, last year the EU's entry/exit system was due to launch. We now understand that it will launch in the first half of next year. We are concerned about this and are planning an evidence session next week. Given that millions of passengers will have to register into this new system at UK-based border crossing points under the supervision of European border officials, how far advanced are domestic preparations? For example, has consideration been given to extending the control zones in which European officers can operate at UK-based border crossing points?

Priti Patel: This comes back to a lot of long-standing Brexit planning and preparation that has taken place across government, certainly over the last year but since 2019. The EU's entry/exit system is a Commission matter on implementation, but you specifically asked how it will work in control zones in the United Kingdom—juxtaposed controls, for example.

We have existing frameworks that we work to with our international partners. Effectively, we continue on those—I do not want to say discussions, because they are not discussions. They are systems that we have in place. It is effectively about assuring that the alignment is taking place, so that we have the fluidity but the right checks. It is all about the right checks.

We are changing some of our own border security systems. That is part of our wider border programme between now and 2024-25. Trying to get as much alignment as possible is important, as is trying to work in a concurrent way, so that we can implement and process in the right way at the right time but, as ever, have the right communication mechanisms to travellers. The proper means are FCDO travel advice and things of that nature.

I cannot sit here and tell you how progress is taking place, because we have made some changes to our own border controls over the last 12 months. Covid is a good example. We have digitalised passenger locator forms and baked them into the e-gate systems, for example. Other countries around the world have not done that. Across the EU they have a

different system. For us, this is very much about, yes, wanting to have systems that are not just compatible but where there are no surprises for travellers, so that we can maintain fluidity and constructive border controls.

Lord Hunt of Wirral: Do we have a start date yet from the EU and are we ready for it?

Priti Patel: I do not know about the EU start date at all. We have a lot of work taking place on Calais, because we are thinking about major ports of entry, but I cannot tell you whether there is a start date.

The Chair: We wanted to raise this, because it would have been discourteous of us to launch into the next piece of work that we will be doing, but we will have a lot more questions about this.

Q13 **Baroness Primarolo:** Good morning, Home Secretary. This is going to be an area where there will be more dialogue. Throughout this morning you have concentrated—rightly, I think we would all agree—on the need for the Home Office to be effective, ethical, legal, accountable and transparent when it is dealing with people, and to do the right thing and know it has done the right thing.

Could I ask you about advanced algorithmic technology and, in particular, its use in facilitating the public duties of the department? I am thinking also of police forces and the continuing growth in the use of this technology without any co-ordination, it would appear, on whether it works or whether it is proportionate, and without knowing what is being done in different forces.

I wondered as a wider question what assurances you could give us as a committee that the key decisions that are being made are genuinely made by humans, even when this technology is employed, and that therefore they can be clearly explained, justified and challenged, given what you have said about whether it is immigration or asylum.

Priti Patel: That is a really important question, so thank you for raising that. I do not want to leave the committee with the impression, as we enter a fast-moving, innovative digital age and everything else, that the role of government will be pressing a button, putting an algorithm in and that is it.

It might be in some parts of public life and government decision-making—it is important for the committee to understand, from my perspective, that decisions about people will always be made by people. Clearly, there is a role for artificial intelligence, but the way to frame this, going back to an earlier conversation, is that human beings and circumstances are not binary. Algorithms clearly have a role to play, but, for example, it is always caseworkers who make decisions about visa applications, which are a good example, and not computers.

Tricia spoke earlier about the changes we are bringing to caseworking. Yes, we will digitalise case working. That means less paper. It does not mean computers making decisions, which is vital. Yes, we will bring specialists in to work alongside digital processes. This is not all about fancy Facebook-style algorithms coming up with basic decisions or things of that nature.

You have asked important questions. I cannot sit here and talk about assurance across different approaches, because I would also argue that it is early days. There are 43 police forces around the country. We need to have consistency across the country. There is lots of work that I am sure, if not today, we can talk about in policing, where we really need

consistency across all fronts, we really do. That is also down to crime reporting, data handling, *et cetera*. We are absolutely not there.

Within the Home Office and the operational side of the department, which I am much more familiar with and well versed in, we have a lot of legacy systems that, quite frankly, go wrong. That is old technology platforms, and I am not speaking about Windows 7. Windows 7 is relatively contemporary, although it was still 20 or 15 years ago, or whenever it was.

Lord Blunkett: Nothing changes.

Priti Patel: Exactly, Lord Blunkett, but I would go further and say that there is a recollection collectively that government has not done on enough on technology to move forward with the times. In my closing remarks about algorithms, I just want to leave the committee with a clear sense that decisions about people will be made by people. As I have said, we hear about algorithms and AI, and we are instantly in a different world. We are genuinely not there in the Home Office for a range of reasons, including tech deficit and legacy systems—you name it—but also processes that are incompatible and systems that are just inconsistent.

Baroness Primarolo: We as a committee have heard of the problems of almost a free for all, in police forces for example, in developing the use of this technology, such as bias. I am thinking particularly of facial recognition. People are using it as a prediction when it is not; it is a collection of information. Going back to your culture point, it is dependent on the data that is put in in the first place, unfortunately often baking in the bias of previous and historic decision-making.

I understand what you are saying about where the Home Office might be at the moment in using this technology, but does the Home Office have a view that it should set down guiding principles for the development and use of this technology to protect individual rights, which are being breached in some terms, to ensure that, whether it be the Home Office in the future in immigration matters or police forces now in facial recognition and detention, they have to meet the very highest regulatory principles? Would you consider having an independent regulatory authority that made sure that happened?

Priti Patel: This goes beyond the Home Office. I am not going to get into my own personal views about this space, but I have long considered, since very early on when I came into the Home Office, that these are wider societal debates for Governments, if I may put it that way, that we will have to have.

Data breaches and data privacy are fundamental, but when we look at how data can be used and the technology tools, which are then overlaid with data applications, algorithms that could home in on certain patterns of behaviour and all sorts of things, that is a different world completely. For the lawyers in the room, this is prime territory for litigation, big challenge, and even future class action lawsuits, so it then comes back to big debates about privacy and public good versus all sorts of other issues. I am looking at it from that perspective.

The Government are absolutely not there. We will have to be there, because I can see that it would be a matter of time. I said two years ago that it could be five years before we see a big data suit coming forward from somewhere like the United States, where people feel that their rights have been distorted because of the analytical tools that you referred to,

Baroness Primarolo, and decisions that have led to someone being put in prison or something of that nature.

The Chair: Home Secretary, in the interests of time, I wonder if I could cut you short.

Baroness Primarolo: I will finish there, but through you, Chair, could I say to the Home Secretary that it would be very helpful if we could write specifically to her about the use of this technology now in police forces, which her department does have responsibility for, and perhaps pursue it?

The Chair: I was, in fact, going to ask the Home Secretary whether the department could put in evidence to our committee. We will provide what we have had so far, but a yes or no would be really helpful.

Priti Patel: Absolutely, absolutely. This is a wide-ranging debate, quite frankly, on data, privacy, laws and regulation.

Q14 **Lord Ricketts:** Thank you, Home Secretary. I have just one prior comment going back to the discussion about small boats and migrants in the channel. I declare an interest as former ambassador in France, so I have lived this myself. I know the frustrations on both sides. The French have been living this since Lord Blunkett was involved in closing down Sangatte 20 years ago.

I hope you would agree that the only solution here is co-operation with the French in the end. We cannot do this in unilateral ways, however frustrating. I believe there is good will on the French side. You have your contact all the time with the French Interior Minister. There is no other solution but working with the French on this, if I could close the bracket on that.

Coming to a national security aspect of your brief and how the trade and co-operation agreement with the EU is working out, we took a lot of evidence on this in a committee I chaired last year and concluded that much of part 3 preserved a good deal of co-operation more or less as it was. One exception was the fact we were excluded from the Schengen Information System II—SIS II—which we were told had been a foundation for British policing in terms of access to alerts and information exchanges. We were told that the UK police consulted it 603 million times in 2019.

The EU decided we could not be part of that. The alternative is this Interpol I-24/7 system. Our interest is in how that is working out in practice, because it requires EU member states to double key into both their EU system and Interpol. Are we seeing a decline in the amount of alerting and information, which could be of vital national security importance?

Priti Patel: The work that took place in the EU negotiations on security was impressive and phenomenal. There is mutual recognition across the board in terms of joint co-operation, Lord Ricketts, to use the phrase that you have used. We all co-operate. We still work together.

You have asked about SIS II. We have not seen a decline or a shift in operational interoperability and data flows coming forward. We have simply not seen that. It is an interesting time as well. We have had the pandemic. We have all been locked up/locked down for the last 12 months. It has also meant that ways of working have had the chance to bed down. We have seen full co-operation in policing. Let us not forget that we had the biggest law enforcement operation that this country has seen in the last twelve months, which went across EU member states. That was Operation Venetic, which was all about

drugs, people smuggling, money laundering, et cetera. That was through co-operation at a force-by-force level across countries in Europe.

Things are working. Things are continuing. That is foundational to long-established relationships and ways of working. I absolutely recognise and acknowledge that. I hosted the G7 in September. It seems like a long time ago. It was the first week or so of September. For the first time, Interpol was part of that G7 and part of the discussions on people smuggling, the trafficking trade, drugs and firearms. Ways of working are evolving. That can only be a good thing.

Our dialogues are much more open and frank. I would not think twice about calling Jürgen Stock or anyone across also EU member states about any issues where we had concerns. We are practical people. We care about our internal security and that applies to colleagues, full stop, around the world, but in the EU too.

My final point, which is not a SIS II point, relates to security and intelligence agencies. Ways of working, I would argue, have been stronger than ever and more accelerated, sadly even despite being locked up/locked down. We have seen all sorts of threats across Europe where we have been at the forefront, even in France. We are always at the forefront of providing help, support and intelligence information. It works both ways in many ways.

Then linked to this is a post-Afghanistan point, so again not a SIS II point. Data sharing is absolutely pivotal in how we work together post Afghanistan, clearly, and that speaks to CT, but also to intelligence, data sharing and data sharing agreements. There is a lot more intensive work taking place there.

Lord Ricketts: I must pass the floor to my next colleague for a last question, but my concern is that the operational co-operation is good because it was close during our period in the EU and it is vital that it does not erode now that we are outside. We did hear about time lags in uploading data on to the police national computer and so on. Then, perhaps, it would be very useful to be kept up to date with this international law enforcement platform, which we were told tantalisingly would come in a year or two, but had very little information about, including whether that would mean the EU having to triple key things into three different systems. When there is information about that we would find it useful to have that.

Priti Patel: We would be happy to share that.

Q15 **Baroness Sanderson of Welton:** Thank you, Home Secretary, for coming to see us. I will be brief. The Daniel Morgan inquiry and the very good report took a very long time, but there is a slight fear now, with the inquiry into the murder of Sarah Everard. What happens to that work and the recommendations that came from that? Does it end up getting not overlooked but side-lined? I know that HMIC has been commissioned to look at vetting procedures, *et cetera*, but I have one specific request. Will the implementation of those recommendations be an official agenda item in the Prime Minister's new task force? I appreciate that some may have to wait for the Sarah Everard inquiry, but I just feel the family has waited a very long time, and certainly there will be repetition in terms of the culture of the police in some of this work.

Priti Patel: There is a lot there.

Baroness Sanderson of Welton: Sorry, that was me being brief.

Priti Patel: No, please do not apologise. The Daniel Morgan inquiry, the report, the wait for that report and the pain of the families were just shattering. I am very clear in my mind about these big insights when they come. When these inquiries report, they report for a reason. We have to take the lessons, and there will be some difficult messages and lessons there for policing, but that is important. We cannot just say, 'The report has come and that's it. Thank you very much'. I just do not believe in that. I will come on to the work that has been done on the Sarah Everard case in particular, which is just appalling and so tragic.

This comes back to lessons learned from the inquiry and the review itself. It is important that there is a common understanding across policing. I mentioned lack of consistency earlier across all our forces on obligations, expectations, transparency and ways of working. That is crucial, it really is.

You have asked specifically whether it is an agenda item. For me, it is an ongoing issue. It has to be ongoing, because these are the sorts of standards with regard to how we hold police to account and they should be integral to HMI. HMI is at a committee this morning as well, no doubt talking about some of the performance metrics and how we need to move policing upwards. I really believe that policing cannot stand still and just read reports of the past. It constantly has to improve and evolve, which brings me back to the abhorrence of what happened to Sarah Everard. It is a sickening area to discuss.

The inquiry that I have now launched clearly speaks to the abuse of power, trust in officers, vetting issues and all sorts. These are regular issues for policing on a day-to-day basis, so we cannot silo and compartmentalise them. This has to lead to cultural changes in policing and I do not even want to say 'best practice'. This should be standard practice across all policing, because for the public to have trust in our police forces and policing, the very people who protect us and our communities day in, day out, they must have confidence in the integrity, the standards and the way officers conduct themselves.

It is fair to say there are similar issues across both inquiries. The work that we are doing on the Sarah Everard inquiry is sensitive and difficult. The committee will recognise that I have been working with Sarah's family on terms of reference and how we give them support through this. That is right and proper. All of those, the framework and the terms of reference, will be confirmed in due course. I have inherited a lot of public inquiries. You name it. This cannot be a long, drawn-out process at all, it really cannot.

Baroness Sanderson of Welton: I know some colleagues around the table are concerned that the inquiry is non-statutory. One of the points that came out of Daniel Morgan was the duty of candour, because, frankly, it is shocking to me that you cannot trust the police. Unfortunately, as Hillsborough and Daniel Morgan have shown, we cannot trust the police to come forward, it seems, with the evidence. There are questions as to whether it should be statutory, sadly, because you need to compel the police to come forward. It was just to ask you about that.

Priti Patel: We are looking at everything. I will be very honest and open about this. There are reasons as to why, and I appreciate and recognise them. You are absolutely right about the duty of candour and culture of openness and honesty. I spent some wonderful, incredible hours with Hillsborough families and Bishop James. It is incredible work. You just feel humbled speaking to those who have been so affected by all this. I have to find the right balance and we are working through that. It will not be straightforward or simple, but we have to work through that, so I have to look at all options.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: Do you have a timeframe? You were saying that you would not want this to be protracted.

Priti Patel: I am looking at a report for next year. That is right and proper. I am afraid, to be quite brutal about this, that we have to stop this culture in government of having really long, drawn-out reviews. It serves no one and does a great disservice to victims, survivors, families and those who want justice and are seeking justice in some ways.

Baroness Sanderson of Welton: There are a lot of other reports, reviews and material to draw on.

Priti Patel: There are.

The Chair: We will try to help you with the duty of candour, because there is an amendment to the police Bill at the end of it. Are you in a position to tell us what form the inquiry, if not statutory, will take? For instance, if it included committees of privy counsellors, they would be able to take evidence—

Priti Patel: I cannot do that right now. I am very happy to come back to committee with details, because there are all sorts of complexities that we are working through, particularly post the sentencing decisions and the trial.

The Chair: Thank you, Home Secretary, very much indeed. We would love to keep you for another two hours. You might not enjoy that, though.

Priti Patel: I have to go to the other House.

The Chair: We have to let you go. We look forward to seeing you again very soon.

Priti Patel: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Tricia and all the officials, for your time as well.