

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The work of the Home Secretary](#), HC 192

Wednesday 2 February 2022

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Members present: Dame Diana Johnson (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; James Daly; Simon Fell; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald. Questions 257-383

Witnesses

[I](#): The right hon. Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary, Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office, Patricia Hayes, Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: the right hon. Priti Patel MP, Matthew Rycroft and Patricia Hayes.

Q257 Chair: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the Home Affairs Select Committee. Today, we are joined by the Home Secretary, the right hon. Priti Patel MP; the permanent secretary to the Home Office, Matthew Rycroft; and the second permanent secretary to the Home Office, Patricia Hayes. You are very welcome.

We have a lot of questions that we want to ask you, so I ask that your answers be as short and concise as possible, so that everybody has an opportunity to ask their questions.

I start with the Home Secretary. Yesterday, the IOPC report on the Charing Cross police station incidents was published. It set out a culture of—I quote—“toxic masculinity, misogyny”, “homophobia”, “bullying” and abuse in that police force. The IOPC said that it was not just “a few ‘bad apples’”, and that these were not isolated incidents. Home Secretary, do you think police forces are institutionally misogynistic?

Priti Patel: Good morning, Chair. Congratulations on your election. There are a number of things to say about the report. I have read it; you have read it; and, quite frankly, anyone else who has read it will be absolutely appalled and sickened by its content and so much that was exposed through that investigation. First of all—I say this as someone who spends a great deal of time with the police—being a police officer is an absolute privilege. What we saw through that report was a privilege that has been abused through the appalling and sickening behaviour of specific officers.

I personally think, and I have spoken about this many times, that there are problems with some aspects of the culture in the Metropolitan police. I touched on this last year, specifically, if we recall, during the very difficult, appalling and sad time post the murder of Sarah Everard. That also exposed a range of issues, and as you will know, Chair, I now have the Angiolini inquiry and the police inspectorate, HMIC, investigating aspects of policing culture as well.

There are some serious and significant matters that need not just following up but further investigation through both the inquiry and the inspectorate, primarily because we are not seeing one-off incidents—we should be clear about that. They are not isolated. We have now seen too many times too many instances in policing of the most appalling behaviours and the most appalling conduct. I also think it shows a failure of leadership in some quarters.

You have asked me about institutional misogyny in policing. There are cultural issues. What we saw in the IOPC report points towards what I will say are not just misogynistic behaviours but cultural and attitudinal



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problems. You can see that through some of the messages that were published in the report yesterday. That is why, through the Angiolini inquiry, we are specifically looking at the culture of policing. We have to. We have to really pull back the layers, not just in terms of attitudes, but by asking what that culture is. What is that culture that permeates policing, and what are we going to do, collectively, to change that?

Q258 Chair: Do you think we need more of a Macpherson-style inquiry into misogyny in the police force?

Priti Patel: My instinct on this, speaking very candidly, is no. We have the Angiolini inquiry, which, as we know, is very specific. The genesis of that inquiry is, clearly, a heartbreaking tragedy. We still have some deep questions about what happened that need some big answers. I speak to HMIC frequently; it is fair to say that in the past year I have commissioned them too frequently, which is a significant indicator of some of the issues of culture, vetting and ways of working. I would like to see evidence and details from those inquiries, and the commissioned work from HMIC, first and foremost. Should we need to go further, we will. I am not ruling that out.

Q259 Chair: Bishop James Jones, who you will know was very involved in the Hillsborough inquiries, called yesterday for a royal commission on policing. He said it was 60 years since there had been such a commission. Policing has changed enormously in 60 years. There are all these things that the police have to deal with now, including some of the issues that you have just identified about who we want to serve in our police forces, the vetting, and the skills and experience that we want in our police officers. Do you think now is the time for a royal commission?

Priti Patel: Let me put some things into context around policing. The majority of our police officers do amazing work. Let's not lose sight of that. They are incredible human beings—they really are. This is a terrible and very difficult moment for everyone in policing. There will be police officers who will be upset and angered by about what they are seeing, reading and hearing.

I will come on to the point about a royal commission in a minute. Last Friday, I was in Nottingham with Nottinghamshire Constabulary—with the chief and their amazing officers. They reminded me, yet again—I hear this wherever I go; we all hear it when we speak to our officers—that one force, one inquiry, one investigation should never contaminate everyone in policing per se. All our officers are out there doing great things. This is also a time when we are recruiting many more officers. We have over 11,000 more officers on the streets of England and Wales—

Chair: I think we will come on to that.

Priti Patel: Absolutely, we will. Ensuring that their training, recruitment and vetting is fit for purpose and in tune with how policing should be, and the standards that we want and require, is absolutely there.



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I am not going to sit here today and say we must have a royal commission. I will say, however, that I wouldn't rule anything out in terms of future royal commissions. The issue is not just policing. I would suggest going further and wider, because it is also about the criminal justice system, in terms of outcomes. Policing is just one component part, let us not forget, of the wider criminal justice system. I am sure that today we will speak about the rape review, and the interactions with the wider system—the CPS and so on. I think that is really important. Policing is obviously frontline and visible. Right now, the spotlight, rightly, is on policing. There can be no excuses for the appalling behaviours, and for what we have seen in the IOPC report. It is quite clear that there are cultural problems and issues in policing—no question about that. Through the inquiries that we have in place right now, we need to find out what on earth is going on, and post these inquiries, we have to start acting to resolve those awful issues.

Q260 Chair: I think we will want to ask you to come back once those inquiries have concluded, because we will want to see what that action will be.

Priti Patel: I would be happy to.

Q261 Chair: I have specific questions. The first is about spiking, which the Committee has been looking at in recent weeks. Do you agree with the NPCC lead on drugs, Deputy Chief Constable Jason Harwin, who told our spiking inquiry that there should be a specific offence of spiking?

Priti Patel: There is a lot on spiking. On Friday, when I was in Nottingham—

Chair: I am going to have to ask you to answer that question, because I have several more.

Priti Patel: I will answer the question, but I think I should put it in some context. If you recall, last September, when spiking became a really big issue, and we were watching the news and hearing about spiking—we have to put the context together, Chair; it is important—

Chair: We have taken a lot of evidence on spiking, so we are well aware of the context. I just want to know whether you agree that there should be a specific offence.

Priti Patel: I will come on to what I want to see done. Context matters, not just in answering your question, but in saying why I have reached the conclusion that I have. I have spent time with police and with our policing leaders. Nottingham is a good example of a police force that was contacted about spiking first of all. I spoke to Caroline Henry there, the police and crime commissioner. She commissioned the work on spiking. We asked Maggie Blyth to look at the phenomenon of spiking. It is a new, appalling trend, and we are still trying to understand the problem, its genesis and component parts. I appreciate that you have taken evidence on this.

Of course, I have asked the NPCC to specifically look at this issue with police forces. It is very early days yet; we don't have the full details or enough evidential information. I have asked my officials to look into what we know thus far with the NPCC, how we can pursue offenders, and—you will know that there is already a list of drug offences that can be applied—how we can prepare a specific criminal offence to target spiking directly.

Q262 **Chair:** So you are looking at preparing a specific offence?

Priti Patel: We are looking into this, absolutely. We are working towards that, but it doesn't mean tomorrow. I will be very clear to the Committee, and to the public watching this: do not expect an announcement tomorrow that we will be creating a new offence of spiking.

Chair: But you are looking at it.

Priti Patel: We still have to understand the genesis, the details, the evidential base and the prevalence of this.

Q263 **Chair:** I think we understand what you are saying. Thank you.

I want to ask you a series of questions, and I would appreciate short answers, because I want to make sure all Committee members have a chance to ask their questions. This question is about updates on the Government strategy on tackling violence against women and girls. First of all, where is the domestic abuse strategy? It was due to be published in 2021.

Priti Patel: The strategy is being worked on right now.

Q264 **Chair:** When will it be published?

Priti Patel: First of all, we want the strategy to reflect the outcomes of the recent spending review. We have just gone into spending allocations post CSR, so our strategy must absolutely be reflective of where money will go, and must capture the ambitions of the whole of Government.

Chair: When do you think you will be able to publish it?

Priti Patel: In the next coming months. I'm not giving a date.

Chair: In the next couple of months?

Priti Patel: Yes.

Q265 **Chair:** So by the end of March, we will have the strategy?

Priti Patel: I don't know if it will be the end of March. You have to remember that it is not just a Home Office strategy; it goes across Government, and that is the whole point.

Q266 **Chair:** Of course, but you promised it would be done in 2021. I am just asking you about a promise that Government made.



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Priti Patel: Sure; of course. I understand that, but at the same time, you have just heard me say that we are allocating, post the SR, the funding for the programme around our domestic abuse work and strategy, which doesn't just sit with our Department; it goes across other Government Departments.

Q267 **Chair:** Okay, but it was a promise Government made. Where is the perpetrator strategy? As I understand it, section 75 of the Domestic Abuse Act says there is a duty on the Home Secretary to publish a perpetrator strategy within 12 months of Royal Assent. That is the end of April. Will that be published in time?

Priti Patel: I do not have a date for publication; I will be very clear about that.

Q268 **Chair:** You won't be fulfilling the duty under section 75. That is what you are saying.

Priti Patel: Well, I do not have a date for that; that is what I have said. It is right that we have a duty to prepare and publish that comprehensive strategy, but again, we have to bring the perpetrators to justice and pull together all the evidential parts of the Home Office work and the justice pillars. That then comes together as a piece of cross-Government work. I do not have a date for that. Of course, we can write to you and provide you with a date.

Q269 **Chair:** I am surprised, because obviously that was a duty that you put into your own Bill.

Priti Patel: It is a duty, but again, unsurprisingly, the work on perpetrators doesn't sit just with the Home Office; it sits across Government, with the MoJ. That is very clear. The domestic abuse strategy and the Act—the Bill, when we were discussing it in Parliament—goes across Government. We are working through the pillars. There are a number of pillars on the DA strategy that go across Government. We will publish when we have all those details.

Q270 **Chair:** On to something that is within the remit of the Home Office: when will the mass communications campaign be launched?

Priti Patel: That work has been signed off by me, so that will be in this quarter. There is a whole programme on communications. I have gone through it, so I have seen it.

Q271 **Chair:** So by the end of March.

Priti Patel: It will be happening this quarter, absolutely.

Q272 **Chair:** What is the timescale for an announcement about filling the gap in the law with the new offence of public sexual harassment?

Priti Patel: In terms of the offence, and closing the gap? When will that be published specifically? I don't know. Tricia, do you have the details of that?



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Patricia Hayes: I'm afraid I do not have a date.

Priti Patel: We can absolutely send you that and write to you with it.

Q273 **Chair:** You mentioned police vetting and the welcome uplift in police numbers. Are you confident about the current vetting procedure for police officers, and is it suitable for keeping people safe? I refer you to a report on the use of specialist online centres, which were set up in the pandemic to cover assessment, pre-employment checks and offers for people applying to work in the police. There seems to be an issue, in that there are no face-to-face interviews at all. One recruit said that the first time he spoke to somebody in person was for his uniform fitting. I just wondered whether you felt that that was effective vetting after what happened with the Sarah Everard case, for example.

Priti Patel: The answer is no. It is not effective vetting at all.

Q274 **Chair:** Police forces such as West Midlands, Wiltshire, Avon and Somerset, and Hampshire are still using that way of recruiting. Is that appropriate?

Priti Patel: No, it's not. It clearly isn't. Of course, there is work taking place with HMI on vetting.

Q275 **Chair:** Are you worried about officers who are being recruited at the moment under those schemes?

Priti Patel: There are a couple of things. First and foremost, on the police uplift programme and new recruits, we are very clear about standards, requirements and vetting. The Department is very clear about the thresholds and the standards that should be in place. Every single force is operationally independent, but even so, they have clear requirements for public safety, safeguarding and standards. There are proper processes that should be followed; there is no question about that. Not only that, but HMIC has constantly pointed to vetting, consistency and raising the bar. If nothing else, the lessons of the last 12 months should send a very strong signal and message to every single police force around the country about safeguards and standards, and making sure that they get the foundations right around vetting.

Q276 **Chair:** My final question is about tackling non-contact sexual offending before it is allowed to escalate. The reason I ask you about that is that, in the case of Sarah Everard, we know that the perpetrator had exposed himself—there is that idea of low-level sexual offending. In my constituency, I had the case of Libby Squire, who was raped and murdered. The perpetrator had been prowling the streets for 18 months prior to Libby's rape and murder, and had been exposing himself, masturbating and taking part in acts of voyeurism. Obviously, there is an issue about how you deal with that low-level, non-contact sexual offending. Do you think there needs to be another look at what more can be done to stop that behaviour escalating?

Priti Patel: Absolutely.



Q277 **Chair:** And what is that? What can we do?

Priti Patel: First of all, again, looking at this in the wider context, we have just touched on perpetrators and perpetrators' behaviours. Obviously, much of what we have spoken about and the work that is taking place is still within the DA remit, but it is also linked to the violence against women and girls approach/strategy. These behaviours are just appalling, and the level of escalation needs serious attention. At the outset, when these behaviours are identified, they should not be dismissed. On a human level, I struggle with anybody who finds that that should be just dismissed and not looked at, because there will be a range of issues around the individual—mental health; criminality; all sorts of things.

You asked what more can and should be done. Again, across pillars of society—I am not going to say Government, but health, social services, policing—we need more work to be done on drawing those strands together. Otherwise, individuals will effectively just be ping-ponged around the systems or parts of the state, not being given the help or support—whatever it may be—that they need to stop behaviours that escalate.

Q278 **Chair:** Is the Home Office leading on that?

Priti Patel: That is part of the wider work, yes, but it is across Government—on perpetrators, escalations, and looking at the root causes of people's behaviours. From a Home Office perspective, we are very much there on the intervention or the criminality side of things, and the policing side, but there is much more that needs to happen in terms of join-up and interventions before this even gets to policing levels and, sadly, the criminality aspect.

Chair: Thank you.

Q279 **James Daly:** Good morning, Home Secretary. Approximately 90% of the rape allegations that are made to forces in England and Wales are not referred to the Crown Prosecution Service; essentially, the police discontinue those matters. Why do you think that is the case?

Priti Patel: A lot of work has taken place around the rape review. The whole rape review approach and strategy was pretty harrowing. There are a number of reasons—I think we should be very honest about this—why cases are not being pursued. Some are with policing, in terms of forensics, digital downloads and all the things that are, I'm afraid, familiar territory—all the reasons that we know about. That said, the Government are not shrugging their shoulders and saying, "This isn't good enough, but we're not going to do anything about this."

From a policing perspective, first and foremost, we have new initiatives. We have the pilot of Op Soteria, where clearly there is a lot of direct engagement with the police taking place, in terms of providing more support on digital downloads, but also, importantly, more support for the victims, giving them the confidence to come forward and protecting them throughout all the evidential processes. But of course—I say this very



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strongly—this is about the end-to-end approach: how police gather evidence; how cases are put together and then go to the CPS; the support, end-to-end, through the criminal justice system; and giving victims the confidence to go through every single stage of following up with prosecutions.

Q280 James Daly: I agree with that, Home Secretary, but I want to come back to the point. Approximately 90% of rape allegations are not going to the Crown Prosecution Service. The police are taking no further action; they are not even referring the allegations on for advice. That is 90% of potential victims of the most horrific offending who are not even getting a chance to have the matter referred to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Priti Patel: We are trying to change that.

Q281 James Daly: When you speak to the police, what do they tell you about why that is?

Priti Patel: I cannot really speak about the historical aspects of policing. The rape review is absolutely trying to tackle and change this. That is the point. It is about bringing all aspects of the criminal justice system together. It is pretty obvious that what has happened has not been good enough. You go force by force. I will speak about Nottingham again; I saw incredible work there, in terms of what they do on an evidential basis—collection and forensics. I saw how they handle rape cases when I was there on Friday. You have asked why.

Q282 James Daly: It is about the leadership of the police, then, isn't it?

Priti Patel: I'm not going to say that, no. There has been inconsistency historically, force by force, in policing; there is no doubt about that. You will know that from GMP. When it comes to data collection and the reporting of crime, GMP has had a terrible time in the past. That is a failure of leadership—there can be no doubt about that—in Greater Manchester, but force by force, it is not consistent. Through the work on the action plan, the end-to-end rape review, the scorecards, the progress reports and the work we are now doing, we want to change all that. It is absolutely appalling, and there should be no excuses. Speaking as the Home Secretary, working through these challenges with the Ministry of Justice, we have to do better. We have to change policing attitudes. We have to give them more tools and the ability to push these cases on to investigation, support them through the training, and give them the resources that they need.

James Daly: Police leaders must be held accountable. I will use an example from a different offence—a very serious offence that affects many people in our country. The police failed to solve 1 million burglaries over the five years up until 2021. That is frightening, astonishing and appalling. I will not ask you what you feel about that, because I think I know what your answer would be.



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We did not need a strategy, or discussion of how to address this problem, because if we go forward 12 months, we see there has been, to quote *The Telegraph*, a “Dramatic fall in burglaries after police sent to scene of every break-in”. It does not take 50 civil servants sitting in a room to come up with a strategy of sending police officers to burglaries. In the three forces mentioned—thankfully one of them is Greater Manchester; the others are Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire—that pledged to send an officer to every burglary, we have seen significant falls in burglaries in the past 12 months. My point is that we can have all the strategies in the world, and we can name everything differently, but if people actually go and investigate offences correctly and properly, we have positive outcomes for victims.

Priti Patel: I would agree with that. I am not going to dispute a word that you have said. We have the beating crime plan, for a start. That is a Government strategy and plan to beat crime. All colleagues here understand the structures in policing: police and crime commissioners, the Home Sec, the money coming from central Government, and how it is allocated across police forces. You are right: absolutely, Mr. Daly, it should not take a strategy and a plan to tell the police officers to go directly to every single reported burglary, but through the beating crime plan we are holding the police to account.

Q283 **James Daly:** But it is reported here that only three forces in this country are sending police officers to every single burglary.

Priti Patel: Yes. Of course, we want every single force to do that, and that is the purpose of our work.

Q284 **James Daly:** But my point is, who is accountable for that? Somebody will have to explain to me why police and crime commissioners exist, because they do not seem to be accountable to anybody for anything.

Priti Patel: Well, there is that, yes.

James Daly: Chief constables seem to be answerable to police and crime commissioners. Then you are up here at the end of the line.

Priti Patel: Absolutely. I am accountable for all of them, despite their operational independence and the money and resources that we give them.

Q285 **James Daly:** I think policing is a lot less complicated than a lot of people make out. Go out and arrest people—that tends to be the way to get things done. You don’t need to talk about it; go out and do it when a member of the public phones up. Is that an outrageous comment for an MP to make?

Priti Patel: No, it is absolutely right. It really is. The police are accountable to the communities in which they serve—they are accountable to the public. I say this to all colleagues, speaking as a Member of Parliament, and not just Home Secretary. You all know that when you hold



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policing meetings in your constituency with members of the public, they are angry. They are angry that when they report their tools being nicked from their van, officers did not come out to look at the van and follow up on the crime. It is a fact of life that with the resources, training and everything else going into policing right now—record sums—you are right: we should not really need a strategy. But we have a strategy as a Government, because we are adamant that we should be reducing crime. Aspects of crime are going down—not all aspects, I should add—but even so, it is a statement of the obvious, in my view, that forces should just get out there and follow up on every single crime. Guess what happens if you do that, with the resources. You get the type of results that the three forces that you have spoken about have.

Q286 James Daly: Absolutely. The last question is on a subject that I talk about a lot, because I think it is fundamental. As I see it, having been involved in the criminal justice system for a long time, the problem is not the court system; it is getting the cases into court and how they are investigated prior to charge. I could spend hours discussing the charging standard with you, Home Secretary, but we will leave that discussion for another day.

Priti Patel: Yes; I would spend hours on it, too.

Q287 James Daly: Tell me what you think of release under investigation as a concept.

Priti Patel: How long have you got? Release under investigation obviously covers a lot of ground and has been accompanied by a lot of controversy. Release under investigation also means that we have to do a lot of work to protect victims. The level of vulnerability around victims, particularly in certain cases where there is release under investigation—

Q288 James Daly: Including rape.

Priti Patel: I think rape is the most prevalent one, actually. It is very hard—very difficult. It really is. Release under investigation should not in my view be used lightly or generally, because, obviously, police officers are not acting fast, in real time, to gather important evidence that could not just safeguard the victim but lead to faster evidential prosecution and to getting cases into the criminal justice system.

Q289 James Daly: Unless release under investigation is changed, we will continue to have problems. Mr Rycroft or Ms Hayes, can you give the Committee an idea of the number of people currently released under investigation in this country?

Matthew Rycroft: I haven't got that in front of me, but we can write to the Committee Chair with that advice. There is a sense in which we need to think about the whole system across Government, as the Home Secretary says. This is not just about policing. This is about joining up with prosecution, the courts, and the prison system. We need to think about it



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system-wide, and make sure that we are progressing the timeliness at every single stage.

Q290 **James Daly:** I will rephrase the question. If an alleged perpetrator is released on bail, how long, on average, are they waiting for something to happen?

Matthew Rycroft: I will have to write to you with that information. I am very happy to do so. It will obviously depend on different crime types. It will probably also depend on different parts of the country. To expand on the Home Secretary's earlier point, by using the power of transparency, shining the spotlight on individual police forces and policing in general in an accountability framework that reports to the Home Secretary, we will improve the performance of individual forces. That is precisely what we are doing through the scorecards and so on.

Q291 **James Daly:** I have two final questions. I apologise for being grumpy, but I am absolutely astounded that you do not know the figures. It is fundamental. I can tell you now that if you walk down Bury high street and somebody punches you in the face and there are witnesses, the person is likely to be released under investigation, not charged, and then lost in the system for months and months. It is frightening when you consider that this affects not just what could be called low-level offending, but serious offending. It comes back to the point that I have been asking questions about. The Home Secretary is here to talk about strategy, but there has to be accountability from your Department for holding police officers to account. You can come up with all the strategies in the world, but unless that police officer on the street is actually going out and arresting people in a timely and efficient manner, it does not matter what your policy is. How is your Department ensuring that chief constables, police and crime commissioners or whoever are doing what you want them to do? Nobody wants the figures that we have for rape and the figures that we have for burglary.

Matthew Rycroft: I totally agree with you about accountability and how the system needs to work together. That is precisely what we do. In addition to the Criminal Justice Taskforce and our other governance structures, which look across the whole system, we have the National Policing Board, chaired by the policing Minister. That body holds the police, force by force, to account on their overall performance.

Q292 **James Daly:** It is not working, though, is it?

Matthew Rycroft: We are using that mechanism to drive improvements precisely in the areas that you and other Committee members describe.

Priti Patel: This is a conversation about process, bureaucracy and structures in Government. At the end of the day, the public want to know that officers are investigating crime, and that criminals are being treated in a very serious way; and they absolutely want outcomes. We have tons of process. We are quite good at process; we just wrap ourselves up in it.



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Your line of questioning is important because this comes back to the fundamental aspect of public confidence in policing.

We want the public to be confident about policing. We want them to have trust in policing. Look at the conversations we have had this morning already: we have covered vetting, the IOPC—all the stuff that undermines public confidence. Accountability for delivery clearly has to be with the local public. To your point, Mr Daly, chief constables and police and crime commissioners—particularly PCCs—should hold the chief and officers to account on all the core crime types.

We set the framework and the targets in the beating crime plan—I am deliberately coming back to that. We have set targets on serious crime reduction. Any harm is outrageous, but we hold the police to account through the Strategic Policing and Crime Board and everything else. I do not want the Committee to be left with the impression that we are not chasing them and holding them to account.

Q293 **James Daly:** I understand that. My final point is that the police are not the social services. They are there to investigate offending.

Priti Patel: I agree.

James Daly: They are not there as a bureaucratic organisation to fill out endless paperwork. There needs to be a reaffirmation to the leadership of the police that the public want the police to go out and arrest people and put them before the courts. That is what undermines confidence, not whether all the other things we are talking about are there. I know that you understand that, and I will hand over at that point.

Q294 **Chair:** You referred to the rape review. Which Minister is responsible for driving it through? Where does the buck stop?

Priti Patel: In the Home Office, it is our Safeguarding Minister.

Q295 **Chair:** So your junior Minister?

Priti Patel: No, no. We do not just have one Minister, because obviously the policing Minister cuts across both Departments. He is also an MoJ Minister. The Safeguarding Minister and Kit Malthouse, our policing Minister, work together on the rape review and delivery of the metrics. We do not look at the rape review from just a Home Office perspective. It cuts across the Attorney General's Office and the MoJ. If you see the action plan with the rape review—the scorecards, the policing side—

Q296 **Chair:** We understand that. We just want to know who is ultimately responsible for the rape review and your plan to get back to 2016 levels.

Priti Patel: It sits with Kit, because he cuts across both Departments.

Q297 **Ms Abbott:** I would like to thank you, Home Secretary, for giving up your time to speak to the Committee. You may be aware that President Macron has been quoted today on the channel crossings issue. He said, in



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an interview with a French newspaper, that the UK economy relies on low-paid, illegal immigrant labour, and that “the British continue to have a system from the 1980s which manages economic migration through hypocrisy. There is no legal immigration route. The British must articulate their needs in terms of the economy and re-open a path to legal asylum requests. We are going to step up the pressure.” Do you have a response to that?

Priti Patel: My first response is that we speak to our French counterparts all the time about illegal migration and channel crossings, which are clearly a very significant problem, and at the same time, alongside our wider work, the French Government are fully briefed on the work that the British Government are doing, including the Nationality and Borders Bill, and the investments that we have made in in France in terms of protection, working with their surveillance teams, intelligence cells and policing.

Macron’s comments are absolutely wrong; let me be clear about that. Alongside that, I should also say that the entire French Government, and both the Interior Minister and President Macron, are fully aware, through the very good work that our ambassador in Paris and her team do, of our co-operation with France on combatting the dangerous and unnecessary crossings, dealing with illegal migration, and working with like-minded partners across Europe. Those comments are just wrong.

Q298 **Ms Abbott:** I want to ask you a few questions on the role that the Navy will play in relation to migrant crossings. How do you envisage that role?

Priti Patel: First, it is a hybrid role involving both the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office. A lot of work has taken place in just under two years to look at patrols in the channel and how those could be conducted, but also—importantly—at having a deterrent effect in the channel. The permanent secretary, Matthew, may wish to speak about the joint work, because we do have joint work under way right now with the MoD—not just the Navy—and Border Force. Those details are being worked up right now. A lot of work and planning is taking place, because we have to look at all sorts of aspects of how we operationalise in the channel, in terms of having a clear deterrent impact and message.

Q299 **Ms Abbott:** You will be aware that the Minister for the Armed Forces responded to an urgent question about this on 18 January. He said: “Details of how Defence will deliver and maintain the primacy of crosschannel counter-migration operations are currently being worked through.” Are you saying that that working-through process has not been completed yet?

Priti Patel: It is still taking place.

Q300 **Ms Abbott:** Do you envisage these naval vessels being involved in interception?



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Priti Patel: That work is taking place. I am not going to comment on operational planning.

Q301 **Ms Abbott:** Well, the Armed Forces Minister said in the House in terms that “the Royal Navy will not be directly involved in the interception of ships”. Are you saying he is wrong?

Priti Patel: That work is not complete, so it is inappropriate for me to comment on operation planning, in terms of what MoD—not just the Navy—and Border Force will be doing and how they will be operationalising. As both our permanent secretaries know—they are working with MoD officials and military planners—the work is operational and sensitive. Frankly, it is not for me to comment on the tactics and approach that they will be using.

Q302 **Ms Abbott:** The Defence Minister could comment, so why are you saying you cannot comment now?

Priti Patel: Primarily because that work is not complete, as I have already said.

Q303 **Ms Abbott:** This was on 18 January. On 26 January, the Defence Committee took evidence from Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Montgomery KBE and Commander Tom Sharpe OBE. The vice-admiral said that in terms of departmental and Government responsibilities, he was “a little bit confused”, and that it was unclear where strategic and operational responsibility lay. Do you know where strategic and operational—

Priti Patel: First of all, I have already said—in fact, I think I said this in the House a few weeks ago during oral questions—that the Prime Minister has effectively asked for the MoD and the Home Office, rightly, to come together to look at how both Departments can play a critical role in defending our borders from all manner of different threats in relation to small boat crossings and migrant crossings. That work is under way. It is being developed. As I have already said, I am not going to give operational details. It is right that both our teams, at an operational level, work through all of that. There is a great deal of work taking place right now across both Departments. My permanent secretary and the permanent secretary in the MoD are also involved in planning and the coordination of that work.

Q304 **Ms Abbott:** The armed forces Minister was happy to speak about these things. Among other things, he said—I am quoting what he said on the Floor of the House—“Neither the Royal Navy nor the Royal Marines will be engaged in pushback”. Is he wrong?

Priti Patel: As I have already said—I will say it again—there is work taking place right now between the two Departments. That is planning and co-ordination in terms of how the two teams will work together. That work has not been finalised; it is still under way. The Minister absolutely gave a view. He gave a view, but—



Q305 **Ms Abbott:** It is not a view; those are facts.

Priti Patel: They are not facts. They cannot be facts, because the work—that operational work—is still under way. While I appreciate that he was responding to questions in Parliament, whether that was in Committee or in response to an urgent question, this is work in progress. It is wrong to say anything specific with regards to work operationally that is still being planned. That work has not completed yet.

Q306 **Ms Abbott:** It is surprising to have a Secretary of State say one thing and a Minister say another. As I said a few—

Priti Patel: Neither of us is actually doing the operational planning. It is really for the specialists to be working on that.

Q307 **Ms Abbott:** As I said a few minutes ago, Vice-Admiral Sir Charles Montgomery KBE said that he was “confused” about where strategic responsibility and operational responsibility lay. Are you able to clear up the confusion?

Priti Patel: There is no confusion, because our two teams—I think the British public will be reassured by this, actually. They would rightly want to know that two Government Departments are coming together to recognise that there is a major problem with illegal migration in the channel and that we are working together to resolve this and find operational means of defending our borders from all manner of different threats in the right and proper way. It is right that both our teams are given the time and space to undertake that work, look at operational primacy, look at the roles of the two Departments, look at where responsibilities lie, look at the planning expertise, look at the co-ordination and delivery of assets, and work through proper plans. I do not think that is too much to ask of two Government Departments when it comes to trying to protect our borders.

Q308 **Ms Abbott:** I am sorry that you cannot clear up the vice-admiral’s confusion, but when the confusion has been cleared up, would you be able to publish the details of strategic responsibility and operational responsibility so that Parliament can review and scrutinise them?

Priti Patel: First of all, it is actually for the two Departments. In the same way that we would not publish strategic operating plans for the Royal Navy, I cannot see us doing that for operations in the channel. That would go against the grain of trying to protect our borders and having deterrence at sea. Quite frankly, it is right that we work through all the delivery of assets, planning and co-ordination. These are two very senior specialist teams with the type of expertise that we simply do not have as Members of Parliament. They are operational teams and professional teams, and they need to be allowed to get on, do the plans and work through the tactics and strategies that they are going to be deploying.

Ms Abbott: I do not want to prolong this line of questioning, Chair, but it is extraordinary that the armed forces can be clear on this matter, Home Secretary, but you cannot. To move on—



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Q309 **Chair:** Before you do, Diane, can I be clear, because of what has been said? Home Secretary, are you saying that the armed forces Minister was wrong in what he said? Has he misled Parliament?

Priti Patel: No, he has not misled Parliament. He was responding to an urgent question before the two teams had come together to do the operational planning.

Q310 **Chair:** So he was wrong in what he said, because it had not been decided?

Priti Patel: At that stage, in terms of the timing, he absolutely had not misled anybody. The timings of the UQ meant that he came to Parliament to respond at a time when the commissions had literally just been stood up. As with all operations, it takes time to work through the details. On that basis, neither of us—I say this because it is officials, and it is right that it should be the officials, the experts, whether they are from maritime, safety, Border Force, and also from the MoD—

Q311 **Chair:** I think we have got that, but I just want to be clear what you are saying about what your colleague, a Government Minister, said. Was what he said to the House correct?

Priti Patel: I have to say, first of all, that you are providing selective quotes, and if you want to go through the entirety of what he said, he also made it quite clear in the UQ that much of this work was being developed and was under way. He did not mislead anyone because that is effectively what has been happening. That work is under way. It is not complete at all.

Q312 **Ms Abbott:** So he did not mislead the House in saying that “the Royal Navy will not be directly involved in the interception of ships”?

Priti Patel: He also went on to say, “Details of how Defence will deliver and maintain the primacy of cross-channel counter-migration operations are currently being worked through.” That is the point. You can selectively quote him, but there are other quotes where he made it very clear to Parliament that this is work in progress and that work is under way.

Q313 **Ms Abbott:** I was actually in the Chamber for that UQ, and I have to tell you, Home Secretary, that my colleagues were not overwhelmed by the vagueness about things being worked through. What he did—

Priti Patel: Because he cannot be specific. It is operational work that is taking place. You would not expect a Minister to come to Parliament and disclose, effectively, military primacy at sea and what operational plans would be.

Q314 **Ms Abbott:** Let me move on. Commander Sharpe, giving evidence to the Defence Committee, accepted that if the military gets this operation wrong, there is a real danger of their presence encouraging as opposed to deterring people when it comes to making the journey across the channel to England. Do you agree with that?



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Priti Patel: First of all, I don't. I absolutely do not. I have confidence in the expertise of our teams who are working through operational details. It is incredibly irresponsible to have any speculation around this area. None of us sitting in this room are expert planners in how to operationalise at sea. It is right that the Government come together, as the Prime Minister has pulled together two Departments to look at this strategically. It is not the responsibility of one Department; it is a whole-of-Government effort. It is therefore right that we bring in the specialists, the expertise and people who understand the dynamics at sea to do the operational planning and work. Quite frankly, that is exactly what the British public want to see.

Q315 **Ms Abbott:** Thank you, Home Secretary. Are you saying that Commander Sharpe, not to mention your fellow Minister James Heappey, was being irresponsible?

Priti Patel: Nobody is being irresponsible. The comment is that anyone who is making speculation about action should clearly recognise the work that is under way, particularly with the Ministry of Defence, which has the expertise and should be left to get on and do that work rather than speculating on outcomes that are completely not decided.

Chair: This has to be your last question, Diane.

Q316 **Ms Abbott:** Yes, of course, Chair. Home Secretary, you will be aware that in 2019, HMS Mersey and HMS Enterprise were deployed in the channel. They did not intercept any small boats while on patrol for several weeks. Why do you think it is going to be different this time?

Priti Patel: It is very much for the operational teams to work through that. Again, I am not going to give a running commentary on operations and tactics that are still being developed. Matthew and the team have been leading this work with the MoD, and it is right that we leave it in the hands of the experts to run through not just primacy, but the operational work that is required. The Prime Minister could not have been clearer that by pulling together two Departments, this work is about defending our borders as well as making sure that we can save lives.

Matthew Rycroft: Can I briefly add a couple of points to what the Home Secretary has said?

Chair: You can, and then I will go to Tim Loughton.

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, yes, the overarching intent of the Government's strategy is deterrence. We want to deter people from making what is a dangerous journey, in order to save lives. That is a shared humanitarian responsibility that France and the UK have, given that there is a shared border; we share the channel. The changes to the operational or strategic responsibilities in the channel have not taken effect yet. There is no change, as we currently stand on 2 February. There will be a change in the future, because the Prime Minister has decided, and the Home Secretary and armed forces Minister have set out previously, what the sorts of changes would be. As the Home Secretary has said, that



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operational detail is not complete. When it is, the announcements will be made in the appropriate way.

Q317 **Tim Loughton:** Good morning, Home Secretary. You will be relieved to know I am not confused. First of all, I want to apologise for not being here at the beginning. The reason was that I was helping to host a group of French parliamentarians who are here at the moment, and who will be meeting the Home Affairs Committee this afternoon. When I met them this morning, I showed them the headline that is in *The Times*—I didn't even have to read the French press for it—and I have to say that they were rather embarrassed by it, to say the least.

I want to come back to that issue in a minute, but can I just tag you on a couple of other technical things? When you came in front of this Committee on 24 February last year, I asked you about the issue of the test of English for international communication—TOEIC—and that scandal where many hundreds of overseas students had been kicked off courses, lost their fees and lost the ability to study or work in the UK. You said, and I quote from the record, “perhaps when I next come back to the Committee—I would be very happy to talk about what we will do as a

Department on this”. From what I can see, legal action is ongoing, nothing has been done by the Home Secretary and these poor people are still in limbo. Have I missed something?

Priti Patel: No, we are absolutely dealing with the legal actions that are taking place, which has really complicated the system, because we are not able to deal with cases while we have got ongoing legal action. If memory serves me correctly—Tricia or Matthew might correct me on this—it was a matter of remote testing that was subject to the legal action. It is because of that outstanding litigation that we can't actually take further steps. I think that is the latest position on this.

Patricia Hayes: That is correct, Home Secretary. If I could just build on that briefly, I think we share your frustration that we are not able to make more progress on this. We are waiting for that critical determination of the litigation case that is in the upper tribunal.

There are two pieces of modestly good news. The first is that we are expecting that very soon, and the second is that we have not been sitting on our hands while we have been waiting for that case to conclude. We have been doing a lot of planning internally to make sure that when we do get that determination, we are ready to announce a way forward almost immediately afterwards. It would have been better if the litigation had concluded sooner, but we have not let it delay our action planning.

Q318 **Tim Loughton:** That is encouraging to hear. When I raised it with you, Home Secretary, you were very helpful and offered to take it away and report back to the Committee. We have not had any report back, and it is almost a year. I think that rather than just waiting for Godot, if you were



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to give us an account of exactly what has happened and what planning you can reveal is in place—

Priti Patel: I will definitely do that.

Tim Loughton: That would help to give some lifeline to those people, whose lives are absolutely in limbo—if that is possible, please.

Priti Patel: It is a terrible situation, as we know, historically, with the cases, so I think on that basis we can talk about the work that we are doing.

Q319 **Tim Loughton:** Thank you for that. For the second thing, I will switch to Afghanistan. I have dealt with, as we all did, various cases of people with constituency connections escaping from Kabul. I have several constituents, or people linked with the constituency, who are in hotels, including one who was with young children at a not very good hotel, with appalling food and terrible conditions. He complained and was subsequently told to shut up and was moved to an even worse hotel, on the basis that he was a troublemaker. Various people in my constituency know him well, and he is anything but a troublemaker. I spoke to him in the queue for the Baron hotel in Kabul. He went through the most terrible time: his daughter was injured and had to leave the queue to go to the hospital. They have been through a terrible time and have now, effectively, been bullied by whichever firm or officials have been dealing with that accommodation. Can I come back to you with that case, because it is particularly alarming?

Priti Patel: Can you please send me some details on this?

Q320 **Tim Loughton:** The bigger point here is this. Where are we with the numbers of families who are still in these temporary hotels, whose lives are in limbo, whose kids are relying on some local schooling, and who then—as happened in that family’s case—get moved to a completely different part of the country and so their lives are completely disrupted? When are we going to see some progress on this?

Priti Patel: It’s an awful situation—it really is. I am very honest, open and candid about the situation that we are in. First of all, we did the right thing, under harrowing circumstances, to bring people over to the United Kingdom. But we do not have the infrastructure—I am very up front and honest about that—in terms of housing accommodation, and there is a lot of work taking place with local authorities. Please drop me all the details, first of all, on your case. We are struggling—we are absolutely struggling with local authorities finding housing accommodation. Also, we want to ensure that we can move people into work and employment; we want them to rebuild their lives here. This comes back to your process point; I’m sorry to say this. There is a cross-Government taskforce. We have a Minister for Afghan Resettlement who leads on this, but we are desperately still trying to pull together the different component parts of the old MHCLG and all of that—



Q321 Tim Loughton: I don't think anyone underestimates the challenge. It was a huge challenge, and it was a huge feat to get as many people out as we did, although, again, I have had complaints from people who worked within your Department, and others, about the way it was handled and the way a number of life support contractors were not given the same priority as embassy security guards or Chevening scholars. These were people who worked, directly or indirectly, for the British Government and allied agencies, whose lives were just as much threatened and who were not given any safe passage. Do you acknowledge that there are still quite a lot of people like that—under cover, in hiding, in Afghanistan—to whom we probably still do owe a duty of care?

Priti Patel: Well, there are—there are people. We know there are people, and we have been working particularly with the Foreign Office. This is very much now—a lot of this is working with the Foreign Office. There are still some—certain categories that it is not for me to speak about publicly—where there is a lot of work taking place to find other means and routes to get them out of Afghanistan, working with third countries and neighbouring countries. There is a lot of work taking place there.

Look, the operation was harrowing—it was absolutely harrowing. It is still harrowing to think about the experiences that people went through, and also our teams across Government. Our Departments were working night and day, and rightly so. We dropped absolutely everything to support the MoD. As colleagues will know, we sent Border Force teams to Kabul to help process, speed things up and help with identification. It was a very, very distressing time.

On our challenge right now—I am, again, very up front about this—if councils want to work with us to find accommodation, housing or even jobs, we want to give people that new pathway to rebuild their lives. That is absolutely central to our work.

Q322 Tim Loughton: Can I just ask one thing, and then I want to come back to channel crossings? I remember your predecessors being in front of this Committee when we were dealing with Syrian refugees. Many of us were saying, "Can we mobilise a sort of taskforce of volunteers and others who want to and are practically able to help?" Many people weren't. They were saying, "I've got a spare room; I can take a family," but it's not as easy as that. But we were able to mobilise lots of local organisations—faith groups or whatever—that were able to provide not just accommodation but the support networks as well, rather than having to rely on hotels. I have not seen the same sort of urgency and call to arms, because a lot of people—

Priti Patel: There is work taking place on this.

Tim Loughton: I have constituents who say, "Actually, we could take on more people even if the council hasn't got the accommodation available. We know those challenges. We think we can provide some accommodation



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and, importantly, the support network to go with it.” I am not seeing that happening urgently enough.

Priti Patel: We should never underestimate the third sector—

Tim Loughton: Absolutely.

Priti Patel: Because there is work taking place on this. Tricia can speak about that mobilisation and the work across Government on this. There is a lot of good work—let me just give you that assurance—but of course, the numbers we are speaking about are significant, with the numbers of children, school places and things of that nature. Tricia can speak about some of that work.

Patricia Hayes: The Home Secretary is absolutely right; this is a huge whole-of-government issue. I thought it would maybe be helpful to start by bringing the Committee up to date on some of the latest numbers, just so we know what we are talking about. So far, we have found homes for 4,000 of the people we brought back from Afghanistan; we still have 12,000 sitting in bridging accommodation, though.

When the permanent secretary and I last came to the Committee, Committee members shared with us some examples of individual councils that had struggled to connect with the cross-government team on offers of accommodation, just as you are describing. Since then, we have improved our systems and processes: we have put in place a dedicated portal that can be used by people who want to offer accommodation that is a way of connecting accommodation suppliers, councils and us. We also have a very—

Q323 **Tim Loughton:** How many people have used it?

Patricia Hayes: I do not have that information about who is using it, but it is up and running, and it is a core part of our operations now.

Q324 **Tim Loughton:** Is it really being used?

Priti Patel: Yes, it is.

Patricia Hayes: It is a core part of our operations now. It is a much more efficient way of exchanging information.

Priti Patel: It helps to match people.

Q325 **Tim Loughton:** It would just be useful to get an idea of the numbers, because I suspect that, actually—

Priti Patel: We can show that to you as well.

Tim Loughton: I suspect it has not resulted in many being taken outside of just the direct council accommodation.

Patricia Hayes: I think we have directly addressed the communications problem that was addressed the last time we were at the Committee. It is



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important to rehearse the financial offer that is available to councils that take people on: we have money for education, healthcare, and English language. We have a three-year funding envelope per individual of £20,520, and we have a special £20 million flex fund. We are incredibly grateful to the 300 councils that have already stepped forward to help us, but we could always do with more, so it is a good opportunity to have a call to arms to councils around the country to engage with the new communication and engagement tools we have created and to make places available.

Q326 Tim Loughton: I understand. The trouble is that there are still 12,000 people in hotels, which is completely inadequate when you have a family to look after.

Can I come back, without trying your patience, Chair, to the channel crossings? Last year, as you know, the figure was over 28,000, treble the year before, despite the fact that the French are intercepting—though not doing anything with—treble the number before they get into the water. The trouble is, they do not process them. Nothing is working, is it?

Priti Patel: Last year, there were over 51,000 crossings attempted by migrants, of which 28,000 arrived and 23,000 were prevented. In terms of prevention, there is a lot of activity taking place, so it is not right to say that nothing is working. There is a lot of work taking place.

Q327 Tim Loughton: You know, Home Secretary, what has happened. When a group of migrants is intercepted by the gendarmerie, typically at 1 o'clock in the morning, they then have their boat confiscated; they are routinely then allowed to go free, and only if there is specific evidence attached to the person who is suspected of being the organising people smuggler will even that person be arrested. The increase in interceptions could be the same group coming back to do it again the very same night, so they are actually intercepting the same people because the French are not arresting them. They are not, as they should be and we are paying for, taking them to their processing centres to see what their status is, and then dealing with them, which remains the nub of the problem, doesn't it?

Priti Patel: That is not the full picture, because there are arrests taking place, and their prosecution and arresting system is very different from the British system as well.

Tim Loughton: I.e., they don't.

Priti Patel: No, not at all. If you look at the work that takes place on surveillance, there is more surveillance taking place. The French Government have even changed their laws on the use of drones.

Tim Loughton: Just.

Priti Patel: As we all know, parliamentary processes take time.



Tim Loughton: It is the courts.

Priti Patel: But even so, they have changed their processes and their laws. They are now using them much more to intercept, and there is co-operation taking place through our joint intelligence centre as well. We cannot speak about the number of prosecutions: the French system is much more complicated, and it is very difficult—all our systems are difficult and complicated—but criminal groups are being arrested and prosecuted, and we are certainly seeing more arrests and prosecutions. We will continue to work with France on that.

Q328 **Tim Loughton:** But, Home Secretary, the numbers who have successfully made that crossing despite everything you say—which is undoubtedly true—have trebled, and that is the basis on which we are judged as to whether our immigration policy is working or not.

I recently met MPs from Calais; as I say, I have been with MPs today. They make, I think, a legitimate case about the absence of safe and legal routes, although as we have seen in Macron's statement, I think they are placing undue reliance on that. We discussed with them a proposal, which is being fleshed out by the Republican party ahead of the election. We will not get a result ahead of the election because Macron thinks it is good sport to be able to resurrect the battle of Agincourt, and it is a vote winner, so he will not come up with anything remotely practical and sensible.

What the Republicans are looking at is: if they agreed to arrest these people trying to get into the water and took them to the processing reception centres, which we pay for, where they can be looked after much better and where they can have their status and claims analysed; if we were to allow them to apply for asylum in the UK from those reception centres, which we do not at the moment; and if they would guarantee that those who were rejected by us would then not be allowed to go free to turn up on a beach again in Calais, but would be dealt with and returned to where they came from, is that a goer? That is a practical way, potentially, if they guarantee to intercept them and take them back to French territory, because that is what would stop people getting to those beaches.

Priti Patel: The answer is no.

Q329 **Tim Loughton:** Why not?

Priti Patel: It would not stop people making dangerous crossings. Park the channel route for now. People are making dangerous crossings not just over the channel, but even getting from Africa over the Mediterranean and then across Europe. They are still working with the smuggling gangs not just to make the channel crossing, but to come upstream into France as well. That proposal effectively makes France a big magnet for more migrants to come. I don't know how the French public would feel about that, processing centres or not; they have enough problems with camps

and criminality and all sorts of issues taking place, so that is not a viable option.

Q330 **Tim Loughton:** But isn't this the magnet at the moment? People are coming into France and going specifically to the north coast of France and around Calais, with all the problems that they now have and the terrible conditions there, and if they get into the water, the chances are they will make it to the UK. If, as part of a deal—it needs to be an EU-wide deal as well; we have to do it by co-operating—the French agreed to intercept those boats and take the occupants back to France, so that it became known you are paying your £5,000 to a people smuggler in order to make a round-trip back to where you started, that would stop that trade. The quid pro quo is that they could then put their applications in, because most of them have not had their applications turned down, anyway, but the French do not arrest them and they deal with them.

Priti Patel: But there is no guarantee—

Q331 **Tim Loughton:** If we could come up with a deal like that, there would be no reason for them to go to northern France.

Priti Patel: No, but at the same time there is no guarantee that their applications would fail. There is no guarantee that they would be removed to another country, because that also means that France would need returns agreements with a range of other countries—

Q332 **Tim Loughton:** That is part of the deal. That is what we need to look at.

Priti Patel: We have our own returns agreements with other countries, and we are expanding that. Let's not forget the majority of the nationalities right now are Iraqi and Iranian. These are difficult countries to agree returns agreements with. France cannot unilaterally have those returns agreements. They will be working with the Commission. So it is not as binary as saying, "Let's process them in France and let the French have returns deals and agreements." There is a lot of work that would be required in that.

Q333 **Tim Loughton:** A lot of work will be required. This is a complex problem, but at the moment it is getting worse, not better.

Priti Patel: Well, there are a couple of things. First and foremost, it is because of the work led by this Government—it is a Commission-led competency, as we know; the Commission has not been moving on this. However, we have good discussions with Commissioner Johansson. Also, look at the unilateral action that some other EU member states have taken. France in particular could do more. Currently—we have to be honest about this—their borders are open. Even stepping up Frontex to do much more in terms of patrolling borders and stopping criminality coming into France would be a positive measure. Belgium are doing that, by the way, and we have good co-operation with Belgium not just on the law enforcement side, but in tackling the gangs. There are good lessons across



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other EU member states that France could actually learn from, and we are persuading them and pursuing that.

Q334 **Tim Loughton:** But they are not, and 28,000 people came across the channel last year. By all accounts, it is going to be worse this year. So, two final questions.

Priti Patel: We have to use every single aspect of the system.

Tim Loughton: We do. And I have suggested one practical thing that the French are prepared to look at, or certainly one party who potentially could come into power this year. Two final quick questions. Of those 28,000 people who came across, how many have left the country? Secondly, what safe and legal route would have been available to them coming across? If the answer is, "Well actually, not anything really," when will there be one? You have promised something for some time.

Priti Patel: First of all, I do not have the numbers of people who have been removed—they are tiny, for a range of reasons, as we know: pandemic, asylum processing and inability to remove people to certain countries. But that does not mean that we are not doing any work on these individuals in terms of removals.

You have asked about safe and legal routes. The majority of these particular individuals who are still coming over are single men. We will be very frank about this: we have people coming over from Syria and from Afghanistan. We have the work of the Afghanistan resettlement scheme, which is a safe and legal route that has been stood up. As you know, Mr Loughton, a lot of work is taking place with the Nationality and Borders Bill in terms of channel removals et cetera. It is those combined elements that would help to put a stop to the pull factors that have people coming over here.

Q335 **Tim Loughton:** If you are not Syrian or Afghani, what safe and legal routes are available now?

Priti Patel: Economic migrants do not need safe and legal routes because they should be claiming asylum in many of the other countries that they are travelling through, rather than doing the asylum shopping that we see taking place.

Q336 **Tim Loughton:** If you are not any of those, what safe and legal routes are available now?

Priti Patel: The majority of them are people who are not claiming asylum or fleeing persecution.

Q337 **Tim Loughton:** I agree, but what is available to those who are?

Priti Patel: Well, it is the ability to return them to their country of origin. But the ultimate point is that they should be claiming asylum in other countries and not coming here.



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Q338 **Tim Loughton:** I completely agree, but what safe and legal route is available if you are not Afghani or Syrian, not covered by one of those specialist schemes and you are genuinely fleeing from danger and would be likely to be granted asylum status?

Priti Patel: That is a different thing. You will know that through the Nationality and Borders Bill we are specifically creating safe and legal routes for people of other nationalities who are fleeing persecution. We currently do not have those routes in place but we are going to be standing those up, working with the likes of the UNHCR. We have been very specific about that through the Nationality and Borders Bill. But currently, the problem we have with illegal migration—we should be very clear about this—is that the majority of people are not fleeing persecution. They are asylum shopping, and that is why they should be claiming asylum in other countries.

Q339 **Tim Loughton:** In which case, there is no problem with doing a deal with the French in which those people will be turned down and they would be the responsibility of the French.

Priti Patel: We do not know that they would be turned down.

Q340 **Tim Loughton:** Well, it is down to us, isn't it?

Priti Patel: It will still act as a pull factor—people going into France—

Q341 **Tim Loughton:** No, no—if they do not fit our criteria, we turn them down and then it is back to the French to deal with.

Priti Patel: They should also be claiming asylum in other countries because they are making very long journeys through other countries where they could claim asylum.

Q342 **Chair:** We are going around in circles on that one. Can I ask you to send us the figures for the removals that Mr Loughton is referring to, so that we are aware? I think it was five the last time we asked that question; it would be interesting to know how that has increased.

Priti Patel: Yes, we can give that in writing.

Q343 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Thank you, Home Secretary, permanent secretary and deputy permanent secretary. Where in the Nationality and Borders Bill is there any mention of safe legal routes?

Priti Patel: It is actually in the new plan for immigration and the work we are doing in the new plan for immigration.

Q344 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But not in the Nationality and Borders Bill.

Priti Patel: The new plan for immigration, as I have mentioned many times.

Q345 **Stuart C. McDonald:** It is just that you mentioned there that it was in the Nationality and Borders Bill.



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Priti Patel: The two are linked. The Nationality and Borders Bill and the new plan for immigration—that is the Government strategy in terms of reforming: illegal migration, the changes that we are bringing in, stopping the pull factors and also about our returns and removals.

Stuart C. McDonald: It is not in the Nationality and Borders Bill—fine.

Priti Patel: It is in the new plan for immigration and the Nationality and Borders Bill is part of the new plan for immigration.

Q346 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Matthew Rycroft, in December the Court of Appeal made it clear that it is not illegal to set sail across the channel with a view to being intercepted in the channel or to arriving at a port to claim asylum. Is that correct?

Matthew Rycroft: That is correct under current law, yes, but the Nationality and Borders Bill deals with that issue as well.

Q347 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Home Secretary, you just about roared the word “illegal” there. The vast majority of these crossings are not illegal, according to the Court of Appeal.

Priti Patel: Pardon?

Stuart C. McDonald: The vast majority of these crossings are not illegal, despite the fact that you just about roared it there at the top of your voice and you use that word all the time. Most of these crossings are not illegal, according to the Court of Appeal.

Priti Patel: They are dangerous crossings, clearly.

Q348 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Yes, but they are not illegal—that is the question I am asking you.

Priti Patel: Actually, to be quite frank—let us be very clear about what we are speaking about—as a Government our policy is absolutely to work to stop dangerous crossings but also tackle the issue of illegal migration.

Q349 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I am asking you about your description of them as illegal.

Priti Patel: Illegal migration and illegal entry to the United Kingdom are linked.

Q350 **Stuart C. McDonald:** You accept that the Court of Appeal says that the vast majority of these crossings are not illegal?

Priti Patel: Well, look, that’s fine—

Stuart C. McDonald: It is an important point because you keep saying it.

Priti Patel: The work of this Government is absolutely to deter illegal entry to our country and illegal migration.



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Q351 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Yes, but you are deterring things that are not currently illegal.

Patricia Hayes, just to follow up on a point in Tim Loughton's questions, you spoke about moving folk on from hotels. When Victoria Atkins was here, I asked her about this and I was assured that it was in hand, but I still have local authorities approaching me saying that they offer accommodation, but they then have to wait months before the Home Office takes them up on it. Why is that still happening?

Patricia Hayes: That is not what we think is happening. If individual local authorities are having that experience, definitely send them in our direction. We have set up the new communication mechanisms so that we can work with local authorities and accommodation providers as quickly as possible. Sometimes we are facing issues when the kind of accommodation that is being offered may not fit what is needed for a particular family in a particular place.

Q352 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Are you monitoring the length of time that it takes to turn these things round?

Patricia Hayes: I do not think we are collecting data on every single time a local authority is in touch with us about accommodation.

Stuart C. McDonald: Okay. I will find specific examples and forward them.

Patricia Hayes: Do. That would be good.

Q353 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Thank you. When you were last here, Mr Rycroft, I asked you about the economic impact assessment and you said, "The Home Secretary said it would be published shortly". Minister Pursglove also told us in November that it would be published in due course; he said the same in a couple of written PQs. Where is the economic impact assessment for the Nationality and Borders Bill?

Matthew Rycroft: What I said before continues to be true.

Q354 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Home Secretary, when will we get to see the economic impact assessment for the Nationality and Borders Bill? Is it not fairly fundamental in scrutinising the legislation that we get to see how much the Home Office reckons it will cost?

Priti Patel: The legislation has been well scrutinised. If you look at what's going on in the House of Lords, I think it was the second day of Committee yesterday.

Q355 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Yes, but we have been unable to persuade people that the idea of deterrence through criminalisation, differentiation and so on is the right way to go—

Priti Patel: That's not what I hear on the doorstep. I hear that the British public want the Government to take all the necessary action to prevent dangerous crossings.



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Q356 **Stuart C. McDonald:** That is not what I hear at all. Putting that argument to one side for today—we have had it at length—how are we supposed to scrutinise the Bill if you do not publish the assessment? Surely just as a mark of respect to Parliament, you will publish that document before it leaves the Lords.

Priti Patel: The Bill has had plenty of scrutiny. It continues to be scrutinised. Quite frankly, we are already working on making sure—

Stuart C. McDonald: You are not denying there is—

Chair: Can I just stop both of you? We cannot hear if you both talk at the same time. Stuart, if you want to ask your question and then the Home Secretary answers. Do not speak over each other, please.

Priti Patel: Apologies, Chair.

Q357 **Stuart C. McDonald:** My apologies, Chair. So there is an economic impact assessment, but you are saying to the Committee that you will not publish it.

Priti Patel: I am saying that the Bill has had scrutiny. The costs of the asylum system are published and well known. The costs of everything we do in the immigration space and the impacts of immigration, legal and illegal, are all published. There are plenty of Government sources where this information is in the public domain. We will happily collate some of that for you if you would like that to help you make further decisions on the Nationality and Borders Bill. But the fact of the matter is that every aspect of the Bill, the process of scrutiny and also the new plan for immigration, which also has sources and references, show that our asylum system is collapsing under the weight of the various strains, abuses, sheer numbers coming to our country. Both the Bill and the new plan for immigration, where there are published sources and data sources, demonstrate the work that we are doing to change the entire system.

Q358 **Stuart C. McDonald:** In short, that's a no. You are not going to publish an economic impact assessment.

Priti Patel: I have been clear from the outset about the work around nationality and borders—what is published and what is not published. If you would like further information, if you want to send me some questions, we will happily answer them.

Q359 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Your permanent secretary said it would be published shortly. It is clear to me that it has not been published for a political reason.

Priti Patel: There is nothing political about it.

Q360 **Stuart C. McDonald:** David Davis estimated in his speech on Report that the cost of offshoring would be £17 billion or £32 billion. Does the Home Office have a figure?



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Priti Patel: I am not sure where that figure has come from, but I would be very happy to circulate to the Committee a wide range of costs in terms of asylum, asylum processing, the cost to the British taxpayer, which will demonstrate that the measures that we are introducing in the Nationality and Borders Bill are absolutely essential, not just for long-term savings for the British taxpayer but for tackling some of the systematic issues that have caused the major strains and the collapse of our asylum system.

Q361 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Home Secretary, we are well aware of what is published in terms of the cost of the asylum system currently. What we are interested in is the estimate that you quite clearly have on your desk of the cost of the measures that you are proposing to implement. You are asking us to vote for them without telling us what you think those costs are. Is it £17 billion? £32 billion? What alternative estimate of the cost of offshoring do you have?

Priti Patel: We have a range of figures—

Stuart C. McDonald: Well, publish them.

Priti Patel: For the benefit of the Committee, I will happily write to the Committee Chair and provide cost estimates, and even some of the cost estimates based on future projections, if that would give you reassurance about the wider implications for British taxpayers and the implications for our asylum system.

Q362 **Stuart C. McDonald:** That would be incredibly helpful. Can we get it very soon, so that it can inform the House of Lords in its consideration?

Priti Patel: Of course.

Stuart C. McDonald: In the next couple of weeks?

Priti Patel: I am sure we can make that possible.

Q363 **Stuart C. McDonald:** That is helpful; thank you very much indeed. We have already spoken a little bit about the number of people who are in contingency accommodation just now—hostels and barracks and so on. Am I right in saying, Mr Rycroft, that it is somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000?

Patricia Hayes: There are 25,000 people in hotels at the moment, yes.

Q364 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Is there a formal policy on the use of contingency accommodation, and is it possible for that to be published?

Matthew Rycroft: There is a statutory obligation to accommodate anyone seeking asylum who would otherwise be destitute, and it is up to the Home Secretary and the Home Office how that obligation is fulfilled each time.

Q365 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But how are we going about that process? Lots of local authorities are getting in touch with me and saying, "We have just been told that the Home Office are putting 200"—or 300, or 400—"in this



hotel.” They are only told after the hotel is booked, regardless of whether the local authority thinks it is completely inappropriate or the wrong location. That doesn’t matter. What are the Home Office’s policies in that regard?

Patricia Hayes: This has been a huge operational challenge to us over the last year, as we have had to work at enormous pace and intensity to fulfil our statutory obligations using the contractual framework that we have put in place. We would absolutely acknowledge, as I think I said to the Committee the last time I was here, that the pace at which we had to operate has made it really challenging to do the absolute best we could, in terms of engagement with local authorities and giving people as much notice as possible. What we have achieved in the way we have mobilised has been extraordinary, given the very high number of people coming through, but we are absolutely determined to do better in future in building strong and constructive partnerships at local level. I completely get that there have been some very difficult moments, and we are keen to do better in future.

Q366 **Stuart C. McDonald:** We will come back to that, and hopefully the number of these incidents will decline.

Priti Patel: MPs and local authorities are informed before any hotel is used. That is absolutely the policy way of working of the team. I should just add that my views on all this are pretty well known and documented. It is a thoroughly inadequate policy. It is not something that we want, and this is part of the reason why there is a lot of wider work taking place on asylum accommodation. We do not want people in hotels. We are looking at dispersed accommodation, first and foremost. We are looking at using and working with our partners in MoD on alternative sites and alternative accommodation, and it is right that we do that. Of course, we are looking, as part of the new plan for immigration, at work on reception centres.

We should not be housing people in hotels. There are a range of reasons why we are in this cycle of putting people in hotels. It is a thoroughly—I don’t even want to say it is a policy, because it is not. It is the culmination of a series of circumstances that have led us—because we have statutory duties and responsibility to stop people becoming destitute—to that level of decision making.

Q367 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay. You have my full support in trying to return folk to dispersed asylum accommodation.

Priti Patel: We need to work with local authorities on that, across the country.

Q368 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I am far less supportive of—in fact, I am outright opposed to—the large-scale accommodation centres. On the issue of local authorities, during Home Office questions, you referred to the Home Office doing everything possible to provide local authorities with financial support and assistance. That is not something that local authorities



recognise. Patricia Hayes, you set out the excellent package, or the good package, that is available to those taking part in the Afghan scheme. There is nothing remotely like that for those who take part in asylum dispersal, which is why councils such as Stoke and others are withdrawing from it. What sort of support were you referring to, Home Secretary?

Patricia Hayes: Shall I come in? On the financial package I described for the Afghanistan resettlement scheme, which was heavily based on the financial package we had put in place for the Syrian resettlement scheme, you are quite right that that is a totally different scheme with very different ground rules from those in the work we are doing on asylum more generally, where the main route to funding for local authorities is through the mainstream local funding settlement, rather than through the bolt-on we have put in place for the resettlement schemes.

Having said that, we have been doing a lot of work recently with the Local Government Association and other councils to see how we can develop a new way of working with local authorities for asylum schemes that recognises, as the Home Secretary says, the financial as well as policy imperative to cut the costs we are incurring in hotels, which is racking up at £1.2 million every single day.¹ We are optimistic that we will be able to broker a new way of working with local government on how we manage these costs.

Q369 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Presumably the Home Office could save money on hotel costs if it spent a little bit of money encouraging local authorities—

Priti Patel: There is no question about that. We have worked through all that, absolutely. No one likes this policy of having hotels. No one likes that approach at all. It is obvious that we need to pay more to local authorities. The top 20 areas are currently contributing to 48% of all dispersed asylum accommodation. That is not good enough.

We have a model. There is work under way, and we propose resourcing LAs based on all the factors that are needed—support, the wide additional costs, et cetera—because we obviously want to work with wider partners.

Q370 **Stuart C. McDonald:** That is encouraging. The other side of the coin—again, the point was made by Stoke City Council—is that the limits on the number of asylum seekers that councils are supposed to take operate city-wide, but that often leads to pockets in those cities having well in excess of that. It is about giving local authorities more say over where asylum seekers are placed.

¹ The Second Permanent Secretary subsequently clarified that the total cost of hotel accommodation used as asylum accommodation is £4.7 million per day, of which £1.2 million is spent on hotel accommodation for persons resettled from Afghanistan. See [Letter from the Second Permanent Secretary on asylum accommodation costs](#), dated 2 February 2022.



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Priti Patel: That is absolutely right. Tricia has already said this, but that comes back to the work with the LGA. We have to be conscientious and very sensible and pragmatic about the implications of dispersed accommodation in our communities. Let us be very clear about that. There is a range of societal factors that we are very sensitive to. We have to do this in the right and proper way.

No Department in central Government can dictate outwards. We have to work bottom-up, and with our partners, on dispersed accommodation, on the issues of localities, on localisation, and the type of support needed.

Q371 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I have a final question on a very different subject. This morning, I understand, the Supreme Court has upheld the Home Office fees for the registration of children as British citizens. I am obviously very disappointed by that, but the overarching issue remains. Thousands of children who are entitled to British citizenship do not get it because they cannot afford it. They are as entitled to that British citizenship as I am, as you are, and as anyone in this room is. Your predecessor called it a huge sum of money. There is not even a scheme whereby there can be a fee waiver or a fee reduction. Surely the Home Office will now think again about how much it charges kids who are entitled to British citizenship to register as British citizens.

Priti Patel: I have not seen the details of that judgment this morning. Obviously, we have to look at the policy implications in the round.

Q372 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Do you accept what your predecessor said—that it is a huge sum of money?

Priti Patel: We have to look at all the judgments and decisions before we make any comments whatsoever.

Q373 **Chair:** Can we have a timescale for when this work with the LGA will be completed and local authorities will get the support they need?

Patricia Hayes: We do not have a firm timescale. We are working very intensively at the moment; the work is almost complete.

Priti Patel: Nearly done, actually.

Patricia Hayes: Yes, it is nearly done.

Chair: Nearly done. Okay.

Priti Patel: We can write to you about this once we have it all. There is some good work taking place.

Q374 **Simon Fell:** Thank you, Home Secretary, for joining us. I would like to cover two areas: fraud and online harms. Fraud, as you will be well aware, is a growing problem, and it accounts for roughly a third of all reported crime. The most recent figures we have from the crime survey for England and Wales showed a 43% increase in fraud and computer misuse. I believe that Action Fraud is seeing roughly a 36% increase in



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reports. I acknowledge that this is a huge topic that spans corporate crime and low-level telephone scams and romance frauds, but there is a significant gap between the scale of the problem, which is growing, and the response to it. The DG for economic crime at the economic crime command said that about 1% of police resources are dedicated to tackling this. My initial question is: how do you plan to close that gap? And what does “good” look like for one of our constituents who falls victim to fraud?

Priti Patel: Can I start with your latter point, Mr Fell? In terms of what “good” looks like, it has to be that when crime is reported—all crime, but fraud and economic crime in particular—there is an understanding of what that crime is, and that it is not just reported, but acted on, and goes into the next steps of the process around investigation, data collection, et cetera. It is pretty obvious that that is not happening right now.

Economic crime and fraud is on the up, absolutely. It is quite clever and sophisticated in some quarters, but in other quarters it is not. The pandemic has shown that. When you look at two years of coronavirus, there has been a wide amount of online fraud and crime—even defrauding of Government schemes, which we all now know about. Our National Crime Agency is absolutely engaged on all of that, and has been from the outset.

I don't think I can sugar-coat this. We are not there—we are nowhere near there—and there are a number of things that Government have to do. First and foremost—this links to some of the online harms Bill work that is taking place—is how advertising is treated online. That often becomes a gateway, doesn't it, to entrapment? Mr Fell, you mentioned romance fraud—the honey traps and everything else. People are coerced into relationships online through advertising etc. That is one component part; it is one aspect. But let us not forget that economic crime does not just take place online; it has many other aspects.

We are looking at legislating now through an economic crime Bill. I am quite unapologetic; I take quite a pushy stance on this. Not all of this, as ever, sits with us in the Home Office. We have a range of measures that we have been working through over the last few years while I have been Home Secretary. There was the publication of an economic crime plan, I think, in the summer of 2019—probably around the time that I became Home Secretary. We are making progress through a lot of the work. We have a taskforce with the financial sector. These are amazing organisations, because they are part of how we can design out some of these crimes. I would welcome more working with the private sector in this area, and we are doing that.

At the same time, we have to work with Treasury and BEIS to pull these key strands together. I would like to give an assurance that work is taking place. If I can bring this back to where the Home Office is, there are organisations such as Action Fraud, and there is the work on training our



new police officers. One of the interesting points about the police uplift programme and the recruitment of new police officers—all our police forces are saying this and showing this—is that the new entrants come with different skillsets. They are much more tech-savvy and much more aware of using and interrogating data online, and that is now building new capacity within police forces.

None of this is going to change overnight. There is a big push, certainly on the policing side and on the criminal justice side, because we obviously have direct influence on that. We are working across Government, and you will absolutely see legislation come forward in this area. As I have said, I have already been working on certain measures that I will be putting in an economic crime Bill from the Home Office's side.

Q375 Simon Fell: I am glad to hear you reference the economic crime Bill—I think it is badly needed. That is welcome, but going back to Mr Daly's point about burglaries, there is an expectation that if you are burgled the police will attend your property and you will get some form of victim support. With fraud, there is a significant gap, and it feels at best as if your information is thrown into a black hole and you don't get much, if anything, of a response. I was reading through the beating crime plan. There are welcome measures in there for improving the victim response and increasing arrests and prosecutions. They are steps in the right direction. However, there is not much in the way of metrics. I would be curious to know what you think an acceptable increase would be, in terms of arrests, as a result of the measures you're talking about

Priti Patel: Sure. First of all, it's difficult to say, "This is what the framework should be around policing and metrics." We have to work with the police in terms of best practice, and the College of Policing is essential to that right now. It's really important to understand that we are creating a skills base within policing—a skills base that doesn't exist. We have Action Fraud, but I am afraid Action Fraud is not driving the outcomes that we would like to see. I am very honest and open about that. It has huge resourcing, by which I mean financial support going in. The City of London police have been doing good work on this, but we can only build upon it and learn constantly, and we are doing that.

It is not right for me to say, therefore, from what we know thus far, that we should be putting down a metric or a target. That is primarily because, as I have said—and I have probably pre-empted some things I shouldn't have pre-empted already—I am signalling towards changes in legislation. I think we need to combine those key elements. We have to aggregate those factors to look at what kind of other measures can be put in place. There will be Treasury impacts; there will be BEIS aspects as well. But from my perspective, the policing bit comes back to public engagement; it is about the police having the capacity and the capabilities—it is actually more of a capability—to understand the changing nature of fraud and economic crime, what it means to an individual, how someone has become a victim and, therefore, what are the actions that they are going to take.

The beating crime plan is quite clear in terms of the direction of travel. I will give Notts as an example again: police and crime commissioners put a very clear plan in place for tackling crime, based on the beating crime plan, and clear directions for the force itself. I want to see consistency, of course, force by force. We can't have different outcomes or different approaches across different forces. We need to take the learnings, first and foremost. That is hard; that is difficult. But also we have the National Crime Agency, which leads on a lot of the dark web—the more sinister, horrible side of things that take place. That is why, again, the online harms Bill helps in terms of going into those component areas, too.

Q376 **Simon Fell:** On that point, the Treasury Committee released a report on economic crime this morning. I would forgive you for not having read it before your appearance.

Priti Patel: Sure. I knew it was coming.

Simon Fell: I am condensing the Committee's findings, but one of the recommendations in the report was to simplify the structures of law enforcement that deal with economic crime more widely into a single law enforcement agency. In your previous answer, you outlined some of the challenge there: we have Action Fraud; we have the City of London police, with responsibility there; and we have the NCA, the ROCUs and individual forces. I am keen to take your mind to whether you think that might be a good approach for us to take.

Priti Patel: Look, I would love a world with less process, less bureaucracy and more streamlining; I am very clear about that. Quite frankly, policing should be much more direct. I will look at all options around that—I really will. The National Crime Agency has some brilliant specialisms; it really, really does. Look at the fantastic work that it does.

We do also need our police forces to have capability in these areas, because that is where the public go to. The public interface with their forces at a local level. We can have a major tasking agency—which we do—but, quite frankly, we have got to have that skills base: the right kind of skills base and the ability to investigate within our local police forces. The College is instrumental in that. It is also important for giving the public confidence. The public need to report crime when it happens to them, so they have got to be able to do that locally with police forces.

Q377 **Simon Fell:** I will move on to online harms, briefly. It's welcome that a stand-alone hate crime strategy is being developed. We had a number of professional footballers in front of the Committee talking about the online hate and abuse they face as part of accessing the world online these days. I am keen to hear your views on what the Government should be doing to promote proactivity by social media companies. As part of that inquiry, we submitted examples of out-and-out racist abuse. There was no disputing what that content was. And even though we had reported it, it sat there for weeks. You can easily search many online platforms and find similar abuse—again, with no ambiguity around it. And it is not being



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taken down even when it is being reported. There doesn't seem to be an appetite to go after a lot of this stuff. I know the online harms Bill is progressing. I am just keen to know your thoughts on that, and whether we should be pushing them to do more.

Priti Patel: I am quite unequivocal on this: I think it's appalling. Pushing online companies to do more? Well, we're a little bit tired of pushing them. We are there nearly every day, after every incident, trying to push them. Quite frankly I think there should be sanctions against them; I am vocal about that. We shouldn't be tolerating this kind of awful cruelty online.

Q378 **Simon Fell:** Thank you. It's not just that. My local paper, the *North-West Evening Mail*, ran an exposé of how they went on to various social media platforms and very easily accessed people selling class A drugs online. It didn't even require much of a search to get there. This is a clear breach of the law, and I am surprised they are able to do so. The mechanism that is used there is that people make these searches and they are then pushed on to encrypted messaging platforms to, essentially, carry out the transaction to buy the drugs. We have had multiple examples of the far right using platforms like Telegram to share hate content, antisemitic content—multiple times. Obviously, there are free speech concerns there, but what is the appetite to move into that space and make sure that platforms like that are captured by the online harms Bill and any further legislation coming down the line?

Priti Patel: They should be—absolutely. The Committee will not be surprised to hear that my views on this are very clear and they have been; they are consistent. We should be looking at every single platform, and this comes back to end-to-end encryption. We should not have encrypted platforms where they are not working with law enforcement when blatant criminality is taking place. This has been the challenge and the battle that we have been having—actually, from my perspective, for just under two years—with many of these platforms. Some are better; some are much more engaged and co-operative. But it is right—in my view, it is absolutely right that law enforcement has the ability to work with these platforms where they have encrypted communications where harm is taking place. That applies to all aspects—for example, child abuse, extreme right-wing content, terrorist content, but also anything that is involving criminality, criminal behaviour.

We spoke earlier on, Chair, about perpetrator behaviours, the escalations. Selling drugs is a crime. That could escalate, not just with drugs but to firearms—all sorts of serious violence, serious harm and criminality. We know that these are never isolated incidents. That is why I have always taken the view, I have always consistently made the case with these platforms when they sit in front of me, with these organisations, that I think that they have actually a moral duty to be working with us in this space, because otherwise they are literally sheltering criminal behaviour and they are allowing some of the most appalling behaviours. They are helping to perpetrate violence and to spread a lot of the cruelty, online



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harms, but also criminality, across not just our country and society but actually across the world.

Simon Fell: Thank you; those are very welcome views. Thank you, Chair.

Q379 **Chair:** I would like to ask you one further question. In the opening remarks that you made, you talked about the failure in leadership of the police. I just wondered whether you wanted to elaborate on that and be a bit more specific.

Priti Patel: I spoke about this obviously in terms of the Independent Office for Police Conduct report yesterday, but also the fact that there has been this culture—we obviously spoke about this within the context of misogyny; the awful comments, obviously, in relation to that report.

In terms of failure of leadership, the fact that those behaviours were allowed to take place—there were no disciplinary actions, no one saying, “That’s wrong”—that is actually about leadership in policing. So, that’s superiors, seniors, line managers calling that behaviour out and stopping it in the first place. The report made it quite clear that those behaviours were taking place for a number of years.

Q380 **Chair:** And that is the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police as well—?

Priti Patel: It is across the board. What was published yesterday, in that IOPC report, is unacceptable, in every sense of the word. So, everyone in policing has a leadership responsibility and that applies to every single level. Whether you are a sergeant, whether you are a line manager, whether you are overseeing the professional development team, whether you are the direct line manager, or anyone in policing, there should be a full understanding of what is right and what is wrong in terms of behaviours, and obviously, that cascades through an entire organisation.

Q381 **Chair:** It obviously starts at the top in terms of the culture—

Priti Patel: It is at every level; Chair, I think it is at every single level in policing—

Q382 **Chair:** And you have confidence that the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police can make the changes that are required, in terms of culture—?

Priti Patel: I am very clear, Chair, and up-front with the Commissioner about the problems that we see in the Metropolitan police; let’s just be very specific about the Met police in particular. With a range of failure points, where there is—I am not even going to call it “under-performing”, but behaviours, culture, particularly post the awful murder of Sarah Everard. And I’m very, very challenging directly with the Commissioner and I will continue to be so, because the public want answers. The public want to have greater confidence and assurance, but obviously that is led by the Commissioner and—

Q383 **Chair:** You are confident in the current Commissioner?



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Priti Patel: Well, look: I have always said that I am confident in her and her work, but that also means that change is required in terms of some of the areas we have been discussing today. And there are many areas, as well. We have got an inquiry taking place into the murder of Sarah Everard; there is work taking place—an inquiry—into betting; there are lots of issues. It's not straightforward with the Met and there are lots of issues there where we need to see major, major significant improvements: culture; delivery; accountability; and protecting our streets, but also the public in London.

Chair: I thank you, Home Secretary, and the officials for coming along today, and for bearing with us; I think we have been going for an hour and 47 minutes. So thank you very much for your time and we look forward to seeing you again later in the year.

Priti Patel: Thank you, Chair.