



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The work of the Border Force, HC 502

Tuesday, 22 July 2014

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair), Michael Ellis, Paul Flynn, Dr Julian Huppert, Mr David Winnick.

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Witness: **Sir Charles Montgomery**, Director General, Border Force.

Q1 Chair: I welcome Sir Charles Montgomery, the Director General of Border Force. If I can explain to the public, we have changed the order because of the Minister's duties in the House, dealing with the electronic communications statutory instrument. We have moved you, Sir Charles, from after the Minister's session to the first session. In a sense, you have been promoted.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I am deeply honoured, Chairman, thank you.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much for coming to give evidence. This is part of the Committee's quarterly look at the work of the Home Office. I see you are resplendent in your uniform. I understand that you are currently being taken to court by 250 people after the new uniforms that you had given them resulted in chemical-style burns, rashes and other ailments. In my seven years chairing this Committee, I have never known this to happen. What is the cause of all these border guards suing the Government?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Can I just correct what has been reported? The 250 figure is not an accurate representation in that context. Two-hundred and fifty of our people reported itching of their uniform. The direction and guidance we gave was to give the uniform good washes and in almost all cases people found that it cured the problem. I understand that a very small number of people—in single digits, I am told—have had rather more profound problems. I am also advised that at least some of those are reporting recurrences of previous skin irritations. That is obviously a cause of concern for me. I would like to put it in context. Out of a Border Force of 8,000 people, all now wear the uniform—which, as you may know, has won a national award for the business uniform of the year, so it is well regarded. I get very good feedback from the public and—

Q3 Chair: So even though it is a little itchy and it has caused chemical burns—I understand that Lucy Moreton, the general secretary of the union representing your members, says, “We have members who now have to wear silk ‘burn garments’ beneath their uniforms to keep the material off their skin.”—despite those problems you still won an award.

Sir Charles Montgomery: The uniform won an award. These are very small numbers of people. I just want to make it clear that, after delivery of current operational success, the well-being and welfare of my people is my most important interest. When I hear of this sort of problem, I take this very seriously indeed. Be assured, the numbers are very small and we have issued or are in the process of issuing pure cotton uniforms to those people so that the problems can be ameliorated.

Chair: Excellent.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I really do regret this, but I assure you that it is a very small number of people. Other than that, the feedback on the uniform has been very positive.

Q4 Chair: Was it a new contractor? I think it cost £3 million. Was it a contractor from overseas?

Sir Charles Montgomery: It was a contractor from the United Kingdom who sourced the garments from overseas.

Q5 Chair: From which country?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I can’t remember.

Q6 Chair: Maybe next time whoever spends £3 million of public money should try them on first, walk around in them, with or without silk lashings beneath them, to see whether they work.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I cannot allow that comment to pass without assuring you that these were very carefully trialled. They were designed and made according to standard law enforcement regulations and stipulations, so there is nothing new in this uniform. The fact that we have had these instances came as a complete surprise after very extensive trialling and testing.

Q7 Chair: But your uniform today is perfectly comfortable?

Sir Charles Montgomery: My uniform today and, indeed, my day uniform—my working uniform—I find very comfortable and very smart and well regarded by others.

Q8 Chair: And no need for silk burn garments underneath?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Chairman, I assure you I do not have silk burn garments underneath today.

Q9 Chair: Good. Let us turn to the issue of exit checks, which has concerned the Committee throughout this Parliament and under the previous Government. You told us last time that you thought about 5 million passports were not being looked at on the way out. You wrote to me subsequently, on 1 April, to say that the number of passengers on routes that are not connected to Semaphore, which is the code name for the operation, was approximately 3.6 million. Because you wanted to go back and check, you gave me a figure that was off the top of your head, and I am grateful for the clarification. Has it now gone down from 3.6 million since 1 April? The Committee, Government and Parliament all want to see this go down to zero by the time of the next election. You probably predicted that I would ask this question. Are we doing better now than in April?

Sir Charles Montgomery: No, we are about the same as we were in April, although the number does fluctuate on a day-by-day and week-by-week basis. Of course, the commitment from the Government is to reintroduce exit checks by 2015, so perhaps I could explain how it is that we are going about fulfilling that commitment.

Q10 Chair: Yes you can, but it is a bit of a disappointment that it has not gone down much since April. I would have thought that you and officials would be monitoring that figure reducing carefully, until gets to zero. It is not a big bang effect, where it will suddenly happen, is it?

Sir Charles Montgomery: The fact is that we are so close to 100% on the routes that are collected for Semaphore in the air environment, for example. Those airlines which are not providing advance passenger information at the moment—

Q11 Chair: How many are there?

Sir Charles Montgomery: About half a dozen airlines.

Q12 Chair: So six airlines are not yet providing the information.

Sir Charles Montgomery: It is about half a dozen airlines that are not providing it.

Q13 Chair: And when they do, it will be 100% connected to Semaphore.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Those airlines have a choice: either they provide us with advance passenger information, which would take us up to 100% API in the air

environment, or they will have to introduce proper swiped checks on their passengers as they depart the United Kingdom.

Q14 Chair: What is the timetable for that? Since no progress has been made, I am sure that you have been having discussions—

Sir Charles Montgomery: No, there has been a very great deal of progress, but it has not resulted in API changing from when we last spoke.

Q15 Chair: But no progress has been made in the overall global figure of 3.6 million. I am trying to make it easy for the public to understand. Having sat on many of these hearings and listened to many of your predecessors, I know that we have these glamorous names, such as Semaphore and e-Borders, but they do not really get through to the public. What the public and Parliament want to know is: when will we get into a situation where someone like you does not come before the Committee and say that 3.6 million passports are still not being checked?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Again, if I could just make the point, it is advance passenger information, not passports—

Chair: I know that, but that is what I asked you about.

Sir Charles Montgomery: The message for the public is that we are achieving advance passenger information on over 95% of people in the air environment. That information allows us to take pre-emptive action against people who may be trying to embark an aircraft to come into the United Kingdom or embark an aircraft to depart. There is just under 5%, therefore, on whom we do not have advance passenger information. The airlines concerned are under pressure, but let me assure you that they are being very co-operative. They want to provide us with this information, but if they cannot, because of the rules of their national Governments, they will provide us with exit check information, which will be not in advance, but at the point of departure, which will enable us to have conducted 100% exit checks on those in the air environment.

Q16 Chair: Can you tell us what that 3.6 million represents in terms of numbers of passports? On the last occasion you said that it was 90%, but now you are up to nearly 100%.

Sir Charles Montgomery: In the air environment we are up to 96%.

Q17 Chair: Can you tell us the names of the airlines concerned?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I cannot, Chair, for reasons that I trust you will understand. In many ways I would like to, but of course, that would give anyone who wished to defeat the advance passenger information system an advantage.

Q18 Chair: Of course, but if it was 100%, then nobody could defeat it.

Sir Charles Montgomery: No.

Q19 Chair: What is the timetable for these six airlines? What date are you giving them when saying, “Unless you get this done by a certain date, you have to get these passports swiped”?

Sir Charles Montgomery: They must do that by the end of March 2015. They must be in a position to provide us with exit check data—

Q20 Chair: You have already told these airlines it is 31 March 2015.

Sir Charles Montgomery: They know that.

Q21 Chair: And in respect of the 3.6 million passports, which has not really changed since the information you gave on 1 April, when will that go down? When will you be able to come before the Committee and say that it is less than 3.6 million?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Of passports? I am not sure of the question.

Q22 Chair: You said to us in your letter of 1 April that 3.6 million passengers were not connected, but you are telling us that by 31 March next year it will be down to zero because everyone will be connected to Semaphore.

Sir Charles Montgomery: No, I didn’t say that—I want to make that absolutely clear. It may indeed still be 96% who are connected to Semaphore, but those who are not connected to Semaphore will be providing us with exit check information through passport checks.

Q23 Chair: By then, but not, for example, by the end of this year? It is still the case that we could get to December with 3.6 million passengers going without having those checks.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I am confident that the 3.6 million will have reduced by December, but I cannot tell you the profile of that reduction because it is still in negotiation with the carriers.

Q24 Chair: Okay. Let’s move on to e-Borders. What progress has been made on the arbitration? Again, on the last occasion you said that you hoped the matter would be resolved shortly.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I did.

Q25 Chair: And four months later?

Sir Charles Montgomery: After I left the last hearing, I engaged with Home Office legal, and they have been in contact with the arbitrators. I understand that at the beginning of this month they received a letter indicating that by the end of this month they should have a date by which the arbitration will be decided. That is the latest I can offer you.

Q26 Chair: So, after four years, we still don't have a date for the arbitration.

Sir Charles Montgomery: That is correct.

Q27 Chair: Presumably no more money is being paid over to the original contractor.

Sir Charles Montgomery: None at all.

Q28 Chair: What has happened to the contracts to replace the original contractor?

Sir Charles Montgomery: The contracts to replace the original contractor went into the Warnings Index, and particularly into the Semaphore systems. Those contracts—with IBM on Semaphore and with Fujitsu on the Warnings Index—are ongoing. As you will recall, we are in the process of implementing a replacement programme, which will see a brand new digitised section introduced into service that will replace the capability that the Warnings Index and Semaphore currently provide and will provide a rather broader capability, too.

Q29 Michael Ellis: Sir Charles, just taking a step back for a moment, I have two points. First, on the pre-emptive action on the 96% that you mentioned, you are currently in receipt of information appertaining to 96% of all passengers who enter the United Kingdom. Is that right?

Sir Charles Montgomery: No. I made it very clear that it is 96% of those entering by air.

Q30 Michael Ellis: So for 96% of all those entering by air, you are in receipt of information that can cause you to pre-empt their arrival into the United Kingdom, if necessary?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Indeed. It can enable us either to intervene upstream or to issue alerts to the border that, of course, supplement the 100% controls that we conduct.

Q31 Michael Ellis: Roughly how many people comprise the 4% for whom we are not currently receiving information that would allow pre-emptive action?

Sir Charles Montgomery: It is about 3.6 million.

Q32 Michael Ellis: What is the reason for that 4%? Is it because of the airlines? Is it because of technical reasons? Is it because of administrative reasons? Is it by the carriers or by officials at the home point of embarkation?

Sir Charles Montgomery: It is purely related to the national legislation in the home country of the carriers themselves.

Q33 Michael Ellis: So there is a legislative obstruction in the home country of the people embarking for the United Kingdom that is causing that information not to be provided.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Well, the country in which the airline itself is based. It is not necessarily the home country, but where the airline itself is based. That country's legislation applies.

Q34 Michael Ellis: On the 96% for whom you are getting that information, how many cases result in urgent action by yourselves in Border Force, with reference to stopping individuals from either embarking or entering the United Kingdom?

Sir Charles Montgomery: The number is small, as you would expect, because we apply that taut regime to a very select target list; but as you will appreciate, those people are very small in number, but represent a high risk.

Q35 Michael Ellis: You say "very small in number," but in this country we obviously receive tens of millions of visitors a year by air. Are we talking about dozens?

Sir Charles Montgomery: We are talking about a small handful on a monthly basis.

Q36 Michael Ellis: Do you see repeat attempts to enter by certain individuals that are blocked by us?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I haven't seen that, no—not in my year and three months or so. May I just make a point? All that I have said is absolutely right in the context of the questions you have asked, but I do want to make the point that advance passenger information is a tremendous source of information that is about rather more than simply physically intervening against an individual in those circumstances.

Q37 Michael Ellis: So it can be useful intelligence, but not necessarily cause someone to be stopped from entering.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Exactly so. It is very useful. Indeed, as I think John Vine observed in his report on e-Borders, advance passenger information was providing extremely valuable information, to the intelligence services and to the police, for example.

Q38 Michael Ellis: What about errors? We hear of people on watch lists, and there have been examples in the past—not necessarily in this country, but notorious examples—where someone with a similar name has found themselves on a watch list. Do you know of many cases where there have been embarrassing errors to individuals—innocent travellers—who have been denied access, because their name is similar or has been spelt incorrectly, or something like that?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I do know of instances; you are right. I know of a number of instances of key allies who operate similar systems to ourselves. I can advise the Committee that I know myself of instances within the United Kingdom where people with similar identities cross the border. They are not stopped from entering, but they are then subject to further questioning and then passing on completion. There are instances. It is a fail-safe system and therefore—disappointingly, of course—there will be some people who—

Q39 Michael Ellis: I accept that you are never going to get a zero. We are dealing with tens of millions of people: there will always be a slight hiccup now and then, but it will obviously be painful for the individual concerned if they are on a watch list in error.

Sir Charles Montgomery: And of course I will acknowledge that. Indeed, I will write to a number of MPs and individuals to apologise if that is the case.

Q40 Michael Ellis: Just one more from me on a different point: staff satisfaction among those who work for the Border Force. Previously, when you were in Her Majesty's Royal Navy, you were Chief of Naval Personnel.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I was indeed.

Q41 Michael Ellis: So you are familiar with dealing with staff and personnel. I understand that a recent survey report for the Border Force found some dissatisfaction among Border Force staff in the vision for the future. I appreciate that the Border Force has been subject to some negative publicity in recent times, but what are you doing to improve the confidence of your staff in senior management?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I will be honest enough to say that when I made my first appearance before this Committee just over a year ago, I was able honestly to report that the Border Force was an organisation with low morale. I recall saying at the time

that part of this was because of the discontinuity in leadership, the lack of investment in leadership, and the way in which change had been managed in the Border Force. I recall also saying that none of those were going to be quick fixes.

So where are we one year on? I can honestly say—indeed, the survey reports support it—that the sense of confidence in the Border Force is increasing. It is low, but it is increasing. As somebody who was used to assessing unit morale over a long period in the Royal Navy, I can honestly say that unit morale—this is a subjective opinion, but I can honestly say it—is increasing. But the endemic problems surrounding change leadership and lack of investment in leadership over many years have left us with a position that is going to take some time to—

Q42 Michael Ellis: So it is improving, but there is still work to do.

Sir Charles Montgomery: It is definitely improving and there is a significant amount of work still to do.

Q43 Mr Winnick: I wonder if I can begin, Sir Charles, by asking you about the child protection squads, which I understand are being organised in order to protect children from the horror of FGM—female genital mutilation? Is this the first time that such child protection squads have been formed?

Sir Charles Montgomery: In this way it is the first time, yes, but we have been doing safeguarding children in Border Force for some time. Certainly I would regard the organisation at Heathrow—with its affiliation with the local council in the way we manage individual children into care—to be one of the areas where for some time Border Force has been in the leading wing of international operations. Other nations have been coming to Heathrow to see how we do that.

What we are doing now is slightly different. In the past, Heathrow was a centre of excellence that was used as a form of consultancy to support other units. We are now rolling out child protection safeguarding teams in all our major ports. There are already dedicated teams in Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Manchester, and there is a constantly rolling programme. Driven by the Home Secretary's focus on combating modern slavery and supporting child protection, we have had a satisfying increase in the number of people who are able to intervene and protect at the border. I assure you that if I were to come before you in a year's time, I honestly expect that I would be able to tell you that that is something that is getting better and better.

Q44 Mr Winnick: It goes without saying, Sir Charles, that any action that can be taken to protect children from this horror will be much welcomed by virtually the whole community in Britain, regardless of which religion they belong to or whether they have no religion.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I assure you that the protection teams get specific training in spotting FGM.

Q45 Mr Winnick: I was going to ask you that. It is children who might be taken abroad. Obviously, you say that the protection team has a means or knowledge—instinct would perhaps be a better word. How would they go about doing so? What would make them suspicious if a child is being taken—unfortunately, it is most likely to be by a parent—and how would they proceed?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Again, you must excuse me for not being specific.

Mr Winnick: Yes, of course.

Sir Charles Montgomery: There are various patterns of travel, age groups and responses to questions about what the individual was doing when she was away for a period of time. Those are the prompts that my officers are trained to pursue in the case of individuals who they think may be subject to FGM. As I say, we have had a satisfying number of interventions, if I can put it that way, in which we have saved a child from this horror.

Q46 Mr Winnick: I understand—perhaps you can confirm this—that the protection team at Heathrow has some 80 officials, Gatwick’s has 65 and Manchester’s has 21. Is that broadly the position?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Before I am specific about numbers, I would like to come back to you, if I may. I would be very happy to give you an idea of the scale of it, but it is of that order of magnitude. Every one of our new entry officers gets specific awareness on this as well, whether or not they are going into one of the teams.

Q47 Mr Winnick: Would it be right to say that in view of the sensitivity of the issue—mistakes can be made, although hopefully not—you yourself take an interest in what is happening and the work being undertaken by the team during the summer?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I do indeed. I take a very keen interest, first, because it is the right thing to do; and, secondly, because it is an area of real focus by the Home Secretary. I get weekly reports of Border Force’s performance across counter-terrorism, counter-crime and immigration, and service level agreement performance. I get weekly updates on this matter in a specific section of Border Force’s weekly report to me on child trafficking.

Q48 Mr Winnick: We have issued a report on FGM—perhaps you have seen it; hopefully you will read it. If the Chairman is in agreement—I am sure he is—could you keep us informed at the end of the summer?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Could you give me an idea of the time scale? You said the end of the summer, but could you give me a sense of when you would welcome that?

Q49 Chair: End of the summer would mean by the end of August—31 August. That would be very helpful. That is a very good idea.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Delighted.

Q50 Mr Winnick: On the question of the Passport Office, I understand that your organisation was giving short-term support. You know of the crisis, which occupied a great deal of time in the Chamber. Indeed, the chief executive came before us. Is that continuing?

Sir Charles Montgomery: It is ongoing, yes. It is a very small number. At the moment, it is exactly 23 people. These were people who we sought. We received volunteers with previous experience that would be valuable, at short notice—in other words, they did not require a lot of training—to go in and add value. So there are 23 people who I am providing, and that is ongoing support until the chief executive decides that the support is no longer required.

Q51 Mr Winnick: Was this the first time, or has it been done previously?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Not in my time. I certainly have not done so. I have been here for two summers, and this is the first time I have been asked to provide this level of support. Sorry; I should say that this is the first time I have been required to provide any support.

Q52 Paul Flynn: Has it been suggested to you that you could lose 23 staff without any reduction in the level of service—that you are overstaffed? If you can lose them without any deterioration in the level of service—that’s your claim, I believe.

Sir Charles Montgomery: These are people who are in support functions at the moment. I have taken a judgment call that, for the betterment of the Home Office, I will take a delay in some of the support provided. It has had no impact whatsoever on front-line operations. As I said, I would expect this to be relatively short-lived support to an organisation in the Home Office that needed that support.

Q53 Paul Flynn: You think that the passport crisis will be short-lived. How would you define “short-lived”?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I will provide the support for as long as the balance of requirement inside the Home Office demands it. My sense—it is only my sense—is that we are over the worst of it. I will provide the support that the Home Office needs, balancing its needs against mine. Of course, I am myself heading into a peak period of Border Force activity as we head towards the summer months and the student season. I will be constantly reviewing the relative demands of both the Passport Office and Border Force.

Q54 Paul Flynn: Are the regulations about all mobile phones and iPads having to be switched on likely to cause increased burdens to you and lengthening queues?

Sir Charles Montgomery: No, it does not affect me directly at all. These are outbound controls under the auspices of the Department for Transport that are fulfilled by the port operators, so it does not directly cut across Border Force activity at all.

Where it has an indirect impact is on the mindset of the travelling public, who will be subject to greater delays outbound at a busy time of the year. There may be some indirect rebound on to Border Force, but there is no direct impact.

Q55 Paul Flynn: Why do they not affect inbound passengers?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Because the checks are all done before people are allowed to board an aircraft.

Q56 Chair: Did you offer to give these 23 extra members of staff to Paul Pugh, or did he ask?

Sir Charles Montgomery: He asked for support from the Home Office in the round. At an executive management board level, we agreed that this was a priority and organisations should seek to support it. I did so. I took a conscious cost-benefit analysis to Border Force and therefore lent the staff.

Q57 Chair: When did he ask?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Probably about six weeks or two months ago.

Q58 Chair: In June.

Sir Charles Montgomery: That feels about right, Chair. Time as Director General of Border Force goes in a flash. I just can't quite be sure.

Q59 Chair: It would be helpful. When you write to us about other matters, could you give us the date when you agreed to this?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Certainly.

Q60 Chair: Presumably they are being paid overtime. Is it coming from your budget or Mr Pugh's?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I pick up the cost of salaries; the Passport Office is picking up the cost of everything else. The question of whether individuals get overtime is a

question of which terms and conditions they are on. As you know, Chair, different people in Border Force are still on different terms and conditions, which I am seeking to address.

Q61 Chair: Everything else meaning what? Do you mean that people are being paid things beyond salaries in Border Force?

Sir Charles Montgomery: You mentioned overtime, for example.

Q62 Chair: And overnight accommodation, if they were sent to different places in the UK.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I do not have sight of that, because I do not pay it.

Q63 Chair: But you don't know when they are coming back.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I have no date for when they will return, as I said. Passport offices are under pressure at the moment. We are coming up to our normal, seasonal pressure points. Of course, if I require those individuals back, I will be inviting the Passport Office to return them to me.

Q64 Chair: Indeed. You gave us some figures and percentages of advance passenger information for air travel. Do you have the figures for other forms of entry into the United Kingdom?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I do, yes.

Q65 Chair: What are your figures for ferry and sea passengers?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Maritime as a whole is 20%, and rail is zero at the moment.

Q66 Chair: So you have no information about people coming in by rail?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I have no advance information. All I have given you is advance information. I have no advance information on rail, but it is 20% for maritime. Part of the exit check work is closing that difference as much as we possibly can. Where it is not practical in the short term to deliver API because of operating models used by both the maritime and rail sectors, those will be the subject of swipes of passports outbound.

Q67 Chair: But those who want to come in will be aware that it is easier to get in by ferry, rail and sea without giving this information.

Sir Charles Montgomery: To be clear, we are talking about advance passenger information. We still conduct 100% checks at the border. When you say “easier to get in”, they are still subject to those 100% checks at the border.

Q68 Chair: Of course. We would be astonished, bearing in mind that everyone has new uniforms, if you didn’t stop people and check them. What does that 20% represent in terms of numbers? Roughly, is it 100,000 people? Millions?

Sir Charles Montgomery: As an estimate, 20% is about 2 million people.

Q69 Chair: My maths is not brilliant, but that means 10 million other people—

Sir Charles Montgomery: I think it’s about 10 million for maritime.

Q70 Chair: We don’t have API on 16 million people.

Sir Charles Montgomery: That would be correct for the rail and maritime sector.

Q71 Chair: Are you telling this Committee you are confident that this will be closed down by 31 March next year?

Sir Charles Montgomery: It will be reduced. I can confidently say that it will be reduced.

Q72 Chair: Reduced to what? What is your target?

Sir Charles Montgomery: The target is 100% exit checks.

Q73 Chair: Of course, but you’re not going to reach that target.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Those exit checks, out of preference, will be done through advance passenger information. When they cannot be done by advance passenger information—there are very good reasons why it becomes physically difficult for some of these operators to do so—they will be provided for by passport checks.

Q74 Chair: But Ministers must ask you this question. It is not unreasonable for Parliament to say to you, the head of the Border Force, “You’re on 20% now and 31 March is a line in the sand as far as your exit checks are concerned.” The Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime

Minister have said that this will all be done by the date of the general election. What is your target? We accept that it may not be 100%, but what is your target for sea and rail entries?

Sir Charles Montgomery: My target for sea would be 100% because most of the maritime operators appear happy to provide advance passenger information at the moment. We are already getting 20% of it. Dover harbour board and P&O have indicated that they would be happy to do so, and that would close the gap significantly to the point where I think others would follow relatively quickly, but that is not a requirement of the exit check project. The requirement of the exit check project is that we conduct 100% checks for all modes of travel.

Q75 Chair: People coming in and people going out.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Exit checks are only those going out.

Chair: Of course.

Q76 Dr Huppert: I apologise for missing the beginning of your comments, Sir Charles; I was in the Chamber debating a statutory instrument. Can I ask about your budget? If I have understood correctly, the Public Accounts Committee found that your 2013 plans were based on you spending 4% more than your budget. That sounds slightly alarming.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Let me be very clear: I'm not planning to spend more than my budget. There is a difference between programmes and plans. At the time, when I was before the PAC, I was talking about a programme that we were bringing back into planned expenditure. Do you see the difference? I don't plan to spend more than I am budgeted for. Last year I was looking for efficiencies and I delivered them, which allowed me to live within budget.

Q77 Dr Huppert: I presume you intend to continue doing that. How will you cope with the fairly substantial reductions in the spending that you have available from £611 million in 2012 to just over £500 million by 2015-16? Is that all going to come from efficiencies, or do you have other plans on what you will cut back?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Let me tell you where it will start to come from. Broadly, it fits into three areas of where that money can be saved. The first, of course, is through technology. We are involved in a very significant enhancement of technology, which will enable greater efficiency at the border. Let me give you some examples. We have been accelerating the roll-out of the e-Gate programme, and we are going to accelerate it still further. That, of course, provides much more efficient and more secure flows across the border. We have a plan to network the Cyclamen project, which will have a significant impact on running costs. The introduction of the automated freight targeting capability, which we have just started to roll out in one domain of the maritime area, will significantly enable better targeting of Border Force's effort. There are a number of areas in the technology programme which I could refer to.

In the people programme, there are very significant benefits already from the roll-out of our dynamic response tool, which is a very integrated tool that enables us to predict passenger flows across the border and to respond much more quickly with staff going where they are needed as opposed to where they may not be needed. Those are some examples. Of course, the alignment of terms and conditions of service will allow a much more flexible work force at less cost.

Q78 Dr Huppert: It sounds as though what you are saying is that you will be able to provide a better service for less money, which sounds excellent. Are there areas where there will be a worsening of service?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I am not expecting them at all. My start point is that I will be providing the same or better service in the future as I am now, in terms of national security, national prosperity and service-level agreements.

Q79 Dr Huppert: If every Government body could produce better services for 20% less money, we would be in a better place.

Sir Charles Montgomery: We already are providing a better service in terms of security and prosperity for less money, and I am confident that there is some way to go.

Q80 Chair: In our Report on tobacco smuggling, we welcomed the new protocol that had been negotiated between yourself and HMRC. Are you reassuring the Committee today that this is going well? In the past, of course, it has not been going brilliantly.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Well, it is going well. It is going, I would say, very satisfactorily. There is always some way to go. As I told the Committee during that tobacco evidence, we have a protocol agreed in terms of the numbers of cases that HMRC will take on. We have seen a 20% increase in the number of cases that HMRC has taken on, and that is very reassuring. There has been a very significant increase in the number of penalties imposed alongside the prosecutions. We have a number of other protocols evolving—probably about half a dozen specific ones on specific areas—which demonstrate an improvement in the relationships between Border Force and HMRC, not only at the strategic but at the operational level of the business. You may recall, Chair, that in the independent inspector's review of freight, he observed the very good relationships at the strategic level. It is all about improving the relationships at the operational level, and these protocols are helping. Down on the ground, there is still some way to go in terms of improving this, which is as I would expect at this stage. There is still scope for much better relationships at the tactical level. That will come with time, I think, when people start to see the evidence that these protocols at the operational levels are really having an effect.

Q81 Chair: In respect of Albania and its admission as a candidate country to the UK, on my last visit to Calais, which you had organised, there were a number of Albanian citizens who were being stopped, having claimed to have very sophisticated documents that appeared to show that they were Italians. Have you seen any movement in respect of numbers of people from Albania or any other country outside the EU that has caused you concern? Is there any big movement of people?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Albanians still figure highly in my interest.

My colleague, Mike Anderson is engaging with the Albanian Government, who—as part of their bid to accede to the European Union—are being very co-operative in helping us to engage in Albania to try to stop the flow of Albanians at source. In straight answer to your question, Albania remains a country of real interest to me at all points of access. On the issue of their documentation, you described it as sophisticated. It is, as far as it goes, but of course these are by and large identity card frauds, not passport frauds. They are not that sophisticated.

Q82 Chair: Are you confident that there is sufficient co-operation with all the other agencies about those who go to fight abroad—British citizens who go to countries such as Syria and then return to the UK—so that you will know when they come back into the UK?

Sir Charles Montgomery: May I come back to part of your previous question after I have answered your question about foreign fighters? This is my highest priority of all at the moment, as you would expect—low in numbers but very high impact if we get this anything other than right. There is enormous co-operation between the various agencies. Border Force is a player in this of course. I engage regularly with my colleagues in the office for security and counter-terrorism who likewise act as a conduit into the intelligence services, with whom I sometimes engage directly. We are all focused on the issue of foreign fighters who may be returning from Syria or, indeed, as they did previously, from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Can I guarantee that none of these individuals will get through the border? Well, the answer is no, as you will understand. I often think of this in terms of Rumsfeld's known knowns, unknown knowns and so on. We have a good handle on the known knowns, of course, and advanced passenger information is a contribution that I make to that effort. We conduct some sophisticated analyses of patterns of behaviour that help us to delve out a number of the known unknowns. Inevitably, as you will understand, there will be some unknown unknowns—much more difficult. This is all part of not only an inter-agency campaign in this country, but one in which we are very joined-up internationally.

Q83 Chair: Thank you. Let us go back and recap on the figures, your targets and expectations, and what the Government have told the Committee, though we are having the Minister in shortly. At the moment, there are still 3.6 million passengers entering the UK—the same figure you gave us on 1 April when you spoke to us.

Sir Charles Montgomery: In the air environment.

Q84 Chair: Not given API—you do not have their information before they arrive. As far as sea and rail, it is about 16 million passengers.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I did say that I will want to come back to you with an accurate figure.

Q85 Chair: Yes, but roughly? I understand that it might go up or down.

Sir Charles Montgomery: I think it will be less than that.

Q86 Chair: In respect of exit checks for those who leave the country, what percentage of people do we check as they leave at the moment?

Sir Charles Montgomery: It is about 80% across all modes. That is on the basis of the advanced passenger information that we are getting from the air, maritime and rail environment.

Q87 Chair: But you are committing yourself and Border Force, and the Government have committed to Parliament, that this will be 100% by 31 March.

Sir Charles Montgomery: It will be 100% by 31 March, but you will recall that there were some exceptions. The common travel area, for example, is out of scope of the exit checks. You will recall that I have given that statement to the Committee before. But let's take that exclusion—I am saying that by 31 March, we will be delivering 100% exit checks.

Q88 Chair: Well, obviously we wish you well in your negotiations with the airlines because I think that is the critical part. I am disappointed that, after so many months, it is still the same figure, so we need to try to help you as much as we can to try to achieve that. You would be happier when it is 100%, wouldn't you?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Of course. I would be extremely happy with 100%, as I have indicated. The exit check regime is based on API, but it does not absolutely require it. We are pressing the airlines and they are being very co-operative. They want to help us and provide us with the information, so I would like to make it clear that it is not an obstacle provided by the airlines.

Q89 Chair: When I visited Calais, there were certainly a lot of expectations in respect of your leadership of Border Force and people were very pleased that you had been appointed. Subject, of course, to what Mr Ellis has said about the survey of staff, do you think that Border Force has caught up with the change in culture that is necessary now that we have got three new DGs working together as a management team? You obviously want morale to be as

high as possible, but the Brodie Clark affair and all that—has that now been put firmly in the past?

Sir Charles Montgomery: Do you know, that is the first time I have heard the name for a little while? There are two issues in what you just raised. One is the degree to which the new structures in the Home Office are working and the relationships at the very top of the organisations are working. I work very closely with my counterparts in immigration enforcement and visa immigration, as I do with fellow DGs across the Home Office.

I trust the point you raise about leadership and morale in Border Force I have already answered. There is some way to go yet. I would point out that the leadership in Border Force is now stable. The same regional directors have been in post throughout my time as Director General of Border Force. There is stability at the level below that as well. I have committed to Border Force for the long term, not for the short. I intend to honour that commitment and I think this issue of consistency of leadership is a really important ingredient in bringing Border Force morale to the position where both I and certainly, I trust, the Committee would wish to see it.

Q90 Chair: We have noticed the fact that the Home Secretary has just announced that a Major-General has been appointed to head her review of policing issues. The Government seem to be turning to the armed forces quite a lot to provide this leadership.

Sir Charles Montgomery: Is that a question or a statement?

Q91 Chair: It is a question. Why? What have you got that nobody else has?

Sir Charles Montgomery: I would modestly say that the armed forces have a very fine reputation in the country as a whole. One of the issues that the armed forces traditionally bring to their work is leadership, interpersonal skills, integrity and moral courage.

Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Sir Charles. We look forward to seeing you again in four months' time.