



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Migration crisis, HC 427

Tuesday 13 October 2015

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 October 2015

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Victoria Atkins, James Berry, Mr David Burrowes, Nusrat Ghani, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Tim Loughton and Mr David Winnick

Questions 93 – 149

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Richard Harrington MP**, Minister with responsibility for Syrian Refugees, gave evidence.

Q93 Chair: Minister, my apologies for keeping you waiting. There was some business for the Committee to do following the recess. I welcome you most warmly to your position as Minister for Syrian Refugees within the Home Office. We are looking at this as a one-off session to do with your role but we will return to it again some time in the future. There is not an inquiry that the Committee is conducting; it is just to look at your role and we will return to it in the future.

Were you surprised when the Prime Minister rang you to appoint you as a Minister for this particular job?

Richard Harrington: I was in fact. You could delete the words “for this particular job” and it would be an accurate reflection. But I was very pleased and very honoured to take on the job because I believe it is very important. I do not have to go back many generations, both sides of my family come from refugees and we were all brought up—as I am sure you were—to be very grateful for what this country has done for us. I was very pleased to take on the job.

Q94 Chair: Yes. I was not actually a refugee but I was born abroad. I understand what you are trying to say and we take it in the spirit to which it was intended.

Now, the critical question about this is about numbers. This is a very serious issue because Members of this House are constantly getting letters from constituents. This morning I received another 100 e-mails from people who were desperately concerned, especially as the winter comes, about the Government’s position. The Prime Minister announced that 20,000 would be accepted in to the United Kingdom, which was a figure that I regarded personally

as much higher than was anticipated, certainly higher than what was being suggested. Of that 20,000 over five years I think the Committee wants to know how many have arrived?

Richard Harrington: As I am sure you are aware, Mr Vaz, this is a complex operation that we are putting together and I felt the day that I took the job on the completely wrong thing would be to hurry planeloads of people over here without proper organisation for when they arrived.

Chair: Of course.

Richard Harrington: The original scheme, the PVG scheme, the last figures that were published—they are published on a quarterly basis—were, I think from memory, 216 people. That was prior to the Prime Minister's announcement. That has increased but I am putting plans into place, which I am very happy to go into if you would like me to, to significantly increase the numbers arriving.

Q95 Chair: We will come to the plans in a minute. You are the Minister for Syrian Refugees, you are coming before the Select Committee, you must know, if anyone knows, how many Syrians have arrived since the Prime Minister's announcement. You must know. We are not asking about the future; we are asking you about now. Do you know how many Syrian refugees have arrived since the Prime Minister's announcement, not under the old vulnerable persons scheme, which we already know is 216, but as from the announcement?

Richard Harrington: This is an enhanced vulnerable persons scheme.

Q96 Chair: Yes, but I am asking about numbers. We will come on to the very good explanation you want to give.

Richard Harrington: I do not think anything will be helped by me giving a running commentary on numbers.

Q97 Chair: But, Minister, I do not think you understand. You have served on a Select Committee; the purpose of a Select Committee is try to get information from Ministers. Do you know how many people have arrived and you just do not want to tell us because you do not want to give a running commentary?

Richard Harrington: Yes.

Q98 Chair: So you know?

Richard Harrington: It is my job to know. It is my job to make sure that the flow of refugees under this humanitarian system is to be greatly increased.

Q99 Chair: We understand about the flow, but I am asking you whether you can tell the Home Affairs Committee how many people have arrived, because obviously the public is very interested in this. You are the Minister and we are asking you how many people have arrived?

Richard Harrington: I would say that the pace of people arriving is much the same as it has been over the last few months and now it is gathering traction. It has been my job to organise that properly, Mr Vaz, and I am sure you are the last person who would want things to be done incorrectly.

Q100 Chair: No, I do not want you to do it incorrectly and I am sorry to press you on this, but it is an issue that the Minister is not prepared to tell a Select Committee how many people have arrived. I am sure you are doing it very properly and it is very complex, but you must have a figure.

Richard Harrington: I am not prepared to give a running commentary.

Chair: No, I do not want a running commentary.

Richard Harrington: This is not a football game.

Chair: I am asking you for numbers. Do you know how many?

Richard Harrington: Yes, I do.

Q101 Chair: But you are not prepared to tell this Committee?

Richard Harrington: No, because they are published quarterly and I want to wait until—

Q102 Chair: So when will they be published?

Richard Harrington: I think the next lot is at the end of November, but I am planning for a huge increased traction in this with a completely new organisation. The original PVG scheme, which the numbers are from, was a very restricted scheme. I have met a few people that have come over—

Q103 Chair: We will come on to that. You are not prepared to tell this Committee how many people have entered the country since the Prime Minister's announcement?

Richard Harrington: Perhaps when I am invited in the future, Mr Vaz—

Chair: Can I just finish? Can I just finish, Minister? You are not prepared to give us a running commentary and we do not want a running commentary. The purpose of a Select Committee—and you served on one—is to try to get information from Ministers. We will have to write to the Prime Minister now and tell him that we need this figure because,

frankly, I think it is unsatisfactory for you to come before this Committee and not have the numbers.

Richard Harrington: Mr Vaz, please may I just say one more thing on it? I am very happy to be judged on the numbers when the scheme that the Prime Minister announced and that I am putting in place comes into fruition, that some traction is there. But the people that have come in over the last few weeks were under the original scheme and we know the type of numbers, you know the type of numbers because it is the scheme that was there originally. But we are hugely increasing it and I am sure in the New Year or whenever it might be in the future if I were asked to come back, which it would be an honour to do so, you would very impressed, but I have only been doing this job for four weeks.

Q104 Chair: I am not sure that we would want you back if you are not prepared to give us basic information as to how many people have entered the country. Anyway, do you know where these migrants have been housed? Since you will not tell us how many have arrived, do you know where they are housed in the United Kingdom?

Richard Harrington: Yes, quite a few local authorities have had the refugees under the original scheme. We have quite a lot of interest—

Q105 Chair: Since the announcement made by the Prime Minister, do you know where these Syrian refugees have been housed as the Minister for Syrian Refugees?

Richard Harrington: I do.

Q106 Chair: You do? Are they in London or are they around the country? How many local authorities are involved?

Richard Harrington: At the moment, the ones over the last few weeks, there are three or four local authorities. I have written to every chief executive in England, but I have also been working with the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Devolved Government and have had a lot of response, people who now want to take refugees in. But the original scheme—

Q107 Chair: We will come back to the scheme; we will question you on that. You are telling us that those that have arrived have been rehoused with the help of about three local authorities?

Richard Harrington: In the last few weeks, yes.

Q108 Chair: In the last few weeks, yes. Clearly, you do not have a figure that you can give us for the end of the year. There is no target as to how many should come in, for example, each year, because I have worked out that at 20,000 refugees over the five years, we will have to be admitting 350 every month.

Richard Harrington: Yes, that sounds reasonable.

Q109 Chair: So are you on target for that?

Richard Harrington: I believe we will be on target when the increased traction of the scheme comes into fruition. But if you would like me to tell you what we have done to bring that about, I would be very happy to do so.

Q110 Chair: We will come on to that in a minute. So your target is about 350 a month?

Richard Harrington: Where it averages out, I think that would be very reasonable.

Chair: A reasonable target.

Richard Harrington: With a calculator, Mr Vaz, you have probably worked it through and I think you are right.

Q111 Chair: My maths is very bad; somebody else did this for me. I was trying to work it out since you will not tell us how many are coming, because it is obviously a state secret. It is about 350 we need a month.

Richard Harrington: Mr Vaz, your eloquence and your mathematics do you credit.

Chair: So by Christmas, when we see these figures that you are talking about in November, we would have seen about 700 arrive. We will wait for that.

Richard Harrington: No, you cannot extrapolate your average to that. The reason you can't is because these are human beings and we do not parcel them up according to a mathematical calculation. It is my intention to meet the target, which would mean—

Chair: Which is about 350 a month.

Richard Harrington: Yes, but that does not mean you stop and say, “We have had our target for this month and we get on to next month now”.

Q112 Chair: So you would like to have more coming?

Richard Harrington: Certainly your mathematical calculation averaging everything out is quite correct but it is not like that with human beings. We want to make sure that these people are moved in a professional manner, they are selected properly with UNHCR and the ION—

Chair: Sure, we are coming to that in a minute.

Richard Harrington: I would just like to make it clear to the Committee—because you are right, I have served on a committee, and I do think it is best to make things absolutely clear so there are no grey areas—that while the mathematical calculation is correct, in practice some quarters may be up and some quarters may down. I do not think it is right to judge me or the Government on a short period of time. I do not think that is the right way of doing it.

Q113 Chair: No. Minister, please do not think we are sitting in judgment on you. The reason why you are here before us today is for us to elicit information. We will judge you later. At the moment we just want to know what the facts and figures are.

One final question from me. I am sure you read *The Times* and *The Guardian*, or if not your very effective civil servants would have shown you the letter signed by 300 judges, QCs and other eminent people who say that 20,000 is not enough, that we could absorb even more, 75,000. What do you say to them when they claim the Government is “too low, too slow and too narrow”, their quotes not mine?

Richard Harrington: Yes, I did read the letter and I heard the interview with one of the signatories on the “Today” programme yesterday. I think what they are saying is very selective. They are implying that all this country is doing for the Syrian refugees is taking 20,000 people. In fact it is part of a huge humanitarian programme and having been to visit refugees in Jordan, for example, you can see that we have spent £1.1 billion on Syrian refugees. We are providing I think it is more than 1 million food packages. I went to a school funded by DfID. I went to a health centre funded by DfID. The main part of our humanitarian programme is to help people who are in the camps and in the areas adjacent to Syria.

Q114 Chair: Sure, but basically your answer to them is we have done a huge amount and 75,000 is not what we are going to take?

Richard Harrington: The Prime Minister has made it very clear that we are taking 20,000 on humanitarian grounds. This is not an immigration programme; this is a humanitarian-based vulnerability programme.

Q115 Chair: Sure, but the 75,000 is out, so, “Thank you, judges, we note your point but we have done a huge amount of work and your figure is just out of the ball park”?

Richard Harrington: Yes.

Chair: Thank you.

Q116 Mr David Burrowes: Welcome, Minister.

Richard Harrington: Thank you, Mr Burrowes.

Mr David Burrowes: Can I give you a bit more time then just to answer this question today? We had the Immigration Minister before us and the Home Secretary in the House confirmed that the places that the UK is going to make available for vulnerable Syrian refugees is wholly in line with the UNHCR request for 130,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees to be accommodated by the end of 2016. Is that case?

Richard Harrington: Yes, they have seven vulnerability criteria and we are taking people from all seven of those.

Q117 Mr David Burrowes: But in terms of numbers, they put out the call for 130,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees, 10% of Syrian refugees, to be found places, of which we have, from the Commons briefing, total places made available to date of 107,239. Of the additional ones to make up the 130,000, I have heard from the Immigration Minister and the Home Secretary that we will be able to be in line with that by the end of 2016?

Richard Harrington: Yes, I believe so, and certainly I met the Commissioner in Geneva, Antonio Guterres—excuse my Portuguese pronunciation, Mr Burrowes—and he seemed very satisfied and was very pleased that the Prime Minister said that we would take the amount that we did.

Q118 Mr David Burrowes: So we have an end of 2016 target from the UNHCR and we have a list of all the countries that have said that is how many they are going to provide places for: Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. The United Kingdom is not on that list of providing exactly the numbers by the end of 2016 that we will provide. We have heard that we are in line with it but we are not actually providing the targeted amount for 2016. Will you be in a position to say by the end of 2016 with all the new traction you are providing that there will be a certain number we can identify that we will have provided by 2016?

Richard Harrington: I cannot answer that question. The reason I cannot answer it is because we are clearly not considered within that list. But I could confirm that UNHCR have told me at the highest level that they are very pleased with our contribution, both to this refugee crisis on the ground and with the number of people that we are taking.

Q119 Mr David Burrowes: Finally, you came into office effectively with this 20,000 figure. Is that a fixed figure or is it one that you would say could be variable during the course of Parliament? We heard the Home Secretary say that if we got much greater control domestically of immigration then we could be more generous with refugees. So if we, over the course of the Parliament, find that we are having that control, could it be the case that the 20,000 figure could increase?

Richard Harrington: The Prime Minister was very clear in what he said. What the Home Secretary said was essentially, I believe, about general asylum seekers rather than people specifically from Syria. But, you are quite right, I was appointed for the purpose of implementing the promise in the speech he made of 20,000 over the course of the Parliament. I hope to do that job as efficiently and as quickly as I can. After that it is up to people other than me. But we have 20,000. I think it is a good target, it is a lot of people, given, as you would know, Mr Burrowes, it is restricted to people within the vulnerability criteria as laid out by the UNHCR. These are people who are in the countries adjacent to Syria. Not just in camps, because the majority of people unfortunately are not in camps; the majority of people are outside but under UNHCR's control.

Q120 Mr David Burrowes: Just very finally, you have been in office for a while now. In relation to this figure, is it based upon a purely humanitarian response or is it related at all to how many we can absorb and practically accommodate?

Richard Harrington: It is based on humanitarian response.

Q121 Mr David Burrowes: So if in the course of Parliament that humanitarian response changes, is it not the case that that figure could change?

Richard Harrington: I am sorry, Mr Vaz was coughing and I could not quite hear the question.

Mr David Burrowes: If it is based purely on a humanitarian response then the figure from the eminent experts who are talking about how many we can accommodate here is not so relevant, it is the focus on humanitarian needs. We do not know what is going to happen over the years in relation to Syria. If the humanitarian needs increase will that then affect our response to that humanitarian crisis to change the numbers?

Richard Harrington: I really do not think speculating on that is helpful because we have to prove that we can absorb 20,000 on a humanitarian basis with the vulnerability criteria. Obviously one hopes, we all would hope, that by then the situation in Syria is much better. The vast majority of Syrians that I spoke to, and in fact all the evidence shows, they want to go and live back in Syria.

Q122 Mr David Burrowes: Would you prefer that just to be a minimum number rather than a maximum?

Richard Harrington: I am very happy with the amount of 20,000 that the Prime Minister has stated, and it is my job to make sure that those people come here and are settled properly. In the past many countries have messed up asylum systems by masses of people coming in and everybody cheering and then it is all sort of forgotten about. But this is a proper scheme; it is all the way through the chain. Obviously when they get here it is in a way the beginning, or the end of the beginning to paraphrase Churchill, because we have to make sure they are settled properly, education, health and so on.

Q123 Chair: We will come on to that now, Minister. You are right, my maths is not what it used to be. It is not 350 a month; it is in fact 384 a month. It is 34 more. So we will look forward to getting those figures.

Richard Harrington: Perhaps if you took December off, Mr Vaz, it might work.

Chair: We will all be working in December, as you will as well.

Q124 Mr Winnick: When the crisis was developing the Prime Minister was adamant that the contribution Britain was making was financial and made a great point about the fact that we were among the most generous donors arising from the crisis. At the time he

was quite clear that we should not be accepting any numbers of refugees because of what I have just stated. Why was there a change of policy?

Richard Harrington: Mr Winnick, as I am sure you are aware, we have been taking Syrian refugees for quite some time. In the Reunion for Families programme, I think in the last few years certainly more than 1,000 have come in alone. The total number has been about 5,000 all in all. So I do not think the Prime Minister was saying that we will not take any refugees at all. What he has announced is a measured expansion for us to deal with.

Q125 Mr Winnick: Are you saying, Minister, there was no change of policy, bearing in mind what the Prime Minister repeatedly told the House? No one challenges there was some coming in but the whole emphasis was on the financial assistance that was given and then later this figure of 20,000 emerged as government policy. You are not denying that?

Richard Harrington: No, I am not denying it at all, but the Prime Minister changes with humanitarian needs as Mr Burrowes pointed out. I do not think any of us two or three years ago could have envisaged what has happened in Syria and the effects it would have.

Q126 Mr Winnick: Would you accept that public opinion in this country pressurised the Government to take in more and to fix this particular figure, which itself has become the subject of controversy? Would you accept that the picture shown on the television screens of the drowned three year-old's body being taken away for burial probably played some part in the change of policy?

Richard Harrington: I do not believe so, Mr Winnick, because, as I say, it is not as if we were not taking any refugees at all. I do think the gravity of the situation in Syria, as perhaps for many people who have not paid much attention to it, as the publicity made it a lot more intense for people, shows public opinion is largely in favour of us taking refugees but I do not think the Prime Minister measures his policy on what people think one day and do not think another day. So I am very proud of what the Prime Minister has said and, as I said to Mr Burrowes and Mr Vaz, it is my job to make sure the 20,000 are brought in properly and are settled, assimilated and integrated properly.

Q127 Mr Winnick: You make it appear that public opinion or public pressure should not have any influence on government policy, because you just said what the public may say one day or another day. So what you are saying in effect, if I am right in interpreting your evidence to us on this aspect, is that the Government were not influenced by public opinion?

Richard Harrington: No, in a democracy surely government is influenced by public opinion, that is how they get elected as government but I think David Cameron said this because he believes it is right given the humanitarian circumstances. Public opinion, as we all know from our correspondence still is split. Unfortunately, I, in my constituency capacity, get a lot of e-mails both ways, as we do on so many issues. Generally in a democracy you have to say public opinion is important but I do not think we can just pick out public opinion as a reason for this change. For example, this Government were very

pro international development at a time when public opinion was not. I hope that is changing now.

Q128 Mr Winnick: The Chair asked you about the number of people, retired judges, Queen's Counsels and the rest, who have urged a larger number coming to the UK. Your response to those people who feel, whether right or wrong, that the 20,000 number is totally inadequate considering the misery and suffering afflicting Syrians at the moment—

Richard Harrington: I feel, Mr Winnick, that it is a such a problem within Syria and the countries around it that the numbers they mention, even the 75,000—there could be 1 million refugees and it still would not deal with the problem that is there. So I think you have to look at what this country is practically doing to help the problem of Syrian refugees. I would accept the majority of that is on the ground in the countries adjacent to Syria. It says 75,000. The lady who was one of the signatories, who was questioned on the “Today” programme yesterday, was just picking a number completely out of the air.

Q129 Mr Winnick: My final questions is: do you accept that there would likely be less controversy if the refugees are dispersed around the country and not concentrated in certain areas where there is intense pressure already on housing, medical facilities and the rest? Perhaps those areas where there is much less pressure than what I have just mentioned should also be willing to accept those people who are fleeing and have fled from terror and oppression?

Richard Harrington: Mr Winnick, I am looking for a really good spread for the 20,000 refugees. If I could just say something about the smaller number up until now. There is a reason for concentrating them because of the facilities that have been offered by certain local authorities. I visited Bradford and using the platform of your Committee, Mr Vaz, I would like to congratulate Bradford City Council and Councillor Dave Green who is the leader. They are one of the early local authorities that concentrated on this issue and a lot of what they have learnt we will be using to spread out to other places. But I do hope the 20,000 will have a good spread nationally, including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Q130 James Berry: Minister, welcome to your still relatively new role.

Richard Harrington: Thank you, Mr Berry.

James Berry: Can you tell us how the UK Government and the UNHCR work together in the region to identify who should be resettled?

Richard Harrington: Yes, I can, both from what I have read and also from my visit to UNHCR in Geneva and in Jordan. The UNCHR are responsible for basically the livelihood of most of the refugees inasmuch as talking about shelter, food, education and so on. They have well-published seven vulnerability criteria, which we have taken on board, and they basically sift refugees who fit into those points. We do not do this ourselves but because we are greatly increasing the numbers we will be taking to get to the

Prime Minister's target of 20,000, I have offered them extra resources from here to go and help them. The screening is quite complex. A lot of it is to do with assessing the vulnerability, which will include health checks and other things. Security is an important issue, family connections, logistics. The UNHCR and the ION, on the migration front—a very helpful agency that helps us—we are working very closely with them. We do not want to second guess what they are doing and we do not want to do their job for them, but we are prepared to give them the extra resources to enable them to do this job.

Q131 James Berry: So picking up on the point you made earlier that there is not going to be a fixed number each month, that it would be unfair to judge the Government like that, it could be 10 one month and 1,000 the next month?

Richard Harrington: The Vaz formula, as it is now called, I do not think can be judged on a month-by-month basis.

Q132 James Berry: All right, but just assuming there was a relatively constant number of refugees being accepted into this country, does the UNHCR operation on the ground, with the added capacity that you have offered, provide enough capability, sufficient capability to assess the numbers that we want to bring to the UK?

Richard Harrington: Yes, I have been assured so by UNHCR.

Q133 James Berry: Just one further question. There is already in the UK a network of very good organisations, charities, already doing work such as psychological counselling for victims of torture and similar work with asylum seekers, refugees, who are already arriving from all parts of the world who have faced these kind of horrors in their home country. Is that existing network going to be the first port of call when we are dealing with Syrian refugees, so that we are not reinventing the wheel but we are using the very good network that is already here?

Richard Harrington: Quite, and in the first week since I was appointed, at 24 hours' notice I called a meeting of all of those organisations in the Home Office. I have a list here but they are all ones that I am sure that you would very familiar with, such as Citizens UK.

Chair: Rather than read out the list, if you could send it to the Committee.

Richard Harrington: I am happy to do that, Mr Vaz, but they are exactly the organisations that Mr Berry mentioned.

Q134 James Berry: One of the points that have been made is about Bradford. I have heard comment that, "Oh well, the Government is just sending everyone up to Bradford" but it is right, is it not, that there are in Bradford some excellent organisations, so places like Bradford where there is already a network may well be the very best place to send refugees who have been affected by things like torture?

Richard Harrington: They are, and our whole strategy is to use best practices from the places that have experience to take it other places that up until now have not. I have been

very pleased with the response from local government since I wrote on the 1st of this month to all of the chief executives. I believe you have a copy of the letter, Mr Vaz, explaining our plans to them.

Chair: I do.

Richard Harrington: I have been very pleased with the response.

James Berry: Thank you, Minister.

Q135 Chair: That is extremely helpful. Just in terms of how you decide, you talked about a spread, you are spreading them around the country not just putting them all in Bradford. I am not sure whether any have gone to Watford but you represent a multicultural area. I was not, as I said, a refugee but I was an immigrant to this country and my family when they settled here tended to want to live near other members of the family: my aunt who was here before us, my father who had come a year before. Are you taking that into consideration, because when you are dealing with some families they are quite extended, are they not? They are not the nuclear family of dad, mum and two kids; there may be a very large extension.

Richard Harrington: Quite.

Chair: So is there a kind of numerical limit or is it just a decision based on what you decide on on a particular day? Is there a criterion that you work with?

Richard Harrington: Do you mean as to where they will go to?

Chair: Whether they are split up or not.

Richard Harrington: Each one is dealt with on an individual basis and part of the diligence work we are doing in Jordan and Lebanon, and so on, is to find out exactly the circumstances, what family connections they may have. I do think you make a valid point: the cultural side of it is very important. Using Bradford as an example, they are met by Syrians and given a Syrian meal to arrive and there are people that can speak to them. I have also held a meeting of the Syrian diaspora in the Home Office. We are trying to map exactly where the Syrian population is. We know there are one or two places where there is quite a lot, but luckily in many towns there are a few Syrian families and we intend to contact them to be part of the welcoming committee and mentoring.

Q136 Chair: Indeed. Among others, I think Nick Clegg may have offered his house and Yvette Cooper offered her house—these individual offers of houses—and you may have offered your house. Have you set your face against this for particular reasons or is that still something you might do in the future?

Richard Harrington: We have looked at the people offering their houses, not particularly in the case of Mr Clegg or Ms Cooper, I might say. A lot of very well-meaning people have done so but, given the vulnerability of the people that are coming, given that the majority of them will be in families, we would rather use the volunteers in other ways. So we are going to make use of all the people who have contacted us, and indeed the Home

Office website has been inundated with people volunteering. We don't think people staying in people's homes is the best way of dealing with it because of the education, health and all of the other issues that need dealing with, but that doesn't mean we can't use the people with the good intentions that they have.

Q137 Mr Winnick: There is plenty of space in Chequers. You might wish to bear that in mind.

Richard Harrington: You have obviously been there, Mr Winnick, and know it rather better than I.

Q138 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: I welcome the Minister as well and I welcome what he said about looking after people all the way through the chain. Touching on that point, what discussions have you had with local authorities, but also other services such as the NHS, to ensure that refugees have the support they need on arrival and when they are finding settlement somewhere in the country?

Richard Harrington: They are ongoing, as you would imagine. Tomorrow, for example, I have five local authorities to contact. We are doing that. We are contacting specialist housing associations. That is not organisations that are traditionally in the pattern of general housing but there are specialist housing associations or people who organise private rental. Similarly, there are special medical practices. In Bradford, there is a specialised medical practice that looks after these. So we are gathering all this information but we are using the local authorities as the conduit to it. It is a kind of hub-and-spoke operation. I do feel the difference between this and many other asylum schemes that there have been in the past is the depth of care down the line. It is not just a question of coming over here and getting on with it, because of the vulnerability of these people, the traumas that they have been through, the physical and mental problems that they have. It is not simply a question of putting them there and saying, "You're here; get on with it".

Q139 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: The depth of care down the line, as you rightly put it and I agree is necessary, means that funding is required down the line too. Some local authorities have said that they would be prepared to do more if the Government could provide funding for longer than 12 months. I note in your letter of 2 October you have said that you will be considering ways to provide that additional funding. Could you outline the methodology behind that with regard to overseas aid or another mechanism?

Richard Harrington: Certainly. As I am sure you are aware, the first year funding is coming from the international development budget and has never really been in dispute. Before I took over, not very much thought had gone into years 2 to 5 simply because the concentration was getting the comparatively smaller numbers over here. We have had a lot of talks about years 2 to 5 and consequently in that letter we made it clear that we will be assisting the local authorities in the costs that they bear. Some of the costs are, let's call them, marginal inasmuch as that it is a direct extra cost. For example, renting a flat is an extra cost. Some of them are to do with a general expense that is in the area, for example

adult care, social care, GPs and this sort of thing. We are very certain that it is the Government's responsibility to assist with this.

What we are doing now, to get down to the kind of detail that you have asked for, DCLG, who have experts in this sort of thing, is in regular communication with local authorities, through the LGA, to try to estimate what these costs can be, because it is rather more complex than appears on the surface. We think that some people will not cost very much at all. A family that comes over and lives with their relatives, who hopefully are able to start working straight away, would cost significantly less than some of the people who I have met who have burns, cancer and all of this sort of thing. I think the cost will have to be banded in terms of the different types of refugees, but if it is done properly now we will get the benefits later.

Q140 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: I support the initiative, but it is true that, because of the way that we are identifying refugees, many are in the highest care requirement bracket. How will the Home Office ensure that local government, which has delivered many efficiencies in the recent past, is not penalised if they do wish to take people who are in great need of care? How will the Home Office work with the LGA, DCLG and others to ensure that refugees are going to parts of the country where they can be properly supported? You talked about best practice, but also it is right that there are high cost areas in the country, or indeed areas where there is no sufficient housing supply. In those areas it would cost the Government a lot more than it would elsewhere and that money could be better put into supporting refugees in another way.

Richard Harrington: I would like to make two points in answer to your question. First of all, how are we including local government in all of this? It is physically based in the Home Office but it is a joint operation. The civil service is working out a suitable acronym for it but it is the Operation Centre for Syrian Refugees. It is adjacent to my office in the Home Office and in it there are permanent staff from DfID, the Home Office and DCLG. I have offered the LGA space in that office and they come to the ministerial taskforce, which is chaired by the Home Secretary and the deputy chairman is the DCLG Secretary of State, Greg Clark. They are on that body, so it is all integrated, and they are the conduit to the local authorities. That is the first point. The second point is to do with the actual costing of it. As I say, we are still doing the work on that. I wrote the letter to confirm to them that we will be assisting them with those funds and they would not just be left out to dry.

Q141 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: Would you agree with me that it would not make good sense for the Government to try to push people into areas that are high cost or areas that don't have sufficient housing even for their own local people? That would create possible resentment, which would not be in any one's interests and would not support the Government's initiative to, first, help people but, secondly, use money wisely to help as many people as possible.

Richard Harrington: I would like to make it clear that no one is being pushed. It is not compulsory to take refugees. The impression I get from local authorities is that it is a comparatively small number of individuals compared to the total housing problems they have. So I don't think it is material in that way. I would like to say that I am satisfied,

certainly for the next few months, given that it is the initial thing, that the places that we have available are broadly equivalent to the number of people that we intend to bring in, if you like, using the Vaz formula, not averaged out.

Q142 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: Just taking a slightly different tack, how will the British Government ensure that refugees arriving into this country from Syria in particular don't present a security threat to people here?

Richard Harrington: The Home Office are doing the checks but it is as part of the UNHCR thing. It is a fairly sophisticated security check and I am advised that this is quite a comprehensive check. We have been doing that for the smaller numbers of people up to now.

Q143 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: Is that going to continue?

Richard Harrington: Yes. I should just point out—I am sure you are aware of this—that it is the refugees who are originally from Syria. This is not the people actually in Syria themselves, which is another very tragic problem but it is not part of this programme.

Q144 Tim Loughton: Many congratulations on your appointment and good luck with the challenge. Probably the last thing you need with such a challenging job is to sit in front of this Committee just three weeks into the job. I think you are absolutely right to put the refugee effort in the context of the humanitarian effort the British Government have made. I visited the Zaatari refugee camp, which I think you have been to—

Richard Harrington: I have.

Tim Loughton: —last year and seen the fantastic way that British money is being used there. There are five schools where over 80% of children in that camp are being educated, and you can't say that for refugee camps often, and that is very largely down to British aid. We are spending 15 times as much as the French are spending on displaced Syrians, and they used to run the country.

However, I come back to your comment about what ordinary people can do in this country. We were all at the time, I am sure, swamped with offers from our constituents saying, "We have a spare room" or whatever it might be; not as many lucky enough to have several spare cottages as the Archbishop of Canterbury had at his disposal. Do you not think, though, there is a place for some of those people, particularly working within local organisations, church groups, faith groups and others? I have many examples of immigrants who have come over here, vulnerable people, who have been looked after by a collection of people, maybe attached to a church. It may be providing accommodation or providing other relevant support, as they are very sensitive, vulnerable people, as you have described. Do you not think we could use those people for accommodation? The pressures on housing are going to be considerable and if there is spare accommodation available that is not available to people on the housing list then it will help this effort.

Richard Harrington: Quite. First of all, I agree totally with your comments about people volunteering to help. We want to use them and we will be using them. In accommodation,

providing they understand that in most cases these are families and it is for a significant period of time—it is not just for two or three weeks—I am very open-minded towards it. Having had these meetings with the faith groups particularly, who I have met most of, it is now my responsibility to see how we can use them. It will be in different ways and I certainly think accommodation will be some of them but they have to be able to offer comparable accommodation to, for example, housing associations that can rent the kind of accommodation that they specifically need. Also to do with mentoring and so many things, and it is really good the way people have offered. All faith groups have been contacted by—well, you could just go through the list of faiths in this country and they want to do it: World Jewish Relief, Church of England groups, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs.

Q145 Tim Loughton: That is the point, isn't it, that we have been inundated with offers from all sorts of different communities, and faith groups are just one example of that? A network of people can help to spread the load. It is a big undertaking to take a family of six on an open-ended basis for five years, say, whereas if you are working with other people within the same church, mosque, Jewish Relief group or whatever, who can help with it, particularly if they are neighbouring, it makes it more reasonable. Given that there has been some kickback against this, if we can use the voluntary faith sector and the philanthropism and goodwill of many of our constituents, it makes it easier to be able to absorb these refugees, particularly the vulnerable ones, in a more sustainable way. I would urge that there are greater possibilities than just using them as volunteers for extended activities. I think the accommodation should be part of it and perhaps you might like to go away and think about that.

Richard Harrington: That is a point very well made.

Q146 Tim Loughton: On a final point, again I thought you made a very good point that in too many cases in the past there have been big welcoming parades for refugees, brass bands or whatever, as we have seen in Germany, but that is when the problem starts. It is a huge undertaking to be able then to give sustainable accommodation, support, education, health and everything else that goes with it. We are working with NGOs and development organisations in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria itself. To what extent are we using them in the UK as well? We have the Red Cross and others who operate in the field but also in the UK. What ongoing support and integration with those NGOs is happening to support the families in situ in the UK?

Chair: A quick reply?

Richard Harrington: These are the people who came to the meeting held at the Home Office, that Mr Vaz has asked me to provide a list of, and they are an integral part of our plans.

Tim Loughton: Good answer.

Chair: Excellent. Wonderful. Mr Burrowes, can we follow that with a quick question?

Q147 Mr David Burrowes: Is there an expectation implicit from the five-year humanitarian protection visa that those resettled here will return to Syria after five years?

Richard Harrington: They are free to apply if they want leave to remain after the five years and I am sure it will be considered on its merits at the time. It is my deep hope that Syria has returned to a position where anybody that wants to go back can, and the vast majority of Syrians do. They are Syrians; they want to be in Syria.

Q148 Mr David Burrowes: From a policy perspective—obviously there is only so far you can look forward—in relation to previous conflicts in history, those from Iraq and Kosovo, how many of those returned home after being given similar status?

Richard Harrington: I don't know the answer to that. I can happily find out and write to you about it, and also the Committee, but I am afraid I don't know the answer.

Q149 Chair: I heard that as an offer to give some figures to Mr Burrowes. We are encouraged. That is so encouraging.

Minister, we have come to the end of the session and we appreciate greatly the fact that you have come here today. You have only been in post for 29 days. The pressure on the Government and Members of Parliament is immense as far as the Syrian refugees is concerned. Every day's news carries more details about it. I understand your reluctance to tell us some figures at the moment, because they are probably very low given that it has only been operating for a short period of time; you do not have your tackle in order and your various complicated bits in place. We understand that, but from the Committee's point of view, and indeed from the Government's point of view, on every other exercise of this kind—and I am thinking of the last time the Committee was involved in an issue of this kind, which is the arrival of the Gurkhas—figures were given on a regular basis and that enabled people to understand the Government are doing something about it, which I am sure you are. It is a very, very challenging task.

Knowing you and your constituency work and your commitment to equal opportunities and equality, we know that you will be doing a very good job, but we hope that you will provide us with that information because I think it will help us understand it. I think it is unsatisfactory that you are not telling us at the moment how many Syrians have arrived. We know that some have gone to Bradford, so we will contact the leader of Bradford to ask if he will tell us. This is not a secret thing. It is played out on television every single day and I think it will help the Government, and help you as a Minister in doing your good and important work, if we have that information, maybe the next time you come—

Richard Harrington: When my tackle is in order, Mr Vaz. I look forward to it.

Chair: —when your tackle is firmly in order. But just so that you know, we will be monitoring this on a three-monthly basis as part of our monitoring of UKVI. We are adding a little section so that you know that we care and we are watching. We wish you the very best of luck in a very, very difficult task. There is nothing more difficult. I remember from my own constituency, the Ugandan refugees, how difficult it is to resettle whole communities, so we wish you the best of luck in your job.

Richard Harrington: Thank you very much for giving me the chance to speak to you.