



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The work of the Home Office](#), HC 536

Wednesday 1 July 2020

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Dehenna Davison; Ruth Edwards; Laura Farris; Simon Fell; Andrew Gwynne; Adam Holloway; Dame Diana Johnson; Tim Loughton; Stuart C McDonald.

Questions 1 - 87

Witnesses

I: Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office, Shona Dunn, Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office, Charu Gorasia, Director General, Capabilities and Resources, Home Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Matthew Rycroft, Shona Dunn and Charu Gorasia.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this evidence session for the Home Affairs Select Committee as part of our regular sessions on the work of the Home Office. We welcome before us today Matthew Rycroft, the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, Charu Gorasia, the Director General for Capability and Resources at the Home Office, and Shona Dunn, the Second Permanent Secretary at the Home Office. Welcome to you all. We want to cover a series of issues this morning, including the issues raised by the Wendy Williams report into the Windrush scandal, but also some of the issues facing the Home Office around the Covid-19 crisis, and others.

We are going to start with the Covid-19 crisis and start with Deanna Davison.

Dehenna Davison: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all our witnesses for taking the time to be with us today.

Clearly, the pandemic has had a huge impact right across our society and clearly that includes the Home Office. What analysis has been undertaken within the Department to look at the impact of Covid on departmental income, the demand for passports and visas, and business as usual? If you could touch on staffing levels particularly, that would be appreciated. Ms Dunn, I will start with you.

Shona Dunn: Thank you very much.

On the passport point, obviously across a variety of departmental services and functions there has been a significant impact from Covid-19. We have had a significant drop in many of our visa streams. We have had a very significant drop in passport application numbers. On the reverse side of that, we have had some increase in demand on the asylum side of the house, and the numbers there.

With passports, numbers have dropped very significantly. In the first few weeks of the Covid response, we also had to take our staffing numbers down very significantly. I think the last time I was in front of the Committee, I mentioned that we were keeping going on emergency and compassionate cases. At that point we had processed something like 570 emergency and compassionate cases. We are now back up to processing about 57,000 applications for passports a week. That is now about one third, I think, of the numbers we would normally be processing.

HMPO in particular, is one of the services of the Department where we have had many staff in throughout the Covid process. We have done that very carefully. We have thought very deeply about how we make sure we make that working environment safe for our colleagues. The numbers coming in have gradually been increasing. At the moment, I think we have, to the best of my recollection, about 80% of people back in. It obviously varies



HOUSE OF COMMONS

dramatically across the Department. In some policy and strategy functions, we have only about 5% of our staff in normal workplaces. In some of our operational functions, obviously far, far more.

Q2 **Dehenna Davison:** Mr Rycroft?

Matthew Rycroft: It is not just those issues that affect the Department. All the work of the Department, indeed across all of Government, is affected by the Covid pandemic, one way or another. For instance, when we look at policing, a very significant role of the Department has been working with our policing colleagues as they work with the public to educate, explain and engage with them and, if necessary, enforce the regulations. That is just one example. Bringing in the public health measures at the border is another, and it was the director general of the Home Office who set up the joint biosecurity centre, and that is a third. So a very significant engagement of the Home Office in a cross-Government agenda, led by the Home Secretary in all of the regular Government structures and meetings that you would expect.

Q3 **Dehenna Davison:** Ms Gorasia?

Charu Gorasia: On top of what both the Permanent Secretaries have mentioned, there have been significant impacts of Covid-19 on additional costs, as Ms Dunn was saying around asylum, and also around policing and the costs of PPE provision, as well as additional overtime costs. There are impacts on finances. About 65% of our staff are currently working from home and we are phasing the return of those who cannot work from home over the next few weeks, in line with Government guidance.

Q4 **Dehenna Davison:** Are there many cases of staff moving around the Department as different workstreams have been prioritised?

Chair: Can I also ask, because we want to cover a series of issues, that we direct all our questions to the Permanent Secretary and ask you, Mr Rycroft, if you could then refer them to your colleagues as well if needed, so we can get through as many questions as possible?

Matthew Rycroft: Of course, Chair. Thank you very much.

The question on staffing, yes there are examples of staff moving around the Department in order to meet high priority needs. There are also examples of Home Office staff being deployed to other Government Departments. For instance, very early on in the Covid pandemic, our DWP colleagues had a requirement for additional operational staff and I am very glad to say that many members of the Home Office were able to become very quickly retrained and provide that function for our colleagues.

Q5 **Dehenna Davison:** Just more question from me. Clearly, there is a huge recruitment drive for policing. How much has the pandemic impacted that recruitment drive?

Matthew Rycroft: You are referring to the 20,000 uplift programme, which is a significant manifesto commitment of this Government. I am glad



to say that for now the programme continues to be ahead of schedule. Obviously, that has been tracked extremely carefully and you are right that Covid has an impact on that, as elsewhere, but for now it is ahead of schedule and the recruitment numbers are doing extremely well. We are, of course, interested in not only the numbers of additional police coming into our police forces around the country; we are also interested in, for instance, the diversity of those new recruits and other police improvement measures.

Q6 Ruth Edwards: Mr Rycroft, the UK has pursued a different approach to border policy throughout the pandemic compared to many other countries. To what extent have Home Office officials been involved in the consideration of scientific advice from the SAGE Committee during the crisis?

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you for the question.

As you would expect, Home Office officials have played a central role in helping to advise Ministers on all aspects of the Covid response that are relevant to the Home Office, including, as I mentioned earlier, the border. In relation to the public health measures at the border, Home Office science advice and Home Office policy advice has been an integral part of the process. The Home Office Chief Scientific Adviser, who of course has given evidence to this Committee, Professor Aston, has explained in detail, I think, his role and that of his colleagues, and that role continues.

This pandemic is not over, by any means, and we need to make sure, as the Government response goes into different phases, that the Home Office continues to be joined-up, and I am glad to say that it is in terms of Professor Aston being a member of SAGE, and the Second Permanent Secretary and myself taking part in Permanent Secretary meetings. There are all sorts of other Government structures where the Home Office is playing a full role at an official level, and of course, at an administrative level, the Home Secretary sits on all the relevant Committees.

Q7 Ruth Edwards: In relation to the decision on 13 March to withdraw guidance advising individuals arriving in the UK from specific countries to self-isolate, can I ask what specific advice was sought to inform that decision?

Matthew Rycroft: That was before my own arrival in the Home Office. I think that we have given evidence previously to the Committee but can I give the Second Permanent Secretary an opportunity to add to that?

Shona Dunn: As Professor Aston has explained, the position on 13 March, when the guidance was removed—because that was the point in time when the stay at home guidance came into effect for all people regardless of whether they were already within the country or coming into the country—was specific guidance with respect to self-isolation for people coming in from particular routes was no longer regarded as being appropriate.

Q8 Ruth Edwards: Ms Dunn, I am going to stop you there because that advice



HOUSE OF COMMONS

came in on 23 March, 10 days later, a gap of 10 days, so it cannot be because the stay at home advice came in, because there was a gap of 10 days. So what specific advice informed that decision?

Shona Dunn: That decision was informed by the work of SAGE and the scientific advice that was available at the time, which had been contributed to by Professor Aston.

Q9 **Ruth Edwards:** So there was specific advice sought from SAGE and that was what was behind the decision to withdraw the guidance to self-isolate 10 days before the blanket stay at home guidance came in?

Shona Dunn: The advice that is available that supports the decisions that have been made, I think has been published, so you have access to that advice. The decisions that were taken at the time were made on advice coming out of the scientific community associated with SAGE, and Professor Aston was very closely involved with that.

Q10 **Ruth Edwards:** Have you ever requested estimates of the number of people entering the country, who may have had Covid-19 at a given time and have they been routinely provided to you?

Shona Dunn: Again, you have seen, with the advice that has been published and with the summary of scientific evidence that Professor Aston relayed to the Committee, that that advice has been based on the 0.5% figure. Professor Aston has explained why we have relied upon that 0.5% figure rather than converting that into an absolute number.

Q11 **Chair:** I am quite puzzled about what you have just said because I cannot see any detailed SAGE advice or evidence before 22 March, which was a Home Office paper to SAGE on 22 March. That is a full nine days after the Home Office decision to lift the self-isolation guidance on 13 March. Can you just clarify what was the advice? Was there specific advice—and did it come from the Home Office or from SAGE—before the decision on 13 March to lift the self-isolation guidance?

Shona Dunn: The decision on 13 March was made when the incidence in the UK had increased and the stay at home guidance to everyone in the UK, regardless of whether or not—

Q12 **Chair:** The lockdown was announced on 23 March.

Shona Dunn: The stay at home message, Chair. I think, Chair, I should give you a day-by-day account—I know Professor Aston has already set some of this out but if it would be helpful for me to set out a day-by-day account, after the Committee session, I am very happy to do that. The decision on 13 March was based on advice, and discussion, which Professor Aston was involved in, as part of SAGE, which related to the point in time when everyone was being advised to stay at home.

Chair: Well, actually everybody wasn't being advised to stay at home on 13 March. That advice came in on 23 March. I have a real concern about this because we have been pursuing these questions for some time and at

the moment we can still see no evidence that there was any scientific advice sought in the run up to the decision on 13 March to lift self-isolation guidance at a time when there was still a very high prevalence in Italy, still a very high prevalence in Spain, and still a lot of flights coming into the country from Italy and Spain. It is obviously not your decision what the policy conclusions are from this, but we are still trying to understand whether there was any scientific advice behind that, whether the Home Office asked for any scientific advice, whether the Home Office did its own assessments, and you are still not providing us with those answers.

Shona Dunn: The Home Office decisions, Chair, were based on, and underpinned by, scientific discussions in which Professor John Aston was involved as part of SAGE.

Q13 **Chair:** There are no minuted discussions of this. In all of the SAGE minutes, there is no evidence that there was any discussion of this at all. That is why I am asking was there a detailed scientific discussion within the Home Office? There clearly does not seem to have been in SAGE, at all, on any of this. So did the Home Office look at this?

Shona Dunn: Professor Aston absolutely was involved in those conversations.

Q14 **Chair:** Which conversations?

Shona Dunn: I suggest that what I do is ask Professor Aston to give an account of the days in advance of 13 March, after this Committee meeting, in detail. Clearly the material he has provided, so far, has not given you that day-by-day account. I am more than happy to ask Professor Aston to provide that, Chair.

Q15 **Chair:** Okay. Did you, as senior officials, see that evidence from SAGE?

Shona Dunn: The senior officials involved in that decision, and Ministers, would have had access to all the advice from and to SAGE at that point, yes.

Q16 **Chair:** Let's just clarify the point that Ruth Edwards raised. Did you, at any point, ask for an estimate of the number of people coming into the country with Covid-19?

Shona Dunn: We have never had, to the best of my knowledge, a number, an absolute number, estimate. Professor Aston has explained the way that calculation was arrived at, the 0.5%, which was looking at prevalence in certain countries and comparing that with the prevalence in the UK and reaching that percentage estimate. He has frequently said that the reason it was important to stick with the percentage estimate rather than an absolute estimate was because the level of uncertainty on both sides of that equation made it important that it was a percentage rather than an absolute number and we continued to operate on that basis, as Professor Aston set out.

Q17 **Chair:** But your paper, from the Home Office to SAGE, on 22 March,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

specifically says that a relevant consideration will be the number of cases of Covid-19 coming into the country. It does not say "the proportion", in that paper, it says "the number". So did you, at any time, ask for an estimate of the number, even if you had scientific advice that there were alternative figures as well? Did you at any time ask for an assessment of the number of people who might be coming into the country with Covid-19?

Shona Dunn: I am not aware that we did, Chair, but I am more than happy to confirm that after the hearing.

Q18 **Chair:** That would be really helpful because I have to say that it is really, really baffling as to why you would not ask for that information, even if you then weighed it up in the balance of other information. I just find it really odd that the Home Office is not seeking crucial evidence like this.

Shona Dunn: Chair, what I would go back to is Professor Aston's evidence that the uncertainties around the number are very, very significant.

Q19 **Chair:** Of course. I would simply say to you that the uncertainties around all of these figures are all obviously significantly high but we have also taken evidence from other countries that have said that that figure about the proportion is not the right one that you should be looking at and instead you should be looking at the number.

Can I ask you now, in terms of your assessment going forward about whether there should be air bridges, whether there should be future quarantine arrangements and so on, have you asked for an assessment from within the Home Office, from SAGE, or from anybody else, about the number of people who could be arriving from different countries with Covid-19, if quarantine arrangements are lifted?

Shona Dunn: So, Chair, of course the Home Office continues to input to the work of SAGE and that will continue to inform the decisions that are made. The decisions that are made around the lifting of various restrictions are decisions that are being taken forward by the Department for Transport but we will continue to input to those.

The question about absolute numbers going forward, again the work that will be done will look at the prevalence in various hotspot countries, but I know the DfT will want to give you a fuller answer on the range of factors that they will consider.

Q20 **Chair:** Look, I am really struggling with this. I know it is not your responsibility to make the policy decisions, but I am still interested in what analysis and evidence the Home Office commissions in order to feed into decisions, to make sure they are informed. Are you telling me that nobody has asked for, or estimated, the number of people who might arrive from different countries if quarantine regulations are lifted over the next couple of months?

Shona Dunn: The understanding of prevalence in other countries is absolutely a factor.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q21 **Chair:** But what about estimates of the number of people arriving with Covid?

Shona Dunn: I do not believe that anyone has asked for that number to be pinned down, given the range of uncertainties that are being dealt with. But as I said, Chair, I am absolutely very happy to make sure that we confirm that after the hearing.

Chair: I find that quite baffling.

We want to turn now to the issues around the Windrush scandal and the Wendy Williams report. Stuart McDonald.

Q22 **Stuart C McDonald:** If I could first ask a couple of questions about Covid in relation to asylum accommodation?

Could I ask, Mr Rycroft, when did the Home Office know that Mears was going to move 300 asylum seekers from serviced accommodation into hotels and what steps, if any, did the Home Office take to assure itself that that was an appropriate move? Was this part of a contingency plan?

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you for the question, Mr McDonald. It is rather hard to hear you, but I think we did get the gist of that and I would invite the Second Permanent Secretary, who oversees this part of the Department, to answer it in detail.

Let me just say first that obviously we work extremely closely with Mears and our other service providers in the provision of asylum-seeker accommodation and we are in extremely regular contact with them over decisions.

Shona Dunn: Thank you, Mr McDonald. The decision by Mears to move asylum seekers from one type of temporary accommodation—serviced apartments in Glasgow—into hotels, was a decision that was made—I apologise that I do not have the exact date in front of me—at a relatively early stage in the lockdown period. Mears made that decision based on their ability to be able to offer the appropriate services to service users during the lockdown period.

Q23 **Stuart C McDonald:** Did you satisfy yourself that the reasoning was sound? For example, I do not understand why Mears moved people from serviced apartments but folk in exactly the same type of supported living in self-contained flats were not moved? When did the Home Office know about this? What oversight or involvement did you have in checking that this had been done appropriately?

Shona Dunn: Mears did keep the Home Office and my colleagues in asylum support closely in touch with their decision-making. I know that colleagues in asylum support absolutely were involved in, and understood, the reasons for that decision.

In addition, I have to say on the specifics of individuals, I know that Mears did look quite carefully with respect to each individual as to whether it was the right decision for that individual. The question about whether the most



HOUSE OF COMMONS

appropriate support that could be provided was taken on a case-by-case basis.

- Q24 **Stuart C McDonald:** What evidence have you seen for that? I am afraid I have the distinct impression that Mears tells the Home Office what it is doing and the Home Office accepts that that is what happens. Is there any documented risk assessment of individuals? The impression I get—and Mears' version of this changes with every week, it seems—is that it was done on the hoof when Mears virtually turned up at the person's property, and said, "Is this person vulnerable, or not?" Is there any documentary trail as to the assessments that Mears made because that is the contractual requirement, as I understand it?

Shona Dunn: The decisions obviously, given the position and the circumstances around lockdown at the time, were inevitably made quickly. They were obviously part of the discussions that took place on a regular basis through the Glasgow partnership, which involved Glasgow City Council, which involved Mears, which involved the Home Office—

- Q25 **Stuart C McDonald:** Mears does this as well. Mears casually drops in reference to partnerships with councils but the councils say they had absolutely no role in deciding that this was an appropriate response.

You say that this had to happen quickly, but the Home Office knew for three, four or five weeks that lockdown, or something like this, was likely to happen. Was there a contingency plan as to how asylum accommodation should be handled? Was moving folk from serviced apartments into hotels part of a contingency plan?

Shona Dunn: There was a significant amount of contingency planning undertaken, and discussions with service providers to make sure that they were ready to implement contingency plans—

- Q26 **Stuart C McDonald:** Are we able to see that plan?

Shona Dunn: —for service users in different circumstances.

- Q27 **Stuart C McDonald:** Can we see that plan and what it said about moving people into hotels?

Shona Dunn: There will have been extensive discussions and service providers will have had their own plans. I am more than happy to ask asylum colleagues in the Department to provide further information to the Committee about the specifics of the discussions that were held. But this is obviously a very, very complex effort at substantial scale and of course at a time when, as a consequence of the decisions that the Government had taken the number of people going into initial accommodation was increasing, so a variety of decisions needed to be made, including sourcing significant amounts of additional accommodation in order to be able to accommodate people.

- Q28 **Stuart C McDonald:** I get that, but the point here is that these folk were already in accommodation.



One of the other decisions that you had to make was about whether or not people in hotels should be paid any financial allowance and it turns out that people were in hotels for three months, still are in hotels for three months, and they have not had a single penny paid to them. Even the accommodation providers themselves, when they gave evidence, said this is causing real problems. What discussions did you have about that? Were those concerns expressed to you and why did you continue to pay nothing?

Shona Dunn: I think it is important, Mr McDonald, to note that the position with respect to support that is paid to individual asylum seekers is not a position that has been driven by Covid-19. The position is that if someone is in full-board accommodation, and all their needs are met, that that payment is not made.

The position with respect to that £5 payment is one that has been stable for some time. I believe, certainly, that Ministers have said that they have heard the message, particularly at the moment, around questions of self-isolation and they are happy to consider those, but the point about—

Q29 **Stuart C McDonald:** I understand that that is a general rule but the target for initial accommodation is 19 days. I think it is bad enough to leave somebody without any money to spend for 19 days, but for three months, that is a significant loss of autonomy. Why was the Home Office not proactive about this?

Shona Dunn: The Home Office has been dealing with its service providers with a range of needs of service users. The Minister has said he has heard the message about autonomy and he is prepared to consider that position. I take the point about the fact that some people are in initial accommodation for a substantially longer period at the moment than they would normally be and that is why the Minister has said he is happy to look at that point.

Q30 **Stuart C McDonald:** I just think it is too slow.

A final question on something that I also think was too slow. Why did it take the Home Office something like five or six weeks after lockdown to decide that it was no longer appropriate for in-country asylum applications to be made by travelling to Croydon? The Home Office still required people to travel to Croydon until late April to access asylum support, did it not?

Shona Dunn: A number of things were put in place. A number of centres were made available. I think we eventually had seven centres available for people to travel to, to register their asylum claim in country. Up until that point, if people could get to Croydon, they could have gone to Croydon. Within a number of weeks, in-country asylum claims were made possible in a wider variety of locations.

Q31 **Stuart C McDonald:** But the question is when that happened. My concern is that lockdown was announced on 23 March. If the Department had been scenario-planning, that should have been ready for then. At the end of April, folk were still having to travel to Croydon from wherever they were in the United Kingdom to access the asylum system. Is that not just—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Shona Dunn: If they wished at that point to register an in-country asylum claim. Of course the Home Office also needed to put in place its own arrangements to be able to undertake face-to-face and counter-service services safely for its customers and in keeping with many Government face-to-face services at that point in time, there were adaptations and changes that needed to be made in order to allow for that safely, both for potential asylum claimants and Home Office members of staff. But I can absolutely assure you, Mr McDonald, that from the moment that we, like everybody else, had to adapt our working practices, and indeed for many weeks before that, absolutely the Home Office was working to ensure it would provide its services as effectively as possible for as many of our service users as possible.

Q32 **Tim Loughton:** Mr Rycroft, you are obviously relatively new to the Department. Perhaps you can give a fresh set of eyes and views on what is wrong with the Department. What are its weaknesses that you have uncovered so far?

Matthew Rycroft: I think there are four.

The first is that it is not joined-up enough. The second is that in the past it has been too closed to advice coming in from outside. The third has been the need to, if you like, re-set relationships between Ministers and officials. The fourth is, as the fictional "Sitting in Limbo" demonstrated, that not every Home Office caseworker on the front line feels empowered to take decisions.

Part of the cultural change agenda that I am interested in is to put those four things right. There is an easy mnemonic in that those four things spell out HOME, of Home Office: be more holistic; more open; be ministerially led; and be empowering in terms of leadership. Those are the four, or big, things that I am interested in doing in this Department in terms of the overall culture. I think probably most people from outside the Department would say one or other of those things is important.

My first impression since coming into the Department has been extremely positive. There are 35,000 civil servants in this Department doing an absolutely fantastic job, many in extremely difficult circumstances. If I can pay tribute to them, I would like to do so. This is a Department of State stuffed full with brilliant people who are very committed, totally committed, to the mission of keeping our country safe, of keeping our borders secure, and of protecting some of the most vulnerable people in our society. I am convinced that we can use the Windrush report and everything else going on to drive forward that approach

Q33 **Tim Loughton:** Thank you for that. I am always slightly concerned when deep-set cultural problems are distilled into a four-letter mnemonic so perhaps I can quote back some of the parts of the Windrush report.

You have obviously joined at a rather turbulent time for the Home Office. The Windrush report, apart from the horrific revelations about how that particular issue was handled, I think probably more concerningly really lifts



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the stones in the Home Office and reveals some pretty torrid things that have been happening.

Some of the quotes from the Wendy Williams report, with which you are only too familiar, “The culture of disbelief and carelessness”; “ignorance and thoughtlessness”; “The Home Office must open itself up to greater external scrutiny”—I think you have mentioned that already—“to change its culture to recognise that migration and wider Home Office policy is about people and, whatever its objective, should be rooted in humanity”; and perhaps quite alarmingly, as well, in the introduction of her report, during her interviews with civil servants, she said that they, “—showed ignorance and a lack of understanding of the root causes and a lack of acceptance of the full extent of the injustice done”. That is really alarming, isn’t it? Do you think there are people in the Home Office who are incapable of being re-educated, retrained, recultured, into understanding that they are dealing with real people with real life stories, that they got badly, badly wrong?

If not, are some of those people going to have to leave?

Matthew Rycroft: No, I do not think that people in the Home Office are incapable of being retrained. Quite the contrary. I see a Department that has read and digested, and is already acting on the brilliant and very powerful report that Wendy Williams did into the lessons to be learned from the Windrush scandal. I feared, coming into this Department—because I arrived on the Monday after the report had come out the previous week—that there might be some defensiveness among officials in the Home Office, but I have not spotted that at all. Quite the opposite. I have been extremely impressed by the ability of the Department—including that of senior officials involved on that side of the Department, but spreading across the whole of our system—to get under the skin of what Wendy Williams is saying.

There are 30 recommendations. It would be relatively easy to slip into a sort of box-ticking exercise, have a plan for each of those 30, to track them in a Gantt chart and to report back, and so on. Of course we are doing that but we are doing something much bigger than that as well and that is to really understand the big cultural things. Of course they cannot be boiled down into an acronym but under each of those things is a huge amount of work and they are going to take time. Each of these shifts is a very significant shift in culture and, as we know, cultural shifts take time.

Q34 **Tim Loughton:** But don’t you think some of the conversations we have had already this morning, and some of our correspondence with the Home Office, do not reveal a culture of openness or preparedness to be more transparent and recognise some of the problems that have taken place, well beyond Windrush, as you have just heard from Mr McDonald, in some of the asylum cases as well?

What is it about the Home Office, where it appears to be insular and inward looking rather than a people-friendly Department, because perhaps more than many other Departments, it is dealing with some very vulnerable



HOUSE OF COMMONS

people who need to be understood and supported rather than interrogated and assumed to be guilty of whatever it is they may or may not be guilty of?

Matthew Rycroft: That is an extremely good challenge. You have put your finger on something that is an important consequence of this cultural reset that we are both talking about and that Wendy Williams is talking about.

When I was outside the Department, I thought that it was something to do with the mission and the purpose and especially having come from International Development, where there is an extremely strong sense of passion, purpose and mission. But as soon as I walked in here, I realised that there is just the same level of commitment to the mission in this Department as there was in my previous Department. That is an extremely strong foundation to work on.

I do think that openness is absolutely key. I think Wendy Williams was right about that. I do think that there has been—perhaps because of the political sensitivity and the amount of risk that this Department carries—a bit of an inward-facing culture and I have, again, been extremely impressed by the way that, if I can say so, the old hands in this Department, people who have been here for a long time, have read and digested Wendy Williams' lessons and are already acting on them.

Already we are seeking to shift the culture to be proactively going out there to talk to communities, not just the ones that are going to agree with us but precisely representatives from communities who are not going to automatically agree with what the Home Office says. The way, for instance, that we have sought to deal with the Windrush compensation scheme has not been perfect, and I am sure we are going to come on to some of its imperfections shortly, but it has been done with that community at its heart. You are absolutely right; the mantra round here needs to be "faces not cases". It is about real people, quite often at extremely vulnerable moments in their lives and their touch point with the state is quite often through the Home Office, or one of our implementing partners.

Q35 **Tim Loughton:** So can I ask you, Mr Rycroft, specifically when the Home Office's new purpose mission and values statement is going to be published?

Then, perhaps to come on to Shona Dunn, who has obviously been there longer, perhaps for you to make a comment on the relationship between Ministers and senior officials and where the responsibility for this lies. Certainly, I think, there have been fewer changes in Home Secretary than there have been in the Department for International Development, that you have seen, Mr Rycroft. Surely Ministers should have provided some degree of consistency.

Then, of course we had the big issue, in front of this Committee, that led to the resignation of the then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, because of clear misinformation that had been flowing between Ministers and senior officials as well. Where does the fault for this lie? With Ministers and the

Executive direction, or with the senior officials, who are running the Home Office and its activities day to day?

Should we go to Shona Dunn first and then come back on the cultural statement, Mr Rycroft?

Shona Dunn: Of course, and as you rightly point out, I have been here since late October 2018, so arrived around six months or so after the Windrush scandal first came to prominence.

In response to your question about the relationship between Ministers and senior officials in this Department, it is a very close working relationship and a very professional working relationship across all of the very difficult things, as Mr Rycroft has said, that we do on a daily basis.

On Wendy Williams' report, I did a great deal of evidence gathering and consideration of the question about the contributing factors to Windrush. I do not have the precise words that she uses in front of me but I know them pretty well. She referenced both the need for officials to have done more to draw out the potential implications of the decisions that were being made and to consider the potential impact of those decisions on the individuals, the people, behind these cases, and for Ministers to have challenged officials more on those points. I think Wendy Williams herself has been very clear that there were lessons to learn all round on this topic and those lessons go very, very deeply to the heart of what we need to change about this organisation going forward.

I hear your points about the culture of disbelief and ignorance and thoughtlessness. In addition, I think there are some basic systems issues that we must address as well, issues around the over-complexity of our systems, the legacy systems that we work with that make it difficult for our excellent caseworkers, our very committed caseworkers, to get to the information they need to be able to make decisions in the way that they would like.

I would say that there are absolutely lessons at every level for this organisation coming from Wendy Williams' report and we are, as Matthew Rycroft said—

Q36 **Tim Loughton:** Can you just comment on the relationship with the Ministers' point? Do you think that there is a problem in the Home Office, not uniquely, but particularly, with the relationship between Ministers and civil servants, particularly senior civil servants? Certainly, in the last Labour Government, Home Secretaries came and went like London buses and there was a sort of feeling that there will be another one along in a minute so it doesn't really matter. Now that has happened less in the last 10 years and we certainly had one Home Secretary whose tenure was six years, but then her successor was thrown under a bus by a senior civil servant in front of this Committee. Do you think that is an unfair representation of the relationship between Ministers and civil servants, or is it still a problem?



Shona Dunn: I do not perceive a problem between Ministers and the senior civil service of this Department. As you say, in all Departments, there will be high points and low points in that relationship or in individual relationships. The issues that this Department deals with, and the impact those issues can have on the lives of individuals, mean there is a particular flavour, often, to what we do, and, having been in a number of other Government Departments, I perceive no particular and specific issues that go specifically to the heart of this Department on the relationship between Ministers and senior officials.

Q37 **Tim Loughton:** Mr Rycroft, finally, on the statement of purpose and mission.

Matthew Rycroft: Before answering that question, I want to strongly agree with what Ms Dunn has said about relationships between Ministers and senior officials. I can only comment on how it has felt since 23 March, which is the day that I started but I have invested very significantly in ensuring that we have an extremely strong set of relationships between the Home Secretary and her ministerial team on the one hand, and myself and Executive Committee on the other. You should ask her whether she agrees but from my perspective, I think we have worked extremely hard to re-set that and we have a very close working relationship. My job as Permanent Secretary has at its heart to ensure that the Department is set up to implement the decisions of the Home Secretary and that is what I and the senior official team are doing.

The Home Secretary and I set up a change programme, jointly, for the future of the Home Office, looking not just at how Windrush needs to be dealt with but how Covid is changing the environment we are in, and how our exit from the EU has changed, and will change, the environment, and how other trends in society will be changing the big things that we deal with here, such as migration, the border, policing and crime, and so on. That is a future programme, looking at that context, how our priorities need to change and what culture is going to be needed in the Department to deliver in that environment.

In terms of the mission of the Department, we are following up the Wendy Williams recommendation quickly. We have done a lot of work on what our mission will be. I am not yet in a position to announce it to the Committee but we are very close to doing so. That is really a statement about why the Home Office exists, what is it that we do that can only be done by the Home Office. Secondly, there will be a vision, which is a forward looking description of the direction of travel. Thirdly, there are the values, which are more associated with our culture. We are spending a bit of time on the second, and particularly the third, to engage with staff because I think the mission can be set at the top and just decided on but the other parts I think will benefit from some staff engagement, which is why the statement has not come out yet and I cannot give a timetable. We are talking about a relatively small number of months.

Q38 **Laura Farris:** My question follows on quite neatly from Tim Loughton's



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and I will address it to Matthew Rycroft in the first instance.

One of the things that I found quite striking about the Williams review is her comments on indirect discrimination. There is a fairly damning passage. I would like to draw it to your attention, where she says, “—some of those that I interviewed—were unimpressively unreflective” and when they were asked—I am paraphrasing now—about Windrush, they only seemed to understand discrimination in quite a narrow context, in the sense of direct discrimination and were oblivious to the idea of indirect discrimination. She said, “—little awareness of the possibility of indirect discrimination or the way in which race, immigration and nationality intersect”.

She points out, not unreasonably—and I am sorry this question may sound more barbed than I intend it but I would be interested in your answer—she refers to the case of *Essop v Home Office (UK Border Agency)* [2017] UKSC 27, that was the Supreme Court decision on indirect discrimination and it is probably fair to describe that as the most significant decision on indirect discrimination in the last 25 years, a massive case, which the Home Office lost. Do you consider that there is a sort of basic lack of equalities understanding among staff? I mean, it seems a reasonable inference from her report. If so, is there anything specific in the field of more detailed equalities discrimination training that you have in mind or is part of your thinking?

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you very much for an important set of questions.

Again, we are absolutely honest in terms of digesting what Wendy Williams is saying and really understanding the big points that she is getting at. The Home Secretary has already responded in terms of accepting the recommendations in full. We will be back in the House before the summer recess with some more detail on that. Then, in September, she will be setting out in detail, at the six months point after the Wendy Williams review, where we are going with the recommendations.

On this set of issues, starting with your first point about an unreflective Department, I have a very high ambition for this Department to be reflective, self-aware, and constantly learning. I think continual improvements are important in any Department. However good a Department is, it can always get better and the way to get better is to learn from experience, not just from mistakes, but also from when things go well. As you know, it is a very large Department, it is complex, and I have said already, there is a lot of risk that we carry in this Department, but we do need to get better, I think, even better, at learning from successes and from failures in one part and spreading the success across the whole Department.

Since I started, race has been an extremely significant issue for our country, for our society, as well as for this Department, partly because of the Windrush report, partly also, after George Floyd’s death, through the Black Lives Matter movement. We have been putting a large amount of time and effort into understanding the lived experience of our colleagues

from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, what they think of the discrimination—direct or indirect—within this Department, and how we can set about putting that right. We have already agreed and published internally a set of actions to dramatically change the picture in relation to our staff.

Finally, in relation to risks of indirect discrimination in our policymaking, we, and all other Government Departments of course, have a public sector equality duty and that is something that for my colleagues and I on the Executive Committee is an extremely important duty, and we need to make sure that everyone within the Department knows what that duty is and knows how to fulfil it, how to implement it. As your questions implied, training is going to be an important part of that. There was already a good package of training but we are looking to see what more can be done in order to ensure that our public sector equalities duties are being fulfilled.

Q39 Chair: Can I follow up on this? It is not clear to me what you are actually doing that has changed, if you have a good programme of training already but that good programme led to where we are and to Wendy Williams' conclusions, which are quite damning. Can you give me just one specific example of something that you are now doing that is different from what you were doing before, that would tackle those concerns about indirect discrimination, about institutional ignorance, about race, that Wendy Williams referred to?

Matthew Rycroft: There are all sorts of things that we are doing, Chair. I will give you some examples. Each one might sound quite small but I assure you they are part of a bigger package.

We are all educating ourselves on questions of race, which is an important thing for each of us individually to do. We are reviewing our performance management system because some of our colleagues feel there is some in-built discrimination against them in that area in particular. We are changing our representation in terms of governance structures, so ensuring that we have diversity where it does not exist at the moment. We are requiring diversity on panels in terms of promotions. We are looking at the suite of training that we do, as I have just mentioned, to ensure that where improvements can be made, they will be made.

Q40 Chair: When you say "looking at" training, is there going to be comprehensive training for every member of staff? If so, by when will you have that put in place?

Matthew Rycroft: The chief operating officer might want to comment in a moment on that in detail.

This is part of Wendy Williams' report. She encouraged us not to rush with our response to the recommendations. She gave the Home Secretary deliberately six months, until September, to come out with the detail about how we are following that up. Certainly at that point we will be able to address your question.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I think the work that human resources colleagues are doing on the training is happening at pace. I am just not in a position yet to announce where it is at. Charu Gorasia might want to add to that that.

Charu Gorasia: Chair, we are doing two specific things. One is mandatory learning on diversity and inclusion that we request every staff member in the Home Office to do. Particularly for the senior civil servants, one of the innovative ways we are trying to talk about race—because external research suggests that people do not feel comfortable about talking openly about race, so just doing the mandatory learning is not enough—is we are creating sessions and workshops entitled Let’s Talk about Race and delivering them alongside the business and community training partnership so that everyone can talk more openly about race and we can address some of the issues.

Q41 **Chair:** I was struck by some of the things referred to in the people survey: 41% of staff in the 2019 survey felt it was safe to challenge within the Department, which is already obviously quite low, but for the immigration enforcement section, for the black staff respondents to the survey, that was down to 32% who felt it was safe to challenge within the Department. Those are really troubling figures. What are you doing specifically within immigration enforcement on this?

Matthew Rycroft: This is an extremely important part of the annual people survey, which in previous roles I have put a lot of emphasis on. In my previous Department we had a big campaign to respond precisely to this question about being safe to challenge. One of the things that I learned in the role is that it is not enough just to say that it is safe to challenge. A lot of people say that and quite often, when they say it, they don’t always mean it and sometimes when they say it and mean it, it does not always come across. What matters are people at all levels of the Department, particularly at more junior levels and, as you say, particularly given the statistics from our black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, what their views are about whether they feel that it is safe to challenge. One of the specific things that we will be doing on this is working with our brilliant NETWORK, which is our organisation for all our black, Asian and minority ethnic staff—it is the largest, and I think also the oldest, such network in the civil service—and they are helping to drive some of the change we need in this space.

I cannot answer the question specifically about immigration enforcement, but if either of my colleagues can—

Q42 **Chair:** I think maybe some further evidence—

Shona Dunn: Chair, just very briefly—

Chair: Yes, very briefly. That would be helpful.

Shona Dunn: The director general of immigration enforcement is absolutely—this is among his top priorities—focused on changing the perception, the experience of members of staff within immigration enforcement. He is about to push forward on rolling out something called



HOUSE OF COMMONS

OpEx—operational excellence—across immigration enforcement, a big part of which is designed to give all members of staff a voice and a mechanism by which they can feel they can exercise that voice. This is very high on his agenda.

Q43 Ms Abbott: I would like to begin by following up on Mr Loughton's questions to Shona Dunn about the relationship between senior civil servants in the Home Office and Ministers.

Ms Dunn, if I understood her, said everything was fine, which made me look up the Wendy Williams report and she has a specific recommendation, recommendation 24, where she says, "The Department should invest in training for the senior civil service to ensure appropriate emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of officials to provide candid, comprehensive and timely advice to Ministers".

Ms Dunn, could you tell me why would Wendy Williams have made that specific recommendation if there was not something problematic about the relationship between Ministers and senior civil servants?

Shona Dunn: I quite understand why Wendy Williams, based on the evidence that she saw of the issues she was exploring, felt the need to make that recommendation. It is a very important recommendation. There are always ways in which we can make sure that the relationship between officials and Ministers is working as effectively as possible and given the issues that we deal with, there are often cases where we have to give very candid advice to Ministers. It is a part of mine and Matthew Rycroft's roles to make sure we are supporting all our senior civil service colleagues in performing their functions appropriately. I would argue that senior civil servants should always be open to more training on that and should always be seeking to develop themselves in doing so.

My point, with respect to the current relationship between senior civil servants and Ministers, is that that relationship is a close one and a professional one and I am seeing senior civil servants absolutely give candid advice to Ministers on a frequent basis. I will continue to make sure that they get supported to do so. Ministers are very keen for them to continue to do so and we will continue to do train people as they come through to make sure they feel able to do that.

Q44 Ms Abbott: I have a number of questions. I don't want to prolong this interchange, but just so I am clear, you are saying that as far as you know, there was nothing problematic about the relationship between senior officials and Ministers and therefore, in effect, Wendy Williams' recommendation 24 was gratuitous.

Shona Dunn: Wendy Williams was focusing on the period up to 2018 and the specific instances associated with the Windrush scandal. She had a particular set of evidence that she was referring to there and her recommendation is right in response to that and we must act on it. I—

Ms Abbott: Okay. Sorry, do continue.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Shona Dunn: No. Apologies. I was simply going to say that I think that statement and my earlier statement, and Matthew's, about the close and professional working relationship that exists today, co-exist.

Ms Abbott: I want to ask a few questions that arise from the Wendy Williams report. One of the things she said, which is important, was that it was important for the Home Office to look beyond the Caribbean in examining the whole Windrush affair. As those of us who have a constituent interest will know, there are people from West Africa, South Asia, who were part of that cohort that came in and were caught up in Windrush. Are you able to tell me whether you were looking beyond the Caribbean and also whether you have or are reviewing data on other Commonwealth countries?

Shona Dunn: Would you like me to come in on that? We have absolutely been very, very interested to reach out to all of the communities that may have been affected by the Windrush scandal. We have done a considerable amount of analysis to determine which those communities might be and where they might be and to make sure that the outreach work that we are engaged in, both directly and indirectly through community groups, is extending out beyond the Caribbean communities.

Q45 **Ms Abbott:** Have you reviewed the data on other Commonwealth countries?

Shona Dunn: The historic case review that you are referring to was conducted on Commonwealth countries because the historic case review was designed to answer particular questions from Parliament at the time. Wendy has made a recommendation, which you will be referring to, which is the recommendation that we consider our response to the NAO's recommendation on that point. The Home Secretary has said that she is accepting the recommendations and we will consider that. We are currently looking at means by which we could meet that recommendation. The Home Secretary will give further information on that when she makes a further report to the House before the summer recess.

Q46 **Ms Abbott:** Thank you. Mr Rycroft, I noted that you said, towards the beginning of this evidence session, that having come into the Home Office you were extremely impressed with what you found. I have to put it you that a lot of people who have been the victims or have tried to work with victims of the Windrush scandal might not agree with that. First of all, am I clear that there will be what Wendy Williams asked for, a comprehensive improvement plan in six months?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, there absolutely will. Thank you very much, Ms Abbott, for the opportunity to add to what I was saying earlier. What I have been impressed by, among many other things, are two things that are relevant to your question. One is about that sense of mission and purpose, which in any organisation is such a crucial foundation on which you can then build. The other is this willingness to learn and to accept that mistakes have been made, to apologise profusely for those mistakes and to get to the heart of what went wrong. That is what the Wendy Williams report is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

all about. The thing that I have been particularly impressed by is the non-defensive nature of the response by officials in the Home Office, and indeed Ministers.

Q47 Ms Abbott: On the question of the apology, it is true that the Home Secretary did apologise and it was very profuse, but the other thing Wendy Williams said about the apology is that the test of how real the apology was was the amount of the fundamental change. Has there been a review and evaluation of hostile, or you might say compliant, policies with external experts that will be published? Mr Rycroft?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, we will be doing all of the things that Wendy Williams has recommended. The Home Secretary has said that we have accepted in full the recommendations, so everything that she has set out we will be taking forward.

I want to say to the Committee that cultural shifts take a very long time in any organisation, particularly in one as large and as complex as the Home Office, so I do not want to give any sense of declaring victory. What I want—I hope—to give a strong signal on is the direction of travel that Ministers and officials are now embarked upon in this Department and we want to work with this Committee as we make those necessary shifts. We will be reporting back very regularly of course, the Home Secretary to the House and us to this Committee, on each of the different parts of that cultural reset, including, as we have already discussed, the training, including the reviews, including hostile environments.

Yes is the answer to your other question about are we going to be doing this with people from outside. That is this openness point that we keep on coming back to. I cannot speak for the culture here before but what I can speak for is the culture that we are seeking now, which is to be open and to be proactive in going out to the communities that are most affected by the policies and the operations that we run here, and to engage with them, putting them at the centre of the design for the future. That is going to be a very significant part of our response to Wendy Williams's review.

Q48 Ms Abbott: With respect, Mr Rycroft, talking in general terms about the direction of travel is easy, answering specific questions is hard. Can I ask you another specific question? One of the things that Wendy Williams recommended was the reduction of the complexity of immigration nationality law, immigration rules and guidance. Have you begun that process?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, we have. The Second Permanent Secretary would be a good person to hand over to.

Shona Dunn: Yes, Ms Abbott, we have started that process. As you know, we received the report on simplification of the rules some months ago. We have started that process. We have also established a board of experts to support us in that as well. As you know, it is a very extensive task. It is one that we need to undertake as swiftly as is safely possible to do. It is critical, from my point of view, as Matthew has said, in terms of changing



this organisation from the inside out. Simplifying the rules is a critical part of that. It is also critically important to underpin good processes and systems going forward. We have started that process, it is an iterative process, but we are seeking external support in making sure we do it well.

Q49 Ms Abbott: Finally, Mr Rycroft, this is a general question about the processing of compensation claims but I am going to raise a specific case because I have been asked to raise it as it typifies what has gone wrong. This is a case about a lady called Jocelyn John, who was wrongfully sent removal papers. She panicked, as a lot of people did, and left and ended up homeless in Grenada. She was sent removal papers even though she had been in the UK for over 40 years, and she provided the Home Office with 75 pieces of evidence. She waited a year. She applied for compensation, she has been waiting a year. She has had an interim payment of £7,500, but you keep asking her for more and more pieces of evidence.

Jacqueline McKenzie, who is a solicitor who has done a lot of Windrush cases—she is dealing with over 200 at the moment—says the key issue is that people are struggling to get the evidence needed and they are not given adequate support. She says, and I am quoting her, that you are treating people with contempt. Can it be the fact that you are asking for all of this evidence and people are struggling to provide it that so far only 60 people have had compensation, which totals £360,000 in all?

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you very much. I will not comment on the details of that case but thank you very much for that detail and we will look into it and respond to you in the appropriate way.

If I can make a couple of general points about the scheme, as the Home Secretary has said, she wants to speed things up but it is worth noting that this is a complicated thing to do and we are determined to get it right. By getting it right, we mean working with each individual claimant to ensure that all of the compensation that they are entitled to is paid. Yes, the numbers look as though they are extremely low in terms of total cases that have come all the way through the system and out the other end with a final payment, but there are many more cases where there has been, for instance, partial payment and now there is an ongoing discussion about additional payments. I encourage people to understand that we have designed this scheme deliberately with representatives of the community who will be using it and we are determined to take our time, not to rush, not to make mistakes, and to ensure that everyone at the end gets the full compensation to which they are entitled. That is a really important part of our response to the scandal.

Q50 Ms Abbott: Mr Rycroft, I understand what you are saying about taking your time, but I know the Windrush cohort. They are my parents' cohort, they are an ageing cohort. What concerns them and the people who are working with them is while you take your time there will be persons who in the end will not get the compensation they are entitled to because they have in fact passed away.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Matthew Rycroft: Let me just repeat we will continue to work as fast as the circumstances permit, with the claimants, with their legal representatives, trying to make it as simple as possible, but it is by its nature a complex scheme that requires individual decisions that are absolutely about the individual faces behind each case.

Q51 **Chair:** This is a real concern for us, because of the four cases that we raised in our Windrush report over two years ago, two of those individuals have now died before they can get any kind of payment or compensation or any redress for the injustices that they faced. Can you tell us how long is it taking? What is the average length of time it is taking to actually give people an offer?

Matthew Rycroft: I do not think on this occasion an average is a particularly useful number because each case is so different and the numbers of actual cases are small, but the average does compare broadly favourably with other equivalent schemes.

Q52 **Chair:** But what is it?

Matthew Rycroft: As I said, we are determined to—

Q53 **Chair:** What is the average?

Matthew Rycroft: I might ask the Second Permanent Secretary to come in here.

Shona Dunn: Chair, as you would imagine, with 60 payments made at the end of March, it is possible from management information to be able to determine that figure. It is potentially extremely misleading and extremely—

Q54 **Chair:** I am asking two factual questions and I have asked for those already in writing. Two factual questions. First, what is the average length of time for those who have had an award given—that should be a factual question—for those 60 people? We recognise that will not cover everybody but for those who have had an offer, what is the average length of time it has taken for them to get an offer? Secondly, what is the average length of time that everybody currently on your books has been waiting? I accept again neither of those will fully capture what is happening but it would still be useful to get that factual information. Can you tell us the answer to that now?

Shona Dunn: I can give you the current management information that I have, Chair. I know the Home Secretary would be very keen for me to be clear that if we provide any information of this sort it cannot amount to anything that people would regard as a target or a service standard because it is very—

Chair: I understand it is not a target, I am just asking you for the factual information.

Shona Dunn: Currently, the management information we have, the time for those whose claims have been completed is around, or under, nine



HOUSE OF COMMONS

months and the time for all of those who have been in the scheme is under eight months. But those figures are not verified, they come from raw internal management information. They are not figures that we would wish anyone to rely on or to draw any conclusions from.

Q55 Chair: We raised a series of individual cases with you. There are some significant discrepancies between the response that we have received from the Home Secretary this morning on those cases, and the information that we have been given, which I think we will want to follow up with those individuals and then come back to you on. However, there are a couple of questions that I want to raise specifically now.

On the first case that we raised with you, for the person who had served in the armed forces and put in their claim in April 2019—well over a year ago—the response we have had from the Home Office is that this case is now in the final quality assurance stage and a compensation offer will be made imminently. He was told that information in January. What does imminently mean, what is this final quality assurance phase and how long does it take? Because from his experience this seems to have involved a six-month wait from when he was told that his case was in the final stages.

Shona Dunn: Chair, of course the length of time that quality assurance phase takes will depend on the issues that that quality assurance phase raises. I entirely understand the frustration and concern. This was one of our very earliest cases and was also quite a complex case in terms of the number of heads under which the claim was made.

As the Home Secretary has explained, one of the things that is really important to do in a scheme like this is to make sure, particularly in the early stages of the scheme, that we are making proper comparisons as we go through early cases to make sure we are making decisions consistently, safely and to the best benefit of the claimant. There have been a number of issues that will have arisen in this case during the quality assurance phase that are being worked through. I can absolutely assure the Committee that the team will be working to resolve those as quickly as possible.

Q56 Chair: Can he not just be offered an interim payment, at least something, to recognise the injustice and how long he has been waiting?

Shona Dunn: As you know, the approach that the team has been taking is where there have been aspects that could be settled fast for the benefit of the claimant, where there was a very simple and clear determination that could be made, interim payments have been made. As an interim payment has not been made, to the best of my knowledge, in this case, I assume there are good reasons behind that.

As you say, Chair, there has been an offer to go through at an even more granular level of detail these cases individually with you and other Committee members. I am very happy to do that. If an interim payment has not been made, there will have been a good reason.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q57 **Chair:** Can I move on to the fourth case that we raised with you, where the response from the Home Office says that caseworkers had been attempting to make contact with the applicant, whereas the information we have been given suggests she has not heard anything from the Home Office at all? When we say attempting to make contact with the applicant, what does that mean? Responding in writing to her lawyer, ringing her up, writing directly to her? What are the attempts that have been made to make contact, because obviously they have not succeeded?

Shona Dunn: The information I have is that attempts have been made to contact the claimant by phone, with the number provided, but that that has so far been unsuccessful. A request was made earlier, probably earlier this week, I think, to the claimant's representative for alternative contact details.

Q58 **Chair:** Only earlier this week once you had the letter from us asking about the case?

Shona Dunn: The information I have in front of me is that the team has been attempting to contact the claimant by phone with the number provided but so far without success. That would have been before this week.

Q59 **Chair:** Can you follow up that case and find out how many attempts by phone that has meant and what happens in these circumstances if people cannot get through on the phone, whether other efforts are made in case there is some issue with numbers having changed, or inaccuracies in the records as well?

Can I raise the case of Andrew Bynoe with you? We also sent you his details. He was refused an initial application for urgent assistance even though he was about to become homeless. He only finally received support from the urgent assistance scheme after I raised it directly with the Home Secretary earlier this year. He is now still facing extreme financial difficulties and is having to apply all over again for additional financial assistance. Your scheme for urgent financial assistance does not seem to be working very well if someone who is clearly facing serious financial difficulties is having to apply multiple times and not getting the support the first time even though they clearly needed it, because he then became homeless.

Shona Dunn: Thank you, Chair. The information I have in front of me—and again I am more than happy to share greater detail with you beyond the detail that has been put into the Home Secretary's letter—is that the first request for exceptional support was withdrawn. The second request, we made efforts to receive additional information associated with that and that information did not come to us, so that was declined. The third request, as you say, was received on 17 February. It was granted on 28 February. I understand there was an issue, an error made by the bank, which meant that those funds did not go through until 10 March. I am more than happy to follow up. I have pages of caseworker details here and I can provide you with that further detail.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q60 **Chair:** What is your estimate of when Andrew Bynoe will finally get a compensation offer? An estimated timescale will be fine.

Shona Dunn: I do not have an estimated timescale. There are a number of issues that are still being worked through with Mr Bynoe, so I do not have an estimated date for that. As the Home Secretary's letter said, caseworkers are in the process of reviewing some aspects of previous criminality and will make a final offer as soon as that has been completed.

Q61 **Chair:** Why are you asking for information beyond reasonable doubt?

Shona Dunn: Apologies, Chair, I realise I did not answer your question about the application process for urgent and exceptional payments as well. Just to say on that, the team—and I reiterate the offer that I know has been made and we would very much like to make again for the Committee or Committee members to go and visit the team, either virtually or personally, and see how these things are done. The team is very focused on direct support to the individual concerned. When an individual comes forward, a lot of support is put around helping an individual through the process of whatever the issue may be by the vulnerable persons team and the urgent and exceptional payments process. I am distressed whenever I hear that there is an individual who fears they have not been given enough support, because it is absolutely the intent of the organisation and the team to do that.

On the point about the evidence requested, this is of course a scheme that is funded from taxpayers' money. Therefore, it is of course incumbent on us to make sure—and is set out in the scheme, which as Mr Rycroft has said was very carefully constructed to put the claimant at the heart of it, the evidence that we will require. It is inevitable that a degree of evidence must be sought in order to support those payments.

Q62 **Chair:** Beyond reasonable doubt feels like quite a high threshold and feels like that is likely to be demanding several different additional levels of information. Given that this is a group of people who have already experienced considerable injustice, distress and trauma at the hands of the Home Office, being asked to provide multiple pieces of information to prove the same thing, if you want to prove beyond reasonable doubt your level of lost earnings, what would count as the evidence that would tick that box?

Shona Dunn: There is a variety of different ways in which that information can be provided, it can and has in certain cases come directly from the employer, it can come from the individual. We have received evidence via representatives from a number of different sources. We of course also go to HMRC as well and the team themselves that are working on this do a lot of the legwork to try to bring together those sources of evidence. So it will depend on the circumstances of the individual case and the background to that case, but the team work with the representatives and the claimant to make sure that they are sourcing their evidence and doing as much of the legwork as can be done.



Q63 **Chair:** Does everybody have a named caseworker who they can keep in touch with and who will keep in touch with them about the position on their case?

Shona Dunn: It will not necessarily be the same caseworker at all points, with the number of cases concerned, but there will be very largely consistency of contact. As Mr Rycroft said, obviously one of the things that we are doing at this point, the team is doing at this point—now that a number of cases have gone through and those early learning stages in terms of consistency over decision-making are working through, we will start to see an increase in the speed at which decisions are made. We are also returning to the question of the care that we provide around the communications with the individual claimant.

Early in the process we were making an awful lot of contact with individual claimants and in some cases claimants are saying, “Don’t get in contact with us if you don’t have a substantive update to make”, which is an entirely reasonable request on their part. We are now moving, and will do over the coming weeks as things move at a greater pace, to make sure that we are providing monthly updates, that we are providing text updates, or using the approach that individual claimants would like us to use, very much focusing our care to the claimant around what the claimant would wish.

Chair: It would be helpful if you could consider further whether people should have a named caseworker who they can keep in contact with, because it is a pattern of the cases that we have received that people are saying to us that they are left in limbo again, that they do not know what is happening on their case, that they are told that they will be getting an offer shortly, very soon, that they are in the final stages and then they do not hear anything at all for months, that they do not know who to contact, they do not have a named person to contact and therefore it is somebody different, and also that they are being asked sometimes to provide the same information twice. Given that they have already been through difficult experiences with the Home Office—in limbo, being asked repeatedly to provide the same information—it is really important to ensure that this experience of applying for compensation does not put people off applying for that compensation or support just because they cannot bear to go through any of those kinds of interactions with the Home Office again because of the way that they have been treated previously. It would be helpful if you could look further at the points we will come back to you on on these individual cases and give us some further answers but also to look again at the personal point of contact for people and also how long it is likely to take for each of these cases going further.

Q64 **Stuart C McDonald:** First a quick question on the evidential standard of beyond reasonable doubt. During the passage of the Compensation Bill I think the Minister agreed to go back to Martin Forde to seek his advice on that, because it does stick out like a sore thumb that you would apply the criminal standard of proof here. Do you know if the Minister has done that and has engaged with Mr Forde?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Shona Dunn: Frequently engaging with Mr Forde on where there is evidence for adjustment to the scheme. I am not aware of an in-the-round decision or discussion at the moment about reducing the evidential standard, no.

Q65 **Stuart C McDonald:** It would be good if you could check on that.

Shona Dunn: I will.

Q66 **Stuart C McDonald:** In the sixth case that we sent, and you mentioned it in relation to another case, you spoke about the process of reviewing an applicant's previous criminality. If I cause wage loss to somebody or whatever else, I do not get out of paying compensation because they may have a criminal record or whatever else. Why on earth is it appropriate for awards to be reduced because somebody has a criminal record?

Shona Dunn: Fundamentally this was a policy judgment that was made at the time the compensation scheme was constructed. The position in the scheme is that the scheme essentially reserves the right to reduce the compensation payment based on previous serious criminality. That is the judgment that Ministers made at the time, based on an assessment of where it is appropriate to use taxpayers' money to provide compensation to an individual who may have conducted serious criminality.

Q67 **Stuart C McDonald:** It is important, I think, for the Home Office to monitor very carefully the number of awards that are reduced on those grounds and indeed the number of award claims for wage loss that are refused because it does not reach that standard. We would like to see that.

Shona Dunn: Of course, it is not the case that it is a blanket policy. It is a positive that allows that to be taken into consideration.

Q68 **Stuart C McDonald:** Of course. My final question is you used the word "complicated" several times this morning and the Home Secretary has as well. Would things not move faster if people were able to have legal aid for applications and people could much more likely engage solicitors without having to rely on pro bono solicitors all the time?

Shona Dunn: Mr McDonald, if there are cases that you are aware of where people either were not able to access the scheme or felt that they were not able to be sufficiently well represented in the scheme as a consequence of that, it would be very good to hear about them. Of course, the costs of representatives are one of the things that can be covered through the scheme itself. It is certainly the case that there are some cases, for example, where the caseworkers are not only considering the costs of representation now but the cost of previous representation as well. If there are cases that you are aware of where people are struggling to access the compensation scheme for that reason, I would be extremely interested to hear of them.

Q69 **Chair:** Some very quick factual questions about the Windrush scheme before we move on to the wider issues. How many cases have been waiting for more than a year?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Shona Dunn: I do not have that figure, Chair. I can find that figure for you and report it to you separately. I do not have it immediately in front of me.

Q70 **Chair:** That would be helpful: that is one of the questions we had previously asked in correspondence and it is factual information we would expect to get. Secondly, can you confirm that fewer than 5% of people who have applied have been given an offer? Is that still correct?

Shona Dunn: As at the end of March, which is the last verified information we have, there were 1,275 claims and 60 payments have been made.

Q71 **Chair:** That is just fewer than 5%, is that correct?

Shona Dunn: Yes, as at the end of March. As the Home Secretary indicated in the House previously, those numbers are now higher. More than £1 million worth of offers have now been made.

Q72 **Chair:** When will we have confirmed updated figures?

Shona Dunn: Currently we are publishing data on a quarterly basis. The data from the end of June would be analysed and available at some point before the summer recess. We will let you know when we are able to publish that. I expect to be able to see it at the end of July.

Q73 **Chair:** Do you expect it to be the case that 90% of claims will still not be resolved?

Shona Dunn: It depends at that point in time how much the overall claim number has gone up. I would expect the number of offers to have been made and the number of claims paid to have increased significantly. I cannot tell you what the percentage of the overall claimant number at that point will be.

Q74 **Chair:** What is your progress in appointing a permanent independent adviser for the compensation scheme? You said in February that you were launching a recruitment for a permanent independent adviser. Where has that process reached?

Shona Dunn: I will have to let you know that separately, Chair, apologies. I do not have that information in front of me. I will absolutely get back to you on that point.

Q75 **Chair:** Given that you knew we were going to be asking about Windrush and the compensation scheme, it slightly surprises me. Do any of the three of you know what is happening about appointing a permanent independent adviser for the compensation scheme?

Matthew Rycroft: No, but we will write to you on that.

Chair: It does not sound like there has been a huge amount of progress on that. It would be very helpful to know if an advert even went out on that.

We are going to move on to some wider issues.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q76 Andrew Gwynne: I want to extend some questioning on to wider immigration issues because the Home Secretary told this Committee that as of 15 June more than 15,000 individuals had received a visa extension from the Home Office. How many extensions are you expecting to grant in total?

Shona Dunn: As I say, we have a very large number that have been processed. We do not have a total expectation there. We are ready and willing to support any number who come forward but we do not have a total number against which we are tracking.

Q77 Andrew Gwynne: This comes to the point about the decision not to implement automatic processes for granting visa extensions to eligible individuals. What difficulties would alternative means of granting extensions have presented to the Home Office?

Shona Dunn: Apologies, Mr Gwynne, I am not entirely sure I understand the question. In terms of the visa extension for those unable to leave by the end of July, it would be very difficult for us to determine who required that service, which is why it was not an automatic service and why we have been processing them as they have come forward.

Q78 Andrew Gwynne: To move on to one of the specifics, the Home Secretary told the Committee that there were practical challenges in extending the offer of visa extensions, for example, to social care workers. Can you outline the process by which the Home Office ascertains which health and care workers are eligible for extensions and explain to us why this process could not be replicated for social care workers?

Shona Dunn: Apologies, Mr Gwynne, I now understand your question better. My fault. As I think has been explained and set out for the Committee before, the majority of individuals in the social care sector operate in a sector that is quite diffuse and where we have upward of 10,000 separate individual employers and where individuals who operate in those settings often have a status that allows a general status for work. Therefore, we would not necessarily be aware of what sector they were working in. Obviously for NHS workers and for the other categories we have extended that offer to, it is possible for us to engage with employers to determine who is eligible for that extension. It is a much more complex and, as you say, practically difficult proposition for the social care sector for those reasons.

Q79 Andrew Gwynne: The Government originally stated their intention to open key routes in the new immigration system from this autumn ahead of the full operation of the new system from 1 January next year. Is that still the intention of the Home Office?

Shona Dunn: It is, Mr Gwynne.

Q80 Andrew Gwynne: Has Covid-19 affected the planned implementation?

Shona Dunn: The future borders and immigration system is a very, very high priority of this organisation. One of the things that I have been very



clear on and that Ministers have been very clear on throughout Covid-19 is that we needed to do everything we could to protect the progress of that project. Inevitably there has been some change in working practices because there have been a significant number of people working on that programme who have had to start working remotely, so we have had some challenges to overcome and we have had to do some rework and re-profiling of the timeline. As of now it is certainly still absolutely on track to start from 1 January and for us to open some of those routes in the autumn.

Q81 Andrew Gwynne: When do you intend to publish some of the further details or even the full details of the new immigration system?

Shona Dunn: That will be a decision for the Home Secretary at the appropriate time to do that. There is a great deal of engagement and communication going on with a large number of people who will be impacted by and have an interest in the development of the scheme. There is lots of engagement going on. The final publishing of guidance and plans will come later in the year. I cannot give you a precise time.

Q82 Andrew Gwynne: How much will visas cost in the new system?

Shona Dunn: The question around fees is a separate question. The fee lists at the moment are as they are and Ministers will consider those fees in the way they normally do from time to time.

Q83 Andrew Gwynne: What will the required level of English be and how will that be measured?

Shona Dunn: The English language tests—as you know for the future borders and immigration system there are a variety of requirements. There are requirements around skill levels, requirements around salary and around occupation. The English language test requirements are as they are. If you require more information on whether there will be adjustments to those, I can provide that, but that is not a key aspect of the way the future borders and immigration system is being devised.

Q84 Andrew Gwynne: Will work visas tie an individual to a particular job and employer? What happens if skilled workers who enter the UK with a job offer switch employers? Will they lose their right to live in the UK or will visa holders be required to inform the Government if they change jobs?

Shona Dunn: The full details will come forward but the bones of FBIS are as I have described. They are around skill levels, income and occupation. Those will be the key aspects of those and further details will be published when full guidance comes out later in the year.

Q85 Andrew Gwynne: Lastly from me, why will EU citizens receive e-visas and non-EU citizens physical documents? Will EU citizens be able to request a physical document in addition to their digital visa if they want that?

Shona Dunn: Essentially the headline answer to your question is that we are as far as possible wanting to move, as a system, towards digitising our

processes and the more we can move towards systems where we rely less on physical documents and more on digital documents, the more secure and more reliable our systems will be.

There are a number of different ways in which people can evidence digital status and digital—where they have a physical document there are a number of ways in which they can demonstrate that digitally. The reverse will also be true, but where we are providing an e-visa we would not generally seek to provide a physical document as well unless there is a very particular reason why someone would require it. There will be ways in which they can demonstrate that, but we would not seek to provide the physical document except in very specific circumstances.

Q86 Dame Diana Johnson: I know time is very pressing so I want to ask about the EU settlement scheme, a particular issue of that, which is relating to children in care of local authorities or those who are care leavers. I understand the Home Office has done a piece of work to establish the numbers of children and young people who would be affected. I have not seen that number being published anywhere. Could you tell me how many children would be eligible for the EU settlement scheme?

Shona Dunn: I do not have that number in front of me. I am more than happy to get that number for you. The critical thing to say about this particular issue is it is one of the issues that we absolutely note as being an area where we need to make sure that our outreach is effective and that we make sure that those individuals are given every support needed to make sure that they go through the scheme. I am more than happy to get you the number. You are quite right to highlight the issue. It is an issue we are very focused on. We have a year to go and we need to make sure that in that period of time we are reaching out to those cohorts that we know need additional support to come through the scheme. We will absolutely do that as an organisation.

Q87 Dame Diana Johnson: The Children's Society recently published some information about this. It thinks about 11% of EEA children have applied through the scheme so far. That leaves a large number of children who have not. I am really concerned with the pressures on local authorities and social workers, particularly with Covid-19, and the lack of specialist immigration advice, because often these children may have very complicated backgrounds in terms of knowing where they have come from or where their parentage is from and so on. What specific things are you going to do? Some guidance has been issued but what more can the Home Office do to ensure that we are not faced in a few years' time with another Windrush scandal if these children and young people have not received the immigration status that they should and they deserve? Most members of Parliament, as corporate parents along with local authorities, are very conscious that we have a duty to these children.

Shona Dunn: Absolutely correct and I completely agree with that point. Of course there is a lot of support around the EU settlement scheme. There is obviously the resolution centre that can provide additional support and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

guidance, and frequently does, to help people through the process. There is also a great deal of resourcing that has been put into supporting organisations to reach out to communities that will find it harder to engage with it, and to make sure that barriers are removed.

Dame Diana Johnson: These are children.

Shona Dunn: Absolutely, but they are the children where, as you say, we need to reach out to the organisations that are supporting those children and make sure that—

Chair: I am going to have to interrupt you. Given the evidence we have seen about how low the level of applications are from those children, what would be very helpful is to hear from you, within a month's time, of what you have done. Not what you will do but what you have completed within the next month that has made those contacts and that is increasing those applications.

I am grateful for your time this morning. Unfortunately, we have to close at this point because the room and technology is to be used again. Thank you very much for your time. We have a series of further follow-on questions. I would particularly press you on some accurate information on the scientific advice that was given around the border decisions. We have asked these questions repeatedly. If you cannot tell us the answers, we will have to assume that you had no scientific evidence behind your decision to lift the isolation restrictions on 13 March. It would be very helpful to hear from you what advice was given at each stage and what advice was commissioned. We will also have to assume that you did not commission any information on the number of people likely to be coming into the country, either in March or in June, who have Covid-19, unless you tell us otherwise, because we have circled these questions for a long time and not had any answers. I will look forward to hearing from you about that and also about some of the follow-on questions on the individual cases that we have been raising.

Thank you very much for your time this morning.