

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Preparations for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, HC 1011

Wednesday 9 May 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 9 May 2018.

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Ian Austin; Chris Bryant; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins; Ian Murray; Priti Patel; Andrew Rosindell; Mr Bob Seely; Royston Smith.

Questions 94-156

Witnesses

I: Harriett Baldwin, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Julia Longbottom, Director for Consular Affairs, FCO, and Martin Harris, Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, FCO.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Harriett Baldwin, Julia Longbottom and Martin Harris.

Chair: Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Minister, for joining us for this afternoon's evidence session on consular provision for the World Cup—or rather, for the fans going to the World Cup.

Q94B Royston Smith: Minister, we had an interesting session yesterday about the operational things that have been put in place for the World Cup. From a strategic point of view, what are the biggest risks to UK nationals travelling to Russia for the World Cup? Do those risks change from match city to match city?

Harriett Baldwin: Thank you very much. I have brought along a couple of officials who will introduce themselves.

Julia Longbottom: I am Julia Longbottom, the director for consular affairs.

Martin Harris: I am Martin Harris, the director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Harriett Baldwin: We very much welcome the Committee taking a close look at this, because it gives us an opportunity to reiterate that, for us, the clear focus of all of the planning—bear in mind that the planning has been taking place over the past two years—has been on ensuring that our fans travelling to the World Cup are safe and secure.

Clearly, the specifics of that security are Russia's responsibility. Obviously, they have given undertakings to FIFA on hosting the World Cup—to ensure that it is safe and secure. In this area, we clearly share exactly the same objective of safety and security. As you heard yesterday in your evidence session from the police and the Football Association, we have been helping to deliver that responsibility for safety and security.

As far as the risks specifically are concerned, as you know, we have extensive travel advice for visitors to Russia anyway. That is kept under constant review and is updated regularly. As you know, for the World Cup itself, we have created specific travel advice under the "Be on the Ball" brand. That is also a platform on which we can outline all the different things that a fan travelling to the tournament would want to be aware of, the various different risks they need to be aware of and the ways in which they can mitigate those risks. Ultimately, of course, it will be for each visitor to the tournament to look at the advice closely and to take their own personal decisions as to whether or not they want to go to the tournament.

Q95 Royston Smith: Minister, if you were travelling to the World Cup, what would you see as the risks for your trip?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Harriett Baldwin: The range of different risks, the distillation of the wisdom of the Foreign Office team who have been working on this, are outlined on the “Be on the Ball” website. Any visitor to any country around the world can look at Foreign Office travel advice for every particular country, and that will summarise a range of different things to be aware of, cognisant of, and ways in which visitors can manage travel to any country. Clearly, we would never guarantee that any visit to any country would be risk-free.

Q96 Royston Smith: We can all look at that information and guidance, but what do you see as the risks? If you were going yourself, what would you think the most risky elements of travelling to Russia for the World Cup are—perhaps including, but not exclusively, post Salisbury?

Harriett Baldwin: As the Committee will be aware, we maintain our advice constantly under review. We have refreshed or updated the advice since the Salisbury incident. Some of that has been factual, but we also put in new wording at the beginning of that generic travel advice that refers to heightened political tensions between the UK and Russia. But I would again reiterate that, as far as the tournament specifically is concerned, it is clearly Russia’s responsibility. It has given clear undertakings to FIFA and—as you will have heard yesterday in your evidence—the UK has been working closely with the Russians for the past two years on our shared objective of the safety and security of British nationals travelling to the World Cup.

Q97 Mr Seely: Just on the point about sharing—tell me if I am treading on anyone else’s toes—I understand that the information on the “Be on the Ball” website has not been updated for quite some time. I have to say, some of the evidence that we heard yesterday left me concerned that not enough thought was being given to certain types of travellers going to this football tournament, such as homosexual couples or black and ethnic minority football supporters. Are you confident that we are not being complacent and that we are understanding the different cultural risks and style of policing, and the certain difficulties we are now having with the Russian Federation?

Harriett Baldwin: First of all, my understanding is that since the “Be on the Ball” website was launched, I think last year in July, there have been five updates to the advice. In terms of the preparatory work we have been doing over the last two years, there have been regular meetings with specific groups about specific areas, where we have been able to relay concerns. Those have all been put in specific sections, in terms of our overall travel advice. Clearly, whereas the UK has a particular approach, in terms of our respect of everyone’s individual choices, different countries around the world have different approaches. The purpose of the travel advice is to highlight those differences. Throughout the period in which we have been preparing for this, we have met with these specific groups to listen to their specific concerns.

Q98 Mr Seely: Which specific groups?

Harriett Baldwin: We have met with Stonewall—

Julia Longbottom: Kick It Out.

Harriett Baldwin: Kick It Out, which is the FA-sponsored anti-racism campaign. There is another group as well—

Martin Harris: Pride.

Harriett Baldwin: And groups of disabled supporters. We have listened to all those issues and taken specific points they have wanted to make. We have been able to share that, in terms of the extensive co-operation that has been happening in this policing area over the two years we have been preparing for this. Julia, do you want to add anything on the engagement with minority groups?

Julia Longbottom: Just to say that “local laws and customs” is always a section in our travel advice. We are very clear, in the travel advice for Russia, that attitudes are different in Russia. Although homosexuality is not illegal, we are very clear that attitudes are different, and displays of public affection may provoke a reaction. We provide the best information we can, and any individual travelling needs to make their own decisions about keeping themselves safe, based on that.

Q99 **Andrew Rosindell:** Obviously, the protection of British citizens at the World Cup is going to be paramount. Has there been an assessment of the potential risks in Russia for the World Cup, compared with previous World Cups in South Africa and Brazil?

Harriett Baldwin: In terms of the British Government’s response, yes. We have a rolling programme of lessons we have learned from other World Cups, and we work with the host country team on how those lessons learned need to be reflected in the situation of any upcoming events. A huge amount of work has been taking place over the last two years. As you know, a range of different sporting events have taken place in that period. The lessons that have been learned in other World Cups inform that piece of work, and they get regularly updated, based on other sporting events that have happened. There have been a range of sporting events in Russia. Most recently, of course, since 4 March there has been a big match in Moscow between Arsenal and a Russian team—

Martin Harris: CSKA.

Harriett Baldwin: Over 20,000 fans travelled from the UK to that particular event¹.

I would like to offer an invitation to the Committee. There is a big UEFA cup final in Kiev at the end of May, and should anyone from the Committee wish to travel to see some of the preparatory work that our teams have been doing on the consular side—obviously, it is in a different country, but it is a similar high-profile event—they would be very welcome. In Moscow on 8 June, there is a women’s qualifying match for

¹ Note from witness, should read as: ‘Over 200 fans travelled from the UK to that particular event.’



HOUSE OF COMMONS

next year's women's World Cup. Again, the Committee would be welcome to send representatives to observe some of the consular preparations that have gone into that.

Chair: We will perhaps come back to you on that later.

Q100 Andrew Rosindell: Thank you for that, Minister. Have you identified any specific additional risks that British citizens could face in Russia, compared with previous World Cups?

Harriett Baldwin: As I say, travel advice is kept under regular review, and we have updated travel advice specifically since the incident in Salisbury. That language is in our updated travel advice. We have also faced the challenge that some of the members of the team who had been working on this over the last two years are among the 23 diplomats who have been expelled from Russia at short notice. This is a moment where I can pay tribute to the incredible professionalism of those public servants, because they have had to deal with moving very quickly. It has affected some of the people who were directly involved in the planning of the consular support at the World Cup, so we have had to adapt to that and adapt our plans. We have had to adapt in terms of some of the roles and responsibilities of the people left inside Russia, and in terms of being able to deliver some of the responsibilities from outside Russia, so that has been a particular challenge.

Q101 Andrew Rosindell: Following on from that, on the same theme, what consular provision have HMG made in cities where England are playing during the World Cup, and also generally for UK nationals visiting Russia during this period?

Harriett Baldwin: I'll bring in Martin in a moment, but clearly over the two years that we have been preparing for this, all of the 11 venues where England might play have received visits and there has been, as you would have heard from the police yesterday, a programme of exchange, where senior police from the UK have visited Russia and Russian senior police have come here. There has been an extensive programme of planning, both in terms of the operations centre in Moscow—again, I repeat that it is Russia's responsibility to ensure the security of this World Cup—and our UK consular teams. We will have a mobile embassy, effectively, moving with the England team to the relevant city, which will have approximately 10 people in place at each of those locations. As I have said, we've done the recce and we've got the locations identified, and so on and so forth. There will be a mobile embassy that can provide all the different consular services such as emergency travel documents.

Can I also repeat the public service announcement that will be in our travel advice, which is that everyone travelling overseas should always ensure that they have got the right travel insurance and the right kind of money, and they should pre-programme into their mobile phone the numbers that we recommend in our travel advice? Again, as a public service announcement, I will mention that EHIC cards are not valid in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Russia. Those are some public service announcements, but Martin can say a little more on the consular preparation.

Martin Harris: I will ask Julia to come in on this as well. We have been planning for the World Cup for two years. We have here in the UK a cross-Government committee chaired by the Foreign Office that brings in all of the different Government Departments and the police and also includes the FA. That meets on a regular basis. It is meeting on a fortnightly basis at the moment and will meet more intensively as we approach the tournament itself. So that is what we do here in the UK.

In-country, we have the base in our embassy in Moscow, where we have dedicated consular officers who will be working on this. We will have police officers also in the embassy and able to participate in the co-ordination centres established by FIFA and the Russians in Moscow. Then, for each of the games, we will have, as the Minister said, a deployment of a mixture of consular and police, who will be able to support England fans in each of those three cities and other cities further on in the tournament.

In the two years, we have been visiting each of these cities and building up our knowledge and our contacts with the local authorities in order to provide a good basis for our presence when the games take place, so it is familiar territory to us. Indeed, next week our embassy will be doing a visit to Kaliningrad, which will be the venue for the game with Belgium.

Q102 Andrew Rosindell: How are you communicating that to British citizens who are booking flights and travelling? Are you working with the airlines to make sure that the people travelling have got that information and it is not something that they discover only when they get there?

Harriett Baldwin: We are communicating primarily around our overall travel advice for Russia and the "Be on the Ball" campaign, where we are working very closely with the Football Association to encourage people, when travel is booked, to look at that advice and to sign up for travel alerts. One of the things we are tracking is the number of people who have signed up for those travel alerts. Something like 8,800 people have signed up for those travel alerts.

I think events like this, and some of the high-profile football matches that we have coming up over the next few weeks will all be hooks on which we ought to publicise the importance of reading that "Be on the Ball" advice. There are also credit card-sized summaries of the advice, and the links to the website. We can let the Committee have some of the materials, but we encourage every fan who is travelling to really look at that advice closely.

Andrew Rosindell: Thank you very much.

Harriett Baldwin: Julia was going to add something on the publicising.

Julia Longbottom: I just wanted to add that we are working through our partners as well to publicise the "Be on the Ball" information. Through the FA and the Football Supporters Federation, we have had staff join fan events in advance of the World Cup, and we are busy promoting the "Be

on the Ball" information. We will do more of that on the milestone dates in the run-up to the World Cup.

Q103 Priti Patel: Minister, how worried are you by the threat of violence by hooligan groups in Russia?

Harriett Baldwin: Clearly there have been past examples of that. I think the most prominent one was in Marseilles in 2016. It has been a specific focus of the preparations. In terms of the evidence you took yesterday from the police, it has been an area where they have been co-operating closely. It is worth highlighting that it is in areas of counter-terrorism and in preparation for sports events that we continue to have close co-operation with the Russian authorities. Again, because it is Russia's responsibility to ensure security and the absence of violence at this tournament, we welcome the fact that, since that event in Marseilles, the group that was alleged to have been involved in that has been effectively banned, as I understand it.

Of course, as we would with fans travelling from the UK internationally, as you heard from the police yesterday, they take steps through the judicial system where they think that there are people who should be prevented from travelling overseas because of that risk of violence. We understand that the Russian authorities take a similar approach to some of the people who they think could also pose a threat of violence within Russia. This is an area where the police co-operation has been extensive, but clearly, as with any football event, this is a risk that needs to be closely worked on, and the risk of violence needs to be mitigated.

Q104 Priti Patel: Do you think British fans should be worried about some of the Russian groups? Russia is known for its Russian hooligan army. I don't know if you have seen some of the footage that came out of the Euro 2016—the scenes of violence and hooliganism were pretty extreme.

Q105 On top of that, a previous Sports Minister in Russia was accused of cheering on Russian fans when violence broke out in the stadium. Are you not concerned about the prospect of scenes of that nature, and what would you say to British fans who might be thinking about buying tickets and going over to watch the World Cup?

Harriett Baldwin: What I would say is that clearly Russia has made representations to FIFA about their bid to host the World Cup in Russia. They have taken responsibility for ensuring that fans are safe and secure. Part of what we have been doing is helping them, in terms of where we think that fans travelling from the UK could cause a risk. That is why the Home Office and our judicial system have a process that they work through, and we think the Russian police will have taken similar steps with regard to potential troublemakers. I mentioned the steps they have taken since 2016 with the particular ban and, as you mentioned, the former—

Q106 Priti Patel: So are you confident that the Russian authorities are doing everything possible to prevent hooliganism, violence and the type of scenes we have seen in the past? Of course, that would help to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

safeguard the security of English fans who go across. I understand completely what we do in the United Kingdom with travelling fans, but this is much more from the perspective of Russian authorities and Russian fans, many of whom in the past have been supported by Russian politicians inciting nationalistic behaviour and all sorts of things. That is something that we should be concerned about as a Government and a country, particularly the impact on UK fans.

Harriett Baldwin: You are absolutely right that Russia has made representations to FIFA on ensuring that the World Cup is safe and secure. Clearly, that is our top priority in the work we have been doing to support Russia in that responsibility, with the policing liaison that we have been engaged in for two years. I don't think the Committee would expect any of us to say that we can 100% guarantee, whenever any British citizen travels abroad, that there is not a range of potential risks and things that could go wrong. That is why we recommend that everyone have a look at the travel advice, sign up for the travel advice alert and ensure that they read any updates we make to it. Martin, do you want to add anything to that in particular?

Martin Harris: These risks are there. The main mitigation we can put in place is to ensure a high level of co-operation between professionals between the police officers. That is something we have been doing over the last two years. Over five successive major international fixtures we have had exchanges between British police and Russian police. Through that, we have been able to develop the kind of confidence in that co-operation that we will need if we face major incidents during the World Cup. We continue to look at that closely, and as the Minister said, the most recent match we had was the Arsenal game, which was an opportunity for us to see, post-Salisbury, how that co-operation was continuing. It does continue, but we keep a close eye on that, and that is also part of the assessments we make about the World Cup as we approach the tournament.

Q107 Priti Patel: Just to come back to the assessment and Russian hooligan groups in particular, are there any active groups that British fans should be aware of? Are there hooligan groups and bodies in Russia that the police are monitoring, or the authorities know of, and that we should be concerned about?

Harriett Baldwin: There was the group that was alleged to have been involved in the 2016 incident in Marseilles, and they have taken steps to ban them.

Priti Patel: That was one that was banned.

Harriett Baldwin: We understand privately that there is a blacklist of known troublemakers that the Russian police would have, in addition to the people that, as the UK authorities, we generally prevent from travelling overseas from here in the UK. I think that numbers around 1,800 people.

Q108 Priti Patel: Do the Russian authorities share the equivalent data on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

their side on blacklisted individuals or hooligan groups that are organised in Russia?

Harriett Baldwin: I don't think we go as far as sharing their names. Martin or Julia, do you know? I don't think we go as far as sharing the names of individuals.

Julia Longbottom: This is all down to the police co-operation. The best guarantee we have of getting that information, should it arise, is the fact that British police will be on the ground during the tournament. What we can say is that if we get any specific information about a threat to British people, we will publish that on the travel advice as soon as we have it.

Q109 **Priti Patel:** This is my final question: is that co-operation holding strong, in light of the relations between our two countries post Salisbury?

Harriett Baldwin: Yes. As I just mentioned, it is really in that area, and in counter-terrorism co-operation, that we continue to have a strong level of co-operation.

Q110 **Mike Gapes:** Taking up the point about police co-operation, we are going to have only a few—perhaps a dozen—police officers. That is agreed to by the Russians, isn't it? There is no huge British presence in Russia, and clearly all the law and order is conducted by their authorities. We have no jurisdiction and no control. In a sense, are you confident that you can actually trust the Russian authorities to protect British fans?

Harriett Baldwin: You are absolutely right to highlight that it is Russia's responsibility to ensure the safety and security of the tournament. The nature of our co-operation has been to work with them to help them achieve that. In terms of the number of police being deployed from the UK, I don't think that number would have been given in the session yesterday.

Mike Gapes: We got the distinct impression that it was very few.

Harriett Baldwin: It's at least as large as any other participating country in the World Cup.

Q111 **Mike Gapes:** Yes. But we were given the figures for Germany and for France—

Harriett Baldwin: And ours is at last as large. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, they will move around with the deployment of the different England matches.

Q112 **Mike Gapes:** I'll ask a question I was going to ask later, because it is pertinent. Have you made any contingency plans on the police co-operation side for UK-Russia relations deteriorating during the World Cup?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Harriett Baldwin: What I would obviously say again is that our travel our advice and “Be on the Ball” advice is constantly kept under review. Therefore, we would update it in that hypothetical situation.

Q113 Mike Gapes: Yes, but that is not my question. My question is: do you have any contingency plans? Have you thought through what you might have to do if there was to be a political event? I am not necessarily saying a Salisbury-type one, but there is potential internationally, whether in Syria, Ukraine or somewhere else, for relations to deteriorate.

Harriett Baldwin: As I say, it is Russia’s responsibility. They have made representations to FIFA that they will put on safe and secure games. Bear in mind the context that—

Q114 Mike Gapes: So your answer is that you have not made contingency plans. My question is: have we made any contingency plans?

Harriett Baldwin: The performance of the consular team over the year to date, where we have had to deal with some unexpected challenges in terms of preparation for the World Cup, shows how adaptable and able to respond to any contingency our teams are.

Mike Gapes: All right, I understand.

Harriett Baldwin: And Martin is itching to add something to that.

Martin Harris: I would like to make a couple of points on this. The first is that we regularly exercise our response for the World Cup. We did a major exercise in February, where we looked a number of scenarios, and we gamed through exactly how we would respond in those scenarios, whether that is a political issue, a terrorist incident or whatever, to ensure that—

Q115 Mike Gapes: Not necessarily in Russia?

Martin Harris: Specifically in Russia. We looked at the challenges of doing this against a strained political background. So we regularly test the plan.

The second point I would make is that we are also ensuring that we have resilience in order to be able to respond to changes in circumstance. That means that we are using consular experience around our whole network: in the Russia network, in the embassy in Moscow, but also in other posts around the region that I cover. Indeed, what we have found is that we have had to use that resilience post-Salisbury to change our plans and ensure we have adequate consular cover. So yes, it is robust against political events.

Q116 Mike Gapes: Can I take you to the “Be on the Ball” campaign you established last year? As I understand it, the website has been updated twice since Salisbury: once on 21 March and then on 6 April. What is your assessment of how that campaign is working? Do you have any indication of how many people have logged on to the site? Do you know how many of those are actually going to Russia, or are they just general football fans who are interested? Have you got any indication or



HOUSE OF COMMONS

feedback as to how useful people think the site is?

Q117 **Harriett Baldwin:** I've got a long list of stats on that—I am just trying to find it in my pack. There have been 23,200 unique views since it was launched, and bearing in mind that you will have heard from the Football Association yesterday that we think about 10,000 people are travelling who are UK citizens from the UK, that doesn't sound completely out of line, but I don't think it is as high as we would like. We need to do more to publicise it in the run-up to the event, which is why events like today are really helpful for us.

Q118 In terms of the subscriptions to travel advice, we are up to 8,800 who are now signed up to the alerts for updates—

Julia Longbottom: For Russia specifically.

Q119 **Harriett Baldwin:** For Russia specifically.

Q120 **Mike Gapes:** But those aren't just football fans—this is the general public.

Harriett Baldwin: Well, you can't tell with that one, I have to say. The stat is over 23,000 unique views in terms of the advice. I do think we need to do more in the run-up and make sure that everyone has had a chance to read it, because it has been very carefully thought through.

Q121 **Mike Gapes:** Your general travel advice for Russia has a warning that was updated in March, which warns about possible racially motivated attacks and a reported increase in acts of violence towards the LGBT community. That is in your general advice, but it is not mentioned on the "Be on the Ball" website. Why not?

Harriett Baldwin: They both refer to each other—

Q122 **Mike Gapes:** I know, but if I am a football fan and I am going to Russia for the World Cup, and I am on the "Be on the Ball" website and I don't get that advice, that is probably quite important if I was interested in those issues or was concerned. Why is it not on the site?

Harriett Baldwin: The link to the main site is obviously there. In addition, as we mentioned earlier, we have held specific events and the advice has then been communicated through specialist forums. We reiterate the advice that we strongly recommend everyone read the general travel advice, that they sign up for the alerts and that they also look at the "Be on the Ball" specialist advice. Do you want to add anything to that, Julia?

Julia Longbottom: Just to be clear, both are hosted on the gov.uk website and the top of the "Be on the Ball" pages has a link to all the Russia advice. The idea is not to duplicate. The "Be on the Ball" advice is very specific and practical about each of the locations where matches will be happening. It has got information about tickets and travel and those kinds of things.

Q123 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that, but given the level of homophobia in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Russia and the level of racism in Russia among football hooligans, I am a bit surprised that it has not been given more prominence. Perhaps you could look at that. There may be people who are making a decision as to whether they would feel comfortable going to Russia and may not be quite aware of some of the problems they might experience in certain places. If we are going to get the information out to people making that judgment, it is best it is done early rather than late as otherwise people might already have booked their accommodation and their tickets, and then change their mind if they don't feel it is safe. I would rather that they got that information early rather than late.

Harriett Baldwin: I think that's a fair point. We have tried to publicise it as widely as possible. Events like today are very good for further publicising it and I think that, as I said, we have gone out to specific forums that the FA has recommended for further targeted communication of the advice. Certainly, if that is something that the Committee strongly recommends, we can look at that.

Q124 **Ian Austin:** Just on this point, what assurances has the Foreign Office sought from Russia about the safety of LGBT fans or black or Asian fans attending the games?

Harriett Baldwin: Obviously overall responsibility for the safety of the events was part of the assurances that Russia gave to FIFA, in terms of putting on the World Cup. In our engagement with the authorities, we have regularly raised these points.

Q125 **Ian Austin:** These specific issues?

Harriett Baldwin: Yes.

Q126 **Ian Austin:** What response have you had?

Harriett Baldwin: On safety and security, people from, for example, some of the LGBT fora put forward points that they wanted us to raise, and similarly so did the Kick It Out campaign group.

Q127 **Ian Austin:** What did the Russians say in response?

Harriett Baldwin: They share our objective to have an overall safe event. In terms of those specific points, the 11 host cities, which by the way have all been very keen for England to be drawn to play there, have consistently assured us that fans of all backgrounds will be welcome and given exactly the same assurances, in terms of safety and security. That is something that FIFA will also pay close attention to, as you know. Indeed, the England FA has also raised these points.

Martin Harris: We have been raising this with the Russian authorities, both at the central level—the local organising committee that the Russians operate with FIFA—and also at the cities that we have visited with the local organising committees there. We have raised this issue and we have had assurances, which they must give to FIFA as well, on the safety and security of fans of all backgrounds. We will continue to raise those issues in the visits that we are doing next week.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q128 Chris Bryant: I sort of get that, but you have relied a lot so far today on the word “assurances”. I presume the Russian authorities had given assurances that they wouldn’t use Novichok in Salisbury and that they wouldn’t murder people using polonium, or that they wouldn’t protect the murdering of Syrians in Syria or allow chemical weapons in Syria. I just wonder if we are being a bit naive to rely on assurances from the Russian Federation.

Harriett Baldwin: I think our travel advice—I am sorry to keep going back to that, but it is the distillation of all of the best thinking—makes some of these points. Specifically on homosexuality, while it is not illegal in Russia, public attitudes are less tolerant than in the UK. Those are the words that we use.

Q129 Chair: So are you recommending in any way that homosexual couples who travel together, and for whom this may well be their annual holiday, or certainly a major event, should in some way behave very differently? Should they not share a room? Should they not dine together?

Harriett Baldwin: No, we are not making any recommendations about accommodation, but we are saying that public displays of affection may attract negative attention. That is one of the specific points that we make in the travel advice.

Q130 Chair: We are aware that, in other circumstances, gay couples have faced abuse and intimidation when they have booked, for example, a double room rather than a twin room and things like that. Have you had categorical assurances from the Russian Federation that that will not be tolerated?

Ian Austin: Or from the local organising committees that you have discussed this with?

Harriett Baldwin: We are dealing with a country where—I think I am right in saying—they have been trying to put on a Moscow pride march for many years and have not succeeded, Martin, and—

Q131 Chair: It is worth being clear why that has not succeeded: because the police have brutalised gay campaigners, have torn flags from their hands and have locked them up for many years using charges against civil rights activists. It is worth being very clear that there is not on one side a bunch of campaigners who are in favour of, for example, traditional values, and another bunch in favour of civil rights. There is the state oppressing civil rights activists. It is worth making it absolutely clear that it is the state doing it.

Harriett Baldwin: And that 2013 legislation further closed down that public space.

Q132 Chair: So these are the people we are relying on to keep our fans safe? These are the same policemen?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Harriett Baldwin: As I say, we have been regularly raising these kinds of issues in our engagement with the Russian state. They have given assurances to FIFA in terms of hosting the tournament that they will make it safe and secure for everybody, but does that mean that public attitudes are the same as they are in the UK? Clearly they aren't, and that is why we have put that statement in the travel advice.

Q133 **Chair:** Forgive me, Minister. I understand why you keep referring to public attitudes—I do get that—and I understand that there is only so much that any society can do to change public attitudes for a competition that happens once every four years. I am not referring to public attitudes. I am referring to the fact that policemen in Moscow only days ago tore rainbow flags out of the hands of protesters, and we are now asking those same policemen to give us the assurance that England fans who may be gay will enjoy the protections and the civil rights that we would expect for citizens of this country. Can you understand why I am more cautious? While I understand what you are saying about public attitudes, I am not talking about public attitudes; I am talking about the command and control of a police force that has, for the best part of two decades, been aggressively repressing civil rights and gay rights in Moscow. We are now relying on them to protect civil rights and gay rights among our fans. This is a big ask, Minister. How confident are you that your ask has been received?

Harriett Baldwin: It is a big ask, and that is why we spell things out in the way that we do in terms of our travel advice. Ultimately, it will be up to each individual to decide whether they feel comfortable travelling to a country that has different public attitudes.

Q134 **Chair:** I understand that, but—sorry—I come back again to public attitudes. The reason I am concerned about the way the advice is worded is that it sounds to me like, “If you happen to be walking down the road and there is someone who has a few traditional views, just be a bit cautious.” We are not talking about a nation in which there are a few traditional attitudes, although they may exist—they exist, after all, as we know very well, in our own country, and I should imagine they exist in pretty much every country around the world. We are talking about a country where the state has actively—deliberately—repressed civil rights, and particularly the gay community.

Q135 Do you see why I am slightly concerned about the way you talk about public attitudes? It sounds like fans can make a reasoned decision just to be a bit cautious—just to stay out of the way. We are not talking about fans being a little bit cautious; we are talking about fans realising that the police force there may not be on their side—that the law enforcement authorities may actually be working against them, and that the state, which they would expect to turn to for protection, may be the organisation that represses them most harshly. Can you therefore understand why I am concerned about the advice suggesting, “If you’re a little cautious—if you don’t hold hands in public, or whatever—maybe it’ll be fine”? No, no, no. It is not about a minor offence on the street, in the sense of offending public feelings; it is about the state actively promoting



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a form of society that, frankly, we in this country would not find tolerable.

Harriett Baldwin: I accept everything that you are saying, Chair. I know that there have been assurances given to FIFA, and there have been assurances given to us in terms of our engagement—about it being fine to carry a rainbow flag, for example. That is exactly the kind of assurance that has been given to FIFA. Martin, do you want to elaborate on any of those points?

Martin Harris: Yes, there are a couple of things I want to elaborate on. First, on the point about the assurances that are given to FIFA, the way we test those assurances ourselves is, as I said, by looking at the police co-operation and seeing how we have been able to work with the Russian police over successive games. We want to see what happens in practice. That is why over these five major international fixtures that have taken place in Russia, we have looked closely to see how the Russian police do that and to what extent we can have a level of co-operation with our officers. It is not for us to police the games, as Members have pointed out. It is for us to see whether the Russian police are willing to work with the UK police in ensuring that the safety and security of all fans is properly assured. That is the test that we have. We have seen across those five games—the most recent one was after Salisbury—that the level of co-operation has been good. That is the first point.

The second point is that I absolutely take your assessment of the very difficult situation that the LGBT community faces in Russia. That is why we have been closely in touch with them in supporting their activities, in standing by them and in supporting events such as the Side by Side film festival in St Petersburg. We have been in touch with the LGBT Network, which is one of the most impressive NGOs that works on this issue. Through them, we are in touch with Stonewall and their counterparts here in the UK to ensure we can give the best possible advice to LGBT travellers about the situation in Russia, about how to deal with it and about how to confront the differences in attitudes that people see. That allows us to continue to update our advice.

Q136 **Chair:** Were somebody to face LGBT abuse in the United Kingdom, one of the first things they would probably do is turn to the police. Are you advising people that that may not be wise advice in Russia? Are you advising them to seek consular assistance immediately, and not necessarily turn to the Russian police?

Martin Harris: Our advice that people should be in touch with consular officials if they feel the need for that.

Q137 **Chair:** Immediately?

Martin Harris: They can certainly immediately contact us if they have any concerns. We would certainly advise them to do that. That is one of the reasons why we want to have a presence on the ground.

Q138 **Chair:** Do you feel we have enough consular staff to do that?

Martin Harris: Yes.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q139 Ian Austin: On the issues faced by black and Asian fans, the reason why I am sceptical about relying on the assurances that have been given is that there has been a failure to deal with racist abuse in football in Russia. There have been hundreds of incidents of racist abuse recorded in the last year or so. Just this year—in the last few weeks—Russian fans have chanted abuse at black players, and the Russian official appointed by the Russian Football Union to chair an anti-racism taskforce is quoted as saying, “There’s no racism in Russia, because it does not exist”. How can we trust assurances given by the Russian football authorities to FIFA that they are on top of these issues and are going to deal with them effectively? If, as it seems to me, you can’t trust those assurances, how can you base advice given to English fans who might be attending the games on those assurances?

Harriett Baldwin: As I have said repeatedly, we spell out in our travel advice the range of different issues and risks. We clearly recognise that this is a very high-profile tournament. As you rightly point out, there have been incidences—probably in the last week—that would be considered unacceptable. The world’s press will be there; the eyes of the world will be there. The Russian Federation has given its assurances to FIFA, and we spell out in our advice the range of different issues. We recommend that people read it closely and make their own decision about whether they want to travel in person to the matches. At the end of the day, whether to go to the matches is each individual person’s decision. I completely agree with the observations you made there.

Q140 Ian Austin: Do you think it is appropriate for Russia to be even hosting the games in the first place, given that the police beat up gay people, this sort of racist abuse is still going on at public events like football matches, and the officials responsible for it don’t take it seriously?

Harriett Baldwin: That was the subject of heated debate at the time. The fact is that they have been awarded the World Cup. They have made assurances to FIFA about the safety and security of all fans at the games, and the eyes of the world will be on this event. Like us, they have said that the safety and security of the fans is absolutely the top priority, which is why we have been working so closely to help them achieve that. I don’t think we need to go back over all of the arguments we had at the time, in terms of our rival bid.

Martin Harris: May I just add one point? It is the case that Russia has to observe international standards for holding this tournament that FIFA sets out, and FIFA has to check that those are being met. There are some examples I can point to where that can be a positive. The example I give is when I did a visit to Samara, which is one of the cities that will be hosting the World Cup. For a long time, we have been supporting an NGO that promotes the rights of disabled people in Samara. It has been under enormous pressure, but the fact that Samara is hosting games for the World Cup has meant that that organisation has had a place on the local organising committee, and has been able to insist, thanks to FIFA standards, on a level of accessibility for disabled people to the venues that otherwise would not have been in place in Russia. So there are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

circumstances where those in Russia who are campaigning for improvements have been able to use the World Cup to promote rights.

Q141 Mr Seely: Do you not think it says something about the country that an organisation that sponsors disabled people is under pressure? Who is it under pressure from? I do not understand. Did I misunderstand that? You said that this is an organisation that promotes the rights of disabled people and it has been under pressure, presumably from the state or from the local authorities. It is a very bizarre statement.

Harriett Baldwin: We could get into a wider discussion about the range of restrictions on NGOs—

Martin Harris: There is a general pressure on civil society in Russia, and on NGOs, which is well known. That organisation is not unique in experiencing those pressures.

Q142 Mr Seely: That sort of supports Ian Austin's point, does it not, about whether a country that pressures NGOs that support disabled rights should be holding the World Cup in the first place? Is that a one-off example, or is that an example of lots of examples, or is that just the only example that you can think of where there seems to be some good that comes out of Russia hosting the World Cup?

Martin Harris: It has been part of our work in Russia to see where there are opportunities to promote human rights. As the Foreign Office and as the British embassy, we have a very good record of supporting civil society in Russia. Where there are opportunities to do that, whether that is through football or through other events that take place, we will do so.

Harriett Baldwin: We also note in our travel advice that, in terms of religious activities, Jehovah's Witnesses are considered an extremist organisation in Russia.

Q143 Mr Seely: On that, I apologise if I am following up too much on other people's questions, you slightly implied, Minister, that it was a free choice and that people had to make decisions. Are you confident that your advice has been strong enough when it comes to BME and homosexual couples?

Harriett Baldwin: And that it is kept constantly under review, yes.

Q144 Mr Seely: And it is strong enough? Is your advice advisory enough, rather than just saying, "Well, make up your own minds"?

Harriett Baldwin: It has been informed by the extensive preparation work that we have done over the last two years, by the experiences that fans have had in travelling to Russia over the last two years, and by the meetings that we have had with the groups representing a range of different interests. It has been updated to reflect that, and it will be kept constantly under review between now and the tournament.

Q145 Priti Patel: On that point, in April, Arsenal fans went over to the CSKA Moscow match. There were plenty of reports of CSKA Moscow fans



HOUSE OF COMMONS

chanting racial abuse at Arsenal fans. There were reports of anti-Semitic banners. What did we do about that? What were the repercussions for Russia and the Russian authorities? What was our response and reaction? Why should BME fans or ethnic origin football fans have any confidence that the authorities will treat them with respect and take their complaints, if there is racial abuse chanted at them, racial harassment or things of that nature? What confidence can British fans have that people will listen to them and take their complaints seriously?

Harriett Baldwin: Clearly, Russia is responsible for that kind of atmosphere. The eyes of the world will be very much be on them. In our ongoing work, particularly at the police-to-police level, and in the examples that have been cited, the overall priority that we put on things is for the safety and security of everyone attending the matches. Clearly we—I know I keep saying this—are going to keep our travel advice updated, reflecting the current situation, but we have no reason to think that our top priority of safety and security and Russia's top priority of safety and security are not aligned, as far as the World Cup is concerned.

Q146 Priti Patel: What did we do after the CSKA Moscow match when those reports were out there? What did we actually do and say with regard to the team and the Russian authorities—this was only last month—in the light of the fact that the World Cup is starting next month?

Harriett Baldwin: Speaking for the consular side of things, that would be something that would inform your ongoing updating of the travel advice, but the police-to-police discussions would have been more elaborate. I know you had the police in yesterday. Martin, are you aware of them specifically talking about that match?

Martin Harris: I am not aware, we did have an embassy team at that match. We would want to follow that up with the police, so we will discuss that with them. There are also, of course, sanctions in place that UEFA would be required to impose. One of the reasons it is important that we have a presence at the match, both from police and our consular team, is so that we can respond.

Q147 Priti Patel: So has the follow-up taken place? Certainly with the Arsenal football team and the fans who may have attended, in terms of what was chanted and the type of abuse, there must be proactivity from our side, and we must also let the Russian authorities know that we are serious about this, and do not take that kind of discrimination and abuse lightly.

Harriett Baldwin: I certainly think that those are very serious allegations. We would like to go back and ask the police, and write to the Committee about their view on those allegations.

Q148 Stephen Gethins: I think Priti and Ian have made the point about those racist incidents that were reasonably well documented, and your own advice says that "people of Asian or Afro-Caribbean descent may attract unwanted attention in public places and should take care, particularly when travelling late at night". When pulling together that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

advice, did you pull it together in consultation with the Russian authorities?

Harriett Baldwin: I don't think we specifically consult the Russian authorities when we are updating our travel advice. We consult our own authorities when we update our travel advice.

Q149 Stephen Gethins: Okay—fair enough. But when speaking to the Russian authorities are you reasonably confident of the willingness and ability of the Russian authorities, including the police, to tackle racially aggravated crime?

Harriett Baldwin: One of the reasons we have been doing this two-year preparation where the police-to-police work has been extensive is to bring, for example, the Russian police over to some of the major football events here to show them the way in which we approach policing. I think it is fair to say that the approach to policing within Russia will appear materially different to fans travelling from the UK. As we would say about any country in the world, different police forces will operate in ways that are different from the police forces in the UK.

Q150 Stephen Gethins: Sure, but during that two-year period when you have been interacting with them, has that two-year period given you confidence in the ability and willingness of the Russian police to keep UK nationals safe, regardless of their background or sexual orientation?

Harriett Baldwin: As you will have heard when you took evidence from the police yesterday, one of the things that has been strong has been that level of co-operation and the fact that, in this case, for both of us the top priority is the safety and security of the fans.

Q151 Stephen Gethins: I have not heard a "Yes, we are confident." That is something that is still under review, is it?

Harriett Baldwin: The travel advice is always under review.

Q152 Stephen Gethins: No—in terms of the ability of the police, just in terms of that original question.

Harriett Baldwin: As I said, fans will notice that the approach to policing in Russia is different from the approach to policing at a football match in the UK.

Q153 Stephen Gethins: So you are perhaps not entirely confident. I was pleased to hear, Mr Harris, that you have travelled outside Moscow and St Petersburg. That is reassuring. England in their group games are obviously travelling to a number of areas where things may be different yet again to Moscow and St Petersburg. We all hope that England will go as far as possible, and possibly even win the World Cup. We talked about the Champions League final, which was in Moscow. How confident are you that there will be the same levels of policing and protection outside Moscow that you might see in Moscow?

Harriett Baldwin: I will bring Martin in in a moment. Obviously, a key part of the preparation has been to visit each of the cities in which England



HOUSE OF COMMONS

could play. I think there are 11—I am confident that the team will get through to the final. It will be different outside Moscow and St Petersburg, in the sense that they have less experience of hosting major international matches, so we have paid particular attention to the locations and, as you have heard, the mobile embassy will move between the various different centres. We have worked with all the other 31 countries that are in the finals in terms of sharing experience. For example, Kaliningrad is, as you know, detached from the rest of Russia and we are going to work very closely with the Belgian consular team there because we are playing Belgium there. There has been a lot of work with the other countries that are sending teams to the World Cup. Do you want to elaborate a bit more on your regional tours, Martin?

Martin Harris: It is clear from the regional tours that we have been doing that the policing angle will be quite heavily centralised. There is a central co-ordination unit in Moscow and the authorities in Moscow will have a lot of management of all the games. It has been important for us to have strong co-operation at central level as well as contacts that we can make locally on the ground.

Harriett Baldwin: The “Be on the Ball” website has quite in-depth coverage and specifics about those locations. It is worth highlighting that fans who have a ticket then apply for a fan ID, which works like a visa and also covers free train travel on certain routes between the various different host cities. It is well worth having a look at the advice around that on the “Be on the Ball” website.

Q154 **Stephen Gethins:** I noted your comments earlier and what maybe seems to be a lack of confidence. I am not sure if that is shared with colleagues in the other 31 competing countries as well. Under what circumstances would you advise fans not to travel to the World Cup, or to travel to the World Cup but not to a particular host city?

Harriett Baldwin: As you know, around the world Foreign Office travel advice has a range of different levels. Even within Russia, there are different parts of Russia in terms of our overall travel advice. Clearly, it would have to be a very serious situation where we did not feel that we could guarantee the safety of UK citizens travelling. That is not our current assessment. Julia, do you want to add to that?

Julia Longbottom: Yes, just to say that for any decision by Ministers to advise against travel to a specific part or all of a country for something other than a terrorist risk, there needs to be an assessment that the risk to British nationals is unacceptably high. That is the bar that we set. Obviously, we collect all the information that we have to make that assessment, but that is what it would take.

Q155 **Priti Patel:** This is really a question for Mr Harris. How much scenario planning has been done for all the regional locations? Every location is different, not just in terms of geography, but also the politics. There are issues with nationalism and with certain teams. I mentioned previous Ministers from the Russian Government encouraging and inciting



HOUSE OF COMMONS

hooliganism activities. Has there been much scenario planning done around the different sites? That is one question.

Q156 My other question is this. Since 2016, a lot has changed. The Minister has already said that blacklisting has been established and bans have been put in place. But we know that in 2016 there was effectively a festival of violence orchestrated by Russian fans, and of course what we see now—it is much more prolific than in 2016—is the ability to organise on social media, whether through Twitter or whatever groups exist. Has that been factored in to travel advice or consular preparations—some of the scenario planning that your team have been involved in? I also want to ask about working with the police. You yourself have already said that policing is centralised, so how quickly can the police go from one location to the other, should sporadic pockets of violence suddenly emerge and then escalate?

Martin Harris: There are two or three points on this. First, in terms of how we run scenarios for different regions, there are two points. The first is that yes, we do exercise our crisis plan, and we exercise it for a regional location, so we look at particular incidents that could happen. That was the basis for the exercise that we ran in February. The second point is that we really look to build up our knowledge of each of the cities involved, so we have an intensive campaign of visiting, now, Kaliningrad, which will have another visit next week, and Volgograd and Nizhny Novgorod, so that we have the right ideas of what is going on on the ground and that we are developing the contacts and networks that we need.

For the third point, on the policing, I would really defer to the experts in the police to say exactly how they can use their monitoring of social networks to be able to see where the threat lies and may be coming from. What we do is have this cross-Whitehall structure that involves the police, so that when we are making the general assessments that we do for the World Cup and updating our travel advice, that is based on a view not just from the Foreign Office, but from all the other authorities, including the police.

Harriett Baldwin: I think it is right to highlight the fact that one of the updates we made to the travel advice recently was about the restrictions on social media platforms. Then there is a bit about keeping an eye on local media to find out about demonstrations that might be organised at short notice, to avoid any demonstrations.

Q157 **Stephen Gethins:** I have just one additional question. Given the withdrawal of some staff from the embassy in Russia recently, are there co-operation arrangements with other countries' missions to Russia for providing consular services to UK nationals?

Harriett Baldwin: In terms of the reaction to the specific expulsion of a number of people, we have done a range of things. We have made some reallocations within Russia, in terms of responsibilities and training, and we have, within the overall consular network, reached out to people who can speak Russian and have experience in consular work, to reinforce the numbers. We have also, throughout this period and before the Salisbury



HOUSE OF COMMONS

incident, been working very, very closely with other countries and other consular officials. But our intention is that the UK nationals travelling to Russia for the World Cup will be supported by this mobile UK embassy, which will be supplementary to the normal consular planning that we would have within Russia.

Q158 Stephen Gethins: Do you think that that mobile service will cover everything? What I'm getting at, when I ask about consular services being provided to UK nationals, is whether there are any other embassies that UK nationals can go to. I take it the answer is, "No, try to find the mobile service."

Harriett Baldwin: I don't think that is entirely fair, because we have printed up—in fact, our ambassador in Moscow called in the other 31 country ambassadors, and we have developed an actual guide, which is going to be shared among all the different consular teams from all 31 countries. I think there is going to be quite a lot of making sure that they help each other out and can point each other in the right direction. Martin, is that a fair characterisation?

Martin Harris: That's true. There will be that co-operation between the embassies. But certainly UK nationals should go to the UK embassy for consular support.

Q159 Stephen Gethins: This is just a very simple question on this issue. Obviously, sometimes, if UK nationals travel to a World Cup, they might not go to the England game, for instance; they might go to other games outside that. If there is no UK consular service there, where should they go? I think you were quite right, Minister, to take the opportunity to make the public service announcements earlier. As a public service announcement, what advice do you have to people in that situation?

Harriett Baldwin: As a first step, we recommend that people travelling from the UK store the British embassy consular number in their mobile phone. That number will be manned 24/7 and will always be available as a first point of contact for any UK traveller. Bear in mind that 150,000 people from the UK travel to Russia every year outside the World Cup.

Julia Longbottom: The guide that we have shared with other embassies of the 32 countries would mean that if an official from the US found a British person who needed help, they would have direct numbers of our consular team to get in touch with. Obviously, we cannot cover the whole country all the time, but we have channels open that people can reach us on, and other diplomatic colleagues will know how they can put fans in touch with us.

Chair: We have a few minutes left before there will be a vote.

Q160 Ian Murray: You mentioned Belgium, and you have answered Mr Gethins' questions about other consular services. Have you been working with other Governments on what they are doing? How does the UK advice and preparation compare with other countries? What are we doing differently?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Harriett Baldwin: As I have described, there have been a range of different ways in which we have worked. Since we have known which countries we are drawn against, there has been specific work done with those countries. The whole series of incidents that happened after March has affected some other countries' preparations too. There is a range of different ways in which teams work with one another, but I would particularly highlight the work convened by our ambassador in Moscow with all the different other embassies as a good example. The size of the policing contingent is every bit as large as other countries taking part.

Q161 **Ian Murray:** I suppose the point I am making, Minister, is that England playing in the World Cup in Russia has particular difficulties, given the current geopolitical atmosphere. Have you been working with the French, for example? They have very similar difficulties, referring to the action that was taken in Syria. Have you been discussing that with other Governments who have very similar concerns?

Harriett Baldwin: It has been widely reported how closely we are working with those Governments on the specific ramifications of the Salisbury incident, but in terms of preparation for the World Cup, there was already a good level of collaboration, which I expect Martin would like to elaborate on.

Martin Harris: From my experience working in Russia, we have a regular liaison with our allied embassies there, where we can look at the political and the security situation that we face as a result of that. The co-operation is close.

Q162 **Ian Murray:** I have a brief supplementary. It has been mentioned before, but having World Cups in Russia is very difficult. What kind of feedback are you having with FIFA, to say that you cannot guarantee the safety of LGBT+ people or black and ethnic minorities in Russia? To make that guarantee would be incorrect. What feedback do you give to FIFA to say that we should not have these kinds of tournaments when the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom cannot guarantee the safety of its citizens? Are you feeding that back into FIFA? What is their response? Will they feed back to you the steps they might take in future in granting World Cups to countries where it is a bit more difficult to determine the safety of supporters?

Harriett Baldwin: Colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport have the primary relationship with FIFA. I have been discussing all these preparations with the Sports Minister. This has always informed our learning from each of the World Cups. We provide feedback to FIFA as a regular part of that, and we will do this time. Martin, do you want to elaborate a bit more on that?

Chair: Can I ask Martin not to elaborate on that? Mike, do you want to go to your last question?

Mike Gapes: I thought I'd asked it already.

Chair: Are you happy that you've got it covered?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mike Gapes: I asked it earlier on.

Chair: You did. We are going to suspend now because we are about to vote. Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you, Ms Longbottom and Mr Harris, for coming to the Committee this afternoon. We are very grateful for your help.

Harriett Baldwin: Do you wish us to return after the vote, Chair?

Chair: No. We will suspend now. You offered to write to us and we would be grateful if you would do so. We would also be grateful if you would keep under constant review the advice you are giving and particularly note that we are not simply dealing with public attitudes. We are dealing with state actors and that is the element of great concern to us. We will, I hope, have a wash-up after the World Cup and find out how wonderfully well the whole consular team did, but we would be very grateful if, during the World Cup, as it proceeds, you would keep an account of how events are proceeding so that we can have a proper review and learn lessons from it afterwards. Thank you very much.