

Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: Home Office Recall, HC 678

Thursday 10 September 2020

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 10 September 2020.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Meg Hillier (Chair); Gareth Bacon; Peter Grant; Mr Gagan Mohindra.

Yvette Cooper, Chair, Home Affairs Committee, and Stephen Timms, Chair, Work and Pensions Committee, were also present.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General, Alex Clark, Director, Home Affairs Financial Audit, NAO, Tom McDonald, Director, Home Affairs Value for Money Audit, NAO, and Marius Gallaher, Alternate Treasury Officer of Accounts were in attendance.

National Audit Office Reports:

Progress delivering the Emergency Services Network HC 2140

The UK Border: Preparedness for EU Exit October 2019 HC 98

Questions 1-104

Witnesses

[I](#): Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary, Home Office, Joanna Davinson, Chief Digital, Data and Technology Officer, Home Office, and Charu Gorasia, Director General, Capabilities and Resources, Home Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary, Home Office, Joanna Davinson, Chief Digital, Data and Technology Officer, Home Office, and Charu Gorasia, Director General, Capabilities and Resources, Home Office.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee on Thursday 10 September 2020. We are here today to talk to the Home Office about a number of issues that we have discussed in this Committee before. I am delighted to welcome our witnesses, whom I will introduce. I also welcome as guests on this Committee the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, Yvette Cooper, and the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, Stephen Timms, as well as members of the Public Accounts Committee as usual.

Our witnesses today are Matthew Rycroft, permanent secretary at the Home Office, who was appointed in March to that role; Joanna Davinson, chief digital, data and technology officer at the Home Office, who previously had a 28-year career in the private sector, including at IBM, but who started at the National Audit Office, so a welcome back to home territory; and Charu Gorasia, director general for capabilities and resources at the Home Office. A very warm welcome to everyone.

I want to kick off with Mr Rycroft—please deflect to a colleague if you feel it is appropriate—and the EU settlement scheme. Then Ms Cooper and I will ask questions about preparedness at the border. On the EU settlement scheme, we have a lot of EU citizens trying to go through this process. The Home Office is a busy Department at the best of times when it comes to immigration. Can you give us an idea of the number of applications you have dealt with so far, and what you are expecting to come through, given that the deadlines are fast approaching?

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you, Chair, and I thank everyone for coming together for this hearing. The EU settlement scheme has been one of the successes that the Home Office has been responsible for in recent months and years. We are approaching 4 million applications, which is a very high number, and the vast majority have had a very positive experience in terms of engaging with the settlement scheme process. As much of it as possible has been digitised, so the user interface, as they say, is as smooth as it can be, and the vast majority of decisions are going through very quickly indeed. Although there are many EU transition deadlines coming up, the deadline for this particular scheme is not until the end of June 2021, so there is another 10 months to go.

Q2 Chair: Absolutely, but the applications that were refused or deemed invalid in June and July were higher than they had been previously. Is there a particular reason for that?

Matthew Rycroft: Not that I am aware of. I can look into that and get back to the Committee if there is something lurking beneath the surface.



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Q3 Chair: We have some concerns. It is all right if you are tech-savvy and you know what you are doing. A very high percentage of working age people from the EU have applied. How are you making sure that the number of applications from people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged is not lower than you expect, and how are you mapping that?

Matthew Rycroft: It is a very good question. We are determined to ensure that every single person who has a right to eligibility under the scheme is able to access it, so we are reaching out to those who would find the technology harder. I don't know if either of my colleagues wants to add to that in terms of the detail and how we are doing that, but rest assured that we are doing that. We know that we need to ensure that this scheme, as with others that the Home Office runs, is open to people, including among the most vulnerable in our society.

Q4 Chair: Okay. Around 2% of applications have been from people aged over 65. I think most people over 65 would not consider themselves to be in a vulnerable group, but is that in line with what you expected? Is it what you expected with other groups that might be deemed as finding it more difficult to apply?

Matthew Rycroft: I think so, Chair. Overall, the numbers are even higher than we expected, which is a good thing. It demonstrates that people are appreciative of the scheme and are using it in significant numbers well ahead of the deadline. If there are, as I say, lurking beneath the surface any anomalies in terms of proportions of people coming from particular backgrounds, I will look into that and report back to the Committee.

Q5 Chair: I am going to move on to preparation, particularly at the border. Are you confident that you are now fully prepared for the end of the Brexit transition period? What are the biggest concerns that you have, day to day, in making sure that you are ready by the end of this year?

Matthew Rycroft: There is a significant amount to do, Chair, as you will know. We are dealing first of all with an ongoing negotiation. Then we are getting ready the changes to the UK system, including the future immigration system that will come in on 1 January, and getting ready for all the plausible scenarios, including no further agreements on the future UK-EU relationship, and an agreement on the future relationship. We will be ready for all those different scenarios. We have put literally thousands of people in the Home Office on to one or other of those strands of activity.

Border readiness is something that our Border Force colleagues are leading on. They have had a significant injection of additional resource and training. In terms of goods coming into the country after 1 January, the fact that this will now be phased—with some new requirements in January, then others in April and then others again not until July—will help with that issue.

However, there are still a very significant number of preparatory steps that need to be taken, including some that that will need to be open until we know which of those scenarios we are in. In other words—



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Q6 **Chair:** So, as all along, you are still planning for more than one scenario. Can you just update me, before I ask Yvette Cooper to come in, on what is happening with the Schengen information system and EU access to that?

Matthew Rycroft: That is one of those issues that is ongoing within the negotiation. As you know, there is another round of negotiations even today in London, so it would be wrong for me to comment on the detail. Suffice it to say that the UK has put forward an offer in our legal position that would allow the equivalent of the Schengen information system to continue. We believe that that would be a good outcome, both for the UK and for the EU, at the end of the transition. That is what we are seeking through the negotiation, but as in other areas we will also be ready for alternative arrangements to be made, if that is what we need to do in the event of there being no further deal.

Q7 **Chair:** What is an alternative arrangement to your having the Schengen information system or the equivalent of that—I mean, realistically?

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, I should repeat that we want to reach an agreement in this area. The fact that the Commission has set out a position that it is not legally possible for a non-Schengen third country to co-operate through the Schengen information system is, in our view, one of the reasons why we have not reached an agreement yet. I think there needs to be a shift on the EU side in order for us to reach an agreement.

If that shift does not come, or if—for other reasons—there is not a deal, we will be looking at a combination of bilateral agreements and other instruments. Of course, there were lots of ways before the Schengen information system came into being, which I think was only in 2015. Before that, there were lots of ways in which the UK collaborated with our EU member state partners and we will revert to some of those ways—

Q8 **Chair:** A chill goes down my spine when you talk about a series of bilateral agreements. I mean, that is 27 different agreements, which really—with the best will in the world—would not be up and running by January of next year. What is the risk to the British public if there is not a deal on exchange of information on this crucial issue?

Matthew Rycroft: As I say, we will continue to ensure that, whatever scenario we are in, the safety and the security of the British public—

Q9 **Chair:** Yes, but practically, what steps will you be able to take if you are talking about bilateral arrangements? You are not going to be able to do it quickly, are you? In summary, what practical steps are you going to take to protect the British public, Mr Rycroft?

Matthew Rycroft: If we are in that scenario, then there will be a mixture of multilateral and bilateral steps. There are other instruments that can be used. As I said, we will continue to work with the Commission to seek a deal.

Q10 **Chair:** Yes, but if you don't get the deal, what is the risk to the British public? Can you just outline—I mean, a lot of people will not understand



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what SIS is or what Schengen is. This is diplomatic talk, if I may say so. Those of us who have been involved in European discussions or who are in this business will understand it. What is the impact on the safety of the British public if there is not an arrangement on SIS—the Schengen information system—and you have not got these arrangements in place by January, which, frankly, you won't be able to do, will you?

Matthew Rycroft: The UK is one of the safest countries in the world. That will continue to be the case whatever scenario we are in. We have got lots of our plans in place and we will make the best of whichever situation we are in in relation to the deal when we know which that will be.

Chair: Very diplomatically answered. I think that Ms Cooper and I will probably pursue this further through our various routes, but I will now ask Yvette Cooper to come in.

- Q11 **Yvette Cooper:** Thank you, Chair; thank you to the Committee for having me; and thank you to the witnesses. I have a quick follow-up question. If you need to rely on bilateral relationships and agreements instead of getting an EU-wide agreement on security, have you started those individual discussions with the key countries already, just in case?

Matthew Rycroft: The UK has a very close set of relationships with individual EU member states. For instance, if you take our co-operation to tackle terrorism as an example—

- Q12 **Yvette Cooper:** Yes, I know. We probably haven't time to hear about all the wonderful things that I know we do. My question is: have you begun preparatory conversations with individual countries—those countries that we end up doing most co-operation with—to make sure that individual back-up arrangements are in place if an EU-wide agreement is not in place?

Matthew Rycroft: I was going on to say that, as part of those relationships, we have ongoing discussions with those member states, alongside the formal negotiation with the Commission, about all the different scenarios. So yes, they and we continue to plan both for the possibility of a deal that would cover this area and for the possibility of no deal. On that latter aspect, yes, we talk to them about what is currently still a hypothetical scenario of not having a deal and therefore having to find other routes to manage down the risks that the Chair was talking about.

Yvette Cooper: Thank you; that is very welcome.

- Q13 **Chair:** I apologise, Ms Cooper, but we are going to have to pivot for a moment, because I am aware that Mr Timms has other business that he needs to be at and we did agree that we would try to cover some of the subject matter around English language testing. Apologies—normally, we would let it flow, but if you hold your thought, Ms Cooper, and Mr Grant, we will come back to you.

We will go back to the issue of the EU border in a moment, but I just wanted to go to you, Mr Rycroft, on the English language test issue. Can



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you give us an outline of what further action has been taken on test fraud since the scandal that involved a lot of people being very unjustly treated? Then I will throw straight to Mr Timms.

Matthew Rycroft: This was an issue that came to light as a result of a “Panorama” programme. It was clear that there had been a very significant systemic fraud that was allowing non-genuine students to pretend to be genuine students with the right level of English language in order to apply for a student visa under what was then the student visa route. That fraud was uncovered, and my predecessors in the Home Office and previous Home Office Ministers clamped down on that fraud and responded to it in a series of ways.

First of all, the student visa route was changed, so it looks quite different now than it did then. Secondly, those organisations that were involved in that fraud had their licences suspended. Thirdly, in terms of the individuals—because clearly people were caught up in this—the Home Office at the time divided up those individuals into those who definitely were involved in fraud, whose certificates were deemed invalid, and others for whom there was a question mark over their certificates. That group, where there was a question mark, were asked, if they wanted to, to come back for a resit, and if they passed the test genuinely, they got their English language requirement and got the visa, if that—

Chair: Well, that’s the history; this was about what you were going to do next, but I’ll bring in Mr Timms now to push the point.

Q14 **Stephen Timms:** Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to be here, and I thank the permanent secretary for addressing this. The problem we have is that we now know that lots of those who ETS said definitely cheated did not cheat. They convinced an appeal court, for example, that they did not cheat. I am continuing to hear from lots of students who were falsely accused of cheating in these tests whose lives have been ruined as a result. Mental health problems are rife, for example. Thousands of people are still in limbo six years on.

I just want to read a sentence from the NAO Report from last May about this. It said at paragraph 19 that “the Department’s course of action...carried with it the possibility that a proportion of those affected might have been branded as cheats, lost their course fees, and been removed from the UK without being guilty of cheating or adequate opportunity to clear their names.”

The question I want to put to the permanent secretary is whether he agrees with the point made by the then Comptroller and Auditor General on the day that that NAO Report was published, which was this: “When the Home Office acted vigorously to exclude individuals and shut down colleges involved in the English language test cheating scandal, we think they should have taken an equally vigorous approach to protecting those who did not cheat but who were still caught up in the process, however small a proportion they might be. This did not happen.” I wonder, permanent secretary, whether you agree with that point from the NAO.



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Matthew Rycroft: Of course I agree with that point from the NAO—my default setting is to agree with points from the NAO. They provide extremely valuable advice on this issue and on others.

Q15 **Chair:** Okay. What are you doing about it, Mr Rycroft?

Matthew Rycroft: As I said, we have totally changed the student visa system since then. We have sought to get the balance right between cracking down on what was—as the NAO Report that Mr Timms just referred to said—very significant evidence of systemic fraud and providing recourse through the courts for those who want to take it, and through a reset of their exam for those who have a questionable certificate. We have made clear to the caseworkers involved from that point on that a person having a questionable certificate in the past is not a mandatory reason to have their language certificate blocked.

Q16 **Stephen Timms:** You have accepted the NAO point that those who were innocent were not protected. The former Home Secretary told Parliament last year—I am quoting his written statement from 23 July—that the Department was looking at “whether there is a need for those who feel they have been wronged to be able to ask for their case to be reviewed.” What has been done since then about that consideration?

Matthew Rycroft: Home Office Ministers decided not to set up a set of reviews like that, but, as I said, there was a legal route open to anyone in that category, and some of them have taken it. I think it is fair to say that the courts have upheld the view of the Home Office at the time that this was a significant fraud and it needed to be clamped down on.

Q17 **Stephen Timms:** My information is that virtually all the appeals being heard at the moment are being found in favour of the appellant. There are two things this scandal has in common with Windrush. One is the extreme hardship inflicted on completely innocent people and the Department’s apparent indifference to that hardship. Secondly, there is an unwillingness or inability to learn lessons when problems emerge with numerous individual cases, as certainly has happened here.

I very much welcome the personal commitment you’ve made to implement the lessons learned from Windrush. How will you apply those lessons in the case of these wholly innocent students falsely accused of cheating, whose lives have been ruined as a result?

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, my heart goes out to anyone who has been caught up either in this issue as a genuine innocent applicant to the student visa scheme or caught up in the Windrush scandal—I am sure we will come on to that in more detail. You are right that there are some parallels between the two issues, including, as you say, the absolute need for the Home Office to be a continually learning and improving organisation that genuinely puts the people we are here to serve at the heart of our decision-making, whether that is in policy terms or in setting up a new operation or in dealing, day in, day out, as our brilliant caseworkers do, with those applicants to the schemes that we are talking about.



However, it is also right to say that there is a difference of scale in the two cases.

Q18 Stephen Timms: Visas have been taken away from well over 30,000 students. The language testing scandal is big scale. I think it is accepted that a large number of innocent students were falsely accused here. You are saying the only thing they can do is spend thousands of pounds to pursue an appeal, to eventually and hopefully get the right result, which almost all of them who get that far are now doing. In light of the Windrush lessons, surely the Home Office should be learning from this and putting in place some arrangement so that people do not have to go one by one through a lengthy, costly legal process—costly for them and very costly for the taxpayer as well.

Matthew Rycroft: I broadly agree with that, Mr Timms. One of the other things I want to say is that, as a result of recent case law, the Home Office now needs to provide an explanation whenever there is any sense that any individual is accused of deception. That is a change as a result of the work of you and others on this issue, which I hope is an example of the Home Office learning lessons.

I do also want to keep things in proportion. Absolutely, this was a very significant issue for those involved, but it is not anywhere like the same sort of scale as Windrush. On the Windrush issue, people who had a right to be in the UK—

Q19 Chair: We know what the Windrush issue was. You are saying that it is not on the same scale.

Matthew Rycroft: This is not the same. This is about individuals seeking a temporary route to come in as a student. That particular route was not open to them because they were caught up in this, and they were entitled, if they had a questionable certificate, to do a resit.

Q20 Stephen Timms: The numbers of people involved are comparable. Surely there should be some route to allow innocent people to clear their names without having to spend thousands, and years, going through a court process. That is what the former Home Secretary envisaged.

Matthew Rycroft: And there is. As I say, someone with a questionable certificate can just do a resit, under the new system, with new organisations, to get their—

Q21 Stephen Timms: No, they can't. If only that option was available, this problem would have been resolved years ago. If you are saying that they can—

Matthew Rycroft: I think it was available if you had a questionable certificate. For people with an invalid certificate, that is where there is a very significant body of evidence that they were non—

Q22 Stephen Timms: Many of them are winning their appeals. They are convincing an appeal court that they did not cheat. There should be some route to allow them to clear their names. They are innocent people.



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Matthew Rycroft: They are going about the route that was set up at the time, which was for them to pursue—

Q23 **Chair:** But, Mr Rycroft, that route is taking years, costing thousands of pounds and putting a stain on their character. Some of these people have been unable to return to where they have come from with their head held high—in fact, unable to return because of the shame, especially where communities have clubbed together to fund their entry into the UK. The way you are talking, you are very defensive about this. That has been the Home Office's attitude all along. Big mistakes were made. Can you give me, Mr Timms and the Committee any reassurance that you are really listening to the problems and acknowledge the pain that has been caused to these people?

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely. Let me repeat what I said earlier: my heart goes out to people who are innocent who were caught up in this. I just want the Committee to remember that, at the time when this came out, the body of opinion—certainly the position of Home Office Ministers at the time, and I think probably the overall body of opinion in Parliament—was that this was a scandal, in terms of systemic fraud that had been allowed to undercut a very important visa route in terms of students coming in.

Partly in order to protect genuine students of the future, there have been a lot of changes to that route since. We are absolutely continually learning the lessons, but I just want to make the record clear that many of those lessons have already been learned and already embedded in the new student visa system.

Q24 **Stephen Timms:** I see no sign of the lesson having been learned in this case. There is a large number of students here whose lives are completely in limbo because of a false accusation of cheating, and there is no way for them to get out of this other than a lengthy, expensive and very difficult legal process. The Home Office should give innocent people the opportunity to clear their names.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely. I totally agree with that, and I do think that that route is open to them. Individuals have always had the right to challenge through appeal or through judicial review, and if there are other lessons that we can learn from this to pursue in the future then we will; but we must also remember that if someone had an invalid certificate it was because there was a very heavy body of evidence that they were non-genuine and that they were not caught up in it—they were part of it. The decisions at the time were that we needed, as a Department and as a system, to clamp down on that abuse.

Stephen Timms: Perhaps, Chair, I might write to Mr Rycroft with some suggestions about how the lessons could be learned in this case.

Q25 **Chair:** I think we can probably collaborate on that, Mr Timms, because this Committee obviously has an interest. I would highlight to you, Mr Rycroft, that since 2014, 8% of appeals by people with invalid results have won their cases. That is over 2,500 people, but they had to pay a lot of money and it took a lot of time. It is six years since 2014. That may



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be justice, but it is justice delayed and has created havoc in their lives. This is a UK that is going to be out of Europe—or is out of Europe—and wants to present itself positively to the world. Do you consider that a good advert for UK plc and our education system?

Matthew Rycroft: I strongly agree on the need for the Home Office to continue to learn lessons, both from this issue and from others, which I am sure we are going to come on to talking about later. I also strongly agree that it is crucial that our country, at this important time in our history, remains open to attract the best and brightest from around the world to come and study at our world-class universities. That is what the updated student route does, partly drawing on the lessons that the NAO and Mr Timms's work have done to respond to the scandal. I do also want just to put things into perspective. As I said, anyone with a questionable result was given the chance to resit and attend an interview under the new system before there was any action taken against them, and only about a quarter of them chose to do that.

Chair: Okay, we will leave that there, but we will pursue this further. I am now going to ask Peter Grant to go back to the issues around European preparation. I thank Mr Timms for joining us today.

Q26 **Peter Grant:** Mr Rycroft, it was very noticeable that earlier on, the Chair asked you three times what are the risks to the British public if we don't get an agreement, particularly around the border and immigration, which is your responsibility, and three times you declined to answer that question. I am not going to ask the same question again, but could you explain to the Committee why you are not willing to answer the question that she was asking?

Matthew Rycroft: I am willing to answer any questions from any members of this Committee at any time, Mr Grant, and on this question the answer is that there is an ongoing negotiation and the outcome of that negotiation will determine, if you like, the answer to that question. As you will know, and as the Chair has said, there are very significant risks at all times to the safety and security of this country, and how we respond to those risks will crucially depend on which of those scenarios we are in. Rest assured that we will respond to the best of our ability and make the best of whatever instruments are available, depending on which scenario that is.

Q27 **Peter Grant:** If you asked a senior member of your management team to do a risk assessment of, for example, the potential risks to welfare of reopening the office after covid and their reply was, "There are significant risks and they will depend on how we decide to do it, what happens afterwards," would you accept that as an adequate risk assessment on which to base your decision as to whether or not it was safe to let people back into the office?

Matthew Rycroft: No, but that would be because it was a discussion in a private room that wasn't public and therefore possible to be played into a negotiation. I don't think there is an exact parallel there. The negotiation is ongoing.



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Q28 **Peter Grant:** Okay, so will you then write in private—not for publication—to the Chair to answer the question you felt unable to answer in a public forum?

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely; of course.

Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Rycroft. We look forward to receiving that detail. Perhaps we can agree that we could share it, of course, with the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee as well. That would make some sense, I think.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely.

Chair: I am now going to turn to the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, Yvette Cooper MP. Over to you, Yvette.

Q29 **Yvette Cooper:** I just want to ask about the border preparations. I know you have recruited over 1,000 additional Border Force staff. Is that now sufficient, whatever the outcome, including if there is no agreement?

Matthew Rycroft: We have not fully recruited all of the people, but there is a system and a process, which is on track to recruit them. I think an additional 450 are needed before the end of the transition period, and then there is another number of that sort of order of magnitude between 1 January and, I think, the first quarter of 2021; but yes, once all of those people are recruited and the training, which I mentioned earlier, is complete, then that is what we are assessing, at the moment, we will need under all of those scenarios.

Q30 **Yvette Cooper:** Just to clarify, the number of additional staff you still need to recruit that you don't have in place today in September is how many?

Matthew Rycroft: I think it is 450, but Charu Gorasia might have the facts at her fingertips.

Charu Gorasia: As you said, rightly, we have already recruited 900 last year for Border Force. This year, for the end of the transition period, we needed 670 extra Border Force officers. As of 4 September, 340 are already in post and 330 are in the pipeline; we are continuing to recruit. Beyond that, for the phased border control by July 2021, we need to recruit more, but we have plans in place for all that recruitment.

Q31 **Yvette Cooper:** When do you expect the 330 to be in post by?

Charu Gorasia: Before the end of the transition period.

Q32 **Yvette Cooper:** When you were doing the preparations for no deal in 2019, you were also anticipating having another 350 civil servants redeployed from other duties in the event of no deal. If we end up on WTO terms, would you expect similarly to transfer hundreds of civil servants from other activities to support Border Force, or do the numbers you announced there include the WTO situation?



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Charu Gorasia: We always have contingency planning for any surge capacity needed for Border Force. As you rightly pointed out, in the past we had trained immigration enforcement staff, for example, being redeployed in border activity. You will also recall that, as part of the 900 we recruited last year, there was a readiness taskforce, which was ready to be deployed to different types of roles within Border Force. On top of that, we also use HMRC surge capacity, which we have used in the past. There are various levels of contingency plans.

Q33 **Yvette Cooper:** That is contingency planning if suddenly something unexpected happens. My question is this: in the WTO situation, will you have to use those additional contingency staff? Does the WTO main scenario plan include bringing in hundreds of additional staff beyond the ones you are talking about recruiting?

Charu Gorasia: I don't have specific details to hand on the WTO issue that you are asking about. We can write to the Committee on the WTO point in particular.

Q34 **Yvette Cooper:** That would be helpful, because given the WTO lapse—the scenario that the Government have been talking about—I would expect you to have a clear sense of what the plans are in that scenario and, if you need additional staff, where they will come from.

Charu Gorasia: As I said, we have two or three different layers of contingency plans, but can I write to you specifically about the WTO scenario?

Yvette Cooper: Thank you. If you could write to the PAC and the Home Affairs Committee, that would be very welcome. Could you also set out the additional cost of all the additional staff who will be doing any of those border and customs activities as a result of the different agreements that are expected? That would be very helpful.

Chair: I am just going to turn to Mr Peter Grant, and then we will move on. Mr Grant, I think you wanted to come back on a point that was previously raised.

Q35 **Peter Grant:** Mr Rycroft, I want to come back to your comments on the English language testing problem. You have said repeatedly that there was a substantial body of evidence that these individuals had cheated. Mr Timms pointed out to you that in far too many cases, that substantial body of evidence was wrong. Would it be fair to say that in the very understandable anxiety to deal with the major organised crime of cheating in those exams, the Home Office were not adequately aware of the risk of falsely accusing innocent people and doing severe damage to their lives?

Matthew Rycroft: That is a very good question, Mr Grant, and it is one that I have asked myself, coming relatively newly into the Department. Of course, this happened many years ago—2014, I think it was—and it is quite hard for those of us who are around now to really understand the atmosphere at the time. I try to explain that by saying that, at the time,



the overriding issue was to respond to the fraud that the “Panorama” programme uncovered and address the weaknesses in the system that allowed it to happen. In the light of that experience, coupled, as Mr Timms was suggesting, with the Windrush experience, the Home Office is increasingly aware of the need to put people first, understand it from their point of view and make sure that if they are, if you like, genuinely innocent and caught up in something, we are providing them with alternative ways—it would be, in that case, putting in an application for a student visa, or, in the case of Windrush, ensuring that their rights are properly upheld and that compensation is received. I think that is the direction that the Home Office has been going in, and it is fair to say we have a good deal further to go, but we are determined to do that.

- Q36 **Peter Grant:** There has obviously been some comparison made with the Windrush scandal. While I agree that in many cases it was not as brutal as people being thrown out of the only country they had ever known, Windrush happened because the Home Office was too quick to believe that people were guilty when they were not. I suggest that part of the problem with English language testing is that the Home Office response was being too quick to decide that someone was guilty of something when they were not. In fact, the recent NAO Report on immigration enforcement, which the Committee is considering now, indicates an understandable emphasis on getting illegal immigrants out of the country, but not enough emphasis from the Home Office on protecting the legitimate interests of people who are here legally. Without necessarily speaking about what things are like just now, is it fair to say that all those things indicate that, in the recent past, while the Home Office was perhaps not quite institutionally racist, it was institutionally biased against the interests of legitimate immigrants in this country?

Matthew Rycroft: You are going to the heart of a whole range of Home Office operations where it is essential both to prevent abuse and risk to our country and, at the same time, to allow the vast majority of law-abiding—innocent—people to go about their business. Getting that balance right is extremely difficult to do.

Before we all rush to the conclusion that the Home Office of five years ago made very significant mistakes that were obviously foreseeable, the report that the independent chief inspector undertook at the time did say that the operation had been “handled well”. So, absolutely there are lessons to be learned, and we are, and we have already. And if there are further lessons to learn, we will.

The Windrush scandal, which we are still absolutely—

- Q37 **Chair:** We will come on to Windrush in a moment. I think we have got to be a bit careful. Tackling a big mistake and doing it well is not necessarily an endorsement of positive activity, but let us leave that there for the moment.

I want to move on to the Windrush issue. You may recall that this Committee recommended that the non-Caribbean Commonwealth citizens



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who could be caught up in the same issue were contacted proactively by the Home Office. You refused to accept that recommendation. But since Wendy Williams's report also made that recommendation, you have, I understand, moved to making proactive contact with those Commonwealth citizens. Could you tell us how that is going and what the timeframe is? Yvette Cooper will then come in on other points.

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, as you have done, it is important to make it clear that the Windrush scheme and the Windrush Compensation Scheme both apply to everyone of all nationalities caught up in that scandal. As a result of the work of this Committee and others, we have absolutely decided to reach out to all those other communities as well. When it was first looked at, it was very much the Windrush generation from a Caribbean background who were the primary priority, and that is where the initial efforts went in order to right the wrongs of the past. I suspect that is the reason why, previously, the Home Office did not accept the recommendation you just referred to. But, as you say, since Wendy Williams's report and her recommendation, we have—

Q38 **Chair:** I know you are relatively new in post, Mr Rycroft, but I represent a constituency where I have probably got more non-Caribbean Commonwealth citizens affected. We did not just pluck that out of nowhere. This was an issue that affected all Commonwealth citizens, but there was a refusal by the Home Office to recognise that. I am glad that you recognise it now. How is it going in terms of contacting those non-Caribbean Commonwealth citizens?

Matthew Rycroft: Well, I would say it is early days, but it is going well. We are doing a huge amount of outreach activity—I hope that people in your constituency have noticed some of that. We have been campaigning involving advertising across all different sorts of channels—community radio, community press—and lots of grassroots activity, partnerships with specialists in different parts—

Q39 **Chair:** How many people have applied for the scheme who are non-Caribbean Commonwealth citizens?

Matthew Rycroft: Ooh—

Chair: Do you have a ballpark figure? You can write to us, but if you have a ballpark figure now that would be helpful.

Matthew Rycroft: I suspect that number will grow as this activity grows in the future.

Q40 **Chair:** You have told us what activity is taking place. To be clear, when did you start doing that?

Matthew Rycroft: I had better write to you about that as well. Sorry; I don't have that.

Chair: Could you write to us? Thank you.

Q41 **Yvette Cooper:** Can you confirm that so far you have made £1 million in payments to 143 people and offered a further £800,000? Is there an



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update on that or are those the latest figures?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, there is an update on that. One second, while I am looking for the precise figures. As we talked to both Committees about before, it is fair to say that the scheme was quite slow to get off the ground, because it is so complex. I was sure that things would speed up as the caseworkers had more and more precedent to follow. One example of that is that the first £1 million offered took 14 months, but the second £1 million offered took less than two months. We have now offered over £2 million and we have paid—I am sorry, I still cannot find the right statistics.

Q42 **Yvette Cooper:** And the £2 million is to how many people?

Matthew Rycroft: Does one of my colleagues have the statistics in front of them?

Yvette Cooper: The £1 million was to 143 people, so I am interested in the £2 million. Was that to another 150 people?

Matthew Rycroft: Sorry; I think I will have to write to you about that, Chair.

Yvette Cooper: I am asking this, and I think it is relevant, because when we look at the previous figures, with 143 people, that was £1 million payment. At that time that was 10% of claimants having some sort of payment. On that basis, you might be expecting total payments to be between £10 million and £20 million, which is considerably less than the £200 million that the previous Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, said was his baseline planning at that time. So I am interested to know: what is your current assessment of the total compensation that you are likely to pay out, based on the claims that you have paid out so far?

Matthew Rycroft: That is a question that I can answer. Our current updated assessment of that total number is in a range between £90 million and £250 million. That is based on 11,500 eligible claims. That is an updated number that has changed and reduced slightly from the initial impact assessment published in April 2019, which suggested the range was going to be £120 million to £310 million, based on 15,000 eligible claims. That is larger than the number that you quoted.

Q43 **Yvette Cooper:** How do you fit that with those early figures? On the current course, and with the payments that you have been making, it looks as though you are on track to spend only £10 million to £20 million.

Matthew Rycroft: I do not recognise that calculation.

Yvette Cooper: All I am simply saying is that, at that point, 143 people were 10% of the claimants, who had been paid £1 million. If 10% of the claimants have been paid £1 million, then you would expect that 100% of payments would be, at the baseline minimum, £10 million. Let's assume that you have some partial payments, so maybe we are talking about £20 million instead. That looks like a different order of magnitude. That is why I am interested in whether something else is happening here, behind the



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figures, that we are not understanding.

Matthew Rycroft: The thing that is happening behind the figures is that, on your figures, of the 90% that have not yet had an answer, not all of those answers are going to be zero. We are going to make as many of the answers not zero as possible.

Q44 **Yvette Cooper:** I would not expect them to be zero; my calculation was on the basis that they would be in the same proportion to those that you have already awarded.

Matthew Rycroft: We look at these numbers very regularly. The numbers I just quoted are much more generous than the calculation that you have identified, and rightly so. If there are further calculations that would back up those numbers, I would be happy to write to you.

Q45 **Yvette Cooper:** There are several possible explanations. The first possible explanation is that you have only given partial payments to the people who you are saying you have made payments to, so although people have had something, the overwhelming majority of people are still waiting for their full compensation. Another possible explanation is that there is a real gap between those who are doing the macro-level assessments and those who are making the awards on the ground, who in practice are giving much lower awards than anyone had expected. I am just trying to get to the bottom of which it is. Either of those is obviously a problem, but it is helpful to understand which problem we are dealing with.

Matthew Rycroft: First of all, I stand by the bigger numbers and the generosity of the scheme. Secondly, everyone involved—whether they are looking at it from a macro perspective, like myself, or a micro perspective, like an individual caseworker working with an individual person—is doing so from the perspective of righting the wrongs of the past, and therefore being as generous as the evidence allows. They are working with the applicants to extract every bit of compensation to which they are entitled, which is partly why it takes so long. Claims are very varied; there is not a single—

Q46 **Yvette Cooper:** Sure. What is the average payment that is being made?

Matthew Rycroft: The average payment is—sorry, I cannot find that number. I have the number for how long it is taking. I will write to you.

Q47 **Yvette Cooper:** If somebody has that in the course of the evidence session and is able to add that, that would be really helpful.

Turning to the detail of the way the system is working and the level of evidence being provided, you said in the letter you wrote to me that “the language used to describe the standard of proof required for these categories should be softened so it is clear to individuals that we are not expecting them to meet the criminal standard of proof.” That is welcome, but I am not clear whether you are simply changing the language that you are presenting to people who are Windrush victims, or whether you are actually changing the standard of proof that the Home Office is using.



Matthew Rycroft: The latter.

- Q48 **Yvette Cooper:** Thank you; that is very helpful. One individual case, though, seems to suggest that the problem is not the burden of proof, but the way in which the system is working. That is the case of Anthony Williams, which we have raised with you several times. He lost his job in 2013; he then started a new job, but the Home Office said to his employer that he did not have status to be able to work, so he lost that job having done less than four weeks' work. The Home Office accepts he lost his job and that he lost his job because of the Windrush scandal; however, he does not have payslips. As a result, even though he was then unable to work for five years, the compensation system only awards him lost compensation for one year. Why is that?

Matthew Rycroft: My heart goes out to him, and to everyone else caught up in this scandal. What has happened to him and to them is absolutely tragic, and all of us here, from the Home Secretary down, are determined to put right the wrongs that he and others have suffered.

The compensation scheme is an important part of that, as you imply. The employment aspects are one of the 13 headings under which compensation can be claimed. We clearly have to require some sort of evidence, because I am accountable for all of the money that comes out of this Department—it is taxpayers' money—but I hope that you and he will eventually see that we are on his side, seeking to be as generous as possible and to be reasonable in the evidence we are requiring. I do not pretend that we have got that balance right every single time; we are learning as we go. This continues to be a relatively early scheme that is very complex, and we are seeking things that can be simplified and be more generous.

- Q49 **Yvette Cooper:** He very much does not feel that, and it is understandable why: it was the Home Office decision that stopped him working for five years. Of course, everyone understands that you have to make an assessment of what level of earnings to assume, and you have to have safeguards in place to do that if he does not have the payslips. However, he does have the proof that he lost his job—that he would have been working, but lost his job because of the Home Office—and you have accepted that proof. He was then, because of the Home Office, unable to work for five years. He was unable to claim benefits for five years because of his status, because of the decision of the Home Office. But the Home Office is asking for proof of something that does not exist by asking him for effectively five years' worth of proof of payslips, which of course he does not have because he could not work for five years. I understand that you make a salary assessment, but I do not understand why you limit it to one year rather than five years when clearly, because of the Windrush scandal, he was prevented from working for five years.

Matthew Rycroft: It is an absolutely tragic case. We are determined to work with him, and everyone else who applies to the scheme, to get to the most generous compensation payment that the facts allow. We clearly have to have some form of evidence. As a result of this conversation, I will



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have a look, just to check again, one more time, to see whether we are asking for too much evidence in the circumstances, but you will understand that we obviously need some form of evidence, but—

- Q50 **Yvette Cooper:** You have had evidence and you have accepted it. The Home Office, I think, has clearly accepted the evidence that he had a job and he lost that job because of the Windrush scandal, because the Home Office said to his employer, “No, he is not eligible to work in this country.” All that is accepted by the Home Office and of course it remains a fact that, had he been trying to work, he would have been working illegally. He was unable to work for those five years because of the Home Office’s decision. If you could look at the broader principle, as well as looking at that individual case, around the way in which decisions are being made about whether somebody is being limited to only one year’s compensation rather than the whole period in which the Home Office meant they were able to work.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely. I very much agree with the principle. We are seeking, as I say, to be as generous as possible on the basis of the facts as far as we can establish them. We are absolutely not asking for five years of payslips; we are asking to know what the pay was at the time that that employment ended. We will continue to work very closely with him and his representatives on this particular case.

- Q51 **Yvette Cooper:** A final quick question: when would you expect half of the cases to be paid?

Matthew Rycroft: I do not think I want to give a precise date for that, because I do not want people to feel as though there is some sort of cut-off point or there is some sort of rush—

- Q52 **Yvette Cooper:** That is why I am not asking you about the final date. I understand, and I would not ask you for a final point, because that will depend on cases coming in, but given the cases that you have at the moment, when would you expect half of those to have been resolved?

Matthew Rycroft: Of the existing cases?

Yvette Cooper: Yes. At what point would we expect it to go from the just over 10% that we seem to have at the moment to 50% of people actually receiving payments? Given the age of many of the Windrush victims, many of those who have been hit so hard, the time is a real concern.

Matthew Rycroft: I will write to you with a specific date to answer that specific question, which, sorry, I misunderstood the first time round. Rest assured that we totally get the speed issue. The Home Secretary has directed that we must speed up the scheme, and we are speeding up the scheme. We have extra people on it—more than 100 staff are working on it full time now, including 22 new staff who came in last month and the month before, and further staff joining next month.

This is not a one-size-fits-all scheme. There are 13 different headings that people can claim against. We want to work with each and every one of them to get the right answers. I absolutely appreciate that we need to do



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that as quickly as possible, including, partly, because some of them are getting on in age.

Yvette Cooper: Thank you.

Q53 **Chair:** The Home Secretary said to the House on 23 June that 35 interim payments had been made. She was also clear in her tone that there was a concern about the pace. How many interim payments have been paid to date?

Matthew Rycroft: I can write to you with that figure. I do not have it immediately to hand, but as I said earlier, the speed of payments is accelerating as the caseworkers—

Q54 **Chair:** To be clear, interim payments are a way of speeding it up, at least in the short term, and giving people some cash when clearly they are eligible for something. Reflecting what the Home Secretary said to the House—that she would review the scheme if necessary, if I recall—to speed it up, you are putting people in, but are you looking at the acceleration of interim payments where clearly someone has a claim but you have to go through a lot more detail to pin down the final number?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, absolutely. In fact, all along there has been a way of supporting vulnerable people if they have needed payments, but you are right that one way to speed things up is through interim payments. We are doing more of that and I can write to you with the precise amount more that we are doing.

Q55 **Chair:** As Ms Cooper has highlighted, this generation is not young mostly, and therefore, while they may not consider themselves to be vulnerable, they might as well enjoy the money and try to get some restitution while they can enjoy that. Would you write to us with the full details on the interim payments—how much and how many individuals have been affected? Clearly, with the work you are doing on the wider Commonwealth, there may well be more people coming into that group who will need interim payments in order to get some benefit from the compensation.

My final question is on housing. When we have talked to the Home Office before on this and challenged you, the answer to our recommendation on housing was that it was a matter for a local authority to provide another council tenancy. That rang hollow to any MP with a caseload, who will know that it is very difficult to get a council property. Where do you put them in the queue of other very deserving cases, of people who are homeless or living in overcrowded situations and so on?

Is the Home Office considering any lump sum support to provide restitution on housing, particularly where there is a tenancy? Have you considered, for example, buying a property off the open market, gifting to the local authority concerned and making that into a tenancy, so that you have restitution on an even basis to what somebody lost?



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Matthew Rycroft: On the housing aspect, we are working closely with our colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. We are exploring all sorts of options.

Q56 **Chair:** When you say that you are working closely with them and exploring options, can you give us some precise examples of what you are exploring? Take as an example someone who had a permanent council tenancy, which is a very valuable tenancy, but lost it because of their legal status, and they were deported or whatever, so they no longer have that permanent home. What are you doing for those individuals? You are talking to the Department, but what practical things are you doing?

Matthew Rycroft: It might be better for me to write with the detail, but we have a specific team, which is there purely to support the most vulnerable people in this category.

Q57 **Chair:** We might be speaking at cross purposes. You are talking to the Government Department in Whitehall that is responsible for housing, but it does not allocate tenancies. All we seem to have had back from your Department is that this, through MHCLG, will somehow fall to the local authority concerned. Local authorities do not have empty properties to gift to somebody in this circumstance. They have other people with equal demands on that housing. There needs to be some better fix, surely, to ensure that people are not waiting in the housing queue, which is many years long.

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely, Chair. I totally understand where you are going with this line of questioning. I just want to acknowledge the fact that the Home Office cannot magic out of thin air a solution to an issue that is not under our control. We need to work, as I mentioned, with MHCLG, and we both need to work with each relevant local authority, and we are. It is up to each local authority to manage those—

Q58 **Chair:** Okay, let me cut to the chase. Will you fund a local authority that has to provide somebody who is not one of their residents and has been hit by this? There are not an awful lot of people who have this housing situation. The calculation you made on compensation is higher than what you are getting—the demand is lower than you expected. I will not go through the figures, but we know the figures from 2019 that you did your analysis on, going up to £310 million, potentially. So, you have money.

Are you considering at all, in any of your discussions, even if it is not yet finalised, that you might put cash into the pocket of a local authority to buy the capital asset and turn it into a council property? That would be one quick way of doing it.

Matthew Rycroft: Thank you for the suggestion, Chair. Let me write to you with a specific answer to that question. That is an example of the sort of thing that we are seeking to do, in order to speed up and make even more generous a scheme.

Q59 **Chair:** Okay, that is something that keeps bouncing back and forth, but in the middle is in an individual who was made homeless through no fault of



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their own. Restitution in that case is taking a long time. There is an assumption in Whitehall that it is easy to solve at a local level, but—I repeat the point that we made in our recommendation—it is not. I am sure Ms Cooper’s Committee and I will continue to explore this. I think the Home Affairs Committee will have the Secretary of State before them in a little while. Perhaps we can have an answer by then. Thank you very much for answering our questions on that point.

We now want to move to the issue of the emergency services network. Ms Davinson, I think this your area, but I want to go to Mr Rycroft first. Mr Rycroft, I think this is the tenth time we have questioned your Department on this issue. I hate to be in a position where we say that everything that we predicted would go wrong has gone wrong, but that is pretty much where we are at.

You are new in the job, having started in March. What is your personal view of how this is going? How will you finally resolve this expensive but necessary system that will provide—should provide—proper support to our emergency services, while bearing in mind the huge current cost to the taxpayer? Will you get it resolved on your watch?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes.

Q60 **Chair:** So what are you doing right now to make sure that you are bringing in the support of all the emergency services and getting their buy-in to this programme? That has been one of the big problems, hasn’t it? They do not believe that this will be delivered. What are you doing? Then we will hear from Ms Davinson on some of the detail.

Matthew Rycroft: The first thing to say is that, as I said in my previous appearance before this Committee, we should acknowledge that this has been a troubled programme in the past. It has gone on for a very long time already. It is over time and, indeed, over budget, but it has turned a corner; it has had a reset. Since then, it has adopted a different approach of genuine engagement with the users, which is extremely welcome. The reason that I said yes to the previous question so clearly is that there is no alternative; or rather, any alternative would be worse than sticking with this programme and ensuring that the emergency services have the sort of network and the sort of equipment that they need.

As your second question implied, the users themselves are best placed to help answer the detailed questions about precisely what this should look like and precisely how it should work. We are now getting into the phase of the programme where there is very significant activity. We have had the Direct 1 handsets rolled out—I have one here. If any of you would like to have a lesson in how it works—the push-to-talk button and all the rest of it—you would be extremely welcome. We are engaging with some forces around the country on Direct 2, which is being rolled out now. In subsequent quarters of the programme, different aspects of the technology will be rolled out.

Q61 **Chair:** How many of those handsets are out in the hands of our emergency workers?



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Matthew Rycroft: Joanna might be best placed to answer that, but there are parts of the Home Office immigration enforcement that are using it, and there are parts of the emergency—

Q62 **Chair:** How many? It was a very low number, I think, when you appeared in front of us last time.

Joanna Davinson: We have 1,000 Direct 1 devices—the one that Matthew showed you—which is what we rolled out to immigration enforcement. We are now rolling out Direct 2, and I can talk a bit more about what that means in terms of capability. We have 5,000 of those, which we will be distributing out to the emergency services over the course of the next few weeks.

Q63 **Chair:** Just to be clear, from where the programme was originally planned, this is very small-fry stuff. Mr Rycroft, we were expecting to see a business case in 2019. Then it was going to be around now, autumn, but there has been a delay because of covid. Now it will be March 2021. But not having an up-to-date business case must be having an impact on the delivery of the programme. Realistically, it will mean further delays, won't it? We will not get this delivered by the end of 2022 because of these delays. Can you give us a date for when you think it may now be delivered?

Matthew Rycroft: The crucial date is when we can turn off the current Airwave system. Until that moment, we will be paying for two systems at once, and that is where the additional cost comes in. The programme, I and everyone else involved—whether they are brilliant non-executive directors or other people who have been brought in to provide assurance—are all working jointly with the future users to make that date as soon as possible, but not so soon that we are asking any of those users to carry an unacceptable risk. If we just decided that the cut-over was going to happen on the date that you described, we would, I'm afraid, be putting the emergency services in a situation where there was a possibility of that kit—that capability—not working as well as it needs to. We, and crucially they, need to be absolutely sure that this works, and that it works in every aspect as well as the existing system does and, in some aspects, better. We also need to ensure—this gets to your point about a business case—

Q64 **Chair:** We know what the plan is. The point is, when? It's "How long is a piece of string?" We could keep paying for Airwave and still not get to the new system. There are lots of reasons for delay, but I am a bit unclear. We heard that covid-19 has had an impact. We recognise that Government Departments have been dealing with lots of issues, but this is a pretty crucial one. Why has it had such a big impact on revising the business case? Maybe Ms Davinson wants to pick that up.

Matthew Rycroft: Before Joanna comes in, I want to say that covid is one of the reasons, but there are other reasons as well. We have had a reset, and the reset is not just about technology. It is also about mindset, and the mindset reset is to put the users at the heart of this. That does take a little bit longer, but I think it is time well spent in order to get a programme that they can support, and so that's what we are doing.



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In terms of the dates, the absolute latest that we could turn Airwave off is 2025, and what we are seeking to do is to accelerate that date so that we can turn it off by the beginning of 2024. If we could turn it off even sooner than that, then obviously we can, but I don't want to give a date which then doesn't get met.

Q65 Chair: That is quite disheartening, really. I fear that we could possibly predict that we might get closer to 2025 than 2022.

Ms Davinson, it has taken nearly as long to write the business case as it has to complete the whole programme so far. What are you doing now to make sure that this really motors forward? And just to pick up on Mr Rycroft's point about the mindset of buying in the end user, one of the reasons why that has had to become a major part of it is that there was such failure on that in the past, so what practically are you doing to engage with emergency services on the ground so that they really know and can trust that this will deliver for them better than Airwave?

Joanna Davinson: I will answer the first question first, around the business case. There is a draft business case, and that business case has been shared with the programme board and with our senior users. We have a process through the autumn to review that with the Cabinet Office MPRG review team, so we do expect to finalise that business case within the next—by the end of this year. I think March is a longstop date; we are working as hard as we can to pull that forward.

One of the reasons why the business case has taken perhaps longer than any of us would have liked is that the critical—we had, through the reset, a really clear plan as to how we were going to deliver the technology and the technical solution. I can talk a bit more about that in a moment if you like. We are getting a lot more confident around the technical solution. But the piece that was uncertain was working out the deployment, so the operational testing plan with the community—how do we give them the confidence that this will work in all scenarios?—and then the logistics around the deployment planning. We have done a lot of work with the community around that—with each of the emergency services. And as Matthew said, when we do left-to-right planning on that, with contingencies, that is what is taking us out to the end of 2024 and into '25.

We have active conversations going on; there are a number of things that we could do to accelerate that, and we are working that through at the moment with the community, with a view to bringing that, as Matthew said, forward into early '24, which although it is, absolutely, later than the dates we talked about when I was here last—when we spoke the last time, we had always said 2022 was the earliest possible date and it would more likely be '23. We are now looking at moving into '24, but with a plan that has much more detail, confidence and engagement behind it with the user community.

I will now answer the second part of your question: what are we doing with the user community? One of the challenges has been that until we



have got a real working solution, of course there is scepticism in the user community, because they cannot see, touch and feel something. Direct 2, which is the release that we have just made, actually includes most of the core capabilities that ESN requires. It's a working network. It will be a SIM card that delivers priority—the application that enables us to prioritise emergency services' use over the network. And the device is a specialised, ruggedised device; it's a Samsung device. All of that we have now integrated, and we can prove that it works with Direct 2.

Over the course of the next few months, we are working with a number of fire and rescue services and with a number of police services. They will have these devices, and we will be working with them to test this, in the run-up to delivering the core, final release, which is called Prime, roundabout Q2 next year.

Chair: That is quarter 2, for people listening; so from March next year.

Joanna Davinson: The plan of record says April. We are on target for that at the moment, but—

Q66 **Chair:** Can I just be clear? At that point, we are still talking small numbers. You have 1,000 handsets at the moment. What number of handsets will be in the hands of emergency services workers in April of next year?

Joanna Davinson: Five thousand.

Q67 **Chair:** You are working with them, but obviously, while this has been delayed, a lot of forces and emergency services have had to buy their own equipment to replace worn-out Airwave equipment, so they have made capital investment in kit. Understandably, with their budgets squeezed by lots of pressures—covid and others—there is a big issue about how they will manage their money. There has always been an approach whereby they can voluntarily join, but is there any discussion now about money centrally from the Home Office—or, indeed, the other sponsor Departments—to fund this, so that you can make sure that the kit is in the right hands? If I were running the budget for one of these forces—ambulance services or whatever—I would be concerned about money going into buying new kit and then, before that was obsolete, having to buy a second set of equipment; I wouldn't have the budget for it. How are you going to square that circle?

Joanna Davinson: Certainly, some of the planning that we are doing is looking at how we manage that. I absolutely recognise that problem. There are a couple of things to say on that. In terms of Airwave devices, the legacy devices, we are looking at schemes to enable us to pool those, share those, to try to minimise the amount of additional investment that individual forces have to make in replacing their old—

Q68 **Chair:** Can you explain that? Can I just be clear? So if they buy a device to run with Airwave, you are looking at how that could be turned to working with the new system—with ESN?



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Joanna Davinson: Sorry; that wasn't what I meant. We are looking at how to make sure that we can share Airwave devices across the system more effectively, so that people don't have to buy any more than is necessary and we don't have too much surplus capacity on Airwave devices across the network. In terms of the new devices—

Q69 **Chair:** Sorry, but to be clear, that is the only way the Home Office is trying to mitigate the cost to the services on the ground; is that right?

Joanna Davinson: The other area that we are looking at is in terms of the new ESN devices. We have already put quite a lot of investment into the research and development to develop the device. We need to continue to talk with the funding bodies around what is the best way to, essentially, manage the procurement of those devices across the system. We have not actually reached a final decision on that. At the moment, the assumption is that individual forces will buy what they need. They will need to define what their demand is. In the police example, it all comes out of the overall police settlement, whether it is spent by the Home Office or spent by police—

Q70 **Chair:** That's fine; we know that. So are you going to increase the police settlement—that is obviously the Home Office bit of the budget—in order to allow, enable, police forces to use this?

Joanna Davinson: We are going through the spending review process at the moment and we are in active discussion about the amount of money that we should be investing in this, both centrally and out to individual forces.

Q71 **Chair:** Does that mean you are putting in a bid for a little bit extra to cover the cost of this, over and above what would normally be in the settlement? We recognise that the spending review is not entirely in your hands, but is that part of the bid that you are putting in to the Treasury?

Joanna Davinson: In terms of what we are sharing with the Treasury, we are sharing with the Treasury the full cost of ESN, including what will flow centrally and what will flow through individual forces.

Q72 **Chair:** We have had quite a lot of evidence from police and crime commissioners who are very concerned about their budgets. I want to go to Ms Gorasia in a moment, but can you just run through the tech stuff? How is the EE network now? Is that nearly there? Where are we at with it? Is it working?

Joanna Davinson: The EE network is there and working. In fact, their mast-build programme is also nearing completion. All the physical builds will be there, certainly by the end of the year—we are actually targeting the end of October—and getting activated—

Q73 **Chair:** What about ground-to-air?

Joanna Davinson: Air-to-ground—that is now under contract, and we have done the first test run of the first air-to-ground mast. That has all



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worked fine. And we have Cobham on board to deliver the air-to-ground devices. Again, that's all—

Q74 **Chair:** What about the London underground?

Joanna Davinson: The London underground—there is a lot more work to make sure we get in place the core infrastructure: the leaky feeder and the fibre cables. We have actually piloted it—or London Underground have piloted it—between Canary Wharf and Westminster. That got cancelled—or paused—during covid, but it has now restarted, so we proved it on that section of the Jubilee line. TfL is about to announce the concessionaire who will complete the build, both for their core network but also the ESN requirements.

Q75 **Chair:** What is the timescale for delivery of that? You are saying it is in testing, basically, but it is not—what is the timescale for delivery for the London Underground coverage?

Joanna Davinson: We do have a—*[Inaudible.]*

Q76 **Chair:** We might come back to you on that point. I am also keen to know what is happening with the Glasgow Metro and the Newcastle Metro. The Newcastle one has only a couple of stops underground, but still it would be helpful to know, because a serious attack could happen anywhere and if there is a gap it is very important that we understand that.

On the other technology, you say you have 1,000 Samsung headsets and you will have 5,000 by April, out there. From what you said, that is all going smoothly, is it? No problems there—or are there?

Joanna Davinson: In terms of designing and building the handset, yes, it is a really good product. It is testing really well. There are some commercial discussions going on with Samsung because the contract we have with them depends on volume. They get paid against the volume of handsets that are out there and of course that is taking longer than the original plan, which is putting some pressure on them in terms of investing the necessary research and development funds to build the device. So far we have worked that through with them.

Q77 **Chair:** Is there flexibility within the contract to work that through without having to do any retendering or recontracting?

Joanna Davinson: Yes. We don't need to retender but we do need to make sure that we have set the right incentive, so that we get the right level of attention and investment through—

Chair: So, in simple terms, setting the right incentives is all good language, but does that mean you are paying more money to Samsung because it has gone slower than was originally planned?

Joanna Davinson: No. It is not more in total; but it does mean we are reprofiling, so we are—

Chair: More up front?



Joanna Davinson: We are putting a bit more investment into the R&D than we had originally intended.

Q78 **Chair:** And Kodiak: I am not sure whether we are on version 10 or 11 of Kodiak, but as the programme slows the Kodiak technology is really critical but obviously capability needs to change out there. There is the whole Manchester Arena inquiry, which may throw up some important issues. Is the whole Kodiak development in timelines fitting in with the rest of the delivery of the programme? There is a danger that we keep chasing the gold standard on this, and never settle because it is never going to be good enough for the services that will need it. Where are we at with Kodiak?

Joanna Davinson: One of the reasons why we took the difficult decision through the reset to switch to the Kodiak product is that it is a standards-based, commercial off-the-shelf product. When I say standards-based, 3GPP is the cellular standard. As long as the technology evolves in line with that standard we should stay current with what the product requires. Direct 2 is based on version 9 of Kodiak. We are currently testing Kodiak 10. We have had that in our test environment since July. The testing is going well. That will be the product that we will release in Q2 next year as Prime—the final product with all the functionality in. Then there is a road map beyond that, where we will go to successive versions of Kodiak as and when they are released.

One of the things that we do have in our contract with Kodiak is that they have an obligation—where the 3GPP standard moves, then within 18 months that standard has to be reflected within the Kodiak software. So that gives us the confidence that it will evolve.

Q79 **Chair:** Not everyone following this will be technical and I am only a little technical, I suppose, on this. Can you explain clearly what Kodiak does and what 3GPP compliance actually means in reality—what capability that brings to the project?

Joanna Davinson: The emergency services network is based on a commercial 4G cellular network—EE's network. On top of that, Kodiak is the application that enables emergency services workers to get priority on the network and to pre-empt other users. It is what gives us confidence and a guarantee that emergency services users will always be able to access the network resources that they need, and it has other features as well—encryption, security and so on. That is the core application that enables the prioritisation of emergency services workers across the network, and the various features such as call groups and emergency buttons that emergency services workers need.

The reason the standards point is important is that this technology will continue to evolve in line with cellular technologies globally. It will go to 5G; new features will come in, and all of that gets agreed internationally through the standards body, which is the 3rd Generation Partnership Programme or 3GPP. Keeping our emergency services network in line with that set of standards is important, so that we can continue to evolve the



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network rather than it ending up in a technology cul-de-sac, which is kind of where we ended up with TETRA, the old Airwave system. It has not evolved over the last few years.

Q80 Chair: I was not quite clear about the time lag, so perhaps you could explain it a little more. I will move on from the technical stuff in a moment, but you say that as Kodiak develops, it has to reach these international standards within 18 months. Is there a risk there? That is a gap—a lag—and I wonder whether there is a risk to the programme from that delay, and why you are allowing it. Is that normal? You have an IBM background; you know more than we do.

Joanna Davinson: It is normal, yes. You would want the standard to settle, and you also have to allow time for—in this case—the software provider to absorb the standard, do whatever coding they need to do, test it and make it available. It would not happen instantly in any case; 18 months is actually pretty reasonable.

Q81 Chair: I just want to ask Ms Gorasia about the cost of this. As it goes on, we have been concerned about the cost to the taxpayer of supporting two systems. Could you outline the costs for every extra year that Airwave has to run, or whatever comparison figure you have to hand?

Charu Gorasia: I am just going to look at my notes. I have the figures for ESN and Airwave separately, but I do not have the numbers on what additional costs we would need for Airwave on an annual basis. Could I please write to the Committee on that?

Chair: Please do. It is a real concern to us.

Charu Gorasia: Unless Joanna has them to hand.

Joanna Davinson: Just for the Airwave contract, we are talking about £360 million to £400 million per year. In terms of what a delay would cost us, there are some additional contracts and costs, so a year's delay across the whole of the legacy estate is in the ballpark of £550 million.

Chair: Thank you. I am going to turn to Gagan Mohindra now, and then I have a couple more questions. If anyone else wants to come in, please indicate.

Q82 Mr Mohindra: My question is to Joanna Davinson, and it is to do with risk management. Technology and policy are potentially evolving more quickly than the programme. How are you mitigating that risk?

Joanna Davinson: May I just clarify the question? The policy—

Mr Mohindra: The policy environment—you know, the interactions you will have with operational users will presumably have changed from day one. Covid has obviously had a massive impact on requirements.

Joanna Davinson: This goes back to what I was saying earlier about standards. One of the reasons we put a lot of emphasis on ensuring that the products we are developing through ESN are standards-based is that



that ensures that we have got an evolution path, so that the product can keep track with technology as it evolves, but also with emergency services requirements as they evolve. That was a really important piece of our reset work—to ensure that we did have that forward path.

- Q83 **Mr Mohindra:** In hindsight, do you think we should have had a centralised, one-size-fits-all programme for this; or would it have been better to have regional or local solutions?

Joanna Davinson: It is a network that needs to connect across the whole of the UK, so it needs to be a single network. If it was multiple networks we would need to have a way of integrating them, which would bring complexity of its own; so I think the decision to have a single network was absolutely the right one. Having multiple networks would simply bring an integration risk that we just don't need.

- Q84 **Chair:** I just want to go to you, Mr Rycroft, on this, as you are the accounting officer. This is a big problem and it has been taking a long time to resolve, despite all the resets and so on. The current position of the Home Office is that none of the services will need to use this until they are confident that it is good enough to take over from Airwave. Is that still the position of the Home Office, first of all, as we sit here today?

Matthew Rycroft: The position of the Home Office is that this will succeed; it must succeed; the emergency services need it. They are—

- Q85 **Chair:** My question is slightly different. It is that actually they don't have to take it on and use it until they are confident that it is going to deliver at least as well as Airwave. Ms Davinson is nodding. That is the current position of the Home Office: yes?

Matthew Rycroft: That is the position of the Home Office, but I wouldn't want any single force to think that if they feel perfectly comfortable with the existing system they can keep going on their own for years and years.

- Q86 **Chair:** That cuts to the point. There is going to be a point at which, even if they are not 100% happy with it—and with all the different versions of Kodiak coming through they could always be wanting to wait for the next change, the next situation—is there a point at which you are going to change position and say, "Now we are cutting off Airwave. You have to move over to the new system come what may, whatever glitches, whether you like it or not"?

Matthew Rycroft: There will come a point when we say we must turn off Airwave and cut over everyone to the new system. By that point there will have been a snowballing effect of more and more users using it, shaping it, getting comfortable with it, improving it, and convincing all of the other users that it is the right way to go. In the end, I am sure there will not be universally high levels of enthusiasm for this change; I don't think you find that for any change in any organisation anywhere. So there will come a point where people will need to look very carefully at their own finances—at the, if you like, disincentives for not coming across and literally getting with the programme.



Q87 **Chair:** You talk about looking closely at their own finances: just to repeat the questions I asked Ms Davinson, I know you are going through the spending review and we know all those caveats, but is it your view, as accounting officer of the Home Office, that the Home Office may need to sweeten the deal for many of these forces, who will have been investing in old technology to keep it going—and therefore that is an added reluctance to buying into the new system, because they just can't afford it, or they can but they would have to cut other local services instead?

Matthew Rycroft: No. This isn't a deal that needs sweetening, to use your words. This is a new bit of technology, which we are working with them on to demonstrate that it works. If they have operational safety concerns then obviously—

Q88 **Chair:** Mr Rycroft, I have the, I suppose, questionable advantage of having been looking at this for a very large number of years now. We have had a lot of evidence from police and crime commissioners. It is not on a party basis; these are people from all party backgrounds, who are very concerned about the impact on their budget—for policing, which is the Home Office end of it—of having to invest in this, which has been much delayed. The planning for it is delayed. They are having to buy new bits of kit. They are investing in that. Somehow they are paying twice, effectively, for a system. Some of them have said to us they do need, as I would describe it, a sweetener. They haven't all used that language, but they need some support from the Home Office in order to make sure that they can do this without any other impacts on their budget locally. Are you saying that that is ruled out?

Matthew Rycroft: No, I am saying that we want to work with them, and we are—and increasingly so. We want this to be something that they want to take on because they can see that other users are using it effectively. It is giving them everything that the current system gives them and some more. Crucially, as Joanna was explaining, unlike the current Airwave system, as future standards change and as future technology changes—as 4G goes to 5G, to 6G and to 7G—this technology will have automatic upgrades built into it, so it will not become obsolete in the way that the current system is already beginning to appear obsolete in a small number of years ahead. There is an inevitability about this programme, which is why I answered yes to your very first question.

Q89 **Chair:** Okay. Can I just say that back in 2019 the Home Office rated three of the six main user concerns as red? One was the network coverage—that is the EE point. I take you on good faith, Ms Davinson, that that is apparently nailed, but there are still some issues around the underground. Tube coverage was one of the big concerns still, and network resilience. Has there been any progress on those concerns since 2019?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes, there has been a huge amount, and Joanna has set out some of it.

Q90 **Chair:** What about in terms of when you have talked to users and they have come back with their concerns? It was rated, through your work,



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that users were concerned about this. I will bring you in here, Ms Davinson.

Joanna Davinson: From a programme perspective, because we are very confident now, having—through the Direct 2 product in particular—integrated the network, the SIM card and the push-to-talk application, that we have addressed the risks around network coverage, around the tube, and we know where we are going on network resilience as well.

Absolutely we have a lot more work to do with stakeholders to bring them on board with that and to address their concerns, which they do still have. We need to reassure them that we have the coverage, that the London underground process will work, et cetera. That is why we have put in nine months of operational trials, which we will be running through 2021 with users in a whole range of scenarios from small tests to big set pieces—the "What would happen in a marauding terrorist attack?"-type scenarios.

Q91 **Chair:** Okay. Can I just be clear? You will have 5,000 handsets being tested in April. At the end of that nine-month testing period, how many individuals will have one of these things in their hand that will be being used?

Joanna Davinson: I'll need to get back to you. We have the 5,000, which is what we are going to use through that testing process.

Q92 **Chair:** Okay, but that is quite a big ramp up from 5,000 for nine months, which takes us to early 2022, to having it all ready by 2022. From what you said earlier about the date 2024 and what you have just gone through, it is not going to be delivered by the end of 2022, is it? Let's be honest.

Joanna Davinson: Absolutely not, and we are not saying that it will be.

Q93 **Chair:** So we really need to know from Ms Gorasia in writing, which we can include in our commentary on this, the cost to the taxpayer. It is hugely costly, and as it goes on the damage to confidence on the ground is immensely costly. I think I am going to leave it there unless any other Member wishes to come in again. Mr Mohindra, did you want to come in again? *[Interruption.]* Ms Davinson—just one last point from you.

Joanna Davinson: Did you want the date for TfL meeting all their roll-out? It's towards the end of 2022. In terms of Glasgow and Newcastle, that is all part of the EE network and that is already in place.

Chair: So Mr Grant is fine, but we are not so good in London at the moment. Lucky for you, Mr Grant.

Matthew Rycroft: Can I just add one final thought on this? To preview the note that Ms Gorasia talked about, even if there is further delay into 2025 the net present value of this programme will be positive. We have to go ahead with this because it is going to be a better product and, in the long run, cheaper year on year than the existing system—but we will set out the detail.

Chair: I am sure the National Audit Office is constantly doing the maths on this under the C&AG. The day of reckoning for what in total this has



cost the taxpayer is enormous, and at some point I hope that there will be acknowledgement that it has not gone smoothly—I think there has been some acknowledgement of that—and that we will do an analysis of this project as a very big learning lesson for Whitehall. It is rather depressing that the former deputy Chair of this Committee wrote about NHS IT failures and here we are as a Committee spending a similar length of time discussing another Government failure, this time in the Home Office, so hopefully we can learn from it.

I am going to bring in Mr Mohindra to mop up on this issue and then I want to talk to you about the qualification of your accounts. Over to you, Mr Mohindra.

- Q94 **Mr Mohindra:** The Chairman has alluded to the fact that this topic has come to us 10 times now. How can we assure residents and the general public watching that we are now back on track on this programme? We have seen a lot of written correspondence, so we may need to have you back sooner rather than later to verbalise that written evidence that the general public may not see. That is an early heads-up on that.

Joanna Davinson: I am very happy to come back any time.

- Q95 **Chair:** In a way, I hope we don't have you back on this lots, but I fear we need to finish what we have started and keep a close eye on it. Ms Cooper's Committee has an interest as well and we obviously collaborate behind the scenes.

We need to move on, so it is over to you Ms Gorasia and Mr Rycroft. The Home Office 2019-20 accounts were qualified by C&AG, but these questions are around the handling of your single bank account. You had a £118 million cash overspend. I will start with you, Mr Rycroft, as you are the accounting officer. Why on earth was there this avoidable problem? It led to the qualification of your accounts. You are a major Government Department. How could this have happened?

Matthew Rycroft: Absolutely. It was an extremely significant error. It was a result of a combination of system error and human error in the last financial year. We are taking it extremely seriously. Under Charu's leadership, she initiated an instant review from Ernst & Young, who came here and who have already given us their recommendations. We have accepted those in full and are pursuing them in order to make sure that this error does not happen again.

- Q96 **Chair:** You've been a diplomat for—well, maybe you are a diplomat too, but you've been a Whitehall insider for some time. Shouldn't someone have known that having a single bank account, dealing with all the inflows and outflows, was going to be a problem? Shouldn't that have been picked up sooner?

Matthew Rycroft: Actually, the NAO did give us advice last year, I think, to that effect. At the time, whether it was possible to separate things out as they had suggested was looked at. At the time, the judgment was that that would be an additional risky layer of complexity. With the benefit of hindsight, clearly that change should have happened at that time and we



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have instantly acted on it now, but obviously too late to prevent the qualification of the accounts for the last financial year.

Q97 **Chair:** Ms Gorasia, what are you going to do to fix this now?

Charu Gorasia: Firstly, Chair, as we said when we wrote to you in July, I would like to apologise to the Public Accounts Committee. Cash is a basic control total and I am extremely disappointed that we have managed to breach a very basic control total in the Home Office. I would like to go on record with that first.

Secondly, I am absolutely committed that we are going to fix this issue. It is not just about having a single bank account, because opening a new bank account is quite easy. The issue is the underlying complexity in our day-to-day processes through which we collect the cash.

Could I spend a minute telling you how we do this? We have two sets of income that we collect, one of which we are supposed to hand over to the Treasury or the Exchequer and that we are not allowed to use for day-to-day funding of Home Office activities. We use the other set of income, of which there is a significant amount. Most other Government Departments, apart from HMRC, will have nowhere near the amount of cash that we collect on an annual basis.

A separate bank account is not going to solve the complexity. The reason for the complexity is that we collect different types of income that we surrender straight to Treasury. One type is consular fees that are not easy to segregate directly, because they are part of our passport fees. Small elements from different types of passports have to be pulled out and surrendered to Treasury. There are 6.3 million annual transactions on average. Last year we issued around 6.3 million passports. We had to collect bits of those fees and surrender them separately to Treasury.

The second type is the immigration skills charge. There are 85,000 underlying transactions, as well as fines and civil penalties that we impose on immigration. There are 20,000 additional transactions. Each one has its own underlying operating system and management information that we need to pull together.

In terms of what we are doing to address that issue, which was your question, as the accounting officers mentioned, we got the Government Internal Audit Agency to work with EY and give us, within weeks, a report on what we needed to do to address these issues. I am going to continue exploring how we segregate our underlying sub-ledgers, as well as our bank accounts, in slower time. However, immediately, we are putting in place some additional financial controls that should have existed in the first place.

For example, instead of reconciling our cash balances only at interim accounts and at year end, we are going to start doing it every month. We have already started that from the month of July. We are going to start reporting on each of our control totals to our executive committee on a monthly basis, so that we can track the controls throughout the year,



rather than at only certain, infrequent points in the year. We are going to make sure that we reconcile all the funding we collect on this for the Exchequer every month and hand it over to the Treasury on a monthly basis, as opposed to allowing the cash to sit in this single bank account for long periods of time.

We began putting in place a lot of different processes immediately as soon as we realised that this error had happened. Of the 13 recommendations that EY gave us, 11 have been implemented already and two will be implemented by the end of this month. The next step for us is embedding these controls, and allowing both the NAO and internal audit to revisit this in a few months' time to give us a view on how well the embedding is working.

Chair: I appreciate your tone—you are not trying to defend this—but it is pretty shocking that a Government Department has this problem, which you have acknowledged.

Q98 **Mr Mohindra:** Can I just echo the sentiment that this seems to be a basic failure in controls? I think, from recollection, that the NAO came forward with some recommendations a few years ago to deal with this specific issue, which at the time I think were to do with complexity as well as cost. With the benefit of hindsight, I think we should have bitten the bullet at that time. What reassurance can you give that this is not symptomatic of a more widespread system failure within the Department and is just a one-off?

Charu Gorasia: One thing that we are doing is looking at all our financial controls, and on a routine basis internal audit reviews all our financial controls and gives assurance on whether they are working. Beyond what internal audit does for us, one thing that the new finance director employed in the Home Office has started working on is a finance improvement programme, so that, on a continuous basis, we can test whether our basics are working as well as they should be. We are redoubling efforts on all those areas.

Mr Mohindra: In terms of the actual verbal response given earlier, it gives me some reassurance that the measures being proposed and implemented sound like the right things to be doing. Hopefully this was just a blip and there will be no future issues.

Chair: Thank you, Ms Gorasia. I will now turn to Yvette Cooper to raise a final issue.

Q99 **Yvette Cooper:** I just wanted to finally ask you, Mr Rycroft, about the video that appeared on the Home Office's Twitter account about asylum and deportations. You responded to a complaint that was raised with you about it, about the use of some of the language in it. Could you tell us what went wrong?

Matthew Rycroft: Yes. First of all, I pay tribute to the staff working in the press office and elsewhere in the Department for grappling with complex, fast-moving and sometimes divisive issues in our society, and for doing that so well. On this occasion, they used in a video that, as you



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know, came out from the Home Office Twitter account, lines that were in my view political. They were absolutely fine for a Minister or a special adviser or any other politician, but they weren't in my view compatible with what a civil servant should be using. That having been brought to my attention, that is why I decided that it should not be used from a Home Office account.

Q100 **Yvette Cooper:** Had the video been produced by civil servants or by political advisers?

Matthew Rycroft: It had been produced by civil servants in the Home Office press office, but using lines that had been created in part by special advisers.

Q101 **Yvette Cooper:** What safeguards do you have in place to make sure that inappropriate political content does not end up coming out of the civil service public forums?

Matthew Rycroft: We have a number of safeguards, as you would expect, Ms Cooper. First of all, every civil servant needs to know what the civil service code says. They need to understand what it means for each of them in their own roles. Each line manager needs to check that everyone working for them has got that understanding.

In relation to the press office in particular, there are additional layers of assurance to check before anything goes out, so that no such inadvertent error is about to happen again. Those checks are in place. In fact, there is an extra level of check now in place to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

Q102 **Yvette Cooper:** So you have increased those checks.

Matthew Rycroft: Yes.

Q103 **Yvette Cooper:** As a linked point, the Home Office does seem to have changed its response to organisations as well, in some of the content that it is putting out. We noticed, for example, that the Home Office put out an immediate response to our most recent Select Committee report, when normally the response has been to give a considered response after some time. Instead, the first response from the Home Office was that the Select Committee was incorrect. Could you tell me what points were incorrect in our previous Select Committee report?

Matthew Rycroft: I'm sorry, but I don't think I know which report you are referring to, Ms Cooper, so I don't know.

Yvette Cooper: The report about the checks that were taking place or were not taking place at the border.

Matthew Rycroft: Without it in front of me, I don't think I can answer that question. Let me write to you when I have had a look at that instant response. It is very unusual in my experience for the Home Office to be accused of doing something too quickly, but I will check why that happened on this occasion.



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Q104 **Yvette Cooper:** What would be helpful to know is whether there has been any further consideration. To be honest, we would expect your full response to our report in due course in the normal way. What I am interested in is the nature of the decision making in the Home Office, either for the Twitter account or in the press office and so on, and at what level a decision was taken to say that things in a Select Committee report were incorrect. As you will know, the factual checking of every point in a Select Committee report is extremely detailed and our Clerks are extremely good.

Matthew Rycroft: Indeed. We will make sure that as we give that formal considered response we answer that question as well.

Yvette Cooper: I am particularly interested in the decision making in the Home Office, as opposed to the wider issues around the report, which I am sure we will get a full response on. Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you very much, Ms Cooper. I thank Committee members and witnesses for your time. We will be considering our response to this; we may publish a report and some of this we will obviously be dealing with in correspondence. Thank you very much indeed for your time.