

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [English Channel migrant crossings](#),
HC 1900

Tuesday 26 February 2019

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); Rehman Chishti; Chris Green; Tim Loughton; Alex Norris; Douglas Ross; John Woodcock.

Questions 91 - 186

Witnesses

I: Alan Pughsley QPM, Chief Constable of Kent Police; Steve Rodhouse, Director General of Operations, National Crime Agency; Julie-Anne Wood, Head of Maritime Operations, Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alan Pughsley, Steve Rodhouse and Julie-Anne Wood.

Q91 Chair: Can I welcome our panel to this session of the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into the English Channel crossings? Can I welcome our panel to give evidence to us today? Could I ask you, please, first to briefly introduce yourselves and to say what your work is in this area? Mr Rodhouse.

Steve Rodhouse: Good morning, everyone. My name is Steve Rodhouse. I am the NCA's Director General for Operations. The NCA has a significant role to play in the matters we are talking about today. In short, we lead the efforts to tackle the organised crime that sits behind some of the migrant activity that we have seen.

Julie-Anne Wood: Good morning. My name is Julie-Anne Wood. I am the Head of Maritime Operations for the Maritime Coastguard Agency. HM Coastguard's role is purely the search and rescue element responsibility in that part of the United Kingdom, in the English Channel.

Alan Pughsley: Good morning, Chair. Alan Pughsley, Chief Constable of Kent. My force's role is primarily in support of the two lead agencies, the NCA being one, as Mr Rodhouse has explained, and then the Border Force are the lead agency of operational primacy on the Channel and migrants crossing the Channel. Our role is co-ordination, support, safeguarding and ongoing assistance with the migrants when they are in the UK.

Q92 Chair: Thank you very much. Could you start by just giving us a picture of what the current situation is in terms of the level of resources that you have and the systems that you have in place in the Channel at the moment, but also in terms of the numbers of attempted crossings you are seeing or intercepting? We are obviously aware of the reporting that took place over the Christmas period, but it would be very helpful to have an update about what is happening now. Who wants to start?

Steve Rodhouse: To kick off, if I may, just to give some context on the scale of the issue that we are dealing with here, over the last year over 500 migrants have made the journey from northern France to the UK. The overwhelming majority of those have claimed Iranian citizenship and indeed asylum once they have reached the UK. Interestingly, more than 80% of those journeys were made in the last three months of the year, so a significant spike, and in December there were in the region of 250 migrants who made that journey. That number has reduced. In January, that was down to 90 and the levels in February are similarly low.

I think it is important: although we will no doubt talk about the efforts that our agencies together have made to tackle that threat and the impact that we believe we have had, we need to be realistic. Some of the demand here is affected by the weather, so we had a significant period of inclement weather that meant people were not travelling and so that led



to a reduction. What we have seen, conversely, over the past couple of weeks—the last week or so, certainly—is the improving weather, which is pretty notable, has led to more people making that journey.

It is safe to say, as I have said, that the majority of people who have made the journey are claiming asylum on arrival. That is quite significant for us, because this represents a very different business model in terms of organised immigration crime. Typically in the past, if people had been using what we call general maritime, so boats of various descriptions, to make the journey from northern France, they would be doing so in a clandestine fashion, so they were looking to avoid being detected before, during and after arrival in the UK. That typically would mean there would be shore parties greeting them on arrival and they would be moving their way through the UK to their intended destination.

What we see in the matters we are talking about today is markedly different, because the business model is essentially for the migrants to reach the point where they can engage with UK authorities, whether that be on land or indeed at sea, and claim asylum at that point, which means that they do not need the infrastructure of shore parties in the UK, it means they do not need to be particularly clandestine once their journey has started and certainly made it into UK waters. That is quite a different business model.

It is worth saying that we absolutely recognise—I think we will speak for everyone on this—the significance of people taking this route. It is extremely dangerous. I think we can appreciate why. It is a very dangerous option for people to take. It is a very small fraction of the overall clandestine migration problem, so less than 2% of those people who seek to enter the UK are doing so through general maritime. In terms of Iranians entering the country, those entering by the routes that we are talking about here, general maritime, account for only 7% of the total.

Q93 Chair: Can you just clarify those figures for me?

Steve Rodhouse: Yes. In terms of those people who are detected coming into the UK through a variety of different routes, whether it be in the back of lorries, through air routes, being either not documented or not having appropriate documentation or general maritime, general maritime only accounts for less than 2%. In fact, the latest assessment is 1.5% of the total coming across in small boats.

Just to focus it down on the Iranians, who we are commonly seeing in this particular spike in the last quarter of the year, of all the Iranians entering the country, only 7% are making that journey through general maritime. Typically Iranians have certainly in the past made good use—not good use, maybe frequent use—of air routes and indeed coming in the back of lorries as well through the juxtaposed controls. What we are seeing though is that the rise in Iranian general maritime is consistent



with a rise in general Iranian arrivals in the UK through a variety of routes. Perhaps I should stop there.

Julie-Anne Wood: The response from Her Majesty's Coastguard is very much based upon our search and rescue assets that we have based in the south-east corner of England. We utilise our coastguard rescue volunteers to respond to incidents. We may receive the call via the Kent Police control room; they may contact us direct via a 999 call; or it may be a passing ship that spots a RIB filled with a number of people and makes a report to us. We then respond using, as I say, coastguard rescue volunteers ashore and also the Royal National Lifeboat Institution at sea. We then work together with the Border Force through our National Maritime Information Centre. If required, we will task our search and rescue helicopter, which is based at Lydd, in the area. That can also then provide us some surveillance and information that will lead to a safe rescue and recovery of the persons onboard.

We very much treat this as a routine search and rescue incident. It is no different from receiving a call from a vessel at sea in difficulty. The only difference is the liaison and the work that we do with our partner agencies.

Q94 **Chair:** By the way, just in terms of your resources, have you changed the level of your resources?

Julie-Anne Wood: No, we have not changed the level of resources at this time. There has been no need to change the level of resources. What we do have, in the event of there being an increase of incidents, is a capability of moving our resources to preagreed locations so that they can respond quicker.

Chair: But you have not had to increase the level of resources you have had? You have sufficient resources?

Julie-Anne Wood: No, absolutely. We have seen an increase obviously in the number of taskings for the resources we have in situ, but we have not increased the resources that we have had.

Q95 **Chair:** You have not had any situation where you have had a tasking request or anything come in that you have not been able to respond to?

Julie-Anne Wood: No, we have been able to respond to everything.

Chair: Thank you very much. Chief Constable Pughsley.

Alan Pughsley: Bringing the numbers, if I may, right up-to-date, as I said at the beginning, we work really closely with the NCA, the Border Force and indeed the Home Office Visas and Immigration down at the Kent Intake Unit down in Dover. The February figures are still, as Mr Rodhouse said, a lot lower than December, so the direction of travel at the moment is still smaller. Up until the weekend, we had 44 migrants into the Kent Intake Unit. Yesterday there were 15 on two vessels, so 11 of them as migrants—four are being dealt with as facilitators on this



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occasion—all claiming Iranian nationality. As we were speaking coming in here today, the Border Force are currently dealing with one RIB where we think there are 11 migrants, but the number is to be finalised as they come aboard, as you would imagine, as we speak. On top of that, as I said in opening, our role is to work really closely with Mr Rodhouse's team and indeed Julie-Anne's team from Kent Maritime and Coastguard and the Border Force in co-ordinating the whole response.

I can talk in due course about how we deal with the migrants when they here from a corporate point of view, how we deal with them when they are in the Channel from a corporate point of view and what intelligence work we are doing linked to the National Crime Agency to try to prevent some of this as well.

Of course the security of the UK is primacy with us, but likewise the welfare and a potential tragedy in the Channel has to take primacy and does take primacy all of the time with all three agencies here today.

Q96 Chair: Just then clarify in terms of your resources that are being focused on this.

Alan Pughsley: We have a dedicated resource in Special Branch Frontier Operations in Kent Police. That is about 150 officers, a mixture of about 20 police sergeants and the rest then police constables. They are dedicated to the frontier in the widest context, but also of course we have local policing response 24 hours, seven days a week, who are often the first responder when we get the 999 call, as Julie-Anne was talking about earlier on. But the Border Force get there very quickly as well. The situation is assessed then by my officers and normally the Border Force. As Mr Rodhouse has said, at the moment there are a majority of males, but there are families coming and children are coming, so social services actively get involved as well.

Resourcing-wise, it is very much the local policing response complemented by a dedicated response, as you would imagine, in Kent at the frontier or border of the county.

Q97 Chair: Have you had to increase resources as a result of the Channel crossings or is this about just flexing your existing resource?

Alan Pughsley: It is the latter. It is about flexing the resource. In the same way that Mr Rodhouse said, this is a different method at the moment. While everyone is incredibly important in the way that we deal with it, the numbers are not causing a resourcing issue or indeed a problem.

Q98 Chair: Again, similar to my question to Ms Wood, have there been any occasions where you have had a sense of there being tasks needing to be done that you have not had the resources to be able to respond to or incidents that you have not been able to address?



Alan Pughsley: No, not at all. Not with regard to dealing with the migrants themselves when they are here or indeed in the Channel or, I think equally importantly, not being able to do the intelligence tasking work that we are being asked to do, quite rightly, by the bigger picture from the National Crime Agency. I agree with Mr Rodhouse, it is a watching picture, let us see what happens, but at the moment we are resourced and capable of doing all the tasks.

Q99 **Douglas Ross:** Thank you bringing us up-to-date with the figures. You have all mentioned the spike we saw in the last quarter of last year. I think, Mr Rodhouse, you said 80% of crossings last year came in those final three months. What is your opinion on the spike in the last quarter of 2018?

Steve Rodhouse: If I can pick that up, it is a notable spike. All our information is slightly caveated. We get our information from a range of sources, but there is also a range of motivations that people have for providing it. Our information will come from people being debriefed, it will also come from covert intelligence collection as well, so there is a degree of caveat on that. There has been a rising level of use of general maritime throughout the year, but at a very low level. It appears some sort of pressure release at the end of the summer has caused more people to make that move.

Q100 **Douglas Ross:** What do you mean by “pressure release”?

Steve Rodhouse: There is a whole range of events that have taken place that have culminated with a significant demand in northern France for services to take people across the Channel. It coincides with increasing security at the juxtaposed controls; it coincides with the increasing availability of predominantly Afghan/Kurd/Iraqi organised crime groups with a presence in northern France able to satisfy the market, people wanting to come across. It is driven by a market. It is predominantly Iranian, as I have said, and there are a number of factors that lead us to try to explain that phenomenon.

One is the changing and deteriorating economy in Iran, which is incentivising people with assets to leave, so with some funds to spend. Our collection would suggest that around 75% of those people who have made the journey are doing so with the help of a facilitator, typically Afghan Iraqi Kurds, who have the monopoly at the moment on that type of crossing. There are a range of cultural and ethnic routes back into Iran that mean there is a relatively smooth journey from Iran into northern France. Around 40% of the people that we have collectively debriefed have said that they started their journey through connecting with facilitators while they were in Iran. There is a cost to this, of course, and one of the phenomena we see is that we believe a lot of the Iranians who are making this journey have clearly had the funds to pay for that service.



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The amount that it costs varies, but on average it is about £5,000 a person. It can be a lot less, it can be a lot more, depending on the relative safety and promises that are made along the way, but it requires money. Of course not all of the migrants gathering in northern France, typically in the camps, before they were taken down—and I think that plays into the spike—had that money, so some of the migrants who were in northern France are effectively looking for opportunities to get in the back of lorries, whatever it might be, and not necessarily having the funds to pay for this sort of co-ordinated service.

It is a very notable jump. We assess that the Iranian population in the UK is a draw to people that are coming over. In essence, there are two groups of people here. There are those that are arriving in the UK through the use of these organised crime groups, maybe 40% of those engaging in Iran, a good chunk of them engaging with facilitators when they have made it to northern France. There is another group of people who have effectively made their own way to northern France and are gathering together—family, friends, associates—and effectively doing it themselves, because there are very low barriers to this technique. Effectively it means getting hold of boats, which are routinely available. Although the French have real efforts to clamp down and understand the sale of suitable boats in the region, what we are seeing is people moving up and down the coast into Belgium and other countries to access the sort of RIBs that are available.

It is quite a mixed picture. I appreciate it is a very long answer to what is quite a simple question, but it is a complex picture.

Q101 Douglas Ross: Before I come to the rest of the panel to answer that point, just on the pressure points, is that something you can only see retrospectively looking—and the debriefs and suchlike—or was there some signals prior to the final quarter of 2018 that would suggest we were going to see this spike? Were you aware it was going to come?

Steve Rodhouse: No. In all honesty, I think this is more of a retrospective view rather than something—

Q102 Douglas Ross: There is no intelligence that can suggest this build-up was going to reach a point that was going to see significantly higher crossings?

Steve Rodhouse: Yes, I think that is fair. The majority of information has come from intelligence-gathering following the end of October, when this peak really started. We were able to deploy a whole range of covert techniques as well as the debriefing, which you will understand why I would not want to talk about here, but it certainly informed our view in a much more thorough way since October.

Alan Pughsley: I agree with Mr Rodhouse. The only additional bit I would say was the weather was a lot better, without any doubt. The debriefing has been mentioned many times. We have Home Office



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immigration staff, the National Crime Agency, Border Force and my staff, a voluntary debrief on every migrant in the Kent Intake Unit. Some of the information from them was without a doubt the better weather in that time of year than was anticipated. Some of the work that we are doing to try to understand that—there is better weather coming now, of course—is the intelligence work that we can do over that side of the Channel, first, and we are very closely linked in with our French counterparts.

My intelligence units go now to all the marinas in Kent, as you would imagine, and we are stopping any light RIBs that are going out, for whatever reason, which we think they may or may not be going across the Channel. In the period that we are talking about, the spike until now, we have stopped about 30 boats. None have been seized, none have been arrested, but the intelligence, importantly, has gone to Mr Rodhouse's team to build the bigger picture.

Q103 Douglas Ross: Just for clarity, what happens when you stop these boats? If you cannot take any action, is this just to try to deter them doing it in the future or can you take any action against people you believe are heading out there to do this?

Alan Pughsley: It is a mixture of three. First, you are absolutely right, it is preventative, so if people are thinking about it, there is now more stop and search, dare I say, on the river and/or into the Channel. That is a preventative element. If we think they are involved in active criminality they can be arrested and their boat can be seized.

Q104 Douglas Ross: But you have not done any of that with the 30 boats?

Alan Pughsley: Not on those 30 at the moment.

Q105 Douglas Ross: What has not been present to allow you to make arrests or seize a boat?

Alan Pughsley: In the same way as any crime type, there is not suitable evidence to arrest them for ongoing criminality at that time. Again, as is normal practice, how do we do that? We build the intelligence picture, which is the important element of it. There are two real success stories on there: a bigger, richer intelligence picture going to the centre that Mr Rodhouse controls and some preventative measures taking place. I cannot say whether or not, hand on heart, those 30 interactions have caused the 270 in December to come down to about 50 or 60 this month, or maybe it is a mixture of everything, but it is right and proper that we do those continued intelligence taskings.

Julie-Anne Wood: The role of HM Coastguard is quite limited with regards to the preventative work. We very much work with our partner agencies. If required, if there is an intelligence gap, we can put broadcasts out to shipping in the area and ask them to report back, which we then feed back. That is very much a role for preventative action. We are very much responsive.



Q106 **Douglas Ross:** This Committee heard evidence last month about the family ties that are drawing many people to try to make that crossing. Is that the number one issue you get when you do your debriefs and suchlike that, rightly or wrongly, it is people with a link—or believe they have a family link—and how much investigation is done in terms of is that a credible family link or is this them just saying, “I have a long-lost relative in the United Kingdom and that is why I made this journey”?

Steve Rodhouse: I can only answer that question in part, I am afraid. Certainly the debriefing reveals a number of people with claimed family ties. The investigation as to whether or not they are entirely genuine largely sits with Immigration Enforcement colleagues to do. But the overall assessment picture says that in part people are coming because of their situation in Iran; in part they are coming because of an opportunity that presented itself because of a change in the visa waiver scheme that allowed people from Iran to move to Serbia and then move to the UK; and in part it is about tying up with family and friends.

Without disclosing all our trade secrets, of course whenever we have an opportunity, we will look at the communications of those people who have been travelling to see who they have been contacting and what link they have to them. That has allowed us to create investigative opportunities, which is our role as the NCA, to pursue those links. It is through that sort of investigation that has allowed us to start a number of criminal investigations that link facilitators in the UK, but more commonly in France, and to pursue those investigations, and arrests have been made. These are active investigations at the moment.

It is worth being clear that the vast majority of our investigative activity, whether it be understanding who has been communicating with whom or finance flows and the like lead us to believe that the vast majority of organised immigration here actually takes place in France and overseas rather than in the UK. That is quite limiting for the work that we can do, but it means it is absolutely essential that we pass all the intelligence that we are harvesting and creating through to French counterparts, which we are doing. We have four international liaison officers based in Paris, we have officers in the Joint Co-ordination and Information Centre in Coquelles and we have officers stationed in the National Maritime Information Centre.

We are passing literally hundreds of intelligence reports to the French and that is creating French criminal investigations that we are supporting with intelligence. I know I keep throwing statistics at you, but I think maybe it is helpful. It is interesting to note that of all the detections, all the crossings that we have seen, 40% of them have been detected and detained in France, which is testament to I think the information-sharing that goes on and the importance of that information-sharing, absolutely critical. In our view, the most effective method of stopping the risk to life we are seeing here is preventing people leaving France.

Q107 **Douglas Ross:** Before you said that, my assumption was that not



enough is being done in France and maybe that is still the case, but surely we have both failed on both sides of the Channel if we are working on the problem in Kent and at this side, because they have already left. Therefore what more can be done or do you think you are working well with the French authorities and really there will always be some that get through?

Steve Rodhouse: In reality, there will always be some that get through. One of the messages I want to kind of leave you with today is an understanding that this is likely to be an enduring challenge for us, particularly as we move into the summer months. But there is a lot that we can do and I think the numbers do tend to suggest that some of our work has been effective. But I completely agree: success here is stopping people wishing to travel and actually travelling from France.

A big key from the National Crime Agency's point of view is there is sharing intelligence that will allow that to happen and the co-ordination in France to respond to that. The Joint Co-ordination Information Centre in Coquelles, where we are embedded, allows the French to intelligently patrol based on this information and get to the beaches where people are launching from and patrol those beaches and stop them. That is important. I think that is the key, as is having surveillance across the coast wherever possible.

Alan Pughsley: If I may, the Counterintelligence Unit I mentioned earlier on, Home Office Visas and Immigration own that unit. The question about the validity of what migrants are saying I think could be forwarded to the Committee through written submission, if you are happy for me to take that away and maybe answer that question. There is a significant difference though with the migrants that are coming across in the way we are talking about today. They want to be found and helped. There is a big difference. On some occasions, from their own boats, they are phoning 999 and asking for our help, so there is a significant shift in clandestine migration in the way we have talked about in the widest sense.

Then the intelligence-sharing with the French authorities, so from a Kent perspective, I agree it is incredibly close. We have a European Liaison Unit based in Kent with the National Crime Agency, the Border Force and my officers and staff are there. On a daily basis we are interacting with the French authorities. Three times a week my officers go over to the unit that Steve is talking about over in Coquelles, where we share slower time and fast time intelligence about this in any way, shape or form. We have had a Joint Border Intelligence Unit in Kent for 10-plus years now and the French authorities are often there working with us. They are very much a very big joint partner. The fact is they are just separated from us by 20 miles of water, but they are actively involved in what we are doing.

Q108 **Douglas Ross:** Is there anything you think we can be doing in the future that we are not doing now that would further reduce these numbers? To hope that the weather remains bad and that reduces numbers is not a



strategy obviously, and I am not saying anyone is suggesting that, but it seems that despite some of the work you are doing, the biggest factor at the moment is the climate and the weather to deter people from making that crossing. Is there one thing or a number of points we can use to continue to see these numbers coming down and we do not see another spike in the last quarter of this year, for example?

Steve Rodhouse: I think it is more than just the weather. I think the information-sharing that we have spoken about has led to many very practical interventions on the beach.

Q109 **Douglas Ross:** Just on that point, the Chief Constable is saying that information-sharing has been going on for the last 10 years, yet we still had this spike at the last quarter of 2018. Even with information-sharing, there was a huge spike in the last three months—you said yourself, Mr Rodhouse—of 80% of the crossings in three months. That is with information-sharing, so clearly that does not work alone. It seems to me, from what I have heard from everyone, the weather is the biggest determining factor.

Steve Rodhouse: Weather is a big factor, but I think it is fair to say that the level and speed of information-sharing has radically changed since the end of October. We have invested significantly in there. Certainly if I speak for the National Crime Agency, the way we have directed our intelligence-gathering assets and our investigation teams has changed since the end of October. There has been a shift in focus that I think is directly related to the ramping up of French activity. That has changed. That is not a constant over the last year. The French patrolling of the beaches in northern France in an intelligent fashion, rather than random, has radically changed. I know I sound slightly defensive here, but I think it is much more than just the weather, but I am also very professionally realistic that this is an enduring challenge, because the barriers to entry are so low. It is a very low-tech technique.

In terms of what will change it—this is not a political statement, this is not about the NCA's view on asylum policy—candidly, one of the things that impacts on this business model, as Alan has said, is that people are actively seeking being caught, so to speak, or engaging with the UK authorities because, rightly or wrongly, they do not fear being returned. That I think is something that is a significant player in the issue there. I know that Home Office colleagues, if they were here—and I would not want to speak on their behalf—will say that there have been a number of returns. It is not my area of expertise at all, but I think at the moment it is in the minds of the facilitators and in the minds of those people willing to make the journey that there is a very low risk that they will be returned.

Q110 **Chair:** It is slightly surprising that you do not know what proportion of those arriving have family links.



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Steve Rodhouse: I just do not have that information here. I will happily provide a written submission.

Q111 **Chair:** That would be helpful, because of the sense of this not looking like a kind of co-ordinated thing. If you are trying to prevent dangerous routes and you may have people who are entitled to safe legal routes because they have family in this country, but you do not even know what proportion of those are, that would seem to have an implication for your strategy and your approach in terms of preventing dangerous journeys. I am just concerned that it is not something that you automatically know.

Steve Rodhouse: I will provide a written submission on what the debriefing is telling us, but the vast majority of people, regardless of the debriefing, are claiming asylum. That is the critical issue for us.

Q112 **Rehman Chishti:** Mr Rodhouse, can I just go back to the point you raised earlier with regards to data? You were quite firm on sharing data and putting the emphasis on that. You said in December there was about 250 individuals that were coming over. Is that right, 250 in December?

Steve Rodhouse: Yes.

Q113 **Rehman Chishti:** Before that, a figure that you did not share—and we clarified with the Home Secretary when he gave evidence here—was in November there was about 110 and 13 boats. You had 110 in November, you had 250 in December, and I think in January there was 90, according to your figures, and in February it was 40. The point you have answered from Mr Ross is about intelligence-sharing. You cannot forecast what may or may not be coming your way and you said it is dependent on weather, but in October you had a certain kind of figure of what may be coming, but you cannot forecast that accurately.

My question to you is this: you talk about intel being very crucial. You have had that, so 250 in December, 110 in November and then in January you then had the Secretary of State putting forward the two Border Force vessels, redeploying them from the Mediterranean to that route over there. When those Border Force vessels came in, the numbers went from 250 down to 90, then they went down to 40, so rather than intel-sharing, the reality is it was putting those decisive actions in place and stopping those crossings. Would I be right in that?

Steve Rodhouse: I make no claim either way.

Rehman Chishti: No, of course. Sure.

Steve Rodhouse: Certainly those facts are correct, but whether the Border Force vessels were a significant deterrent I do not claim to know. All I can say is the work that the NCA have done to gather information, to understand the links between people who are coming in and who they have been calling and create criminal investigations.

Q114 **Rehman Chishti:** Sure, but would I be right in saying the figures that you have just given, 250 in December, 110 in November—you have not



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given me the figures for October, but I am not going to go down there—and then you suddenly go down to 90 in January and then 40, people could infer the inference that having those Border Force vessels would have had a real effect, apart from intelligence-sharing and the co-ordination centre that we have in place?

Steve Rodhouse: I welcome them there, because those vessels are significant.

Q115 **Rehman Chishti:** No, it is not that. What I am trying to say is people can draw that inference, right, from the figures that you have just given, that—

Steve Rodhouse: I am sure people could draw that inference.

Q116 **Rehman Chishti:** Then those two Border Force vessels, are they in force now?

Steve Rodhouse: I am not from Border Force. I cannot tell you that, I am afraid.

Q117 **Rehman Chishti:** Yes, you are not from the Border Force, but you are from the National Crime Agency and therefore you liaise with and work with all the other counterpart agencies. Therefore the NCA cannot tell me, with a key deployment from the Government of two Border Force vessels, if those two Border Force vessels are now fully operational or not?

Steve Rodhouse: I will check my notes. I believe they are, but I do not want to misinform the panel.

Q118 **Rehman Chishti:** Can I just ask Chief Constable Pughsley—who I know is brilliant, not because he is my own Chief Constable in Kent, but I know he does a great job—do you have the answer to that, sir?

Alan Pughsley: I only know the answer this morning that we were talking about, Mr Rodhouse and I. As we speak, there is one RIB being dealt with by the Border Force in the Channel as we were walking in here today. I make the assumption that that is one of the cutters out there doing that work today.

Steve Rodhouse: I cannot speculate.

Rehman Chishti: You cannot. Thank you, Mr Rodhouse.

Steve Rodhouse: The material I have tells me there are three cutters and two coastal patrol vehicles in the Channel.

Q119 **Rehman Chishti:** Can I just clarify that a bit further? The information I have here is that in January you had two Border Force vessels that were deployed from the Mediterranean. From the information that you have there, are those the two Mediterranean vessels that you are referring to? Because along with that there is also a Royal naval ship that was deployed there for interim purposes. I am just trying to understand the



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two, the Mediterranean vessels, are we talking about them still being there or how long—

Steve Rodhouse: I do not know the answer to that, no.

Q120 **Rehman Chishti:** You do not have that. Do you know who would be able to give us that answer?

Steve Rodhouse: I imagine the Border Force could.

Q121 **Rehman Chishti:** Yes. Do you speak to the Border Force?

Steve Rodhouse: As an agency, we do.

Q122 **Rehman Chishti:** As an agency, yes, so you should have that information, should you not, as a co-ordinated approach, where we are talking about information-sharing, intel, everything else?

Steve Rodhouse: I do not think that is necessarily fair, if I am honest, no. As agencies we are very closely linked, but I cannot tell you the specific location or the identities of whether it is the same boat or not.

Q123 **Rehman Chishti:** I am not being difficult. The only reason I ask those questions is because I pushed the Home Secretary on this in November. He gave evidence here. I come from a constituency where we are on the front-line. Therefore our constituents demand that everything is being done. The reason I am trying to put this is we pushed this with the Home Secretary in November when there was 110 individuals who came in 13 boats. In December, there was 250 coming over. Maybe if the Government had done what they should have done, taken further action and put these two Border Force vessels and the naval ship there, we may not have those numbers coming into Kent.

Steve Rodhouse: I can only speak from the National Crime Agency's point of view. I am not from the Border Force and I am not the Home Secretary.

Q124 **Rehman Chishti:** No. The reason I ask you that, Mr Rodhouse, is important. It is that you are giving evidence to this Committee, and before giving evidence to this Committee, we are told—and then you had time to prepare—that there is intelligence-sharing, the Joint Co-ordination Centre, Kent Police, NCA, everyone is working together with those basic figures. The Government made a big emphasis that they are coming into play and nobody can tell me if those two vessels from the Mediterranean are there and how long they are going to be there. Has that not been shared with you, that information?

Steve Rodhouse: I can tell you the number of vessels. I cannot tell you whether they are the same ones that were there before. I do not control the movement of those vessels.

Q125 **Rehman Chishti:** I am just saying how much co-ordination there is between—it is all right, I have made my point, but I am just saying that information should be apparent.



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But if I can ask you, Ms Wood, if you have that information, because you deal with the crossings. The naval ship that was supposed to be deployed and is deployed, do we know how long it is going to be deployed for?

Julie-Anne Wood: I do not have any information on the naval vessel. The Border Force vessels I am aware are currently operational in the English Channel. We have Border Force staff with our coastguard staff up at the National Maritime Information Centre. They work very well together. In the event of the coastguard receiving a 999 call or Kent Police receiving a 999 call, that information is shared and is made available via our information management system and all of those resources are made available for all of those operators that are responding to that incident.

Q126 **Rehman Chishti:** Can I just say to you, the work that you do in your agency in helping those vulnerable people I think is absolutely amazing, so thank you.

But a question, if I may ask you this: a lot has been made of the joint action plan between the French and us. Apart from saying it is working, because if we have to look at this in six months' time, one may ask the question again, are there any concerns that you have with regard to that plan that you think are not completely where they need to be that need to be addressed now?

Julie-Anne Wood: No concerns at this present moment in time. While we could anticipate there will be an increase in the number of incidents, we have a plan in place where we will bring additional assets if they are required to respond. We liaise then as well with our coastguard counterparts in France. Quite often a call may be made and it is within the French search and rescue region. We contact our French counterparts and then that co-ordination is passed to that authority to respond to.

Q127 **Rehman Chishti:** Chief Constable Pughsley, there is just two points. With regards to the Joint Co-ordination Centre, a lot was made by the Home Secretary when he gave evidence here in November to say that will help a lot in resolving this, to a certain extent. What could you do now that you were not able to do before and what more would you like to be seen to be done to further help address this issue?

Alan Pughsley: I think the biggest change has been the focus on to this as a priority, without any doubt at all, and I referred to it earlier on. We have been looking at a lot, as you would imagine, the wider frontier of immigration coming into the UK, migrants, whether it is clandestine or not. As Mr Rodhouse said earlier, what we are talking about today is a small percentage of the overall picture, so we have to protect, quite rightly, as you mentioned earlier, the whole border of Kent and we continue to do that.

The information-sharing committee, in my view, has brought all of the partners closer together in a really focused way into dealing with this issue. Over in Coquelles, as we speak today, there will be NCA staff



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embedded in there, there will be our staff over there, there will be the French staff working there, sharing intelligence very fast time on this and wider issues.

Q128 Rehman Chishti: Just one final question to you, then one for Mr Rodhouse, then I am done. For you, in terms of resources, you said you have 150 officers who deal with these front-line issues and the rest you have to deal with the existing resources. I accept the earlier figure of about 2% is the number of individuals who come via the maritime route, but being on the front-line, I know you have also increased the number of police officers in Kent by 250, with the Police Commissioner, Matthew Scott, doing an excellent job. Would you like to see more resources given to you, being on the front-line, to help assist you in doing more work there than you are doing at the moment?

Alan Pughsley: If it is front-line in the widest context, yes, please. I will have more police officers all day long, thank you very much, but at the moment the numbers and the demand mean that my dedicated resource and the local resource can deal with this, dare I say it, almost as business as usual. If it increases dramatically—and it may do—then we are going to have to flex the resources.

Q129 Rehman Chishti: A final question to Mr Rodhouse is this: you mentioned the point earlier, the route from Iran to the UK, and there was a visa waiver with Serbia, and therefore individuals from Iran could come to Serbia and from there can go elsewhere. That has been addressed now, hasn't it?

Steve Rodhouse: Yes, that is right.

Q130 Rehman Chishti: That is because it was damaging to the Serbian economy with the numbers coming in and all the other concerns. My question to you is with that now addressing this and on the wider issue of what further needs to be done, yesterday we had a summit with the Prime Minister looking at migration with the Arab countries and Europe. Is there anything that can be done to help address that flow coming in? That one issue with the Serbian visa may have been resolved. On the wider issue, so that when we look back in six months, saying that you are plugged into all the different agencies, is there anything else that you think from your intel that we will need to be pushing at, looking at, to ensure that those issues like the Serbian visa waiver do not come back and hit us from another point later on?

Steve Rodhouse: That is sort of outwith the NCA's responsibility. We do operate a joint initiative called Operation Invigor, which is between ourselves and Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office. That is about worldwide organised immigration crime and flows, so through that route, that is where we will feed in. I do not have any particular points to make now, but that is where we will feed in, where we are seeing challenges and changes in the flows. It is for others to propose the solutions there.



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Q131 Chris Green: In January, the Royal Navy ship was redeployed to the Channel as an interim measure, with the cost borne by the Home Office. How simple is it for the Royal Navy to integrate and work with the existing organisations, the existing forces in the Channel? Ms Wood.

Julie-Anne Wood: Yes. There is Royal Navy representation in the National Maritime Information Centre. Again, all of our agencies are represented in that location. When information is received, if it is intelligence or it is indeed a response that is required, that information is made available to the Royal Navy, who work very closely with our officers who are embedded in that location.

Equally, the Royal Navy has the communications capabilities to talk with our agencies, with their communication infrastructure, whether that be via satcoms or VHS radio and so on and so forth. We are also able to share our automatic information data that we have from vessel traffic and of course in the Dover Coastguard we have the radar capability. All of the surface picture, down in the Dover Strait is probably that the best that we have in the United Kingdom from HM Coastguard, so they would work very closely together.

Q132 Chris Green: What about as well in terms of—I am not sure this is the right phrase—rules of engagement, the way naval personnel interact with people coming across?

Alan Pughsley: We have a port control room down in Kent and pretty much the system is like this: however the call comes in, however the information that is coming in is reported, in the simplest terms it is created and our port control room then interact with Julie-Anne's officers and staff, Mr Rodhouse's staff, the Border Force and/or the Navy. We can see very clearly who has primacy and who has been given what task to deal with whatever issue we are dealing with. I think you can be assured that there is no crossover and there is clarity about who has the primacy at that moment at that time with the incident.

Q133 Chris Green: There is always a question about additional resources, whether you need more money, more resources, more people, but in terms of the Royal Navy contributing as and when necessary, that is quite a good relationship and you would be more than happy to have them back?

Julie-Anne Wood: Yes, absolutely. They contribute to other search and rescue efforts as well, so it is a relationship that we are used to working with.

Steve Rodhouse: I have very little to add. The co-ordination that Julie-Anne has spoken about is absolutely essential, but from our point of view it is not directly relevant to our investigations into organised crime. It is more about co-ordination at sea, which is something that we do not have a huge involvement with.

Q134 Chris Green: Fair enough, thank you. The additional investment



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promised at the Sandhurst Treaty has all been released for operations. Has all the money been delivered, all the additional resources?

Alan Pughsley: I am afraid I would have to come back to a written submission on that. I cannot answer that here today.

Q135 **Chris Green:** But the fact that there is an absence of concern is in itself reasonably positive?

Alan Pughsley: I am certainly absolutely comfortable with the joint resource, the joint collaboration, that we are doing the very best we can and dealing with the current demand at issue.

Q136 **Chris Green:** Yes, thank you. To a certain extent this has been addressed, but broadly speaking, are there enough resources directed to making the border secure or are there specific areas that require specific resourcing and anything more that needs to be done? Mr Ross was highlighting a question about weather, so if we had a warmer, easier spell in terms of weather you can perhaps expect more people to come over and it is going to be always challenging for intelligence because there are natural challenges there. In terms of looking forward now to spring and summer, the anticipation would therefore be that more migrants will come over. In terms of resources are you happy with what you have or what will become available?

Steve Rodhouse: From the National Crime Agency's point of view the same question has been asked to my colleagues here. We have not had to bend the organisation significantly out of shape. However, if the level of demand that we have seen and the level of activity we have seen continues, then there is of course a knock-on, because there are choices to be made as to how we—

Q137 **Chris Green:** In a sense the levels we saw in December, if that were consistent over the spring and summer, would you need more resource?

Steve Rodhouse: From our point of view it is not directly related to the number of migrants, because of course it is a whole collection of agencies that engages, debriefs and rescues and the like. What creates the demand for us are the investigative opportunities that we can use to create our own investigations or intelligence-sharing with the French. I am really comfortable with our level of resourcing on this at the moment, but of course all the time I have an investigation into this it is an investigation I cannot pass out to another one of my teams to deal with.

Q138 **Chris Green:** Yes, a reasonable assumption, whether it is what you are doing more broadly, is if you have to redeploy and it is perhaps sustainable in the short term, is it sustainable in the longer term?

Steve Rodhouse: As we said earlier, one of the key tactics that will limit the opportunities for people to come across—and our ambition is for them not to come across, not that we just rescue them—is the level of patrolling in France and the level of focus on the beaches there and the safe houses and where migrants and organised crime groups will mix and



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merge. We would be keen, over the coming months, to see at least a continuation of the resources that are placed there by the French. That is important to us. The surveillance of those beaches provides the French a real opportunity to intervene when people are, quite literally, pulling boats into the water. That is an area that we would want to see a continuation of.

Q139 **Chris Green:** Any other comments on the resources?

Julie-Anne Wood: I think of the 47 incidents that we have been involved in, we have had a total of 26 lifeboat launches to those 47 incidents and 45 coastguard rescue teams called. At the moment that is being managed with our volunteer service. They are the responders. They leave their place of work when they are required and we would be able to maintain that. As you say, we have seen a decline in January and February. In the summer months, if we have a good summer, we can respond to incidents along the coast that are just routine, but at the moment we are comfortable with our resources.

Alan Pughsley: I think the answer is yes at the moment to being comfortable. If December's figures were increased and sustained for a 12 month, 14 month, 16-month period, I would have to flex my resource and we are very good at doing that, Kent Police and other law enforcement agencies, but if that was sustainable for a long period of time then there may be an issue come in due course about resourcing.

Q140 **Chris Green:** Residents in Kent may be a little bit concerned about that.

Alan Pughsley: Fortunately, as Mr Chishti said earlier, I have a supportive PCC and I have more resources coming, thank goodness, so we would have to watch that carefully.

Q141 **Chris Green:** A final point. It is quite interesting, Mr Rodhouse, the initial comments you are making in terms of the business model of the criminal gangs. Is it fair to say that as this problem has rolled on our response to that problem has adapted and they have seen an opportunity, that rather than do the beginning, middle and end of the process and get people away from the beaches in the UK, they just get people into a dangerous situation, perhaps in the English Channel, and leave us to pick up the pieces and we in a sense are complementing their business model?

Steve Rodhouse: I think that is a fair assumption of the business model as we understand it. There will always be exceptions, so predominantly we think the business model is people are effectively provided with the facilities and some instructions and sent on their way. There will be examples of facilitators travelling with migrants as well. As I said, there are circumstances where facilitators are not really involved. It is a loose collection of people who have made it to northern France, who have the wherewithal to source a boat and have decided to make an attempt. It is a pretty varied model, but I think for the bulk it is a fair explanation.

Q142 **Alex Norris:** Mr Rodhouse, you touched on this in your introduction, but



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moving to when people have arrived, what happens next?

Steve Rodhouse: Can I hand over to Alan on that?

Alan Pughsley: Thank you. If we take very recent examples, a 999 call will come in. On the majority of cases the first responder will be my local police officers on an emergency call. They will get to the scene and assess, quite rightly, priority-wise welfare, safety and safeguarding of the migrants and sometimes, as I have said, we have had even a 12 month-old baby to be assessed at that time. We will be quickly followed; almost at the same time the Border Force staff will accompany us and join us at wherever the scene is, whether it be on the beach or on the street or on the road, wherever that may or may not be.

After initial assessment the staff are taken by the Border Force, assisted sometimes by Kent Police, to the Kent Intake Unit, which is resourced by the Home Office Visas and Immigration. Once in there, two things happen. The migrants are then assessed by Visas and Immigration with regard to their status, but they are also asked for a voluntary debrief, as has been mentioned earlier, by the joint debriefing unit, which is made up again of the relevant agencies sitting in front of you today and wider. That builds the intelligence picture. As Mr Rodhouse has said, that gives us some rationale from the migrants themselves why they want to come to the UK, and then Home Office Visas and Immigration dictate and decide the final outcome of what happens to the migrants.

Q143 **Alex Norris:** You mentioned vulnerability around children and there could be other vulnerabilities too. Is their treatment any different or is it just that you are dealt with first?

Alan Pughsley: Social services are actively involved when children are involved and thus far—I think it was mentioned earlier and it was remiss of me to not say earlier—on this type of method that we are talking about, the children involved are with the family. That is maybe because Mr Rodhouse has referred to this as a crossing style where money, and a lot of money, is paid on occasion. We have seen no examples of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on this method that we have seen previously on other methods. Maybe that is some element that the vulnerability is a little less on those children currently, because they are with their family.

Q144 **Alex Norris:** How would you characterise your relationship with the local authority? They will be challenged resource-wise, as all local authorities are. Are they part of all your partnerships and all your tasking work and is that a clear link through to them?

Alan Pughsley: The social services part, when they are involved with this, is very strong. The unit has been in Dover for some time. Our local council and local authority work very well again with the joint agencies.

Q145 **Alex Norris:** At the beginning, Steve Rodhouse, you mentioned that you have detected a move away from the shore party model to now a basic



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acceptance that it is okay or acceptable to present to authorities.

Steve Rodhouse: That is right.

Q146 **Alex Norris:** Your characterisation of the shore party is that to all intents and purposes authorities would not know those people had come and they would presumably enter the black market, so whether that is some form of debt bondage possibly or forced labour, possibly sexual exploitation, something within the slavery family, why is that different now? Presumably there would be financial incentives for organised gangs that run those sorts of things, to run those enterprises. Once the person enters through the authority's route, which has just been characterised by Chief Constable Pughsley, are they then later intercepted and put into those black market operations or do they never get into those?

Steve Rodhouse: They may well do, but there is no clear link at the moment between the migrants that are coming across and claiming immigration and then subsequent trafficking or modern slavery, not that we are seeing. You are right, the wider organised crime groups that have previously used the full clandestine model for people who did not want to claim asylum, they may well be some of the same people who are involved in this, but we are not seeing that. As I say, the majority of the organised crime that we are picking up and alerting the French to and are working on is based in northern France, rather than in the UK.

There are some exceptions. As I said, there are investigations going on where people have been arrested, people are on bail at the moment, and only in September of last year seven members of an organised crime group were sentenced to 48 years in total for their role in smuggling people across the Channel, which is an NCA operation involving Albanian organised crime groups and those based in the UK, but we think that is distinct from the phenomenon we are seeing here.

Q147 **Alex Norris:** You would be happy to say that there is certainly no evidence at this time that those coming across using this method that we are discussing today are then a part of the slavery network industry?

Steve Rodhouse: That is right. We are not seeing that picture at the moment.

Q148 **Alex Norris:** That is helpful. A final one for me for Chief Constable Pughsley, just for me to have a sense of the sort of level of anxiety. I say this lightly, probably because I represent a Nottingham constituency, so I am probably the furthest away from water you could possibly be in this country. Life for the modern Chief Constable is a very difficult one. You have, across the country, challenges around violent crime, lots of growing interest again around acquisitive crime, all the pressures you have around counter-terror, child sex abuse, historic and current. You have an awful lot on. Where does this sit in your anxiety list, these crossings?

Alan Pughsley: Pretty high up, if I am honest. We have a model that, dare I say it, is focused on vulnerability and that is everything that you



have just talked about. Why is it at the top of our priority list within many others? Because every crossing there could be a tragedy. That is the reality of it. Every small RIB coming across the Channel we could have a tragedy. Thank goodness—and I am touching wood—we have not had thus far, but we could. I speak for everybody here, but the response from me and our partner agency is one of priority, one of emergency, because of the vulnerability.

Q149 Tim Loughton: It is encouraging to hear that quite a few of these boats have been picked up by the French and taken back to the French coast. Of course we are purely dealing with territorial waters, either France or the UK. It is not international waters in the Straits of Dover. What is the protocol at the moment? Will somebody automatically, even if it is by a UK patrol vessel of some description in French territorial waters, be taken back to France only if they are intercepted by French agents and similarly with the UK? How does it work?

Julie-Anne Wood: At the moment, obviously the search and rescue region is split into two in the English Channel, so you have the French and the UK responsibility. If it falls within the French search and rescue region that is then co-ordinated by France. Ordinarily that would mean that the French assets are the closest responding vessels and then they get taken back to France as a place of safety. There are occasions with the Border Force vessels where the people have been transferred on to a Border Force vessel and there are plans in place that can then transfer those people back to France.

If it is an incident that the RNLI respond to, it is very much normally within UK waters. At that time we take them back to a place of safety where we are confident that the partner agencies are able to set up reception committees and that is usually then around Dover, which is our nominated safe point. The priority format is basically removing these people from a place of danger to a place of safety.

Q150 Tim Loughton: Okay, but a deterrent that has been raised in the past has been that anyone picked up in the Channel, having come across where there is a good expectation that they have come from French soil, whether they are in UK territorial waters or in French territorial waters, would be returned to the place they came from, ie France, which might make people think twice before giving money over on the basis that there is a high likelihood that they are going to be stopped and returned to France. How viable is that?

Julie-Anne Wood: From a search and rescue perspective, if we have an incident that is within UK waters it is one of our priorities to return that search and rescue unit back into operational capability and to go to the quickest place of safety. If that is one of our rescue helicopters that are airlifting casualties off a vessel or from the water—thankfully we have not had to do that yet—it is very much a case of we will return back to the United Kingdom.



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Q151 **Tim Loughton:** I understand that from a safety perspective, but what is the French view on even if they were returned in a helicopter or in a lifeboat to the Kent coast that they could then, without technically having touched shore, be returned to France rather than become the responsibility of the UK authorities?

Julie-Anne Wood: I am afraid I am not able to answer that question. We very much hand over to UK Border Force at that time and the search and rescue side is then complete.

Q152 **Tim Loughton:** Does anyone else know the answer?

Alan Pughsley: I think the primary issue on that is as I said when opening is the Border Force. The Border Force has that decision to make. We will respond to the reality of a RIB 100 yards from the Kent beach. I think in all sensible seriousness—and I understand the wider question of course from a safety point of view and a safeguarding point of view—that RIB will come ashore and the UK law enforcement and support agencies will deal with that. The Border Force probably would have to answer the question about their interaction with the French authorities in such a scenario.

Q153 **Tim Loughton:** Do we know what the French attitude is on that?

Alan Pughsley: I do not, I am afraid.

Q154 **Tim Loughton:** Where is the offence committed?

Alan Pughsley: Again, Steve has the lead on the organised crime immigration part, so if this is organised criminality and it has been facilitated from France, that is the origin of the crime.

Q155 **Tim Loughton:** What constitutes organised criminality in this case?

Steve Rodhouse: Anybody who is facilitating another to unlawfully enter the country. You could have a case, and commonly would, where some of that organisation has taken place in France and some within the UK. The offence I think you were referring to is entering the UK unlawfully and that is a matter that Immigration Enforcement will deal with in its entirety.

Q156 **Tim Loughton:** But if you have an RIB full of Iranians make it, as some have, to the Kent coast where the people organising have scarpered—and often they leave them mid-Channel or whatever—and they then march straight to the local police station to present and claim asylum, as the Iranians had been doing voluntarily in most cases, on the basis that they know it is very difficult for them to be sent home to Iran because Iranian authorities will not accept them, have they committed an offence?

Steve Rodhouse: I would have to defer to Immigration Enforcement. That is not something the NCA would deal with. That in itself is not a matter we look at. That is Immigration Enforcement who will make a decision on whether an offence has been committed and of course whether or not they are proceeded against, because there is a difference.



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Q157 **Tim Loughton:** Because this leads on to my next question, which is about how we disrupt these people. A Shoreham fisherman in my constituency recently told me about a very enterprising Shoreham fisherman some years ago who would take his boat over near Calais, would pick up some of these people for a fee, who were expecting to be transported to the UK under cover of darkness, and after a few hours pootling around would then deposit them further down the French coast, unbeknownst to them that they had not made it to the UK, and would then scuttle off, having made a tidy sum. Was he committing an offence?

Steve Rodhouse: I have to say I do not know. It may well be that is an offence under French law, but that is not something we commonly encounter.

Q158 **Tim Loughton:** No, but a bit of competition like that might eradicate the problem, wouldn't it? If people pay over their money and end up a few miles down the French coast, what offence has been committed? They have used their money not getting to the UK. It is quite a good scheme, isn't it?

Steve Rodhouse: I am going to plead the Fifth on that one, if I may.

Q159 **Tim Loughton:** On the question of the main thing being to stop these boats getting into the water in the first place, it is encouraging to hear that there has been a greater sharing of intelligence with the French, but you gave an example, Mr Rodhouse, just now of some Albanians. I have seen the case of an Albanian father and son who I think facilitated a group coming across who have been prosecuted. I have seen few examples of people traffickers, be it Iraqi, Kurds in particular, as you have mentioned, but we did see some Iranians being interviewed by the BBC openly saying how they were bringing people across. It is not as though these people could not be found.

When this Committee some years ago went to Calais, we were taken around Calais by the French police, who openly pointed to the quite smart houses owned by the people traffickers. They knew who they were. Hardly any of them seem to get prosecuted, so what progress is being made on taking those people out of circulation, which would make it harder for those Iranians and others to then find a boat and get across to UK waters?

Steve Rodhouse: A lot of those people would be operating in France and I do not have the details of French convictions, but I know through the work that we are doing and the information we have provided there are a number of live investigations and convictions that have taken place in the last few months.

From the UK side, since 1 April last year we have arrested 106 people for organised immigration crime in the UK and 25 of those have been convicted and others are part of an ongoing caseload. That is the work of our operation Project Invigor, the joint team that I talked about earlier.



Q160 **Tim Loughton:** How does that relate to people coming across in boats?

Steve Rodhouse: I will have to get back to you on that. A relatively small number, because it is a very uncommon technique, as we have talked about earlier; it is a fraction of the overall immigration crime. What we are finding though of course is as we are looking into trying to understand people facilitating people coming across in boats, we are uncovering more and more investigative opportunities for people coming across for us to tackle people who are facilitating lorry transfers and air traffic transfers as well. We are seeing an increase in our overall organised immigration crime workload.

But I go back to the point, the numbers of people coming across through general maritime from France has been very low. The case I have just highlighted, that was around organised immigration crime not for asylum purposes; that was a clandestine operation where people were buying and using jet-skis to bring people across in an organised fashion, hence the significant sentences that we see at the end of it, 43 years between seven people.

Q161 **Tim Loughton:** Do you see a determination by the French to prosecute and take out of circulation people who are benefiting hugely from what is a very lucrative and significant trade or do you think they could do more?

Steve Rodhouse: I am really comfortable with the level of effort that the French police are putting in. There was a media expose the other day and I think *The Sun* was carrying a story where in France migrants were talking about how they were coming across and facilitators were talking about it. The French have taken that on as an investigation and they have taken on a number of investigations as a result of intelligence that we have passed them, so I am very comfortable. I have met with French counterparts and I am very comfortable with the efforts that they are putting in place.

Q162 **Tim Loughton:** Would you be able to get us the figures about the prosecutions that have taken place on French soil around people traffickers?

Steve Rodhouse: I can try, certainly. That is not data I have, but I will certainly try.

Q163 **Tim Loughton:** There is a frustration. Certainly the impression is that a lot of people are involved in criminality, a lot of people are making a lot of money involved in this criminality. We pick up the pieces in terms of those people then who have asylum claims or are the responsibility of social services or whatever over here, but we see very little about the perpetrators being prosecuted. Why is that and what more can be done to make sure they are picked up and they are properly disrupted?

Steve Rodhouse: I will seek to get the details of the prosecutions that have taken place overseas. That may not be easy. As I say, over the last year there were 140 organised immigration crime disruptions that the



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NCA have led upon, and the disruption will be arrests, prosecutions, returns, intercepting people overseas. There are a whole range of methods that we have put in place through Project Invigor.

Q164 **Tim Loughton:** But that is UK-wide and that is airborne, lorry-borne, seaborne or whatever. How many suspected illegal entrants have there been? They are the only ones that we know about.

Steve Rodhouse: Yes. The broad numbers coming across the whole range is in the region of 35,000, 36,000 in a year. You are right, but I highlight—

Q165 **Tim Loughton:** So 140 disruptions is scratching the surface, isn't it?

Steve Rodhouse: Of course we would like it to be more and we are working hard for it to be more, but on the area of general maritime that we are talking about here, I will come back to the point that only 1.5% of those 35,000 were people coming across in small boats.

Tim Loughton: I understand that, but it strikes me that given that we have 7,800 miles of coastline or whatever to safeguard, which is a tall order, our best bet must be to stop craft going into the water or lorries leaving the French coast or Belgium if it is further up the coast, or light aircraft coming in as well. It would be good to see what serious disruptions there have been in that activity on the continent in the first place across all those different forms of transport.

Q166 **John Woodcock:** Mr Rodhouse, I have been listening carefully to what you have been saying to Tim and I am confused in terms of when you talk about the high level of intelligence co-operation and that you are happy with it. I do not see how that is commensurate with not only not having the numbers of people that the French have prosecuted, but also not being clear you would be able to get them. Surely if the intelligence co-operation and the way in which you work is as rosy as you describe it that would be something with which you would be in lock-step with them.

Steve Rodhouse: I apologise if I have inadvertently misled. We are certainly in lock-step. It would be wrong to say that I am entirely happy, because as Alan has said, every time someone comes across is a potential death and tragedy. It is something we are working exceptionally hard on. To be clear, since we stepped up efforts after the end of October there are seven French criminal investigations that have been commenced based on UK intelligence. That is in addition to the six UK criminal investigations that have been commenced.

As I alluded to earlier, when you get into this you start understanding and finding links into other sorts of organised immigration crime as well. Hopefully by giving you that information I can show that we are absolutely in lock-step. What I cannot give you here is the wider, historic number over the whole year of French prosecutions, because of course the law is different. I am sure I can get a sense of that and will be happy to share that with you.



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Q167 **John Woodcock:** Thank you. Do you think the way in which you end up collaborating ends up with good co-operation at the operational level, but perhaps with room for improvement at the strategic level in terms of what Tim was suggesting before, if there are effectively bosses of gangs who are evading prosecution? That would be the impression I would get, reading between the lines from what you have said, but tell me if you do not think that is right.

Steve Rodhouse: Nothing is ever perfect, is it? I think the advent in 2015 of Project Invigor, which was originally aimed at the immigration challenges in the Mediterranean, but has been expanded to tackle the Channel as well, was a real step-change. It is a funded unit, 150 people across those agencies that I have spoken about. It has led to an increase of our staff overseas to have that upstream intervention and they are strategic roles as well as operational. It has led to the deployment of CPS magistrates in France to make sure that join-up is there. It is not a bad place to be, but of course what we are wrestling with here, as we alluded to earlier, is a fundamental shift in demand over a period of time.

We have been peddling exceptionally hard to get the intelligence picture that we have spoken about today, the criminal investigations in place that we have spoken about today both in the UK and overseas. Organised immigration crime is one of our priorities. It is where we are putting a significant amount of the National Crime Agency's effort because we recognise the risk to life. They are focusing on people who are incredibly vulnerable to make those journeys.

Q168 **John Woodcock:** Absolutely, I can understand that. If you were cynically looking at France's position in this, if they were operating with you as their partner, who takes the people intercepted back to the UK, then the incentives within the system for them to act more vigorously are not necessarily there, are they?

Steve Rodhouse: That is something you may need to put to the French. I accept that point, but I made the point earlier myself, because I agree that of course the business model relies on having a market of people who want to make this journey for the long term, not just for the short term. I understand that incentives are tremendously important here. I cannot comment in any more detail on the French motivation other than I understand that they do not want to be attracting people through their country and there are challenges, having been in northern France recently, in that part of the world.

Q169 **John Woodcock:** Obviously it is outside of your direct jurisdiction, but from what you have seen, and you mentioned at the beginning the relatively easy and long-established cultural links, the route through which Iranians can take to get to the north of France, is there any realistic proposition of being able to substantively change and make more difficult that route or is that something that is just going to be able to happen, come what may?



Steve Rodhouse: Frankly, I think it is going to be challenging. The Iranians that we see will take a variety of routes, generally taking a plane at some point in that journey. There are a number of access points where documentation and security can be checked. Most of those, if not all of them, are outside of the UK. It will be a fundamental challenge. There is an overland journey that people can make, and as we have said, once you are into Europe it is relatively clear to get to northern France. I think we should be preparing ourselves. This is a fundamental challenge that will be with us for some little time to come.

Q170 **John Woodcock:** Could you briefly explain how the Serbia visa issue has affected this, the end of it in October? Is that good or is that bad? Please enlighten us on this.

Steve Rodhouse: From my understanding of this position, the Serbians opened a window of opportunity for Iranians to access Serbia without visas. When they did so, a number of people took that opportunity. The material I have been provided with tells me that in the region of 10,000 to 12,000 people did not go back and that they therefore are in Europe, and a proportion of them have clearly made their way to northern France. I would not claim that it is all. Of course we know that a number of those who have been debriefed, because they have come from northern France, have claimed that they used the visa waiver, but didn't. There are others who claimed they didn't, but clearly did. It is a very imprecise figure.

We think around 10,000 to 12,000 people are left in Europe as a result of that visa waiver. That has now been closed. How many of them, what proportion of them have come through northern France and have made the journey on general maritime as opposed to going in the back of a lorry or another route I am afraid I cannot tell you.

Q171 **John Woodcock:** Finally, to you or across the panel, clearly you have an established culture of co-operation, which you have described, and good intelligence-sharing, which you describe. How much of that is dependent on the enabling powers from our membership of the European Union and therefore what is disrupted in the event of a no-deal Brexit and then again in the event that you do have a deal, but it does not include SIS II?

Steve Rodhouse: Shall I lead off with that?

John Woodcock: Yes, if you will.

Steve Rodhouse: In terms of the information-gathering that we have talked about, our staff being deployed in Coquelles and the like, I very much hope that does not change. There is no reason why that should change, because it is not reliant on one of the EU tools. Of course when we are undertaking investigations we will and do make use of things like European Arrest Warrants and European Investigation Orders. As we know, if there is no deal then we will lose access to those and the alternative provisions through mutual legal assistance and through extradition are slower, they are more time-consuming, they are just not



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as slick. That would be a challenge for us. I have spoken about this a lot and reiterate that would be a challenge for us.

SIS II for the wider policing and law enforcement family—I am sure Alan will speak on this—I see as a significant loss. It is a system that allows live-time access to important information that keeps people safe. Although a system of Europe Interpol notices can carry to some extent the same information, it is not as timely and it is more bureaucratic. Probably the most important thing from my point of view is it relies on European partners using the Interpol system when they are not used to it, because frankly they have been using SIS II. It relies on them putting in place another bureaucratic step in the process and that does worry me, because Alan's staff out on the streets, my investigators, want to have information at their fingertips that tells them if someone is arrestable, if someone is missing, if a car is stolen. Those are things that are fundamental to law enforcement, yes, in this sphere, but much wider as well.

Q172 John Woodcock: You talked at the beginning about how some of this intelligence-sharing is very fast-moving, so without SIS II we are going to get to a situation where things that otherwise we could have stopped and you need to stop within a matter of hours are not simply at the moment going to be able to be apprehended.

Steve Rodhouse: That is a risk. Certainly within the National Crime Agency we are working exceptionally hard to make sure that the alternative systems, whether that be Interpol notices and the other measures that we have talked about, are as speedy as possible and that we are gathering the information that would be on SIS II and manually entering it into the Police National Computer and other systems to ensure that front-line colleagues have that information.

Q173 John Woodcock: A lot of the debate has focused around the idea that retaining the European Arrest Warrant, retaining a place within Europol—even if not with a position on the board—is a good deal. You have given important evidence as to why, without SIS II, there is a quite significant step-back.

Steve Rodhouse: Yes. I think that is consistent with what myself and Richard Martin for policing have said for some time now.

Q174 Chair: Let me ask you some final questions. Right back at the beginning you gave us some figures and some numbers, talking about 250 people in December and 90 in January. For clarity, how many boats were intercepted?

Steve Rodhouse: We talked about this outside, because we wanted to make sure that we give you the most current information, but since that time, 20 October, we are saying that there were 86 incidents. Of course incidents and people are very different.



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Alan Pughsley: With the one today we talked about, that would make 87.

Q175 **Chair:** That is 87 boats or vessels, is it, when you talk about an incident?

Alan Pughsley: I think that is incidents, because that includes those who have been stopped in France. This motive of operation, so intended small vessels, but on occasion stopped before they even get into them over in France, so I think we would say collectively 87 either used or intended small vessels.

Steve Rodhouse: If it assists, when a boat comes ashore, the NCA will look to forensically examine that boat, and we have forensically examined 44 boats.

Q176 **Chair:** So 44 boats, and those are the ones that have come ashore in the UK?

Steve Rodhouse: Yes, that is right.

Q177 **Chair:** What about boats that have been intercepted in the Channel? How many of those?

Steve Rodhouse: If they had been intercepted in the Channel and brought to the UK?

Chair: I do not mind, just intercepted in the Channel. I would like to know the number of boats that have been intercepted in the Channel.

Steve Rodhouse: I do not hold that information, I am afraid.

Julie-Anne Wood: I do not have that information at this moment in time, but we can certainly get that and provide that for you.

Alan Pughsley: It is a mixture of those three. I am afraid the Border Force would have that data, because they stop the boats, as you would imagine, so within the 87 it is the 40-odd that Mr Rodhouse has said arrived in the UK and then the remainder include those that have not even left the shore, dare I say it, over in France. I do not have that number, I am sorry.

Q178 **Chair:** With respect, it does not sound very co-ordinated if you do not have those figures. If those are just figures that the Border Force have and you do not, that feels quite surprising to me. I think we could do with knowing the number of interceptions of whatever kind that have taken place in the Channel. I do not mind if it is just one month's figures. Just having January's figures would be helpful or just having the figures from October would be helpful, but it would be really helpful to know the number of interceptions in the Channel. It would also be helpful to know how many of those have been by the French authorities and how many have been by the British authorities. Within those figures it would be helpful to know, for the British authorities, how many of those have been by the MCA and how many have been by the Border Force and how many



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have been by the Navy patrols.

Steve Rodhouse: I can help you there. NCA does not have a maritime capability. None of them will be by the NCA.

Q179 **Chair:** Sorry, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. That was my question. I said "M", not "N". Maybe, Ms Wood, you can tell me how many boats you have intercepted.

Julie-Anne Wood: We would not necessarily intercept. We respond to the distress calls, so if we are informed of a vessel that is crossing the Channel by a passing ferry, for example, we would then respond, but we do not have people on patrol to go and intercept in that sense. We are very much a response organisation.

Q180 **Chair:** How many boats have you responded to?

Julie-Anne Wood: I can give you that. We have responded to 47 incidents and that has included 26 lifeboat taskings, 13 aircraft taskings and 45 coastguard rescue team taskings, so that is from a period of 3 November to 18 February.

Q181 **Chair:** From 3 November to 18 February you have had 47 incidents? That is 47 boats?

Julie-Anne Wood: That is 47 boats.

Chair: That you have responded to?

Julie-Anne Wood: Absolutely.

Q182 **Chair:** It would be helpful to know how many of those each month, so what the profile of that has been. I think we just need to know this basic information and in addition to that how many boats have been responded to by the Border Force cutters, by Vigilant and Searcher and by the naval vessel.

Julie-Anne Wood: Yes. During those times, the 47 incidents where HM Coastguard had an involvement, 46 Border Force vessels were also called. I have that breakdown and I have the breakdown as well for each month for November and January.

Q183 **Chair:** What you do not have is the ones that they responded to without your assistance?

Julie-Anne Wood: Without our knowledge, yes.

Q184 **Chair:** Again, I just find this surprising, that this is not part of a co-ordinated set of data and information that you all have access to, because it would seem to be basic in order to respond to the problem and having a sense of the scale of the problem if you do not have the figures on the number of boats being responded to or intercepted in any way each month.



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Alan Pughsley: Sorry, we do. That is 86. That is the number that we said earlier, so the 86 incidents include the boats that have come ashore here, the boats that have not even started from France and the boats that have been returned to France. What I cannot tell you is how many have been returned to France within that 86 number, but the Border Force should be able to. That is the total figure that we are talking of. What we cannot do is give you that exact breakdown of how many have been returned to France.

Q185 **Chair:** I assume you do have that information within your organisations, even if you do not have it in front of you today. That is not information that you do not share?

Alan Pughsley: We can absolutely give you that in written submission, Chair.

Q186 **Chair:** It would be helpful to have this information this afternoon. We have questions to the Home Secretary on this subject tomorrow and it would be helpful to have this basic information, number of boats stopped, intercepted, responded to by whichever agency, by the British authorities, by the French authorities, and within the British authorities, which British authorities responded to them. To have that this afternoon would be immensely helpful.

Alan Pughsley: We can do that. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence this morning. We really appreciate your time.