



Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Home Office
2 Marsham Street
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21 July 2022

Dear Home Secretary,

Passport Delays

Today we held an oral evidence session on passport delays and the impact of those delays on passport applicants. Due to an “unprecedented demand” for passports following the relaxation of COVID travel restrictions, HM Passport Office increased the standard time for processing a passport from 3 weeks to 10 weeks in April 2021. Despite this extension in processing time, numerous applicants have experienced major issues in obtaining a passport and have found it extremely difficult to get advice from the Passport Office owing to the poor performance of Teleperformance, the contractors operating the Helpline.

The Committee was extremely disappointed that Teleperformance declined our request to attend the session stating:

“Teleperformance will not appear at the Home Affairs Select Committee this week as the main issue is that UK citizens are facing delays to obtain their passports. We have no control over the processing and delivery of passports and support HMPO’s customer communications only. We feel that providing information on our service performance and supporting HMPO is more appropriate.”

Given the Helpline is one of the biggest frustrations cited by applicants, we find this refusal completely unsatisfactory. We asked Thomas Greig, Director of Passport Operations, to relay our concerns to Teleperformance. However, their refusal to appear before the Committee does raise questions about the accountability of Home Office contractors. As a matter of note, the contractor responsible for delivery of passports, TNT, accepted our invitation to attend the session.

I write, on behalf of the Committee, with recommendations to redress the issues discussed in the session which have had a detrimental impact on passport applicants in recent months. We will write separately to HM Passport Office regarding the data and information requested and promised in the session.

Recommendations

- 1. We recommend that HM Passport Office engage in greater proactive management of passport demand from the public.** During quieter periods in the demand cycle HM Passport Office should proactively contact customers whose passports are due to expire during a period of peak demand and offer incentives, such as a slightly longer passport extension, to encourage applications to be submitted ahead of the peak.
- 2. We recommend that the Home Office review the terms of its contract with Teleperformance for the provision of the Helpline.** In particular, it must ensure that customers who will receive passports in time for their travel are notified immediately to provide reassurance and reduce call volumes. At periods of peak call volume, the Passport Office should immediately publish advice on its website which seeks to triage urgent cases, answer key questions and reduce demand. In your response, please set out the timetable for upskilling call operators so that all have access to Home Office systems and can provide meaningful, timely and useful advice to customers who are seeking information about the status of their applications.
- 3. The Home Office should write to the Committee to explain why the digital passport application system does not enable applications from family groups to be linked in the system and setting out an assessment of how and when this feature might be introduced.**
- 4. We recommend that the Passport Office monitor the number of people trying to access the priority services and set a target for the minimum acceptable number of priority slots** which must be made available on the website each day for priority service.
- 5. We recommend that the Home Office examine the feasibility of offering an emergency service for passport extensions of up to 6 months via HM Passport Offices.** This service could be open only to those travelling within the week, on the condition they physically attend a passport office and could be subject to an additional fee. The Committee requests that the outcome of review of this proposal is supplied to the Committee within the next 6 months.

I would appreciate a detailed response to each of our recommendations by 30 August 2022 so that it may be fully considered when next we meet on 7 September.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dame Diana Johnson MP