



Home Office

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Meg Hillier MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
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Dear Chair

In our session with the Committee on 13 July, principally on the NAO's review of Immigration Enforcement, the Second Permanent Secretary, Tyson Hepple and I committed to providing you with some additional detail on points raised.

Windrush engagement

Since my predecessor wrote to you on 18 October 2019 we have continued with our engagement and communication activity to raise awareness of the Windrush Scheme and the Windrush Compensation Scheme ('the Windrush Schemes'). We have held over 100 engagement and outreach events across the country. These were promoted by stakeholders, by working with local authorities, and by placing advertisements in local newspapers and on social media. Due to the current pandemic, we moved our engagement events online. Since 21 May, we have held six online events, with a further four scheduled before the end of August: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/windrush-online-engagement-events>.

In addition, we continue to work with the Home Office volunteer network established in May 2018, which has become a significant channel for outreach into affected communities. This network has approximately 130 staff volunteers who come from a range of Black and other minority ethnic backgrounds and engage with their local communities to promote the Schemes.

As we mentioned, we have also set up a Windrush Stakeholder Advisory Group, bringing together community leaders with links to regions across the country; seeking their advice on our communications and engagement strategy to encourage applications to the Windrush Schemes. The Group was launched by the Home Secretary in September 2019 and has met regularly since then.

In March this year, the Home Secretary announced a national advertising and grassroots campaign to raise awareness. Activity will run across a range of channels including radio, digital, local and community publications, and online. This will be supported by specialist

media partnerships reaching priority Commonwealth groups, partner activity and the recruitment of national and regional community ambassadors to help reach out to people who may have been affected.

Communication plans have been developed with stakeholder input, and materials and messaging have been tested with representative members of the target audience to ensure effectiveness. A £500,000 Community Fund was announced, so community organisations can bid for funding to run outreach, promotional and support activity to increase awareness of the Windrush Schemes further.

The Home Secretary and Bishop Webley hosted the first meeting of the new cross-government Windrush Working Group on 25 June to address the wider inequalities affecting the Windrush generation and their families. Three sub groups have now been established to support the implementation of the recommendations made in the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, to design the new Community Fund, and to work with the new Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. This Group is also advising on our new communications campaign to encourage more people who were affected to come forward. We are also developing plans with our British Embassies and High Commissions for additional bespoke activity in priority countries overseas.

Legal advice

We agreed to provide further details regarding the provision of legal advice at early stages in proceedings.

In 2013 the Home Office commissioned an evaluation of the Early Legal Advice Project. This evaluation was prompted by stakeholders to ascertain whether providing legal advice earlier in the asylum process would help people make better applications and get to a result more quickly. The evaluation found that this was not the case and that there was no clear benefit to the applicant or value for money for the taxpayer. The evaluation can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199962/horr70.pdf

The Home Office have not undertaken any similar analysis since, but we will continue to consider our approach as we develop our new immigration system.

End-to-end Immigration Enforcement system

There has been considerable progress in delivering a more interconnected and mutually supportive Border, Immigration and Citizenship System (BICS) over the past few years. Immigration Enforcement (IE) plays its part in every stage of the BICS, from the work to prevent people without documentation boarding planes to the UK, to the provision of intelligence and analysis about potential abuse, to the compliant environment designed to prevent people in the UK illegally from accessing work, benefits and services to which they are not entitled, to active enforcement – arrest, detention and removal. Key examples would be the provision of intelligence and extra capacity to support Border Force on challenges such as small boats and other forms of clandestine entry, and the close work with UK Visas and Immigration to ensure that their decision-making flows through quickly, where appropriate, into enforcement action by IE.

Within IE itself new technical solutions will help digitise manual processes, increased investment in analysis will improve our understanding of those with whom we engage, and

more automation will help prioritise and co-ordinate the action we take to maximise impact. These reforms will not only make IE a more coherent and effective organisation but will also contribute to streamlining the immigration system, and making the most of BICS resource, as a whole.

Barriers to deportation and returns to the EU

The Home Office is committed to the deportation of Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) from the UK wherever it is legal to do so. Since 2010 we have removed over 53,000 FNOs, including more than 4,700 in 2019/20 (including over 3,200 EEA nationals). While the coronavirus pandemic has presented challenges on returns, we have continued to progress the removal of FNOs where there are available routes, and by charter flight operations.

There is a balance to be struck between the legitimate rights of people liable for deportation to challenge the decision of the Secretary of State under international law, and to bring human rights or trafficking claims, and the use of such avenues to delay proceedings unreasonably. Delays can have knock-on effects, as travel documents become invalid, charter flights need to be postponed and escorting arrangements rescheduled, or the individual creates new rights under the UK's current obligations under international law.

Restoring trust in our immigration system is a priority, including by removing individuals as quickly as possible where it is appropriate to do so; as is overhauling the current system to make it fairer and more compassionate. This work is at an early stage, but Ministers are actively looking at all options, including legislative changes.

The UK continues to work with EU Member States on the issue of returns, and EU Exit negotiations are ongoing.

Foreign National Offenders: removals from prison

The Early Release Scheme (ERS) enables Foreign National Offenders (FNOs) who are subject to deportation or administrative removal to be removed from prison and the UK up to 270 days before they would otherwise have been eligible for release.

In the last five years the Home Office has removed over 2,000 FNOs each year under this Scheme. Those who wish to return home voluntarily are fast tracked through the system to ensure a speedy removal.

Initiatives that have helped deliver this include having two FNO-only prisons and four FNO "hub" prisons, with Home Office staff based within the prison estate. This has enabled us to manage all FNOs serving a custodial sentence more closely, and provides a direct link with Immigration Enforcement, encouraging compliance and expediting removal.

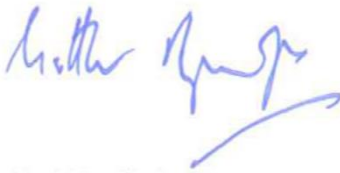
Broader initiatives, such as serving FNOs with notice of intention to deport earlier, at 36 rather than 18 months before their earliest release date, have allowed more time to progress cases and remove barriers so that removal can be undertaken more quickly. In addition, following an increase in appeals from non-EEA nationals the Home Office piloted an expedited appeal process for those within the prison estate. This has enabled us to reduce appeal turnaround time by 12 weeks. We plan to roll this out across all four FNO "hub" prisons.

Asylum claims in detention

Of the 4,300 plus asylum claims made from detention in 2017, where time has passed for the majority of these claims to be concluded, analysis of internal management information indicates that by March 2020 under 2% had been granted asylum or another form of leave at the point an initial decision was made, with around 7% eventually granted some form of leave.

I hope that these additions respond to the questions from Committee members, and I look forward to future opportunities to discuss these points and others with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Rycroft', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Rycroft CBE
Permanent Secretary