



Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson MP  
Chair  
Home Affairs Select Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

6 September 2022

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 21 July on behalf of the Home Affairs Select Committee, following the oral evidence session of the same date.

I share the Committee's disappointment relating to Teleperformance declining the invitation to the evidence session. As a supplier to the Home Office, Teleperformance have been reminded of their responsibilities for accountability to Parliament. They have subsequently provided assurances relating to their attendance should they be invited to provide evidence in the future which you may wish to follow up on.

Thank you for the Committee's recommendations for further improving the passport service. I have responded to each of these recommendations in turn below.

**1. That HM Passport Office engage in greater proactive management of passport demand from the public.**

The seasonality of passport demand does put greater pressure on passport services, and there remains significant value in exploring options to smooth this demand across the full year. However, Her Majesty's Passport Office has not yet identified a viable incentive to bring forward demand into the autumn/winter.

With regard to the Committee's suggestion of a longer passport extension, the UK was the last country to abandon carrying over validity from a previous passport. We are not aware of any other country which allows for this kind of extension.

This practice was abandoned, due to the fact that for third-country nationals travelling to most countries in Europe, a passport older than 10 years will not be accepted for entry.

To ensure certainty for those travelling, since September 2018, the UK has therefore ceased to carry over additional validity. This is also in line with the

International Civil Aviation Organisation's guidance to its 192 Member States, with a maximum validity of 10 years for adults and 5 years for children.

**2. That the Home Office review the terms of its contract with Teleperformance for the provision of the Helpline.**

The Home Office has a robust contract for the provision of Contact Centre Services, which contains several mechanisms to incentivise and manage delivery by Teleperformance.

Enquiries to the Passport Adviceline range from pre-application guidance, through to detailed case queries. While not all Adviceline staff are provided with access to HM Passport Office systems at any one time, clear processes are in place to refer customers to the right team to help meet their need.

We recognise it would allow for a more flexible use of resources if a larger proportion of Teleperformance agents were trained and able to access our systems. As a result of this we have agreed with Teleperformance they will take the necessary steps to make it possible for all their staff working on the contract to be able to work across our systems.

To access passport application systems, Teleperformance staff must undergo the relevant security clearance. All new entrants are trained to navigate passport application systems to ensure there is no impact of attrition upon their resourcing to answer specific case enquiries. Teleperformance estimate all Adviceline staff will have undertaken this training by the end of October.

I am grateful to the Committee for its recommendation for changes and additions to customer messaging. These proposals will help to inform HM Passport Office's work to review customer messaging ahead of the continued elevated demand that is expected in 2023.

**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.**

It is not straightforward to adjust the system to allow for the linking of family groups as there are multiple system and data dependencies, and these require detailed analysis and design before we can determine the timescale and impacts. However, we have developed a feature which will enable families to direct HM Passport Office to link applications with shared supporting documents/evidence, as this is the most common reason for considering multiple applications together.

This feature is currently being implemented and guidance published for those applying online will be updated to advise of the process to follow in these circumstances.

**4. 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.**

Appointments for urgent services are released three weeks in advance. While this means new appointments are released on a daily basis, in busy periods these will be booked quickly.

With urgent services being face-to-face services, appointments are limited to estate capacity. Given the current high demand, HM Passport Office provides appointment slots to meet this capacity, which is approximately 12,000 per week.

Options have been explored to increase appointment capacity to further support customers with urgent travel needs. This work led to the opening of an eighth public counter in early-June.

#### **5. The Home Office examine the feasibility of offering an emergency service for passport extensions of up to 6 months via HM Passport Offices.**

This is not an option we would consider sensible to pursue at the current time for the following reasons-

- The UK issues passports in line with the current International Civil Aviation Organisation guidance with a maximum validity of 10 years for adults, and 5 years for children. British passports remain a valid travel document for the entire validity period shown, however it remains for each country or group of countries to set their specific entry requirements, which may include defining a period of remaining passport validity, and/or a maximum age of a passport that they will accept. Similarly, it is for any country or group of countries to determine if they would accept a passport that has been exceptionally extended. Therefore, an extended passport would be unlikely to be acceptable in several countries and it would not be possible to offer unequivocal advice to customers as to where and when it could be used
- Alongside there being no guarantee an extended British passport would be permitted to enter any other country, the vast majority of extended passports would still need to be renewed in the near future. The use of extended passports therefore prolongs the resolution of any operational issue that has led to the measure being introduced.
- Extending a passport would still require security checks, for the passport to be submitted, and for administrative tasks to take place. It would also require us to see applicants and conduct a decision making process. It is not clear this process would be significantly quicker than the process required to issue a new passport instead, which would inherently be of more use to an applicant than the suggestion the Committee makes here.

The Committee will have noted the unprecedented passport demand following the pandemic is not unique to the UK. Media coverage overseas has reported increased processing times across the world, such as Canada where applicants are now asked to allow up to 13 weeks. Thales, who manufacture and personalise the British passport, have confirmed they have seen a record increase of demand of 40% across their contracts globally.

In 2022 to-date, HM Passport Office has processed over 6 million of the 9.5 million passport applications forecast for this year. That is over one million more applications than were received in the whole of 2021.

Despite this exceptional demand, HM Passport Office's staff have helped to ensure families have their passport in good time for their hard-earned holidays, with 97.7% of applications in the UK between January and June being completed within the published processing time of up to ten weeks.

With my very best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Foster', with a flourish at the end.

**Kevin Foster MP**  
**Minister for Safe and Legal Migration**