



Home Office

Permanent Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

Rt Hon. Meg Hillier MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

15 October 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Committee on 1st October, and for your letter of 8th October requesting further information, which I am providing below.

1. Police IT systems: what lessons can be learned from the problems experienced in Greater Manchester and how many other police forces are currently procuring new IT systems.

Operational decisions, such as the procurement of ITC systems, are matters for individual forces and the Home Office does not collect data on which forces are currently procuring new IT systems. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Police and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) plays a crucial role in requesting data from forces, in identifying issues, and monitoring progress with the implementation of its recommendations. It is the responsibility of each local policing body to hold their Chief Constable to account for any improvements that are needed.

In the case of Greater Manchester, the Home Office was not involved in the procurement of the Integrated Operational Police System (iOPS). However, we are in regular contact with Greater Manchester Police to ensure progress is being made in resolving identified issues and addressing the recommendations of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Police and Fire and Rescue Services Report: "Greater Manchester Police Integrated Operational Policing System inspection". The inspection report contains useful insights on implementation of new ICT systems which can help support other forces. We await the findings

of the Inspectorate's follow up to their initial inspection, which we understand is likely to be published in December.

More broadly, the National Policing Digital Data and Technology strategy sets out a vision for the policing technology landscape and addresses issues related to local force procurement, including inter-force operability. The Home Office is working closely with policing partners to support its implementation.

2. Deportations: the number of enforced, voluntary and foreign national offender deportations each month since January 2020, along with a breakdown of the reasons why the Department has been unable to return any asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected during that period.

There has been a fall in enforced returns in recent years due to a number of changes in the immigration system including: a commitment to detain fewer people in response to Stephen Shaw's second review on immigration detention; the introduction of an automatic referral for bail hearing after four months in detention for all non-foreign national offenders (FNOs); and ongoing legal challenges to detention and removals.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Immigration Enforcement decided to prioritise work to deal with the continued detention of FNOs to enable their return where possible. This has had an impact on Immigration Enforcement's capability to remove non-FNOs.

At the outset of the pandemic, Immigration Enforcement put in place a range of measures to protect people who remained in detention and people working in immigration removal centres. These reduced the capacity within the immigration detention estate by more than half. They included:

- Mandating a move to single occupancy and use of rooms only where in-room toilet facilities were available.
- Establishment of units within each centre in which people could be isolated if they became ill or if they required shielding.
- The introduction of a system known as reverse cohorting, in which all new arrivals spend 14-21 days in dedicated units separate from the rest of the population. Reverse cohort units operate on a three-week cycle in which people arrive in week one and then spend the next two weeks within the unit. This process is effective in preventing COVID 19 entering the detention estate but significantly reduces capacity.

Covid-19 global travel restrictions from mid-March impacted both voluntary and enforced returns in a number of ways. Operators significantly reduced the number of scheduled commercial flights. Receiving countries also imposed separate travel restrictions and in some cases, closed borders to any arrivals. Even now, scheduled flights are operating at a lower level compared to before March 2020.

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place) (England) Regulations 2020 made it mandatory for face coverings to be worn on scheduled flights, which has caused additional challenge to facilitate

disruptive enforced returns on scheduled flights. To mitigate, Immigration Enforcement has significantly stepped up the charter flight returns programme and continues to work with airlines to make returns on scheduled flights where possible.

Please find below a table showing the number of Enforced and Voluntary Returns for January to June 2020, in line with the latest available published data, for individuals with and without a criminal case (foreign national offender (FNO)).

Table of Enforced and Voluntary returns January to June 2020

	2020					
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Enforced returns	551	504	315	47	123	196
<i>FNO</i>	380	347	208	43	120	192
<i>Non-FNO</i>	171	157	107	4	3	4
Voluntary returns	924	757	739	123	107	141
<i>FNO</i>	10	8	6	2	4	4
<i>Non-FNO</i>	914	749	733	121	103	137
Total returns	1,475	1,261	1,054	170	230	337

3. Use of hotels as accommodation: of the 9,500 asylum seekers currently in hotels, the number whose claim is still being processed, those who have been given a positive decision to remain, and those whose asylum application has been refused. Also, the number of families with children who have been accommodated in in hotels for more than 35 days, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our records show that of the 9,500 people in hotels circa 6,600 have an outstanding asylum application, circa 330 have an outstanding further submission application, and circa 80 have been granted a form of leave. The significant majority of the remaining cases have had their application refused and have exhausted their appeal rights. The total for refused cases includes people who had been refused and subsequently re-entered the asylum support process as a consequence of not being able to travel to their home country.

There were around 1,400 asylum seekers accommodated in hotels on 20 March, prior to the pandemic, of which 122 were children of school age. Dependent upon the availability of dispersed accommodation, the Home Office is prioritising moves out of hotels for vulnerable applicants, families and those who have been accommodated in hotels for the longest periods (these cases are the most likely to have received an outcome in relation to their asylum application). There were 822 school-age children in hotels on 1 October, 428 of whom had been present for more than 35 days. We will continue to prioritise these cases for transfer to dispersed accommodation as and when it is made available. In the interim we will work with relevant Local Authorities to establish

what the support needs of the children are and how they can be met. We are scheduled to complete this work by the end of October 2020.

4. Prevalence of COVID-19 in hotels: since the start of the pandemic, the number of people in hotels that have been tested for COVID-19, the number of positive results, the number of hotels affected, and the local authorities in which these hotels are located.

Figures for testing and positive cases are held by Public Health England and form part of the national Covid-19 dashboard. They are not broken down by setting, nor do they differentiate in a way that allows us to draw out the data on supported asylum seekers.

Given that the national figures do not allow us to review by cohort, we rely on providers keeping manual records based on data provided by PHE or by supported asylum seekers themselves. This is of course subject to change if we are not informed that a test has taken place by health colleagues, or by the Service User themselves. Our current provider records indicate that of those tested in hotel accommodation, 29 have tested positive. Those who tested positive were in 16 hotels in Leicester, Birmingham, Didsbury, Hackney, York, Wakefield, Glasgow, Newcastle, Redbridge, Hammersmith and Fulham, South Croydon, Croydon, Hounslow and Hertsmere.

These figures are for hotel accommodation, as requested and do not include those in core Initial Accommodation sites such as Stone Road or in Dispersal Accommodation.

5. Stone Road: a full, detailed explanation of what happened to the people who were moved out of the Stone Road Initial Accommodation in Edgbaston, Birmingham, following the COVID-19 outbreak there, including what conversations took place with local authorities and local MPs, when and with whom.

Management of the incident was co-ordinated on a day to day basis by an Incident Management Team (IMT) chaired by Public Health England, with the Home Office and Serco represented. All moves that took place were either to Dispersal Accommodation or to hotel accommodation in which service users could self-isolate. It was agreed that PHE would make initial contact with the relevant local authorities.

Please note that we have redacted the names of individuals from this account as we do not consider it appropriate to include these in a public letter. We would be happy to confirm these details to the Committee separately if that would be helpful.

25 August - 27 people moved to Dispersal Accommodation

- **22 people moved to Coventry – All Positive.** At IMT on 24 August, PHE had requested relocation of positively-tested service users from Stone Road

as it was unsuitable for self-isolation given the number of positive cases that had been identified. PHE contacted Coventry City Council public health team that day by voicemail, and followed up by e-mail, to advise them of the situation and make them aware of the moves. Serco followed up the PHE communication by email and phone call on 25 August. Coventry CC participated in the IMT calls on 25 and 26 August. Additionally, Serco engaged Coventry CC's Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officers to support service users to self-isolate.

- **5 people moved to Walsall – All Negative.** Vulnerable service users at Stone Road had been identified and prioritised for moves to Dispersal Accommodation in which they could self-isolate (this was the basis for moves of all negatively-tested cases during the outbreak). It was identified at IMT on 26 August that Walsall Council had not been notified of these arrivals, and the Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP) telephoned Walsall Council and advised them of the situation whilst others remained on the IMT call. Serco followed this up that day by telephone and email, with specific details on location and service users involved. There was a further complication that one of the service users had originally been thought to have tested positive, but this mistake was corrected, and Walsall Council advised accordingly as soon as this was identified.

26 August - 3 people moved to Dispersal Accommodation.

- **3 people moved to Coventry – All Positive.** Engagement with Coventry CC followed on from that put in place for the initial 22 cases.

27 August - No Moves

28 August - 7 people moved to Dispersal Accommodation

- **1 person moved to Walsall – Positive.** Serco contacted Walsall Council that day to advise of the arrival. Walsall were also involved in daily IMT calls.
- **4 people moved to Dudley - All Negative.** Serco had exchanged e-mails with Dudley Council on 27 August to advise of the details and confirm arrangements.
- **2 people moved to Wolverhampton - Both Negative.** Serco contacted Wolverhampton City Council by e-mail on 27 August to advise of the details and followed up on 28th August by telephone and e-mail.

Also, on 28 August, Birmingham City Council served a closure notice on Stone Road, with a deadline of midnight on 31 August.

29 August (Saturday) - No Moves

30 August (Sunday) - 12 people moved to Dispersal Accommodation.

- **10 people moved to Coventry – All Positive.** On the evening of 29 August notification had been received from the NHS swabbing team that an additional 12 service users had tested positive. Property was identified in Coventry, and the Home Office Service Delivery Manager (SDM) notified the SMP of the advice from PHE that they needed to move. The SMP contacted Coventry CC and followed up that evening. Serco also sent a follow up email detailing the properties that they intended to use. Initially all 12 cases were going to be dispersed to Coventry, but this reduced to 10 following a request from Coventry not to use one of the properties.

It should be noted that these moves were originally planned to take place in the evening of 29 August as soon as the positive tests were confirmed, but that Covid-secure transport had not been available, hence these moves began on the morning of 30 August. This was examined at the IMT on 30 August.

- **2 people moved to Walsall – Both Positive.** At 10.15am on 30 August, whilst the service users were travelling to Coventry, an e-mail was received from Coventry CC requesting us not to use one of the properties that had been identified. Serco identified an alternative property in Leicester and our SDM e-mailed Leicester City Council to advise of this whilst Serco diverted the transport. Whilst on route to Leicester, Serco identified that the property was not suitable, and identified another property in Walsall. Serco emailed Walsall Council to advise of this, whilst the Home Office SDM contacted Leicester CC to advise that property had been stood down. All of these communications happened on the day.

31 August - 175 People Moved to Hotels; 2 to Dispersal Accommodation

- **131 to Strathallan Hotel – Birmingham – of which 5 Positive.** The Home Office liaised with Birmingham City Council and PHE on daily IMTs and via email to agree the use of Strathallan. Birmingham CC approved the use before the service users moved in.
- **44 to Seraphine Hotel - Hammersmith– of which 2 Positive.** Following the 48-hour notice period from BCC steps were taken to identify a suitable second hotel in Birmingham to keep the outbreak contained within the city. Serco attempted to secure the Copthorne Hotel, which had been agreed for use by Birmingham CC. However, this fell through on Saturday 29 August. Serco, with UKVI's assistance and that of another Home Office provider, Clearsprings Ready Homes, identified a replacement at 6pm on Sunday 30 August. PHE Birmingham was updated with the details of the second hotel and made aware it was out of region at the IMT on 31 August. On 31 August Serco telephoned Hammersmith out of hours PHE contact, which generated an e-mail exchange with questions that both CRH and Serco answered that day. An MDT was set up for 1 September, pulling in relevant Stakeholders, with both Serco and CRH in attendance.

- **2 to Leicester Dispersal Accommodation – both Positive.** Our SDM had been in e-mail dialogue with Leicester on 30 August about potential arrivals. Once the numbers and location were clear on 31 August Serco advised Leicester CC by e-mail of the 2 people to be accommodated in the area that day.

Stone Road was emptied and closed to staff and service users on 31st August.

Summary of Movements

Number of service users in Stone Road at Point of Outbreak	231
Total Moved to Hotels	175
Total Moved to Dispersal Accommodation	51
Total left AASC for private addresses*	5

* 5 service users left Stone Road between 24 and 31 August and did not travel to asylum accommodation. All contact details available to UKVI, Migrant Help and Serco were shared via the IMT structure with the contact tracing team in order to ensure they were traced and advised of the need to self-isolate.

We continue to work with Local Authorities and partners to implement lessons learnt from outbreaks within the asylum accommodation estate.

6. Service credits: the value of service credits, by provider, since the NAO carried out its fieldwork (i.e. from February 2020 onwards), as well as details on how the Department assesses whether service credits will have negative implications for service users.

Service credits raised as a result of provider failure to meet contractual standards is commercially sensitive information, and not appropriate to be placed in the public domain. We would be happy to share this information with the Committee privately if that would be of assistance.

We can confirm that service credits are limited in their totality on a monthly basis and as such are designed to impact upon the profits earned by the provider in a given month. The aim is to incentivise the provider to improve its service delivery without presenting the risk of negative implications for service users or for the viability of the contracts.

7. Open book accounting: details of the Department's work to assess each provider's accounts, when available.

The first anniversaries of the contracts were on 1st September and 1st October and we will be timetabling structured reviews of the accounts from November onwards once provider accounts have been finalised and released. This will be in accordance both with the Government's open book contract management principles and the contractual requirements on the assessment of profit and any profit share requirements. As above, we would be happy to share appropriate documentation with the Committee privately if that would be of assistance.

I very much hope that this letter addresses the further questions you had.

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