



# Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP  
Home Secretary  
Via email

28 February 2024

Dear James,

Further to my letter of 19 February, I am writing to you following our oral evidence session with the former Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, Mr David Neal, on Tuesday 27 February 2024. I wanted to raise a number of concerns we had following that oral evidence session:

## **Dismissal of the ICIBI**

In response to the Urgent Question on 20 February 2024 regarding the information about London City Airport, the Minister for Legal Migration and the Border told the House that that information “has no basis in fact”. When we questioned Mr Neal about the factual accuracies of his reports, he said, “I wouldn’t have submitted the report and behaved in the way that I have done if I thought there was any doubts that what we put into the public domain wasn’t accurate”. We appreciate that the ICIBI reports are submitted to the Home Office for review and fact checking, but we are unclear what facts in particular have no basis and we would like the Home Office to clarify this.

## **Appointment of new ICIBI**

The Home Office launched a recruitment campaign for a new ICIBI in November 2023, the deadline for which was 18 December 2023. Recently, the Home Office launched another recruitment campaign for the same role on 21 February 2024, with applications closing on 2 April 2024. Firstly, we are unclear why another recruitment campaign has been launched, and why this Committee was not notified that this would be the case, especially given our role in the pre-appointment process.

Secondly, whilst the Home Secretary informed Radio 4 on 23 February 2024 that Mr Neal “chose not to” apply for the vacancy, in his oral evidence to the Committee Mr Neal told us that he was “not sure where that has come from” stating that “I haven’t been asked to re-apply”. He told us that the Home Office had intended to extend his contract but that No.10 refused to. Can you clarify if this is the case, and if so why No.10 refused to extend the contract?

Thirdly, we are very concerned about the length of time it will take to appoint a new ICIBI and the impact of having a vacant role for a significant period of time, will have. We understand it took nearly a year for Mr Neal to take up his post as the ICIBI and recent reports are suggesting it could be 6-9 months before a new ICIBI is appointed. Mr Neal told us “any gap in Chief Inspectors means that the work stops...until the new Chief Inspector is appointed.” Please could you tell us how the

Home Office is proposing to cover this gap, which will occur at particularly crucial time.

### **Outstanding ICIBI reports**

Mr Neal told us that during his time in post he had contacted the Home Office weekly in order to ascertain when the 15 outstanding reports were likely to be published. However, he was given “no indication” of when the reports will be published. It is unacceptable that these reports have yet to be published and that the 8 week commitment to lay reports by the ICIBI before Parliament, made by James Brokenshire to Parliament back in 2015, is not being met.

Please could you send us a timeline for the publication of these 15 reports. We understand from Mr Neal that in the past there has been a “great report dump” which some stakeholders have said “would hide bad news in the reports, particularly the denser reports”. We hope consideration is being given to this, and would appreciate an update on how the Home Office plans to publish these reports (whether that will be done at the same time, or spaced out over a period of time).

Furthermore, if and when the Home Office does decide to publish these 15 outstanding reports, Mr Neal pointed out that there will be no ICIBI in post to write the press release or provide independent comment on the reports. What plans, if any, does the Home Office have to address this?

### **Assessment of the ICIBI role**

One of the recommendations made in Wendy Williams’ review into Windrush, called for a review of the ICIBI’s role and remit. Mr Neal told us that the Home Office’s decision not to pursue the review of the ICIBI’s role and remit was an “opportunity that was missed”. He has provided our committee with [written evidence](#) summarising how the ICIBI role could be improved. We would like to make you aware of this evidence, in the hope that you reflect on its contents.

### **Wethersfield asylum accommodation centre**

During our oral evidence session with Mr Neal, he spoke of his concerns regarding Wethersfield asylum accommodation centre. He told us “a number of suicide attempts” had been made at Wethersfield and that six weeks after his initial inspection of the site, “insufficient progress” had been made, resulting in him writing to the Minister for Legal Migration and the Border and requesting an urgent meeting with him to discuss his concerns. Those concerns related to violence, purposeful activity, and whether the Home Office had the correct expertise to handle 555 men who were “marooned on an island in the middle of nowhere”. He told us that whilst an initial meeting with the Minister for Legal Migration had occurred, the urgent follow-up meeting had been cancelled at the last minute.

Sadly, the concerns raised by Mr Neal are not surprising. We have been frequently contacted by stakeholders raising concerns about the situation at Wethersfield. I understand that a judicial review has just been launched against you in relation to conditions at Wethersfield, including claims that you have failed to provide a dignified standard of living for asylum seekers. This is extremely concerning. We therefore hope our request (as of 20 February 2024) to visit Wethersfield will be granted imminently so that we can understand the severity of the situation.

### **UK borders**

We asked Mr Neal his views on whether UK borders were safe and secure. He responded by saying that “there is some way to go for the workings of border force...to work to its optimum level”. He argued that “there is a long, long way to go with the functioning of security of the border and the role that border force plays within it and that’s what I’ve tried to bring out in my reports”.

We remain extremely concerned that at a time when fundamental policy changes and significant problems are occurring across the asylum and migration arena, the position of the ICIBI remains vacant, and will likely remain vacant for at least 6-9 months. This is simply not good enough.

Given the urgency of this situation, we would appreciate a response to this letter, as well as my letter of 19 February, by 4 March 2024.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'D' and 'J'.

**Dame Diana Johnson MP**  
**Chair of the Home Affairs Committee**