

18 March 2024

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

Dear Dame Diana,

Thank you for your letters of 19 February and 28 February.

As they were sent either side of your evidence session with the former Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) David Neal, I will respond to both in this letter, as agreed with the Committee clerks.

Mr Neal's appointment was terminated after he discussed sensitive and misleading information with the press.

Mr Neal's inspection report on the handling of General Aviation flights at London City Airport contained erroneous conclusions about how those flights are checked based on data where there was a known recording issue at that particular port. The Director General of Border Force wrote to Mr Neal to explain the position and offered an opportunity for a further discussion. Instead, Mr Neal approached a national newspaper and discussed these matters of border security directly with them, while also suggesting that this could be a nationwide issue. That conclusion is simply incorrect, which the Minister for Legal Migration and the Border asserted in his response to the Urgent Question on 4 March.

A new Chief Inspector will be appointed in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments.

The shortlist and panel interviews are expected to take place in the week commencing 15 April and 6 May respectively. Following the interview process and subsequent pre-appointment hearing by the Committee, my intention is to make the appointment as soon as practicably possible. My officials will work with your clerks, as required, to arrange a provisional date for a pre-appointment hearing in good time. I look forward to working with you on this important appointment process.

In the meantime, interim arrangements for the gap between David Neal's departure and the appointment of a new ICIBI are being considered.

We have now published 12 of the former ICIBI's inspection reports, and his last annual report. The two remaining reports are both within the 8-week commitment to publish and will be published soon. We have also noted the proposals outlined in Mr Neal's written evidence which he has also previously discussed with the Department. Some of these proposals, however, require further primary legislation for which we have no plans to make in the current Parliamentary session.

As I set out to the Committee in January, I have delegated decisions on Wethersfield to the Minister for Legal Migration and the Border who is content for the Committee to visit. My officials will be in touch to confirm a date.

Finally in regard to the UK Border, Border Force work tirelessly to keep this country safe and secure. I note in the ICIBI inspection foreword Mr Neal described Border Force staff to be dedicated and well-motivated. I am disappointed with the broad assessment he made based on limited inspections. Nevertheless, we are working to implement the recommendations we have accepted as part of continually improving the service we deliver.

I trust this information is helpful.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Cleverly', written in a cursive style.

**RT HON JAMES CLEVERLY MP
HOME SECRETARY**