

Defence Committee

Shifting heaven and earth? The Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes: Government Response

Second Special Report of Session 2026–27

HC 674

Defence Committee

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Second Special Report

The Defence Committee published its First Report of Session 2026–27, [Shifting heaven and earth? The Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes](#) (HC 69), on 30 July 2026. The Government Response was received on 2 October 2026 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is grateful to the House of Commons Defence Committee for its thorough examination of the Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP) and the previous government's response to the February 2022 data incident. Having inherited the super-injunction, this government has welcomed Parliament's scrutiny of these matters and continued to support the principles of transparency and accountability.

This government has remained committed to relocating eligible Afghans who supported the UK mission in Afghanistan. With nearly 40,000 Afghans already resettled in the UK under the ARP, the government is confident in our progress towards our goal of concluding central government's delivery of this programme before the end of this Parliament.

In responding to the Committee's report, we demonstrate our commitment to learning lessons while recognising the significant challenges faced throughout the programme's delivery. Since the launch of the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) in April 2021, the programme has operated in a complex and evolving environment through Op PITTING, the data incident and super-injunction, and wider geo-political challenges. Despite these pressures, it has continued to deliver against its objectives and has, under this government, transitioned to a single, streamlined resettlement pathway under the ARP.

The programme today is on a sustainable footing, drawing on the expertise of organisations across government – with Ministers driving progress to deliver our commitment to eligible Afghans well within this Parliament. The programme has highlighted the value of partnership between central, local and devolved governments. The members of the Committee who visited the Grange Hotel in Bracknell were able to see first-hand the work being undertaken across government and with Local Authorities and partners. The programme has demonstrated the importance of early engagement and sustained partnership with Local Authorities, whose contribution has been critical to successful delivery and integration outcomes.

In this response we aim to demonstrate how we have learned lessons, and continue to do so, and how improvements have been made to strengthen outcomes for eligible Afghans, refine programme delivery and ensure value for money for the taxpayer.

Introduction and Scope

1. *We are not a public inquiry and our access to evidence has been constrained, especially in relation to government and Court material, and material at higher levels of classification. We have nonetheless been able to reach important findings in less than a year. However, the constraints imposed on us have unavoidably diminished the completeness of democratic scrutiny of an episode involving risks to life, substantial expenditure and prolonged secrecy. If government wishes to rely on select committee scrutiny in cases of this seriousness, it must provide the access needed for that scrutiny to be as complete as the circumstances require. It is for others to judge, on reading this report, if a further inquiry with more extensive powers and access to information would be valuable.* (Conclusion, Paragraph 23)

On 15 July 2025, the then Defence Secretary, the Rt Hon John Healey MP, told the House of Commons that “*our Select Committee system in this House is perfectly capable of, and better suited to, many of the in-depth inquiries that often get punted into public inquiries or calls for such inquiries*”. The government continues to hold that view. Select committees play a central role in Parliamentary scrutiny; however, that role must operate within the constraints that apply to particular categories of sensitive material.

The MOD engaged substantively with the Committee’s inquiry and provided evidence where it was possible and appropriate to do so. The early provision of the OPEN Court bundle for the super-injunction was shared on an exceptional basis due to the unique circumstances of the proceedings and this government’s desire to enable full Parliamentary scrutiny of this issue.

Over the course of the inquiry, the department shared nearly 150 individual documents comprising over 1,800 pages. This was complemented by a private briefing for the Committee members in person in February 2026.

There are a small number of requests from the Committee that the department was unable to fulfil for several reasons. For example, the court bundles requested from separate litigation were prepared for court proceedings for the exclusive use of the Claimant, the department, and the Court. There are established processes for requesting the disclosure of documents like these from the Court and the department considered it inappropriate to bypass these.

The other requested documentation represented confidential deliberations amongst Ministers. As previously noted in correspondence by the Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry, the release of Cabinet documents such as Domestic and Economic Affairs (DEA), Home and Economic Affairs (HEA) and COBR papers, and especially those of a previous administration, must be approved by the Cabinet Secretary. This was not granted in this instance. However, as the Committee noted, redacted versions of all relevant papers were provided in the super-injunction High Court bundle which covered the full range of issues.

Within those constraints, the government provided the Committee with all other requested material that could properly be shared. MOD Ministers and officials appeared before the Committee, and former Ministers and officials gave evidence. The government also arranged a visit for the Committee to a site accommodating resettled Afghans, as well as a private briefing session at the MOD.

The government remains committed to enabling effective Parliamentary scrutiny, including through the provision of relevant documentation, where it can do so.

2. *In responding to this report, the government should publish a single action plan covering lessons from the breach and the resettlement response, with each action assigned a named owner, timetable for completion, intended outcome and means of reporting progress. After this initial response it should report progress against each of these actions to us every six months.* (Recommendation, Paragraph 25)

We are committed to learning lessons from this incident, recognising the highly unusual set of circumstances that government operated under. The lessons cover a wide range of topics, from the initiation of government activity to relocate and resettle Afghans in the UK, the February 2022 data incident and the government's response under the super-injunction, and the cross-government work to deliver the ARP. We have set out the lessons relating to these specific circumstances.

While the response under any future comparable scenario would be for the government of the day to decide, we will use these lessons to inform future thinking across government. In addition, we will report back to Parliament on the progress of the ARP in light of these lessons.

Data protection

Improvements on data protection have been identified and implemented following the McIvor Review – an independent MOD review led by Neil McIvor (former Chief Data Officer at the Department for Education), conducted in late 2023. This was set out in the letter from the Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry on 19 December 2025 to the Chair of the HCDC, which provided the review itself and the department’s progress in implementing its recommendations. MOD personnel are required to undertake mandatory data and information eLearning courses to build awareness of good data management and put it into practice. These have been reviewed and improved through work with the Military Commands. They are complemented by a wider Digital Skills for Defence programme to transform digital skills across MOD leadership, digital professionals and the whole workforce.

In October 2025, the Cabinet Office and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology also set out a comprehensive package of measures to drive up information and data security standards across government, ensuring greater compliance with data protection legislation. Underpinning this is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO), which sets out an enduring framework and approach to co-operation and collaboration. The government will also drive greater transparency and public accountability by publishing an annual assurance statement on GOV.UK, that will demonstrate how we are keeping the public’s data safe. The first of these statements will be published before the end of 2026. Officials will meet regularly with the ICO to ensure the MOU remains relevant and the commitments it makes are understood and implemented by both parties.

The super-injunction

Following the lifting of the super-injunction, the former MOD Permanent Secretary, David Williams CB, commissioned an exercise to learn lessons from the super-injunction and surrounding events. This exercise has involved consulting widely across government, speaking to those involved throughout the history of Afghan resettlement, and drawing conclusions set out below. This work has also considered carefully the conclusions of the HCDC, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and others in informing its conclusions and how it will be taken forward.

These lessons must be situated within the extremely challenging and unique context that people, teams within departments and the government worked under. Routinely, people across government went above and beyond, driven by a sense of duty to uphold our moral obligations to Afghans eligible for resettlement. This was recognised by the National Audit Office (NAO), and we welcome the commendation in the HCDC's report of the individual efforts which led to Afghans being brought safely to the UK.

Within this context, the main conclusions of this exercise are:

1. We must be clear from the start about who is in charge across government, as part of any urgent cross-government response. As per the Committee's conclusion 10, we accept that dispersal of levers across departments made delivery more complex, though this is routinely a feature of government programmes. This complexity was exacerbated by the element of a super-injunction. However, particularly in the early stages, the Lead Department Model was not implemented under the previous government with sufficient clarity. Some areas of responsibility were unclear or inefficient from the outset. Responsibility, particularly early on, was sometimes unclear and there was no effective way to resolve differences between departments. With the MOD operating outside of its normal remit, there was insufficient review of how best to achieve government's objectives using the right balance of central coordination, work by the lead department, and support from other relevant organisations across government. While there were significant contributions from all departments, there were initially ad hoc ways of working, often necessitated by unprecedented circumstances, which were not reviewed to identify the most effective or the most efficient delivery of the government's objectives. Despite this, individuals and teams came together to operate effectively in many respects during the programme as a whole and especially over the course of the super injunction.

There are a range of measures to address this issue in future circumstances, many of which are already part of this government's ways of working. In this case, the earlier adoption of a single empowered cross-government Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) could have addressed some of the coordination issues, and greater use of centrally coordinated decision-making may have provided a mechanism to escalate and resolve issues sooner. The appropriate balance of these measures must be decided based on the circumstances at the time but informed by the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities from the outset identified here.

2. There should be formal measures to review how we conduct challenge and scrutiny in secret. Noting the Committee's Recommendations 7 and 8, we recognise that we should avoid normalisation of the use of injunctions by government and that, in such circumstances, there should be a more formal

and regular approach to reviewing what briefing can be given confidentially to Parliamentarians. The Accounting Officer advice recently published by HM Treasury sets out the key principles which should be applied by Permanent Secretaries, noting the Committee's Recommendation number 9. Those operating in comparable circumstances should actively review how we conduct challenge and scrutiny when delivering a policy area in secret. While the approach in this case may not have changed, there should have been a more formal process to make and review decisions on whether to inform Parliament in the highly unusual circumstances presented by a super-injunction. There will always be circumstances in which government must operate in secret, and the balance of how and when to ensure appropriate scrutiny will always require careful judgement in unique circumstances. We will ensure leaders across departments are aware of these lessons and are able to draw on relevant experience and advice, as needed. Ultimately the appropriate course of action will remain a decision for Ministers at the time of any future circumstances arising.

3. There should be a greater focus on longterm outcomes at the outset, preparing for how measures such as an injunction will conclude and policies will be delivered. We recognise the element of Conclusion 10 about the need for long-term planning on the use of levers to deliver policies effectively. While resources are often limited at the outset of a crisis, medium- to long-term horizon scanning and planning are important in those circumstances and must be prioritised where possible. This function should test and challenge assumptions early, including likely endstates and exit scenarios, and stress test whether decisions will deliver the right outcomes over time. This should also include, as far as possible, putting in place a relevant strong programme management function, which establishes or maintains long-term goals and plans, especially as a policy area shifts into or out of crisis working. Long-term policy objectives should be explained as soon as practically possible to maintain public and Parliamentary trust.

Taking into account these lessons, a number of measures have been developed to improve how the government would operate under any future super-injunction:

1. Formal guidance to Accounting Officers on sharing information covered by injunctions has been published by HM Treasury. This includes guidance on many of the points proposed by the Committee on policy designed or implemented in secret, including consideration of cost reassurance and appropriate oversight.
2. Inclusion of lessons from the government's response to Afghan resettlement being incorporated into wider government practice where relevant, for example in the management of litigation and in ensuring routine review of Parliamentary engagement in sensitive activity.

In addition to the lessons on government decision-making, there is an important conclusion for how departments operate under pressure. For staff, the uncertainty and the strains of operating under a super-injunction all came with some cost to wellbeing. We have already drawn on independent counselling support from the Staff Counsellor for the National Security community and will continue to use cross-government resources to support staff and teams whose work is inherently secret or morally challenging. The availability of these services should be communicated clearly to departments not routinely operating in this way to ensure appropriate support.

Parliamentary reporting

Given the importance, complexity, and human impact of the ARP, the government recognises the value of continued Parliamentary scrutiny and clear public accountability. While the MOD has already provided information on the ARP to Parliament on numerous occasions and continues to provide regular updates on the programme to the PAC and the NAO, we will also provide the Committee with six-monthly updates covering the overall programme (for example casework progress across the ARP, Triples cases, and relocation activity). Where appropriate, these updates will refer to the distinct issues raised in this report such as the changes made following the February 2022 data incident and on Afghan Resettlement. Further changes to data protection will be set out to Parliament through the appropriate channels.

Part One: The Data Breach

3. *The breach was not simply an individual mistake, but a foreseeable systemic failure. It arose from the combination of inappropriate tools, weak operating procedures, insufficient training, poor organisational continuity, and an inadequate culture of data protection and accountability. The pressures of the fall of Kabul in 2021 help to explain how these weaknesses developed; they do not excuse their continuation into 2022. The MOD handled sensitive immigration casework using tools and controls not appropriate for a life-endangering dataset at any scale. Controls have improved since, but the episode shows the risk of taking on unfamiliar responsibilities without fit-for-purpose systems, assurance and clear accountability. (Conclusion, Paragraph 60)*

The department accepts that the data incident was unacceptable and fell far below the standards expected of the MOD. The MOD acknowledges that alongside the one-off combination of factors that led to this specific incident, there was a wider failure due to inadequate processes and tools that were in place at the time.

ARAP was launched in April 2021 under the previous government, and the initial assessments for relocation were approximately 800 principals (c.4,000 people including family members). Following Op PITTING, the complexity of Afghan resettlement increased as the number of eligible individuals grew significantly due to assessments of threat they faced from the Taliban at the time. While the number of applications to ARAP grew, so did the operational challenges of resettling those found eligible.

The risks associated with casework, data management and security were recognised when the programme was managed by the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ). The risks then transferred to MOD Head Office when the Defence Afghan Relocation and Resettlement Directorate (DARR) was established in December 2021. The development of a secure casework system, eventually known as the Defence Afghan Casework System (DACS), started in late 2021. It was designed and delivered by Defence Digital and was rolled out in May 2022. MOD was therefore already taking significant steps to acquire new systems at the point the data incident occurred. Initially, when DARR was established, the department investigated transferring the data to Home Office systems, but this was ruled out as the Home Office was going through a major upgrade of its systems, which would have delayed the process of transfer until late 2022. The MOD, therefore, developed its own system, specifically tailored to ARAP's requirements. Given the understanding of risk to ARAP applicants, it was imperative decisions were processed at pace whilst solutions for an appropriate casework system were explored.

The government welcomes the Committee's view that controls have improved, and agrees that when taking on new, unfamiliar activity as a department, the appropriate tools to deliver the task should be in place from the outset.

4. *Describing the breach as a systemic failure does not mean that responsibility lay nowhere. Institutional accountability requires clear lines of responsibility. Where a department takes on unfamiliar responsibilities involving life-endangering data, clear senior ownership of risk, assurance and data protection becomes more important. The evidence suggests that this ownership was inadequate before the breach; the injunction then made ordinary political accountability for the response largely impossible for nearly two years. By the time the facts could be scrutinised publicly, the ministers responsible for earlier decisions were no longer in office and the opportunity for ordinary contemporaneous ministerial accountability had passed. That combination—weak internal accountability before the breach and displaced democratic accountability after it—is central to why this episode became a wider governance failure. (Conclusion, Paragraph 61)*

5. *Government should mandate and enforce minimum standards for skills, process, tools, controls, independent assurance and testing for datasets where compromise could plausibly risk life. The MOD should also explain who held senior official responsibility for data-protection risk in ARAP before the February 2022 breach, whether any disciplinary, performance-management or other accountability processes followed, and how individual senior accountability is now assigned in comparable high-risk operations. The government should also review how ministerial accountability can be preserved where major decisions are taken under legal secrecy and cannot be scrutinised by Parliament or the public until after the responsible ministers may have left office. (Recommendation, Paragraph 62)*

The department notes the Committee's conclusions and agrees that clear accountabilities are essential. Lessons have been learned through internal reviews, cross-government collaboration, and engagement with the ICO, resulting in improved record-keeping and strengthened data protection measures.

It is important to note the significant scale of data handled during the period of Op PITTING, which far exceeded initial expectations. The risks associated with data management and security were acknowledged by officials when DARR was established in December 2021, following its transfer from PJHQ. Concurrently, work was underway to introduce new systems to manage and securely store data, with Defence Digital developing DACS and introducing this in May 2022.

As also outlined by David Williams CB during his oral evidence session to the Committee on 21 April 2026, in his former capacity as Permanent Secretary, he noted the responsibilities his role carried regarding data protection and the security culture within the MOD, and the role the data incident played in his departure as Permanent Secretary.

Beyond senior accountability, there must also be operational awareness and accountability – both are essential to the effective delivery of all government programmes. The department takes seriously its obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018; MOD's Data Protection Officer and their team work closely with senior leaders across the department to support decision-making and provide challenge where necessary when personal data risks are being reviewed or considered. To fulfil this function, the Data Protection Officer and their team are supported by a network of Data Protection Authorities across the department to provide day to day advice on the management and protection of personal data.

The department recognises that the data incident was an unintentional failure to adequately protect individuals' data. That is why ensuring that all staff adhere to data protection standards across Defence and have the digital skills they need is a priority. As per the data protection lessons

set out in the response to Recommendation 2, all personnel are routinely reminded of their obligations regarding data protection and information management and undertake mandatory eLearning courses. Furthermore, the department maintains a robust system enabling all staff to report suspected security incidents promptly.

The government also acknowledges the unique circumstances surrounding the super-injunction and notes the Committee's conclusion that Ministers responsible for earlier decisions were no longer in office. However, several former Ministers and senior officials provided evidence to the Committee and were questioned on their previous actions and decisions. As the Committee's report notes, this scrutiny has included decisions made by the previous government regarding the restrictions imposed by the super-injunction. Although during the super-injunction public scrutiny of Ministerial decisions was limited at the time, Ministers in both governments remained accountable through Cabinet Committees to their colleagues and the Prime Minister, financially through HM Treasury. The Court also provided regular scrutiny of policy decisions relating to the data incident. Following the lifting of the super-injunction by this government there has been extensive scrutiny by Parliament, the public and the media.

The government does accept however that lessons should be taken from Afghan resettlement and when operating under a super-injunction, Ministers and the government should actively review how we conduct challenge and scrutiny in those circumstances. Further detail is set out in our response to Recommendation 2.

Regarding the specific recommendation to mandate and enforce standards for skills, process, tools, controls, independent assurance and testing for datasets where compromise could plausibly risk life, the government already has a range of well-established robust mandatory security controls in place through the GOV07 Functional Standard¹ and other associated policy frameworks, including the Government Security Classifications Policy.² These standards require departments to implement rigorous measures to ensure sensitive information and data are protected, including where its compromise could plausibly cause threat to life. Government is also standardising the assessment of risks associated with sensitive data using the new Data Sharing Risk Framework (DSRF) to proactively minimise high risk threats in new systems.

This government has committed to going further to raise information security standards across the board, including working to strengthen cross-government leadership, accountability and transparency driving down the risks of threat to life data incidents. As set out to the Science, Innovation

1 [Government Functional Standard GovS 007: Security](#)

2 [Government Security Classifications Policy](#)

and Technology Committee in October 2025, an active programme of work is underway led by the Office of the Government Chief Data Officer in the Government Digital Service (in DCMS) and the Government Security Group (in the Cabinet Office) to address high risk data security threats.

As part of this programme, this government is enhancing its annual assurance processes to verify that departments meet baseline requirements. Further detail will be set out in the Data Protection and Information Security Annual Assurance Statement due to be published by the end of 2026. The findings of our annual assurance work will identify where further targeted interventions will have the greatest impact on reducing the likelihood and impact of future incidents, while driving the cultural change needed to ensure that protecting data becomes a routine part of how public services are designed and delivered.

Part Two: The Response Under Secrecy

6. *The Afghan data-breach injunction was an exceptional measure with profound constitutional consequences. Even aside from the “superinjunction” element, it prevented public and parliamentary knowledge of a major policy response involving risk to life, substantial public expenditure and affected communities across the UK. A short period of secrecy may have been justified to reduce immediate risk to affected Afghans, but secrecy endured far longer than originally envisaged. Over time, the injunction displaced normal democratic, audit and public scrutiny; it limited controlled external challenge; and it imposed serious costs on accountability and trust among affected Afghans and the UK public. (Conclusion, Paragraph 103)*
7. *Future governments should treat this case as exceptional, not as a precedent for normalising injunctions that suppress matters of widespread public interest. (Recommendation, Paragraph 104)*
8. *In any future circumstances requiring both secrecy and accountability, the government should test more seriously whether confidential briefing could be provided to a wider group of parliamentarians without significantly increasing the risk of disclosure. (Recommendation, Paragraph 105)*

The government’s position remains that the initial response to protect life by limiting knowledge of the data incident was justified, and that the government did not apply to extend the super-injunction beyond a period considered necessary by Ministers, based on the understanding of risk to life at the time, to undertake protective action for affected Afghans.

The government agrees with Recommendation 7 at paragraph 104 that the super-injunction and the circumstances to which it related were exceptional. As the report notes at paragraph 86, the injunction was of an “exceptional

legal character” and “unique in English law”. The government recognises the significance of restricting access to information where there is a strong public interest in disclosure. Such restrictions should be exceptional. As the then Defence Secretary, the Rt Hon John Healey MP, stated on 15 July 2025, “the Court has always recognised the Parliamentary privilege of proceedings in this House and Ministers decided not to tell Parliamentarians at an earlier stage about the data incident, as the widespread publicity would increase the risk of the Taliban obtaining the dataset. But, as Parliamentarians—and as Government Ministers—it has been deeply uncomfortable to be constrained from reporting to this House”. Equally, decisions affecting the safety, liberty, and security of individuals in the UK and overseas require careful judgement and are not taken lightly.

The government recognises that democratic accountability requires scrutiny, including by Parliament. In this case, the previous and current governments served the super-injunction on a limited number of Parliamentarians so that they could be informed of the data incident. The number of individuals made aware was deliberately limited because the risk to life concerns meant that expanding the circle of knowledge any further was not considered appropriate.

Regarding Recommendation 8 at paragraph 105, the government recognises the importance of Parliamentary scrutiny, but any decision to brief a wider group would have had to be balanced against the risk of wider disclosure and the potential consequences for affected Afghans. Furthermore, to have briefed only a limited number of members from either committee would have placed them in a position where they could not have been expected to exercise full scrutiny of the government’s actions and decision-making. In the circumstances of this case, the government’s view remains that further widening the circle would have carried an unacceptable risk to life.

This does not mean that the same approach would necessarily be appropriate in every future case. Decisions of this kind will always depend on the specific facts, risks and context at the time. Therefore, although the government accepts in principle Recommendation 8 it would be for the government of the day—not the response to this report—to balance the public interest in disclosure and scrutiny against the need to protect life, liberty, and national security at the time such a decision is required.

9. *The government should, in response to this report, publish the lessons it has learned from the Afghan data-breach injunction and set out clear principles governing when it or any other public body may exceptionally seek an injunction preventing disclosure of a matter of widespread public interest. Those principles should include requirements for: periodic reassessment of necessity and proportionality against recorded criteria; controlled external challenge at the earliest safe stage; minimum expectations for parliamentary*

notification; arrangements for audit and Accounting Officer assurance; and clear ministerial accountability for applications to maintain, vary or discharge the injunction. (Recommendation, Paragraph 106)

These were unique and unprecedented circumstances for the previous government to have applied for an injunction and to have been granted a super-injunction. This government accepts part of this recommendation, acknowledging that the lessons from this super-injunction are clear that there should be active review points on how government operates under a super-injunction including the necessity and proportionality of any restrictions, clear accountability for key decisions, appropriate challenge and assurance arrangements, and careful consideration of how Parliament is informed within the constraints. The measures that will be published in our response to Recommendation 2 outline ways to improve how government operates under a super-injunction. This includes new advice published by HM Treasury which provides guidance for Accounting Officers under circumstances of an injunction.

Regarding principles governing when the government or any other public body may exceptionally seek an injunction preventing disclosure of a matter of widespread public interest, any appropriate course of action remains a decision for Ministers and to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

10. *The response to the breach exposed a serious weakness in cross-government governance. Once relocation became the principal means of mitigation, the MOD carried the strongest responsibility and incentive to act, but many of the levers needed to deliver the response—accommodation, immigration processing, local authority capacity, funding and integration support—sat elsewhere. Under conditions of secrecy, that mismatch was harder to challenge externally. The financial consequences of the breach were shaped not only by the original loss of data, but by policy choices made under the injunction about cohort size, accommodation, pace of implementation and delivery model. Decisions about risk became decisions about housing, local capacity, departmental budgets and long-term support. The result was an incremental response whose pace, scope and cost were shaped by misaligned responsibilities, cross-government constraints and limited democratic, audit or public scrutiny. (Conclusion, Paragraph 131)*

Once the data incident became known to the department under the last government, the government had a strong responsibility to mitigate the risk to life of individuals on the dataset. Ministers under the previous government carefully considered several options other than relocation, with relocation only considered for targeted cohorts thought to be at the highest risk. Decisions under the previous and current governments were made at Cabinet sub-Committees, with official-level cross-government working to draft recommendations and collective Ministerial Cabinet agreement

sought at each stage of developing the Afghanistan Response Route (ARR). As the levers needed to deliver the response did not sit solely with the MOD, relevant departments across government were consulted and engaged. Key officials and Ministers from across government involved in delivering relocations were informed of the super-injunction and were able to consider the implications of policy choices on housing, Local Authority capacity, departmental budgets and long-term support.

However, as recognised as part of the lessons exercise outlined in the response to Recommendation 2, the government acknowledges that governance put in place by the previous government could have been improved by setting clearer responsibilities among departments and senior leadership accountability from the outset of ARAP. Lessons have also highlighted the importance of designing policy around delivery realities from the outset, including housing supply, Local Authority capacity, funding arrangements and operational delivery considerations, to ensure policy objectives can be delivered effectively in practice.

At the point the previous government became aware of the data incident, ARAP had been operational for over two years. Although we accept the Committee's conclusions that the data incident inevitably increased pressures across Afghan resettlement and cross-government governance arrangements, some of the challenges the Committee highlights pre-date the data incident, reflecting the complexities of delivering a significant, cross-cutting programme in an environment of competing demands.

11. *The government did not maintain adequate cost visibility over the direct financial consequences of the data-breach response. The NAO found that the MOD could not identify ARR-specific costs with normal audit confidence, because those costs had not been separately recorded. The evidence also suggests that government did not consistently distinguish between the marginal cost of the breach response, the cost of the ARR, the cost of prioritised ARAP relocations and the wider cost of Afghan resettlement. Weak cost visibility, ambiguous presentation and delayed programme controls limited assurance and made it harder to test whether decisions were being taken on a realistic understanding of their financial consequences.* (Conclusion, Paragraph 132)

The previous government's decision to respond to the data incident through the ARR came following consideration of a range of options, assessed against several factors including costs and value for money. Due to the risk to life concerns, which existed throughout the super-injunction and guided the government response, decisions were taken to mitigate this risk.

Once it was agreed by the previous government that the appropriate mitigation for the data incident was to offer relocation under the newly established ARR, it was important this scheme mirrored ARAP in its

operation to minimise the risk of inadvertently disclosing the data incident that was subject to the super-injunction. As such, the offer, including services such as flights, hotels and casework was delivered alongside existing ARAP arrangements, including by many not aware of the super-injunction, and the ARR expenditure was not identified separately in the MOD accounts. This allowed for the full costs of Afghan Resettlement to be reflected in both MOD accounts and the Spending Review bid, calculated against the total number of people expected to arrive under all Afghan schemes. Whilst the schemes have not been separately accounted for, as noted in the MOD Annual Report and Accounts 2025–2026, the risk associated with Afghan Resettlement and the completeness of provisions and contingent liabilities was assessed by the C&AG that *“the Department reclassified a contingent liability as a provision and made a material adjustment to the value of provisions...I did not identify any unadjusted material misstatements in the completeness of provisions and contingent liabilities”*.³

Furthermore, the total costs of the programme across all departments’ expenditure are well understood, with £3.3bn spent from 2021 to end Financial Year 25/26. The government had previously forecast that total ARP expenditure would be in the region of £5.5bn–£6bn by 2029. The re-baselined forecast now indicates total expenditure of c.£4.8bn by 2029, representing a potential saving of up to £1.2bn. The reduction in estimated ARP spending is primarily due to the change to self-move where eligible Afghans make their own way to a Third Country when they are able to do so. The lower total expenditure forecast is also, in part, due to a lower estimate of those still to travel, which we can predict with more accuracy since schemes were closed, including the closure of the ARR, supported by the conclusions of the Rimmer Review and the change to our understanding of risk. These changes in the forecast will be subject to further refinement as the programme progresses.

The government acknowledges that the move to a formal programmatic footing was delayed due to the data incident, however since the ARP was established by this government, this has provided focused resources to improve programmatic controls, ensuring more effective governance across all departments and accountability for delivery of all pillars of activity responsible to the cross-government SRO. This has been assessed as ‘implemented’ by the NAO in relation to their recommendation on the maturity of programme.

12. *Where policy must be designed or implemented in secret, the government should establish formal interdepartmental governance arrangements from the outset. That governance should include clear ownership of decisions,*

3 [MOD Annual Report and Accounts 2025 – 26](#)

delivery and costs; documented ministerial decision points; scheduled reassessment of necessity, scope, delivery and proportionality; explicit cost-assurance arrangements; and mechanisms for controlled democratic and audit challenge where normal parliamentary scrutiny is displaced. (Recommendation, Paragraph 133)

- 13.** *The government should set out clearly where responsibility lay across departments for the major decisions taken under the injunction, including responsibility for delivery, accommodation planning, cost assurance and oversight. It should also set out what lessons it has learned from this experience about governance and delivery where one part of government owns the immediate risk but depends on others to deliver the response.* (Recommendation, Paragraph 134)

The government agrees with the recommendation that there is a clear need to ensure appropriate inter-departmental coordination and decision-making in all government activity, and even when it takes place in secret. While this happens routinely in most cases, the super-injunction, combined with existing operational challenges, meant those systems were under pressure. It is necessary to ensure those mechanisms are carried out effectively including in situations of novel activity or under super-injunctions. This aligns with the lessons identified in the response to Recommendation 2 of setting clear responsibilities from the outset of the programme.

Under the super-injunction, major decisions regarding the data incident and ARAP were taken by the relevant Cabinet sub-Committees, with officials across relevant departments engaged in developing recommendations drawing on their expertise and providing advice to their respective Ministers. In May 2024, a cross-government programme SRO was appointed to bring coherence across all Afghan resettlement activity and provide oversight and governance of the resettlement programme. The bringing together of Afghan resettlement schemes under the ARP by this government into a single programme has ensured departmental expertise can be factored into all stages of the resettlement journey and enabled improved working-level decision-making. Departmental responsibilities under the ARP are published within the programme's policy guidance on GOV.UK.⁴

This government recognises that the model should have been adopted sooner, and moved to implement this model straight away to enable better cross-government governance and delivery, clearer accountability and improved decision-making, especially in circumstances where not all parts of government equally share the risk and cross-cutting delivery is required.

4 [Afghan Resettlement Programme: Policy Guidance](#)

14. *The government was right to commission the Rimmer Review, and a similar reassessment of risk and proportionality should have taken place much sooner after discovery of the breach. The Review was coherent, logically constructed and a fair reflection of the evidence it received; it provided a rational basis for the government and the High Court to conclude that the injunction should no longer be maintained. However, because the Review was conducted in secret, the range of evidence that could be gathered and tested was constrained. That affected perceptions of its fairness and completeness among affected Afghans and those who advocate for them, and means the Review should not be treated as the final word on risk. (Conclusion, Paragraph 143)*

The government notes the Committee's view that a similar assessment like the Rimmer Review could have been undertaken sooner. Throughout the period of the super-injunction, threat assessments produced by Defence Intelligence were under continuous review. The threat to life assessment did not change in that time, and the then government therefore felt it necessary to continue the super-injunction while protective action was taken, which the Court maintained – until fresh insights were commissioned by this government when it met to consider this issue for the first time. The government nevertheless recognises the importance of ensuring that formal review points are embedded within governance arrangements where activity is conducted under a super-injunction.

The government welcomes the Committee's view that the Rimmer Review provided a rational basis for the then Defence Secretary, the Rt Hon John Healey MP's decision to request the High Court lift the super-injunction. This was a risk-based review, which sought to examine the overall policy context in Spring 2025, three years since the data incident. The focus of the review was on the potential impact of the dataset itself, and specifically how this might increase the net additional risk to individuals affected, taking into account the time that had passed since the data incident.

Due to the continued assessment at the time of risk to life, and as noted by Paul Rimmer in his oral evidence to the Committee, the government agrees with the Committee's assessment that the super-injunction imposed some constraints on the ability to gather evidence. Nevertheless, a range of individuals and organisations were engaged and interviewed who had relevant experience and expertise of the position on the ground in Afghanistan. As Paul Rimmer stated in his oral evidence, this provided him with a broad insight into the conditions in Afghanistan and gave a coherent basis for the Review's conclusions.

15. *The government should establish and publish a process for periodic reassessment of the risks faced by ARAP applicants, former applicants and their family members who remain in Afghanistan or third countries,*

where those risks arise because of their past connection with the UK or from their applications for resettlement. The process should draw on current intelligence, operational evidence, engagement with those supporting affected Afghans, and evidence from applicants where available. The government should report, at least annually, how these reassessments affect eligibility, safeguarding, relocation and self-move policy. (Recommendation, Paragraph 144)

The government acknowledges this recommendation but notes the ARP already receives regular information and assessments from a variety of sources to inform programme decision-making. This includes reference to Defence Intelligence assessments, staff in Third Countries supporting eligible Afghans, delivery partners such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), applicants to the ARAP scheme, and diplomatic channels, among others. The government recognises that obtaining independently verifiable information from Afghanistan remains inherently challenging and therefore assessments are informed by multiple sources, each with strengths and limitations.

This government relied on information from across these sources to develop plans for the lifting of the super-injunction and significant changes to movement policy. Since the Rimmer Review, DARR has produced regular risk statements held at a higher classification. These reviews drew on available information and reporting to test whether the conclusions of the Rimmer Review remained valid and to inform policy decisions. These assessments considered evidence from a range of sources, including cross-government reporting and engagement with relevant partners and stakeholders. This includes information from within the MOD, FCDO, HO and the United Nations, as well as open sources. We will continue to conduct these assessments every six months and take this broad range of information into account as the central government role in the programme concludes by the end of this Parliament. As part of our routine updates to the Committee, we will provide detail on any policy changes made in response to developments in the security context.

16. *The government approached notification of affected Afghans primarily as a communications exercise rather than as a safeguarding intervention. Although the notification reached most affected individuals, it did not provide sufficiently specific, actionable or individualised information to enable people to understand their level of risk, what data relating to them or their families had been compromised, or what practical steps they could take. Nor was it supported by an adequate system of follow-up engagement, case-specific advice or assistance. Given the time available to plan for disclosure and the foreseeable reaction of people receiving notice of a potential risk-to-life data breach—many of whom were in Afghanistan or precarious third-country*

settings—the government should have treated notification as an immediate operational response to safeguarding need, not simply as public messaging. (Conclusion, Paragraph 161)

- 17.** *Where government manages disclosure after a period of operational secrecy in a case involving credible risk to life, it should treat disclosure and notification as a safeguarding intervention. Break-glass arrangements should be tested in advance and designed around the needs of affected people. They should include, as a minimum: clear and timely communications; specific information on the nature of the data compromised, as far as can safely be disclosed; tailored guidance reflecting different levels of risk and location; accessible multilingual support channels; routes for case-specific enquiries; and a coordinated cross-government plan for follow-up assistance. (Recommendation, Paragraph 162)*

The Information Service Centre (ISC) established at break-glass was never intended to provide specific, individual advice to all impacted by the data incident. The ISC was first established in early 2024, following a cross-government decision to provide a centralised and efficient response mechanism. The ISC was designed as a first port of call for large numbers of people seeking confirmation of whether their data had been affected. The approach developed for the ISC had to consider requirements for a wide range of different audiences to ensure messaging was clear, consistent and correct. It would not have been possible to provide individualised security assistance to all correspondents, due to the overall numbers, the lack of UK presence on the ground in Afghanistan to provide accurate information or assurance, and the security risks of sharing information on individual circumstances at the time.

The advice provided by the ISC was always intended to offer general security guidance, not tailored or specific to individual situations. Due to the variety of circumstances individuals may have been in, the MOD provided general security advice, but it remained for individuals to determine how to apply that advice in their own particular circumstances.

The methods of informing impacted individuals on security advice had to take into account the additional risk to life posed by large numbers of emails being sent at the same time to potentially affected individuals. It was agreed that the GOV.UK Notify system was the best option to inform impacted individuals. Pre-set email messages were developed, one for initial notification and one with a follow up message containing the live links to the data incident webpages. The emails used were generated on the day the super-injunction was lifted to ensure the most up to date addresses were used.

Alongside the email notification, the ISC also included a telephone service which allowed those concerned to call. This operated on a 24/7 basis, but for security reasons could not provide individual advice over the telephone. Callers were directed to the online self-checker where they could confirm if they were impacted. The numbers of people contacting the ISC were significantly lower than anticipated, with a total of c.4000 emails received, and c.500 phone calls. Other government and MOD contact centres also did not see significant amounts of engagement in relation to the data incident. All of the ISC's public facing services were offered in English, Pashto and Dari, with pre-recorded information offered by the telephone service also translated into Dari and Pashto, with live call-handling in English.

Although we acknowledge the Committee's conclusion and recommendation, this government believes we took appropriate and reasonable steps to provide clear information to those impacted by the data incident. Whilst future governments will need to consider the specific circumstances should a mass disclosure response be required again, the focus will be on safeguarding to ensure those impacted are able to access the information they require, at an appropriate level and taking into account serious security considerations.

Part Three: Longer-term Consequences

18. *We recognise and respect the sensitivity surrounding Special Forces operations. However, the “no comment” approach is inappropriate for matters of administrative decision-making, data handling and accountability for resettlement casework. Serious questions have been raised about the governance arrangements under which Special Forces personnel contributed to immigration casework and data handling affecting former Afghan partner forces. Special Forces’ involvement must not prevent Parliament and the public from understanding how administrative failings occurred, whether lessons have been learned, and whether senior accountability has been exercised. (Conclusion, Paragraph 198)*

The MOD recognises the importance of transparency, accountability and learning lessons from the administrative failings associated with ARAP. The department remains committed to ensuring that appropriate scrutiny can be applied to governance and decision-making processes, and that lessons are learned and implemented from any identified failings. That is also the reason the current government took steps to ensure that the super-injunction we inherited was properly tested, and ultimately applied to the Court to lift it.

As the Committee is aware, the longstanding ‘neither confirm nor deny’ policy is applied in relation to Special Forces for reasons of national security. This approach remains an essential safeguard enabling Special Forces—a critical capability within Defence—to operate effectively. We recognise the Committee’s concerns regarding the application of this policy. However, the department remains firm that its consistent application is essential, as seemingly limited or innocuous information, when aggregated with other sources, can be advantageous to hostile actors and cause significant harm to national security. Therefore, this approach only remains effective if it is applied consistently and without exception. The Committee will be aware that Special Forces are, and continue to be, accountable to Defence Ministers.

The application of ‘neither confirm nor deny’ has not prevented examination of the administrative and governance arrangements that supported ARAP casework. Decision-making, casework processes and data handling responsibilities have been subject to scrutiny through a range of mechanisms. This includes independent judicial oversight where the department accepted shortcomings in aspects of the ARAP process relating to the Triples. The department has subsequently implemented improvements to strengthen governance, decision-making, record management and data-handling practices.

19. *The Triples Review revealed serious administrative failings in the handling of ARAP applications from former members of Afghan specialist units who had worked closely with UK forces. The high overturn rate showed that earlier determinations that applicants were not eligible for relocation could not be treated as reliable. The government therefore has a special responsibility to former Triples whose applications were wrongly refused and who, because of those failings and subsequent delay, may have spent additional years in hiding or been left to make their own way to a third country. (Conclusion, Paragraph 199)*

The MOD recognises its responsibility to the 884 former members of the Triples units whose ARAP decisions were overturned following conclusion of the Triples Review and agrees to the conclusions reached by the Committee in paragraph 199. The department understands that these overturned decisions may have resulted in prolonged uncertainty for affected individuals. We remain committed to supporting eligible Triples in their safe relocation from Third Countries and successful resettlement in the UK, with associated Triples family unit casework being prioritised.

20. *The UK’s obligations after the breach were wider than its pre-existing ARAP commitments. The government had continuing obligations to eligible Afghans to whom public commitments had been made after Op PITTING, and additional responsibilities to people placed at increased risk by the breach*

itself. Prioritising breach-exposed people was understandable, but it created trade-offs within an already strained resettlement system. Those trade-offs should have been more explicitly governed, documented and subjected to controlled scrutiny, particularly where different groups faced credible risk because of their work with the UK. (Conclusion, Paragraph 200)

The government accepts that the data incident broadened the previous government's pre-existing ARAP commitments by increasing the numbers of those likely to be found eligible for relocation. When the previous government became aware of the data incident, priority was given to ARAP applications from individuals identified as being affected by the incident and whose risk had, as understood at the time, increased as a result and where their applications had not yet been determined. This was one part of a wider suite of actions taken to mitigate risk to life. However, aside from a prioritisation of casework for those affected by the data incident and during the Triples Review, applications are considered on a first raised, first decided basis.

Once outcomes are communicated to applicants, their progress through the ARP pipeline is not dependent on which scheme they are eligible under, but rather on a number of other factors including time taken to provide information on family members, whether the applicants are ready and able to relocate, and the time taken to complete biometric and security checks. Once in the UK, the resettlement support offered is also the same regardless of what scheme eligible Afghans arrived under.

The decision by the previous government to offer relocation to highest-risk individuals impacted by the data incident was carefully considered in the context of existing commitments and challenges within the resettlement system, prioritising the understanding at the time of the risk to life. As set out in the response to Recommendation 10, decisions were made at Cabinet sub-Committees, with official-level cross-government working to draft recommendations and collective Ministerial Cabinet agreement sought at each stage of the previous government developing the ARR.

- 21.** *The government should treat the remaining work for former Triples whose applications were affected by serious administrative failings as a corrective exercise, not routine casework. It should identify the affected cohort, prioritise the remaining cases, including family applications and relocation arrangements, provide clear casework updates, and report regularly to Parliament until the corrective work is complete. Reporting should include numbers outstanding, numbers relocated, average time in each stage, and the action being taken for those unable safely or affordably to self-move. (Recommendation, Paragraph 201)*

After both phases of the Triples Review, 884 applicants who had previously been found ineligible were subsequently assessed as eligible under ARAP.

The government recognises the shortcomings in the original decision-making process under the previous government and acknowledges the uncertainty that affected individuals may have experienced while their cases were under review. The Triples Review was established in part as a corrective exercise to address eligibility decisions, and that exercise has now concluded. This government continues to recognise its responsibility to those former members of the Triples who have been found eligible through the Review and will continue corrective efforts through their successful relocation and resettlement. The government remains committed to supporting their relocation from Third Countries and resettlement in the UK and continues to prioritise the progression of outstanding casework, including associated family applications.

All applicants whose cases were reviewed under Phases 1 and 2 of the Triples Review and for whom an eligible decision has been made have either been notified or, in the case of a very small number, have been contacted about their application and will be notified of the outcome in due course. Applicants are also able to monitor the status of their application through the ARAP application self-checker, introduced in November 2025, and DARR will continue to provide case-specific updates where appropriate.

The government remains committed to providing Parliament with regular updates on progress across the ARP. These updates will include information on the progress of eligible Triples remaining to relocate to the UK.

- 22.** *Government should not allow departments to continue leading high-risk protection or resettlement casework by default where that work falls outside their core expertise. Where such responsibilities are assigned in urgent circumstances, ministers should keep the operating model under formal review and transfer responsibility if better-placed departments or agencies can deliver the work more safely, fairly and efficiently. (Recommendation, Paragraph 203)*

The government agrees in principle that departments that have the right expertise to deliver, should lead the appropriate response. Although the MOD lacked expertise in areas like case working at the outset, as the former Defence Secretary, the Rt Hon Sir Ben Wallace, told the Committee, it was felt appropriate at the time for MOD to continue leading due to the employment information held by the department. MOD also recognised the risks associated with data management and case working early on and work was already underway in the early days of DARR's establishment to introduce new systems.

Whilst the government agrees that, in principle, operating models where departments are undertaking non-standard work should be kept under review, in the case of ARAP, cross-government working was engaged to deliver better resettlement outcomes – that was at the core of why the

Lead Department Model was chosen in this instance. Cross-government collaboration has also played a critical role in the delivery of the Home Office-led Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

However, as we have outlined in the lessons above, at the start of the crisis response, the Lead Department Model was not implemented in the most appropriate way under the previous government. Early on, departmental responsibilities were sometimes unclear, and more effective ways to resolve differences could have been introduced under the previous government. This government recognises that it should have been reviewed earlier how best to achieve the programme's objectives using the right balance of central coordination, effort by the lead department, and support from other relevant organisations across government. These are important lessons for future governments, particularly those that find themselves operating under multiple crises. As time passed, we drove improvements in the operating model, and a programme SRO was appointed in May 2024. Since the creation of the ARP by this government, Afghan resettlement activity has moved onto a more stable and programmatic footing with greater central oversight, ensuring improved use of departmental expertise at all stages of the resettlement journey in delivering a single efficient resettlement pipeline.

- 23.** *We welcome the government's stated ambition to clear the current ARAP caseload by spring 2027, and its decision to publish KPIs and transparency data. These are important corrective steps. But the commitment will only be meaningful if it is delivered fairly as well as quickly. The government must ensure that pressure to close the programme does not reduce the quality of decision-making, particularly in complex cases and cases involving applicants whose previous decisions were affected by administrative failings. It should continue publishing performance against the KPIs, which should include indicators reflective of the quality of decision-making, explain where KPIs are being missed, and set out what operational action is being taken to recover performance. (Recommendation, Paragraph 206)*

The MOD has strengthened its decision-making processes based on the experience gained in the delivery of the ARP. While this government remains committed and on track to completing all ARP casework by Spring 2027, the government agrees with part of the Committee's recommendation that programme milestones should not take precedence over the quality and accuracy of decision-making.

The MOD has increased case working capacity and continues to maintain quality assurance processes to ensure that applications, particularly complex cases and those previously affected by administrative failings, are considered thoroughly and fairly.

The Committee's report acknowledges the MOD's milestone to complete all initial principal applicant decisions by August 2026. For full transparency, the MOD has not met this target and casework completion modelling has indicated completion will be closer to October. This is primarily due to the number of complex cases identified that required enrichment from partners across government, which was higher than indicated by initial modelling. However, this is not expected to impact overall programme deliverables and the government's target of completing all ARP casework by Spring 2027.

The MOD will continue to publish departmental performance against its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on decision timeliness and will provide explanations where published targets are not met, including the operational actions being taken to improve performance where appropriate. The department also monitors a range of internal quality assurance metrics to assess the quality and consistency of decision-making. However, the monitoring of quality is complex and goes beyond any individual criteria. Publishing quality assurance KPIs could have unintended consequences including promoting a focus on a selection of specific criteria at the expense of overall quality and timeliness.

24. *The government has not adequately explained how it will protect eligible Afghans who cannot safely, lawfully or affordably self-move to a third country for UK entry-clearance checks. This is a serious gap in the current model. A policy that works for many applicants may still fail the most vulnerable, including those who have already waited years because of government delay or error. If the government is to honour its obligations in substance, not merely in process, it must identify those for whom self-move is not realistic and set out what alternative support or exceptions will apply. If the government does not identify and support those unable to self-move, the 12-month deadline risks becoming in practice an exclusion mechanism for eligible people who are too poor, too vulnerable or too exposed to travel independently. (Conclusion, Paragraph 215)*
25. *The government should publish, by the time it responds to this report, a clear policy for eligible Afghans who cannot safely, lawfully or affordably self-move to a third country. This should include criteria for identifying these cases and should set out steps to ensure that the 12-month deadline does not exclude eligible people because they lack the means or ability to travel independently. Without such a policy, the government cannot credibly claim that it is honouring its obligations to all eligible Afghans. (Recommendation, Paragraph 216)*

The UK's approach to Afghan resettlement has been generous, both in terms of the numbers of eligible Afghans reaching the UK and the support we have offered. When this government announced the self-move policy in April 2026, the MOD had already seen increased evidence of individuals being

able to self-move successfully out of Afghanistan. With a mature evidence base, and assessing a range of factors, including the risks to individuals and value for money for the taxpayer, the Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry announced the end of in-country assistance for movements out of Afghanistan.

As of 30 September 2026, of the eligible Afghans who have completed DARR eligibility and biographic checks, over 51 per cent have already completed their movement to a Third Country. Although the policy is in the initial stages, early evidence is showing that people can self-move and are making plans to. Furthermore, we have seen the ACRS run a successful self-move model, and this change enables closer alignment across Afghan resettlement schemes. Once eligible Afghans reach a Third Country, we will continue to provide support, including with visa applications and flights, to reach the UK, until the end of 2028.

As the Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry outlined in his Written Ministerial Statement on 28 April 2026, the government will keep the ARP support under review as the context evolves. As also indicated in the Written Ministerial Statement, exceptional circumstances will be considered where eligible Afghans cannot self-move to a Third Country within the 12 months deadline to attend a visa application centre (VAC) appointment. The government will continue to provide updates to the Committee on relocation policy.

The enforcement of the 12 months deadline, which is an existing provision within the Immigration Rules and expressly subject to exceptional circumstances, is intended to encourage timely relocation by those who want to come to the UK, whilst meeting government aims to complete the central government role in the programme by the end of this Parliament.

- 26.** *Afghan resettlement has brought many people to safety, but successful resettlement cannot be measured by arrival numbers alone. It should also be judged by how quickly families move from temporary to settled accommodation, whether they receive early support, whether unresolved family and casework issues are addressed, and whether employment, language, health and community integration needs are being met.*
(Conclusion, Paragraph 222)

The government agrees that the success of the ARP cannot be measured by arrival numbers alone. The UK government is committed to supporting those granted resettlement in the UK to fully integrate and contribute to the British economy and society, in a way that promotes community cohesion. To enable this, the ARP offers pre-arrival cultural orientation support and, on arrival to the UK, transitional accommodation for up to nine months. This is intended to provide time for families to acclimatise to life in the UK and to help them build independent lives. Transitional accommodation is a vital

part of the government's support offer to Afghan arrivals, allowing them to orient themselves and set themselves up for success for their new lives in the UK, enabling the government and Local Authorities to provide access to healthcare, education and employment support.

The government works with Local Authorities to provide bespoke case working support to eligible Afghans and their families as they move into settled homes, enabling them to establish roots, integrate into local communities and begin the path to self-sufficiency. Integration tariff funding is in place to support Local Authorities in assisting eligible ARP individuals and families with their journey to self-sufficiency. Individuals under the ARP with Indefinite Leave to Remain also have access to mainstream benefits and services to support their integration. The government recognises the strong partnership with Local Authorities and is grateful for the crucial role they play. The effective use of Local Authority expertise has been key to delivering positive outcomes and these lessons will continue to inform future resettlement approaches and wider government responses.

The ARP has seen many stories of individuals and families who have successfully integrated into UK society, finding secure employment, accessing education and establishing roots in local communities. Further detail is set out in the response to Recommendation 29 about how the government is measuring successful resettlement.

- 27.** *For many relocated Afghans, unresolved cases involving close family members remain a significant source of anxiety and affect wellbeing and integration. Family separation and lack of timely casework updates are therefore not peripheral issues; they are part of the continuing consequences of how the schemes have been administered. (Conclusion, Paragraph 223)*
- 28.** *The government should ensure that relocated Afghans in transitional accommodation have timely access to casework updates where unresolved applications involving close family members remain a significant source of anxiety or practical uncertainty. (Recommendation, Paragraph 224)*

The MOD welcomes the Committee's conclusion and recommendation and recognises that unresolved applications involving close family members can be a significant source of anxiety and uncertainty for relocated Afghans, especially those living in transitional accommodation.

To address this, we have strengthened the support available through Home Office Liaison Officers operating within transitional accommodation. These officers now have the capability to provide more detailed and meaningful updates on the status of Additional Family Member applications, helping individuals to better understand the progress of their cases and any further action required.

29. *The government should publish the outcome measures it is developing for the Afghan Resettlement Programme and explain how they will be used to manage delivery and improve outcomes. These measures should cover, at a minimum, movement from temporary to settled accommodation, access to early support, casework resolution for close family members, English-language support, employment, health and wellbeing, and community integration. The government should also explain how the Home Office-led evaluation and programme-board management information will feed into ministerial accountability for Afghan resettlement outcomes.* (Recommendation, Paragraph 225)

The government has established internal Strategic Objectives, Sub-Strategic Objectives and programme level milestones for the ARP, which collectively set out what and how the programme will deliver to meet our commitment for eligible Afghans by the end of this Parliament. In addition, KPIs are being put in place to measure progress against these Strategic Objectives as well as programme outcomes across operational areas such as casework, relocation and resettlement. This provides accountability for the programme, including to Ministers.

One of the Strategic Objectives focuses on the importance of integration of eligible Afghans, enabling them to become independent and active members of UK society through targeted initiatives in language, employment, education, and community engagement. The Home Office evaluation will support the delivery of this Strategic Objective by providing an independent assessment of the Afghan resettlement schemes. This in turn will support Ministerial oversight through providing evidence on programme effectiveness of delivery, outcomes achieved, and value for money.

The evaluation of the Afghan schemes forms part of a broader multi-year evaluation of UK resettlement schemes and will examine the ARP, ACRS, ARAP, ARR, and Communities for Afghans (CfA) in supporting long-term integration across housing, employment, English language acquisition, health, wellbeing, safety and community participation.

The evaluation builds on existing work including the Indicators of Integration framework⁵ (2019), which provides the government's established framework for assessing integration outcomes. The framework sets out the key domains of successful integration and has informed the approach to understanding the resettlement and integration of eligible Afghans in the UK. The indicators are grouped into four overarching themes: Foundations; Markers and Means; Facilitators; and Social Connections.

The evaluation will draw on multiple sources of evidence, including primary data collection and established data linking projects such as the Refugee Integration Outcomes (RIO),⁶ which links administrative data across government to understand long term integration of refugees including resettled cohorts on outcomes such as economic activity, English language and housing. This mixed-methods approach will provide a robust assessment of how the schemes are operating in practice, the outcomes they are delivering, and the factors that enable or hinder successful integration which will inform future policy and delivery decisions, including for the ARP. The evaluation is being conducted between 2025 and late 2028, with final reporting anticipated thereafter. The Home Office aims to publish final evaluation findings at the end of the programme on GOV.UK.

Conclusion

30. *The obligations examined in this report arose from the UK's long involvement in Afghanistan, the commitments made to Afghans who supported the UK mission, and the additional risks created by the data breach. The government and local partners have brought many people to safety in challenging circumstances and supported their settlement in the UK: those efforts deserve recognition. But the central lesson of this episode is that a foreseeable MOD data failure became a wider failure of governance. A breach that should have been prevented was followed by a response shaped by prolonged secrecy, weak accountability, fragmented delivery and inadequate challenge. The consequences were operational, financial and constitutional, but also, first and foremost, human. High-risk, secret, rapidly scaled operations require stronger systems, clearer ownership, earlier external challenge and firmer accountability from the outset. (Conclusion, Paragraph 226)*

The government welcomes the Committee's recognition of the efforts of officials, military personnel, Local Authorities and delivery partners who work in exceptionally challenging circumstances to bring eligible Afghans to safety and support their resettlement in the UK. The successful relocation of nearly 40,000 people so far reflects the UK's commitment to those who supported our mission in Afghanistan.

The government acknowledges that the February 2022 data incident was unacceptable and that MOD fell below the standards expected. The circumstances surrounding Afghan resettlement have been challenging, involving rapidly evolving operational requirements, geo-political instability, risk to life, and the super-injunction. While those circumstances presented considerable challenges, they have also highlighted the importance of clear ownership, effective cross-government coordination, robust programme

6 [Refugee Integration Outcomes \(RIO\) Insights](#)

management and appropriate mechanisms for challenge and scrutiny. These themes are reflected throughout the government's response and in the lessons identified following the lifting of the super-injunction.

The government remains committed to learning from where it fell short, while also recognising the efforts of those who work across departments and organisations to uphold the UK's commitments to eligible Afghans. The ARP is now operating on a more stable and sustainable footing, with strengthened governance, clearer accountability and improved coordination across government. These lessons will continue to inform future government responses to complex operations. Above all, we recognise the human impact on those affected and remain focused on delivering our commitments to eligible Afghans and ending the programme successfully within this Parliament.