



Home Office

Permanent Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
SW1P 4DF  
[www.gov.uk/home-office](http://www.gov.uk/home-office)

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

22 June 2021

Dear Dame Meg Hillier

## **FOLLOW UP TO THE HOME OFFICE EVIDENCE SESSION, 7 JUNE**

Thank you again to the PAC for the session on 7 June. This letter is our response to the issues on which my colleagues and I undertook to follow up in writing.

### **Windrush Compensation Scheme**

**In answer to the Committee's questions concerning whether the Home Office looked at previous compensation schemes when creating the scheme for Windrush victims, I agreed to write to the Committee with more detail.**

The Scheme was set up and designed with the independent oversight of Martin Forde QC, in close consultation with those who were affected by the scandal. In May 2018, we launched a Call for Evidence addressed to those affected and their families which ran for four weeks and received over 650 responses. Following this, we launched a consultation which ran for 16 weeks and received almost 1,500 responses. We also held several public events so we could hear from those affected. This meant we gathered views from people directly, and not just through the formal consultation.

In designing the Scheme we also considered guidance contained in the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's 'Principles for Remedy', National Audit office briefing on establishing time-limited compensation schemes, and good practice from the Home Office and other government departments' existing compensation and ex gratia schemes.

That said, the breadth and scope of the Scheme is unprecedented – the Scheme acts as a single gateway for compensation in thirteen different

categories covering a range of impacts, some of which are beyond those directly in the Home Office sphere. This contrasts with other compensation schemes which often cover a single event or issue.

**In answer to a question from Shaun Bailey, Tom Greig agreed to write to the Committee with more detail concerning the additional cost the Department was facing as a result of Windrush cases taking longer to process.**

Across 2019/20 and 2020/21, since the start of the scheme, we have spent £8.1m on running costs. We have budgeted £9.0m in 2021/22 reflecting a planned increase - we are currently recruiting more caseworkers in order to reduce the time claimants are waiting for a decision.

However, I would like to confirm that the Windrush Compensation Scheme is not restricted by budget. We are confident that our current allocated budget of £9.0m is sufficient, but should it not be, further funds will be made available.

**In answer to another question from Shaun Bailey Mr Greig agreed to provide the Committee with a breakdown of what caseworkers handling the Windrush Compensation scheme were paid. You also asked that this breakdown also cover the pay gap between caseworkers and senior decision makers.**

I can confirm that as of 01 July 2020, the salary band for an EO based in Sheffield and Leeds is £24,883 to £27,372. The salary band for an HEO based in Sheffield and Leeds is £30,817 to £33,899.

### **Payment Cards**

**Peter Grant asked about the problems that asylum seekers were having with accessing their payments cards in recent months and the steps the Home Office were taking to address the matter.**

As a result of switching to the new Aspen (asylum support payment) card provider, there was a short, but unavoidable period of service disruption to ensure service user data and card balances were moved in time for the new service to begin on 24 May 2021. The Home Office tested technologies and infrastructures to assess the viability for dual processing and phased roll out of the new cards, but neither option was supported on our platforms. Therefore, the service transition and associated data had to move from the outgoing provider to the incoming one in one process.

From late April and throughout May we communicated with service users to inform them of the period of planned disruption. Translated posters, leaflets and letters were circulated and we worked with all of our strategic delivery partners, as well as voluntary sector partners, to support service users in preparing for the disruption and advised them to withdraw cash and purchase essential goods. The transition project team took on board feedback from

stakeholders and revised communications following a workshop attended by members of the National Asylum Stakeholder Forum on 4 May.

Service users had access to their weekly payments from 17 May as planned and ahead of this necessary period of disruption. The disruption began at 5pm on Friday 21 May and ended at 9am on Monday 24 May when the new service went live.

Whilst we consider the messaging and information was robust, we put in place contingency plans to support service users during the planned disruption. The emergency cash payment provision with our accommodation providers was bolstered to ensure that anyone needing emergency cash support over that weekend and beyond could access it. To support this, Migrant Help and Home Office operational teams stood up an increased out-of-hours service to support the processing of requests from service users, if required.

During the weekend of 22 May our Advice Issue Reporting and Eligibility (AIRE) service received a minimal amount of requests for Emergency Cash Payments which we provided accordingly.

The vast majority of service users have now received and activated their new Aspen card, since the new service went live. We are, however, aware that some service users experienced difficulty in activating their payment card and we worked closely with our providers to resolve the issues and provide emergency cash payments to individuals where necessary. The vast majority of issues have been resolved and we continue to work with providers to resolve any outstanding problems.

The contract for the Pre-Paid Financial Services provision of the Aspen card runs for up to four years. A Lessons Learned Review will be conducted to inform our plans for future roll out if and when we move to a new provider.

### **Asylum accommodation**

#### **You asked about the number of people moving out of asylum accommodation.**

The use of hotels and wider government facilities as contingency accommodation is a short-term measure to fulfil our statutory obligations to house destitute asylum seekers whilst their claims are examined. The majority of individuals currently accommodated in contingency accommodation are relatively recent arrivals who are yet to have their claims considered.

As I set out at the hearing the number of asylum seekers housed in hotel accommodation has decreased by 3000 over the course of this year as individuals are moved through the estate from contingency to longer term dispersal accommodation. In total, approximately 12,000 people have been moved from hotel accommodation since the start of the year and the plan is

for a continual reduction over the next few months. We are achieving this reduction through a combination of moving people on to mainstream accommodation if they are granted refugee status – and we have a programme of work in place to increase our asylum decision making output - and through working with local authorities to increase the amount of dispersal accommodation. We currently have a pause on moving people whose claims have been refused but will resume this activity in due course, taking account of public health advice.

### **Prediction models**

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton Brown asked for the Home Office to provide the Committee with any modelling we have done to measure the number of asylum seekers, adults and children, leaving and entering the system.**

The Asylum system is, by its nature, very uncertain and Covid-19 has added to that uncertainty. However, we have developed a range of scenarios to help plan for both the number of people seeking asylum in the UK and the number that require support until they leave the Home Office system.

In the long term, our models project an upward trend in supported population. However, these models do not take into account any future policy changes until they are given Royal Assent; including those proposed by the New Plan for Immigration. In the short term, our scenarios are much more volatile – illustrating the uncertainty of managing the system through the pandemic.

In the year ending March 2021, we received 26,903 claims for asylum and we were providing accommodation to 61,241 asylum and failed asylum seekers. For the year ending March 2022, our current modelling scenario project asylum applications ranging between 40,000 and 50,000, and an accommodated population of between 60,000 to 80,000. Our models estimate a range of scenarios from these points and are currently being used for policy development. However, they are heavily impacted by assumptions and the actual figure may in fact be outside this range. We are also working to increase the number decision makers alongside transforming, streamlining and simplifying the process to increase speed of decision making and reduce waiting time for decisions.

So far this year we have seen asylum intake in accordance with some lower levels and the supported population remaining relatively stable. Overall, the main proportion of new adult asylum claimants that require accommodation tend to be single rather than families with children.

## **Emergency Services Network (ESN)**

The committee asked for a full breakdown of what the 70% roll-out of ESN has covered so far. The committee expressed a particular interest in receiving a breakdown of the current cost and the number of staff involved in the roll-out.

This assessment is based on three areas:

- **Technology Delivery** – including the infrastructure, data centres and Kodiak application.
- **Network Coverage** – including core coverage provided by EE and provision of addition coverage in extended areas.
- **Provision of Coverage on the London Underground (TfL).**

Approximating the relative sizes of each area based on supplier costs and allocating progress based on indicative analysis gives an overall completion of around 70%.

It should be noted that provision of the remaining 30% centres on delivery of the core technology in the form of our two further releases – ESN Beta and ESN Version 1.0 and completing the rollout of coverage in the London Underground. This also assumes that delivery of the contracted coverage (plus a subset of Critical Locations) will be sufficient to allow users to commence rollout (Transition) i.e. the programme is not expecting to deliver significant coverage above this level.

The table below shows the whole life costs of the programme from 2015/16 to 2036/37. The cost to date is £3.4bn with the total spend for the programme forecast at £11.3bn through to 2036/37

<b>£'m, P50 Financial Year</b>	<b>Costs to Date</b>	<b>Whole Life Costs</b>
<b>Programme Delivery</b>	0.6	1.6
<b>Ongoing Costs</b>	0.7	5.0
<b>Legacy Costs (inc. Airwave)</b>	2.1	4.9
<b>Income</b>		(0.2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>11.3</b>

The total number of civil service staff delivering the programme currently stands at FTE 144.7. We are also supported by staff from our delivery partners, Deloitte, alongside specialist contractors.

**The committee also asked Charu Gosia to provide a detailed breakdown of what the annual delay to the ESN programme has cost the Department, particularly how the £650m figure quoted by Joanna Davinson last year fits in with the annual figure of £450m quoted in the evidence session.**

In Joanna Davinson's letter to the committee in Sept 2020, she referred to the annual costs of extending Airwave beyond December 2022 as likely to be in excess of £450m, subject to commercial negotiation. She also referred to the annual cost of delay to the ESN programme as likely to be in excess of £650m, taking into account any assumed Airwave extension, programme costs and the cost of delayed benefits realisation.

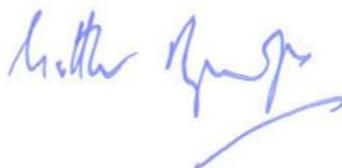
In evidence given at the Public Accounts Committee on 7 June the £450m quoted was for the additional cost of extending Airwave. The projected cost of the delay in the programme is still £650m made up of extending the Airwave contract £450m, lost benefits £60m, and ESN programme running costs forecast at £140m.

### **Digital Services at the Border**

**Paul Lincoln committed to write to clarify the number of ports being ready to use BX.** As Mr. Lincoln stated as of 7 June, 34 ports stand ready to use BX.

I trust that this answers the Committee's questions and I look forward to further engagement with you.

*Yours sincerely,*



**Matthew Rycroft CBE**