

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

14th July 2022

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 29 June following my appearance at the Committee on 23 May.

### **Migration and Economic Development partnership with Rwanda**

**You have asked what data the Department is collecting about the scheme and what information, when and with what frequency, the Department will make available on the scheme to allow Parliament and the public to hold it to account for performance.**

The Department routinely publishes statistics on the operation of the immigration system. Two sets of data may be of particular relevance in this context:

- The inadmissibility statistics are contained in the Asylum chapter, of which the most recent edition can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-march-2022/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to#inadmissibility>

- A report on irregular migration is now published quarterly and the latest example is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/irregular-migration-to-the-uk-year-ending-march-2022>

As per Managing Public Money guidance, there will be an updated Accounting Officer (AO) Note if our evaluation of the Programme against the four tests changes, or if the Programme deviates materially from the agreed plan which informed the Accounting Officer's previous approval.

We anticipate an updated AO Note ahead of the next financial year taking into account the additional data we would expect to have available (such as number of transferees, number of legal challenges, level of crossings etc).

**You asked how much the scheme is expected to cost in each of the next three years, how much has been spent to date, and on what.**

We have provided Rwanda with an initial investment of £120m as part of the Migration and Economic Development Partnership.

We are also providing funding to cover processing costs for those persons relocated, such as costs associated with caseworkers, legal advice, translators, accommodation, food, healthcare, and for those granted protection, a comprehensive integration package to help them put down roots and start a new life.

Every person's needs are different, but we anticipate the amount provided for processing costs would be comparable to processing costs incurred in the UK. Funding is only provided while a person remains in Rwanda.

Actual spend will be reported as part of the annual Home Office Reports and Accounts in the usual way. As set out previously, costs are dependent on the number of people relocated to Rwanda and the outcome of their claims.

**You asked for details of the evaluation plans the Department has for the scheme, the scope of the evaluations, when the evaluations will be completed and the results made available.**

We are currently developing a monitoring and evaluation strategy that will allow us to increase our understanding of people crossing the English Channel, inadmissible asylum claims, and the wider context of irregular migration. The evaluation will also help inform our ongoing assessment of the policy against the accounting officer tests. To meet those aims, the evaluation will be broken down into several cross cutting themes:

- Intended Impact
- Value for Money (VfM)
- Operational Impact
- Unintended Consequences
- Equalities Impact

I would be more than happy to set out more details on this for the Committee by the end of September.

**You asked for updates when decisions are taken in relation to our schemes to support those impacted by the war in Ukraine.**

I will be happy to write to the committee when decisions are taken in relation to the Ukraine schemes.

In the meantime, Lord Harrington, Minister for Refugees, answered a number of questions, including on rematching at his recent appearance at the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Hearing on 29 June which you may wish to review at <https://committees.parliament.uk/event/14032/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/>

## **Immigration Caseload**

**You asked what the Department is doing to get caseload levels back on track, what we do to identify cases where individuals have been severely negatively affected, what support we provide and when we expect normal service levels to be resumed in each category of visa and immigration route.**

At the session I confirmed we have prioritised the Ukraine Schemes. Resources are now being returned to focus on visa routes impacted by these prioritisation decisions.

Across the migration and borders system we have been recruiting new staff, increasing our use of agency and contractor resource, and deploying our existing staff flexibly to meet the increased demand over summer in our critical functions and get caseload levels back on track.

In the longer term we are continuing to develop existing and new technology to help build on recent improvements such as digital interviewing and move away from a paper-based system. We are streamlining and digitalising the case working process to enable more effective workflow, appointment booking, and decision-making. The quick work we have done to make the Ukraine Schemes available on AccessUK is emblematic of our ambition in this area.

UK Visas and Immigration are working to reduce the current processing times as quickly as possible. Our Gov.uk website provides up to date information on our turnaround times for visit, work and study applications and we encourage customers to continue to refer to these as our performance changes on a weekly basis.

We continue to prioritise any urgent compelling or compassionate cases. Where Priority and Super Priority Services are currently not being offered, we aim to restore these as soon as we can deliver on our expected standard timescales.

## **Passports**

**You asked how many passport applications are currently outstanding, how long, on average, customers are waiting to receive their passports, projections for the number of passports we expect to issue over the next six months and when the Department expects the average turnaround time for passports to return to three weeks.**

As I noted at the session, we are dealing with record levels of intake so that work in progress will naturally be high, but we also have higher numbers of caseworkers and have record levels of output.

The number of passport applications in progress at any one time is not the best measure of how the system is operating, as HM Passport Office carries work in progress across the year as part of normal operational planning.

By way of illustration, between 200,000 and 250,000 passport applications are being processed each week. Accounting for the seasonality of passport demand, our forecast is that over four million passports will be issued over the next six months.

We put the 10-week service standard in place as early as April 2021 because we knew of the latent demand following the pandemic. Over 5 million people delayed their passport applications in 2020 and 2021, and as passport demand has returned applications will take longer. Across March, April, and May, 98.5% of standard passport applications from the UK were completed within 10 weeks.

For those customers whose applications have been with HM Passport Office for longer than ten weeks and where they are travelling within the next fortnight, an expedited service is provided at no additional cost to prioritise the application. However, as has always been the case, a British passport will not be issued until all checks have been satisfactorily completed, and where further information is required, applications will take longer.

Every effort will be made to return processing times to the previous timeframes as soon as possible. In the meantime, we urge customers to make their applications in good time, allowing 10 weeks for processing, and not to book travel without a passport that meets their travel needs.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pam Hayes', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Mrs P J Hayes**

**Second Permanent Secretary**