



Home Office

The Home Office response to the Independent Chief Inspector's report:

An unannounced inspection of the Cardiff Asylum Team

February 2014

The Home Office thanks the Independent Chief Inspector for his report. The Home Office's UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) command has responsibility for making millions of decisions every year about who has the right to visit or stay in the country, with a firm emphasis on national security, protecting the vulnerable, and a culture of customer satisfaction for people who come here legally.

We welcome scrutiny of the Cardiff Asylum Team (which sits within the Asylum Casework Directorate, ACD), which is one of 10 non-detained asylum casework units within UKVI across the UK and which receives approximately 8% of the UK's annual non-detained asylum claims.

UKVI aims to become a high performing, consistently competent, customer focussed organisation. In support of this ACD has established a Change Programme for our asylum organisation which has been broken down into three project categories:

- To give ACD the staff and structures it needs to perform as a national command in a consistently competent manner. This will help increase our capacity to deal with increased volumes of claims by implementing effective recruitment and retention of staff.
- To move ACD towards being a high performing Directorate. It will bring changes to decision-making to improve decision quality, consistency and productivity and eventual customer experience, running alongside a new technology end to end data platform for improving decisions.
- To have proper complaint and customer contact procedures and gaining Customer Service Excellence accreditation for the whole of the Directorate by 2015.

The Home Office finds this report a useful addition to that programme.

The Home Office is pleased the Chief Inspector recognised that vulnerable people were always treated as a priority in Cardiff, and that staff took their responsibility to safeguard these claimants seriously. We also welcome his finding that both staff and management were working to the same objectives of effectively managing new asylum claims through increased productivity, and deciding older cases to help clear the backlog. We welcome the finding that local managers had provided excellent support to staff during a significant period of change and that recent proposals to improve efficiency had been developed with staff. Finally, we welcome the recognition of good communication links between asylum, appeals and enforcement teams in Cardiff.

We are grateful to the Chief Inspector for highlighting shortcomings in some of the casework productivity targets used, in Asylum's ability to manage large-scale change, including retention and recruitment of staff during periods of transition, and the methodology used in our assessment of decision quality. We agree with all these points and are putting in place measures to address them.

The Home Office accepts all three of the Chief Inspector's recommendations in full.

The Home Office response to the recommendations:

1. Decides all asylum applications within its published service standards and informs applicants where it is unable to do so.

1.1. Accepted

- 1.2. We will continue to review our targets and performance during the course of the year to ensure that we are meeting the standards we have published.
- 1.3. From April 2015 we anticipate introducing a new published service standard that would ensure we provide a decision to asylum claimants on all straightforward asylum cases within six months of their claim. Where that was not possible, we would contact claimants and advise them on when they can expect a reply.
- 1.4. This year we are trialling new internal targets for straightforward cases, with the aim of deciding 50% of cases within 30 days, 75% of cases within 60 days, 85% of cases within 120 days and the rest within 180 days.
- 1.5. To support these targets we recruited additional decision makers and administrative support staff. Once recruitment and basic training is complete, we will have a total of 409 decision makers who will work on deciding the older asylum cases along with the new intake. 90 additional support staff will provide administrative support to our decision makers so that they can focus on delivering interviews and making decisions.

2. Ensures targets for deciding asylum claims are regularly reviewed and takes immediate action if it identifies that they are resulting in unfair treatment of applicants

2.1. Accepted

- 2.2. We agree that any future targets should be regularly reviewed to identify if they are unfair on claimants.
- 2.3. Moving forward we will review our performance against our targets monthly, to allow us to identify if they are resulting in unfair treatment of our claimants. If this is the case, we will take swift action to amend them.
- 2.4. However, it should also be noted that each asylum claim is treated on its individual merits and it is not possible to provide a quick decision on every case. Some cases may take longer for reasons outside of our control, such as when waiting for medical reports or where there are issues relating to national security. In other cases, such as children or potential victims of trafficking, longer timescales are in place to allow claimants longer periods of adjustment before interview.
- 2.5. We firmly believe that serving decisions in six months on straightforward cases will help us to achieve this recommendation.

3. Evaluates its previous asylum casework change programmes in order to improve its management of future change.

3.1. Accepted; already implemented

- 3.2. We accept the Chief Inspector's view that the Home Office should improve its management of change.
- 3.3. An evaluation of the previous ACD change programme took place in September 2013. Communication links between senior managers and staff have been strengthened since then as noted by staff in Cardiff at 5.7 of this report. Senior managers are committed to engaging and consulting staff on all major change initiatives through staff engagement sessions, regular global e-mails to all staff from the Director and other SCS, web chats between staff and senior managers and regular visits around the UK. We have recently completed four large-scale recruitment campaigns which means that we are now almost back to 2013 staffing levels. Seeing new, trained staff arrive in post and beginning to help with the workload is helping to improve morale. We also have an action plan focusing on the key issues raised in the last people survey, which focuses on boosting learning and development opportunities, leadership training, and improving change management.
- 3.4. Additionally, in September 2013 a dedicated business strategy team was established within the ACD to specifically manage its change programme. The new Asylum change programme will include key projects such as case work improvement, work force planning: recruitment and retention and the implementation of embedding a continuous improvement strategy to support the efficient and effective delivery of ACD. We are communicating the achievements of the change programme to all staff regularly, and consulting them on the projects as they develop. This should all help improve staff engagement.