



Home Office

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

'An Unannounced Inspection of the Service Provided by Glasgow Public Enquiry Office'

December 2013

The Home Office thanks the Independent Chief Inspector for his report. UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) aims to become a high performing, consistently competent, customer focussed organisation. In support of this, an on-going change and improvement programme is underway; which through the introduction of a new operating model will standardise and improve in-country Premium Services and align them more closely with services overseas, leading to improved customer service outcomes. The Home Office found this report a useful addition to that programme.

The Home Office is pleased that the Chief Inspector has recognised that the vast majority of applications submitted to Glasgow Public Enquiry Office (PEO) are decided on the same-day and that feedback from customers is positive. We welcome his finding that customer service provision is good, that processes are free from discrimination and customers are treated fairly. We welcome also his recognition that staff in Glasgow are committed and understand the importance of delivering a professional service.

The Home Office welcomes the Chief Inspector's recognition that despite some problems with its implementation in Glasgow PEO, the introduction of the new operating model addressed risks inherent in the previous operating practice and gave customers greater choice about when they access our services.

We are grateful to the Chief Inspector for highlighting shortcomings in the implementation of the new operating model in Glasgow; in particular the issues around management assurance. We agree that this was an unacceptable situation and are putting in place measures to address this.

The Home Office accepts four of the Chief Inspector's recommendations in full and accepts one in part; where we already advise customers of average waiting times as part of the auto-messaging on our general enquiry line. We are taking steps to address all of the issues raised.

The Home Office response to the recommendations:

1. [That the Home Office] Sets minimum acceptable levels of quality assurance checks and ensures they are conducted across the PEO network.

1.1. Accepted

- 1.2. The Chief Inspector's report highlights the importance of a robust quality checking regime to ensure positive customer service outcomes and to provide confidence in the decisions made by caseworkers. UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) shares this view and aims to become a globally trusted operator delivering excellent customer service and secure decisions.
- 1.3. The PEO network routinely conducts post-decision decision-quality checks on a random sample of cases. Complex cases, caseworkers in training and refusals are targeted in particular; with a random sample of other cases also carried out.
- 1.4. While the majority of PEOs were conducting appropriate decision-quality checks, we accept that in the case of Glasgow PEO, a shortage of suitably trained staff had led to a reduction in decision quality checks and that none had been conducted there between August and December 2013. Following our receipt of the Chief Inspector's report, we carried out a review of this process. We identified that in addition to undertaking insufficient decision-quality checks, this office appears also to have not consistently carried out checks of the UK's border watchlist prior to deciding cases during this period.
- 1.5. We have now carried out a retrospective check of these cases and confirmed that this failure has not made a material difference to the decisions taken. This failure has now been addressed and a more comprehensive checking system introduced. We have alerted the Chief inspector to this failure that he assisted us in identifying and have asked that he reviews the effectiveness of these steps in due course.
- 1.6. Minimum checking levels have been clarified with managers and we have established a project to produce a single decision quality process which is consistent with the wider UKVI approach. We have also issued new guidance to staff on mandatory checking requirements.
- 1.7. We are currently recruiting additional managers and senior caseworkers across the network; including a further three managers in Glasgow. This will ensure sufficient capacity for decision quality checks in future. Pending their appointment, senior caseworkers from other offices will assist local managers to undertake quality checks on Glasgow PEO cases.
- 1.8. While post-decision checks are a useful tool to establish and maintain confidence in decisions made by caseworkers, they are less useful in addressing customer service issues, as they do not highlight errors until after the decision has been served. Following recruitment of additional senior caseworkers and full implementation of the new operating model, decision quality checks on PEO cases will be conducted pre-decision; thereby

addressing any issues prior to decision service and preventing the formation of quality checking backlogs.

2. Ensures that there are adequate notes on the casework database about the rationale for decisions, including any reasons for delay and the outcome of any enquiries made.

2.1. Accepted

2.2. Whilst the Home Office accepts that reasons for its decisions must be properly recorded, it is important that we strike the right balance between retaining appropriate evidence on case files and offering a fast and efficient service that provides value for money for both the customer and the taxpayer.

2.3. We accept the Chief Inspector's view that in some cases inadequate caseworking notes were made within the casework database. As part of our implementation of the new operating model for Premium Services, we have for the first time developed a comprehensive training course for PEO caseworkers.

2.4. All caseworkers, including those with previous experience, will receive a period of formal training as part of new operating model roll-out. This will ensure that all caseworkers understand record keeping requirements and work to consistent standards. This substantial investment in training, together with the new, consistent approach to decision quality, will ensure adequate records are maintained in future.

3. Publishes clear customer service standards in respect of Premium Services and removes any conflicting or ambiguous information from its website.

3.1. Accepted

3.2. We accept the Chief Inspector's view that published service standards for Premium Services have in the past been inconsistent and unclear. New customer service standards for all in-country customers were launched in January 2014. This clear set of standards differentiates straightforward applications from complex cases, where we are unable to provide the same certainty over processing times. Complex cases will include those, for example, where a customer has a pending criminal prosecution and the outcome may affect the decision we make.

3.3. For Premium Services, our service standard is to decide 98.5% of straightforward same-day cases on the day. It is not considered practical to set a layered service standard for complex cases, as the time taken to decide a complex case is dependant on the degree and nature of the complexity. UKVI is committed to ensuring that cases do not remain undecided longer than is necessary; moreover undecided premium cases will be subject to daily review as part of the changes introduced by the new operating model.

- 3.4. We recognise a need to improve the information provided to customers about service standards. Where we are unable to meet the standard or where an application is complex, we will explain to the customer what will happen next and how long it will take.
- 3.5. The new standards are an important change and are part of the new customer focussed culture which UKVI is seeking to create. We have included them on our new website which is hosted by .GOV.UK. This will ensure that UKVI customers receive a more clear, transparent and reliable service than was previously the case.

4. Provides up-to-date information about the complaints process at PEOs, with complaint posters and leaflets being available in public areas and ensure staff understand and can explain the process to applicants.

4.1. Accepted

- 4.2. The PEO network was recently reaccredited for Customer Service Excellence and we remain committed to those principles; including seeking out and responding to a variety of customer feedback; whether through satisfaction surveys, or informal and formal complaints.
 - 4.3. We are pleased that the Chief Inspector recognises the potential benefits of the implementation of an online customer satisfaction survey. The online survey will decrease costs and administration, has the potential to improve the speed and quality of analysis and supports the Government's 'Digital by Default' policy.
 - 4.4. We acknowledge however, that this recent change has resulted in a reduction in the number of surveys returned. To address this issue, we are increasing the number of reminder emails and have procured interactive survey points (tablet computers in a secure housing) for each PEO. This enables customers to complete the online survey during their visit. We are confident that this will result in an increase to the level of customer feedback received.
 - 4.5. While the new (November 2013), centralised complaints handling process is still bedding-in, we are confident that it will eliminate inconsistencies in complaints processes, will improve service standards for responding to complaints and will facilitate improved analysis of both performance and customer concerns.
 - 4.6. We have recently refurbished four of our seven offices. As part of this, we undertook a review of signage across the PEO estate and will ensure that complaint procedures are clearly visible to our customers. We will also ensure that complaints procedures are clearly articulated to staff and that lessons learned are discussed in team meetings.
- 5. Sets an appropriate and measurable standard for answering telephone calls to its immigration enquiry line and publishes this on its website.**

5.1. Partially Accepted

- 5.2. We are pleased that the Chief Inspector recognised our good level of performance regarding appointment availability.
- 5.3. While the overwhelming majority of PEO customers now apply online, a very small minority of customers who are part of a family group of twelve or more still use the telephone booking line.
- 5.4. We partially accept this recommendation as we now advise customers of average waiting times and busy periods via an automated message on our general enquiry line. This information is refreshed weekly to reflect the previous week's performance.
- 5.5. Our service standard, as per Cabinet Office guidance, is for 80% of calls received to be answered by an agent. At the time of the inspection, our year to date performance was that 88.26% of calls had been answered by an agent.
- 5.6. To enhance performance and in response to feedback from our customer survey, we have also transferred European calls to our Sheffield contact centre to help reduce call traffic through our Croydon contact centre, thus helping to bring down call waiting times.
- 5.7. We acknowledge that performance of the telephone booking line has at times fallen short of our target and we will continue to examine any further improvements that can be made.
- 5.8. We welcome the Chief Inspector's comments about providing greater clarity over call costs, these were published on .GOV.UK in June 2014. In March 2014 we launched an 0300 number and will switch-off the 0870 number after a testing period.