



Home Office

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

'An inspection of Home Office Outsourced contracts for Escorted and Non-Escorted removals and Cedars Pre-Departure Accommodation'

July – November 2015

The Home Office thanks the Independent Chief Inspector (ICI) for the recommendations in his report.

Work is already underway to address the recommendations relating to ticketing and escorting and, as the report acknowledges, these issues are being factored in to the re-procurement exercise for both contracts which began in 2015.

There is ongoing work to identify ways of reducing running costs for Cedars pre-departure accommodation.

The Home Office accepts the eight recommendations and our comments on each are below.

The Home Office should:

Recommendation 1:

In order to reduce the logistical difficulties and additional costs created by late changes to escorted removals, work with Tascor to improve the usefulness of the Electronic Request Form (ERF) for risk assessing escorted removals and allocating escorts, and consider what of the additional information provided at the 72 hour point could be provided earlier.

1.1 Accepted - implementation underway

- 1.2 Returns Logistics and Tascor have implemented a new risk definition process for charter flight removals. As a result far more detailed, accurate and up to date returnee risk information is shared before each flight which ensures the right level of escort to returnee ratio. This has already led to a reduction in the number of escorts required on some charters. The lessons learnt from this initiative are now being taken forward and a pilot is underway to apply the risk definition process for charter flights to scheduled flights. This will facilitate a more defined and consistent assessment of risks for Tascor to consider when allocating escorts.
- 1.3 In the longer term the new travel contract will seek to address the issues raised in the report.

Recommendation 2:

Regularly review by business area and/or removal category the percentage of, and reasons for, cancelled or failed removals, including those deemed 'out of [Home Office] control', and set a common threshold, and develop guidance for caseworkers, for when to request refundable tickets.

2.1 Accepted - implementation underway

- 2.2 The Home Office is undertaking a programme of work to drive down cancelled and failed removals. The Returns Logistics Airline Ticketing Team are undertaking a rolling training programme for case owners/flight 'bookers' which provides clear guidance for when to request refundable tickets. Additionally Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) staff use the Travel Information Guide (TIG) when exploring ticket options. The TIG sets out which carriers are the most robust in the removal of immigration cases i.e. the carriers who are most willing to carry our cases. By prioritising bookings with such carriers failed removals are minimised.
- 2.3 The Returns Logistics Team produce a Ticketing Performance Report which sets out on a monthly basis the reasons for 'in-control' removal failures. From March 2016 these reports will be discussed more systematically with business areas to establish trends and develop practices to reduce failures/ticket cancellations.
- 2.4 Immigration Enforcement (IE) is also undertaking a review of its approach to physical disruptions across all removal types to identify changes that will reduce the volume of removals that fail for this reason. This includes reviewing the work of IE staff, service providers and contractors and engagement with detainees in encouraging compliance with departure.

Recommendation 3:

Put in place (and monitor) a process that ensures that where travel tickets have been purchased for an unescorted or escorted removal and the removal is cancelled or fails:

- **the caseworker updates the Case Information Database (CID) and alerts the travel services contractor at the earliest opportunity (so that the contractor can seek the maximum possible refund);**
- **escorts deployed out of hours and at week-ends alert the travel services contractor at the earliest opportunity, and the escorting contractor confirms to the caseworker that this has been done.**

3.1 Accepted – implementation underway

- 3.2 The Returns Logistics Airline Ticketing team were already circulating regular reminders to ‘bookers’ to highlight the importance of updating CID with a removal outcome and cancelling tickets at the earliest opportunity. This is also covered in the rolling training programme for case owners/flight ‘bookers’ (referenced in 2.2).
- 3.3 In the longer term the new travel contract will seek to address the issues raised in the report.

Recommendation 4:

Given the co-dependencies of the escorting and travel services contracts, consider re-designating the latter ‘Tier 1’, and reviewing both together at senior level, where relevant applying the lessons from Moore Stephens and other reviews to both.

- 4.1 **Accepted - implementation of the recommendations from Moore Stephens and other reviews is underway.** Significant progress has been made, with more than 90% of recommendations completed.
- 4.2 The Home Office will consider re-designating the travel contract as “Tier 1” and putting in place the corresponding management oversight.

Recommendation 5:

Having relaxed the current performance regime and reduced Tascor’s losses for the remainder of the current escorting contract, press Tascor to deliver as required in relation to the ‘significant efficiency improvements’ to the removals process envisaged in the Joint Business Plan.

5.1 Accepted - implementation underway

- 5.2 Performance is discussed at monthly contract review meetings between the Home Office and Tascor and at regular meetings with senior Directors from Immigration Enforcement. These meetings cover both in-country and overseas escorting.
- 5.3 The contract management assurance and governance process is in place. Progress and achievements in relation to the efficiency improvements and joint business plans are reviewed at Senior Director level, oversight meetings are held (currently on a quarterly

basis) and attended by senior commercial representatives, senior business leads, the supplier and cross-Government Crown Representatives where appropriate. The objectives are to hold an open discussion on the performance and the relationship across contracts and to provide a forum for both parties to resolve issues and drive continuous improvement.

- 5.4 The Tascor contract has a Senior Business Contract Owner (SBCO) accountable for the performance of the contract, although the commercial function retains responsibility for the appropriate application of commercial and contractual levers.

Recommendation 6:

Conduct a detailed analysis of the operational and financial impacts of delays between the date requested for a removal and the date escorts are made available, using the results to improve the effectiveness of current processes and to inform future performance measures, including financial deductions ('service credits').

6.1 Accepted - implementation underway

- 6.2 Data relating to the delay between the date requested for a removal and the date escorts are made available is already discussed at the monthly contract review meetings (referenced in 5.2). The cost implications of delays already feed into the scheduling of charter flight operations.
- 6.3 The Detainee Escorting and Population Management Unit within Immigration Enforcement will undertake an analysis of cost differentials between delayed removals (including detention costs) and the cost of employing additional Detainee Custody Officers to expedite overseas flights, by end of April 2016.

Recommendation 7:

In designing the performance regime for the new escorting and travel services contract(s), ensure KPIs:

- **focus on outcomes, striking a balance between operational delivery and costs (including refunds) and do not distort performance by an over-emphasis on certain activities (e.g. In-Country Escorting (ICE) movements);**
- **that the number KPIs is manageable for all parties;**
- **that performance data can be monitored and validated independently (where necessary through Home Office direct access to contractors' systems and full data sharing); and,**
- **that any deductions (e.g. 'service credits') and conditions (e.g. sliding scales, caps) are correctly applied and used to incentivise continuous improvement and, where appropriate, collaboration between contractors.**

7.1 Accepted - implementation underway

- 7.2 The design of the performance regime for the new escorting and services contracts will take in to account lessons learned from the previous contract management regime, the recommendations of the ICI report and recent commercial reviews by the National Audit Office (NAO) and other public bodies as well as Cabinet Office guidance developed since the previous procurement.
- 7.3 An innovation partnership board will bring together the Home Office and the Escorting and Travel Service providers. This contractual governance structure will focus on service improvement initiatives and issue resolutions to ensure that all parties are focused on achieving a common outcome.

Recommendation 8:

Conduct a fundamental review of the requirement for Pre-Departure Accommodation for families with children under the age of 18, with a view to providing facilities, including welfare and other essential support, that are appropriate in scale, nature and cost to the projected demand for and proven value of such accommodation.

8.1 Accepted - implementation underway

- 8.2 Pre-departure accommodation at Cedars is unique, and has been designed to support families before departure. It is only used as a last resort, and this has an impact on its overall value for money.
- 8.3 The low level of use of Cedars reflects the success of the returns process and the fact that more families are accepting voluntary assistance to leave the UK when they no longer have a lawful basis to stay here. Cedars has only ever been intended to be used as a last resort after all voluntary return options have failed and following the advice of a panel of independent child safeguarding experts.
- 8.4 The cost of pre-departure accommodation is kept under review. The Home Office is currently considering the most cost-effective way of providing pre-departure accommodation within an enforced family returns service going forward.