



Home Office

The Home Office response to the Independent Chief Inspector of Border and Immigration's re-inspection of the complaints handling process

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

We are pleased that the ICI found considerable positives in the way that UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI), Detention Services and Border Force were handling complaints. This reflects our ongoing commitment to implement improvements to the way we handle correspondence.

The re-inspection found that three of the original eight recommendations could be considered closed for all three immigration and borders commands overall. These relate to the review of complaints handling guidance, to informing complainants what to do if they remained dissatisfied and to investigating complaints thoroughly and fairly.

The ICI made specific findings about each command separately, identifying successes and also areas where more work is needed. The Department will continue to work on addressing the open recommendations.

UKVI

The Central Correspondence Team (CCT), who sit within UKVI, handle complaints about UKVI and Immigration Enforcement. The re-inspection found that CCT had made significant improvements since the original inspection and that only one recommendation remained open.

The open recommendation relates to the acknowledgment of complaints made by post and interim responses where a complaint would not be answered within 20 days. However, CCT's own quality assurance processes had already identified these issues. New processes were put in place in January, including an IT supported 'bring forward' process, but the ICI found this was too recent for the re-inspection to confirm they had been effective. We are confident the process introduced addresses this aspect of the recommendation.

Improvements made include a new Style Guide for responders and detailed Standard Operating procedures; systematic quality assurance; improvements in the quality of case recording and the introduction of senior management sign off for all Stage 2 cases (where the customer is not satisfied and complains a second time).

We will continue to look beyond the recommendations, at what more we can do to enhance our service. We are pleased that the report acknowledges our success and that we have made a significant shift in the right direction.

Border Force

The Border Force Complaints Team (BFCT) handles complaints about Border Force. The re-inspection found that four of the original eight recommendations could be considered closed.

The open recommendations are in relation to improving performance against the 20 working-day service standard, ensuring effective use of the Complaints Management System and having efficient workflow management in place. These findings reflect areas where improvement work is already in place.

The BFCT moved from central Home Office management to direct Border Force management in July 2016. Since then there has been a programme of work to address the quality of responses and provide more ownership of complaints by the operational areas, including the sign off of minor misconduct cases at Grade 7 level.

The next stage of continuous improvement is underway, which builds on the recommendations of a continuous improvement review undertaken in March/April 2017. So far an overhaul of the information available to the public on the complaints process has been completed and further work is ongoing to provide more information on certain types of service complaints to reduce the number received.

A new complaints handling process was introduced in June 2017 providing a more efficient approach to workflow management focussing on case ownership, the cessation of paper files and more effective use of the Complaints Management System. This will enable Border Force to better align resources to demand and drive up performance to meet service standards.

We are pleased that the ICI found the quality of complaints responses to be of a good standard and that investigations were fair and thorough.

Detention Services

Complaints made by immigration detainees are handled by the contractor responsible for the detention facility but are managed and monitored by Immigration Enforcement's Detention Services Customer Service Unit (DS CSU). The re-inspection found that six of the original eight recommendations could be considered closed.

The open recommendations are in relation to improving the rigour and timeliness of quality assurance checks and ensuring interim responses are sent for cases that will exceed the 20 working days target. Work is well developed to conclude the two open recommendations within 3 months. Additional processes and training workshops have been introduced to improve the rigour and timeliness of quality assurance of complaint responses. Targeted dip sampling of complaint responses and increased stakeholder engagement with Immigration Removal Centre suppliers is also being undertaken to ensure performance remains consistently high.

The re-inspection report recognises the upward trajectory of overall complaints handling by Detention and Escorting Services. The consistent meeting of stretching performance targets and the work that has been undertaken to ensure the continuous improvement of the service provided were the key positive findings.

The improvements identified by the ICI are welcome recognition of the sustained efforts to ensure the appropriate treatment and conditions for detainees.