



Home Office

# **The Home Office response to the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration's report:**

## **A re-inspection of Border Force Operations at Coventry and Langley Postal Hubs**

**November 2018 – January 2019**

## **The Home Office thanks the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) for his report.**

The Department's Postal Command sits within Border Force's Central Region and operates from two sites. The volume of parcels and packets arriving from across the world runs into many thousands each day. The Home Office's aims at these two sites include disrupting the flow of illicit goods into the UK with minimum impact on wider processes. This report reflects progress made since the last inspection and acknowledges the effectiveness of the operations at both sites in managing the unique operational challenges. The report also acknowledges the strong partnerships that exist between Border Force and Royal Mail and Parcel Force.

The five previous recommendations that this report confirms have been implemented reflect the progress made since the original inspection in 2016. This includes activity to enhance the working relationship between Royal Mail Group and Border Force, formalising arrangements to manage bulk seizures, the introduction of robust Health and Safety procedures, improvements to record keeping and improved communications to staff.

The Home Office recognises there is more to do. In order to address the remaining actions from the previous inspection the ICIBI has made five further recommendations for the Department to address. Work is already underway in all of these areas.

Border Force accepts three of the Chief Inspector's recommendations and partially accepts two.

## The Home Office response to the recommendations:

### The Home Office should:

1. Resource and complete the actions required to close the recommendations from the 2016 postal hubs inspection assessed by ICIBI as “Open” following the re-inspection, including:

#### Recommendation 1 (a)

If the development of a solution to capturing data about refunds using the Customs Declaration System is not imminent, take alternative steps to ensure that data about the refunds it makes is readily retrievable.

#### 1.1 Accepted

- 1.2 Border Force already has a manual system in place to ensure that refund data is accessible. The Customs Declaration System is the Global Universal Postal Union system of which Royal Mail Group (RMG) is one of its operators. RMG will work with Border Force, and HMRC as the policy lead for postal operations, to ensure this forms part of the next set of changes which is expected in October 2019.

#### Recommendation 1(b)

Produce a jointly owned postal hubs - Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU) plan (including pursuing job shadowing, visits, presentations and briefings) with the objective of creating an effective mutually-supportive relationship with regular and constructive feedback to the hubs about the quality of seizure reporting and improved feedback to FP JBIU about the operational value to the hubs of its intelligence products.

#### 1.3 Partially Accepted

- 1.4 Since the last inspection, Postal Operations and the Fast Parcel Joint Borders Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU) have been working together to implement more refined processes to enhance and build more supportive relationships.] Whilst Border Force does not feel that a ‘plan’ as recommended would bring the benefits suggested, it will continue however to build on initiatives already in train such as staff exchange opportunities to gain experience and build relationships and FP JBIU attendance at monthly operational planning meetings.

#### Recommendation 1(c)

Review whether the system in place for reporting low priority seizures is fit for purpose, as a minimum ensuring that the spreadsheets created by the hubs contain sufficient detail (where available) to be actionable, and that FP JBIU identifies amongst the spreadsheet items those which are time-sensitive or “easy wins” and disseminates them promptly rather than at the end of the month.

#### 1.5 Partially Accepted

- 1.6 FP JBIU already has a system in place which ensures that opportunities for quick time intervention/referrals are triaged. If they are high harm or a priority on the Border Force

Control Strategy they will be sent immediately to the relevant police force. Low priority cases will be dealt with through end of month bulk reporting. FP JBIU deal with around 2000 referrals per month. Border Force is concerned that committing more resource to manage low threat/low priority cases would divert valuable resource from higher priority intelligence activity elsewhere.

- 1.7 FP JBIU and Border Force Operations are however working together to improve the data quality of spreadsheets to ensure the spreadsheets created contain sufficient data to be actionable. This work will be completed over the next six-twelve months.

#### **Recommendation 1(d)**

**Revive with the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) the idea of a conference to 'kick start' improved understanding between Border Force and the police service about one another's needs and priorities in relation to postal seizures.**

#### **1.8 Accepted**

- 1.9 Border Force will consider whether such a conference would be an effective use of time and money in view of other ongoing collaboration by December 2019.

#### **Recommendation 1(e)**

**As a matter of urgency, review the data sharing agreement between Border Force and Royal Mail Group and ensure that it is compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).**

#### **1.10 Accepted**

- 1.11 A data protection plan is expected to be in place by April 2019 to underpin data sharing arrangements between Royal Mail Group and Border Force.
- 1.12 The Independent Chief Inspector has also made four housekeeping points. One of these concerns internal communication where the newly formed 'Coventry Collective Group' and monthly meetings with the Assistant Director are already capturing staff views and making the required improvements. Border Force will, as suggested, review the current process for recording negative interventions. It is important however that front line record keeping reflects legislative and policy requirements and does not distract officers from core operational functions. The remaining two points, concerning security clearances and the bulk seizure policy, relate to Postal Command and will be completed by end of June 2019.