



A re-inspection of Border Force operations at Coventry and Langley postal hubs

November 2018 – January 2019

David Bolt

Independent Chief Inspector of
Borders and Immigration

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

Independent Chief Inspector of
Borders and Immigration,
5th Floor, Globe House,
89 Eccleston Square,
London SW1V 1PN
United Kingdom

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Email us: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

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Borders and Immigration,
5th Floor, Globe House,
89 Eccleston Square,
London SW1V 1PN
United Kingdom

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Foreword

In 2016, my original inspection report on Border Force operations at the postal hubs (known as 'Offices of Exchange') at Coventry (Coventry International Hub) and Langley (Heathrow Worldwide Distribution Centre) made eight recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Home Office.

This re-inspection looked at the progress Border Force had made towards implementing each of those recommendations and found that four, plus an element of a fifth, could now be considered "Closed".

Overall, Border Force continued to work efficiently and effectively at both locations, where it performed two main customs functions in relation to the 'postal packets' (letters, parcels, packets and other articles) arriving in the UK from overseas by post: the detection and seizure of controlled and prohibited items and the identification of items where duties are owed and levying of the appropriate charges.

However, there was still work to do to ensure that intelligence flowing from and into the hubs was timely and actionable. Some of this - the flows between the hubs and the Fast Parcels Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU) - was in Border Force's hands to fix. The adoption, investigation and, where appropriate, prosecution of detections and seizures also relied on the capacity and priorities of police forces and other partner agencies. Nonetheless, Border Force needed to ensure that it was doing everything it could, both at a strategic and operational level, to assist and encourage greater take-up.

This re-inspection report makes two recommendations, each broken down into several elements. The first identifies the actions necessary to close the remaining "Open" recommendations from the original inspection. The second identifies further improvements that Border Force can and should make in relation to the recommendations that are now "Closed".

The report was sent to the Home Secretary on 31 January 2019.

David Bolt

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

1. Scope and purpose

- 1.1 'An inspection of Border Force operations at Coventry and Langley postal hubs (March to July 2016)' was published on 13 October 2016. The inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of Border Force operations at the two postal hubs. The inspection report contained eight recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Home Office. The recommendations covered:
- Partner Relationships
 - Processing of "postal packets"¹
 - Use of intelligence and risk management
 - Staff engagement
- 1.2 This re-inspection looked at the progress the Home Office had made towards implementing each of the eight recommendations.
- 1.3 Where a sender ('consignor') pays a premium to send a postal packet with a guaranteed arrival time using a single service provider, such as an international courier, this item is designated as a 'fast parcel'. The re-inspection did not examine Border Force processes for dealing with fast parcels but did look at the work of the Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU), which in October 2016 assumed national responsibility for managing the referral of all Fast Parcel and Postal seizures made by Border Force to law enforcement partners for adoption and prosecution as appropriate.

¹ A collective description for letters, parcels, packets and other articles that arrive in the UK from overseas by post

2. Methodology

2.1 In September 2018, the Inspectorate wrote to the Home Office with formal notification of the planned re-inspection and requested written evidence of the work done to implement the eight recommendations, including:

- the latest staffing structures for the postal hubs and the Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU)
- year-on-year performance data for the postal hubs since 2016-17
- an update on the use of agency staff by Royal Mail Group at the hubs
- a 'Bulk Seizure Process Map' and related staff guidance, plus the formal agreement with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs evidencing that the process is compliant with the law and policy requirements
- evidence that the storage arrangements for bulk seizure goods has been health and safety assessed and staff have been appropriately trained
- an update on the Customs Declaration System (CDS), including Standard Operating Procedures, guidance and policy documents, and data or reports relating to CDS usage, and file reference numbers for applications for refunds received between July 2017 and July 2018
- copies of the assurance process map and any related guidance for the opening and clearing of postal packages, plus data about assurance checks, instances of non-compliance and details of remedial actions
- information about current intelligence handling processes, including data for detections and seizures referred to police and other agencies between July 2017 and July 2018, with adoption and prosecution rates
- details of data sharing between Border Force and Royal Mail Group, including any reviews of the arrangements completed since the original inspection
- an update on internal communications at the Postal Hubs.

2.2 Inspectors also:

- made familiarisation visits to Langley on 8 October 2018, to Coventry on 24 October 2018, and to the FP JBIU on 25 October 2018
- returned to each of these sites (Langley on 9 November 2018, Coventry on 12 November 2018 and FP JBIU on 21 November 2018) to conduct focus groups and interviews with managers and staff, ranging from Senior Civil Servant (SCS) to Administrative Officer (AO) grades
- on 9 November 2018, interviewed managers from the Royal Mail Group (RMG)
- on 14 November 2018, interviewed the Border Force Regional Director responsible for the Postal Command.

2.3 On 28 November 2018, the re-inspection team presented its emerging findings to the Regional Director and members of his Senior Management Team (SMT).

3. Summary of findings

- 3.1 The 2016 inspection found that, overall, Border Force worked efficiently and effectively at both postal hubs, coping well with the high volumes of postal packets and adapting its risk-based approach to meet the particular circumstances and challenges at each hub. The re-inspection found that this was still the case in 2018. Meanwhile, there had been improvements in some areas in response to the Inspectorate's recommendations. Although there was still more for Border Force to do to close some of the recommendations, any criticisms should be seen in this context.
- 3.2 The original report recommended (Recommendation 1) that Home Office should agree with Royal Mail Group a joint Action Plan to address the negative impact on working relationships of Royal Mail Group's use of agency staff. This was done and changes were made to working patterns to try to achieve more consistency in terms of the staff deployments. It had not been entirely effective and both parties needed to keep working relationships under review. However, the actions taken in response to Recommendation 1 were sufficient to consider the recommendation "Closed".
- 3.3 Recommendation 2 from the original report was that Home Office should ensure that the appropriate authorisation is in place for the continued use by Border Force Postal Command of its 'bulk seizure policy'. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) had since provided confirmation in writing that Border Force's process was compliant with the law and policy. The re-inspection found, therefore, that Recommendation 2 could be considered "Closed".
- 3.4 The original report recommended (Recommendation 3) that the Home Office should explore whether an alternative solution exists for storing goods that have been subject to 'bulk seizure' that would reduce the potential health and safety risks associated with the current arrangements. The re-inspection found that Border Force had explored alternative solutions for storing bulk seizures, but its options were limited. In order to mitigate the health and safety risks associated with the current arrangements, it had embedded manual handling training alongside a risk assessment and review processes and management, staff and the unions appeared to be content. Recommendation 3 is therefore "Closed".
- 3.5 The original report recommended (Recommendation 4) that the Home Office should ensure that information and data relevant to the efficient and effective running of the Postal Hubs at Coventry and Langley, and to Border Force as a whole, is routinely captured and made available to those who need it. There were three strands to the recommendation: a) data on the accuracy of fiscal charges levied through the automated Customs Declaration System (CDS); b) data on 'postal packets' that are opened and cleared to proceed; c) information known to, or acquired by, frontline officers that is relevant to Border Force's understanding of threats but is not currently reported.
- 3.6 The re-inspection found that Recommendation 4 b) could be considered "Closed". Coventry and Langley had a system in place for recording negative interventions that provided an audit trail of which postal packets had been opened and by whom. As a result, Border Force was able to respond to complaints or queries from the public, albeit it would be better able to do so if it maintained some form of central log of negative interventions at Langley rather than having to trawl through officers' notebooks.

- 3.7 However, both 4 a) and 4 c) remained “Open”. In the case of 4 a), the CDS system was still a “work in progress” and Border Force was still unable to evidence the accuracy of the fiscal charges levied through the system. This was a serious weakness and if the development of a system solution to capturing data about refunds was not imminent, Border Force needed to take alternative steps to ensure that data about the refunds it makes is readily retrievable.
- 3.8 In the case of 4 c), while there had been process improvements since the original inspection more work was needed to improve the quality and operational value of the information being passed by the hubs to the FP JBIU. Improvements to the feedback to the hubs from FP JBIU and the job shadowing, visits, presentations and briefings being considered by the hubs and FP JBIU, if followed through, could go a long way to closing this recommendation.
- 3.9 The original inspection recommended (Recommendation 5) that the Home Office should ensure that the flow of intelligence to frontline officers at Coventry and Langley is managed, so that officers receive (in good time) only those assessments and reports that are relevant to their work and are encouraged to provide regular feedback. Changes to the way intelligence was disseminated to and handled by the postal hubs had gone some way towards ensuring that information reaching frontline officers was timely and relevant. However, feedback was still not working properly and officers at the hubs did not value the intelligence they received from FP JBIU. Both parties clearly had work to do to create an effective mutually supportive relationship. In order that this receives appropriate attention, Recommendation 5 should remain “Open”.
- 3.10 Recommendation 6 was that the Home Office should work with police forces, and other relevant partner agencies, to increase the number of referred detections and seizures that are adopted, investigated and, where appropriate, prosecuted. The re-inspection team received conflicting evidence about whether moving the dissemination of all law enforcement referrals to FP JBIU had increased adoption rates. While the decision whether to adopt a case does not rest with Border Force, the timeliness and quality (level of detail) of the referrals can make a difference. Same day dissemination of Seizure Notification Forms (SNFs) for high priority seizures is appropriate, but the system in place for reporting low priority seizures seems all but guaranteed to discourage their adoption, and risks involving a lot of effort for little reward.
- 3.11 There is clearly more work to be done at both the strategic and operational levels to ensure that Border Force and the police service understand one another’s needs and priorities. Recommendation 6 therefore remains “Open”.
- 3.12 The original inspection recommended (Recommendation 7) that the Home Office should ensure that a Data Protection Act 1998 compliant data-sharing agreement with Royal Mail Group (RMG) is in place (and regularly reviewed) and covers the information shared to assist the sifting of postal packets and RMG’s handling of such information. The re-inspection found there had been some tightening up of data sharing and target lists were no longer displayed on the walls at the hubs, but Border Force had not done what it had committed to do in its response to this recommendation and although work was underway to review data sharing between the postal hubs and RMG the timing and outcome of this was uncertain. Recommendation 7 therefore remains “Open”.
- 3.13 Since the original inspection, there have been legislative changes in the form of Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) that have reinforced the importance of ensuring that appropriate data protection and data sharing arrangements are in place and seen to be working. The outstanding actions should therefore be prioritised, completed and subject to review and updating, as necessary.

3.14 Recommendation 8 was that the Home Office should review internal communications at Coventry and Langley and make sure that frontline officers were made fully aware of the rationale for particular Border Force priorities and targets, and of the purpose of any initiatives or pilots. The re-inspection found plenty of evidence of efforts to improve internal communications, both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up'. This appeared to have been largely successful at Langley. However, there were still issues at Coventry, where officers were more doubting. Senior management was aware of this, and recognised it still had some work to do to achieve its vision of a single Postal Command identity. Therefore, while maintaining effective internal communication will require constant care and attention, Recommendation 8 may be considered "Closed".

4. Recommendations

The Home Office should:

- 4.1 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:
 - 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.
 - b. Produce a jointly owned postal hub - Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FB 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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).
- 4.2 Address the ‘housekeeping’ points in relation to the “Closed” recommendations identified in the re-inspection report:
 - a. Create a clearer shared understanding of the required security clearance level for all permanent and agency staff employed at the hubs, supported by the wearing of colour-coded photo ID passes, could be helpful in providing further reassurance.
 - b. Ensure that Border Force Assistant Officers (AOs) at Coventry have seen and understand the process map for the bulk seizure of EU tobacco.
 - c. Maintain some form of central log of negative interventions at Langley rather than having to trawl through officers’ notebooks.
 - d. Invite staff at Coventry to identify what simple improvements they would like to see introduced in order to encourage their ‘buy in’ to the value of internal communications.

5. Background

“Postal packets”

- 5.1 Letters, parcels, packets and other articles (collectively known as ‘postal packets’) that arrive in the UK from overseas by post are forwarded to one of two postal hubs (also known as ‘Offices of Exchange’), where they are processed by the public postal services provider (Royal Mail Group) for onward delivery to the recipient.

Coventry and Langley

- 5.2 The two ‘Offices of Exchange’ are at Coventry (Coventry International Hub) and Langley (Heathrow Worldwide Distribution Centre). Border Force officers are based at these two locations, where they may legally examine postal packets for customs purposes.² Border Force performs two main functions at each postal hub: an anti-smuggling function, which involves the detection and seizure of controlled and prohibited items; and a fiscal charging function, which identifies items where duties and taxes are owed and levies the appropriate charge.

2016 findings

- 5.3 The original inspection found that, overall, Border Force worked efficiently and effectively at both locations, coping well with the high volumes of postal packets and adapting its risk-based approach to meet the particular circumstances and challenges at each hub.
- 5.4 The scale and time-sensitive nature of postal packet movements, and the legislation governing their handling, demanded that Border Force and Royal Mail Group work collaboratively. The inspection found this was the case at an organisational level, where a strong working relationship had been built over time, based on a shared understanding of each other’s objectives and needs, and recognition that each is dependent on the other to achieve these. Both had also worked with Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs on the introduction of an automated system for fiscal charging (Customs Declaration System, CDS) that had created some efficiencies, with more to follow when its use can be extended.³
- 5.5 However, the inspection identified certain areas for improvement and made eight recommendations, covering partner relationships, the processing of postal packets, staff engagement, and the use of intelligence and risk management.

² Using powers drawn from Section 159 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 (CEMA) as amended by The Postal Packets (Revenue and Customs) Regulations 2011, Regulation 7.

³ In this report, references to CDS refer to the Universal Postal Union (UPU) Customs Declaration System (CDS), and not to HMRC’s Customs Declaration Service (CDS).

The Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit

- 5.6 The Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JPIU) was formed in September 2016, in response to a recommendation from a review of Border Intelligence led by the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT).⁴
- 5.7 FP JBIU is a Border Force-led, multi-agency unit, comprising officers from Border Force, the National Crime Agency (NCA) and CT Policing (Borders Policing Service). The unit has a national remit with officers based at East Midlands Airport. Its purpose is to provide a co-ordinated, intelligence-led approach to threats posed to the UK Border through the illicit use of fast parcels and postal traffic. It receives, enhances and disseminates intelligence to the Border Force operational teams (and other law enforcement partners as appropriate) to support strategic decisions and operational activity. Since October 2016, the FP JBIU has had responsibility for managing the referral of all fast parcel and postal seizures made by Border Force to law enforcement.

Border Force Postal Command

- 5.8 Responsibility for Border Force's Postal Command falls to one of its Regional Directors (Senior Civil Servant), supported by a Deputy Director (Grade 6). The two Postal Hubs are managed by an Assistant Director (Grade 7). Each hub has three operational teams and a post seizure team managed by Border Force Senior Officers (BFSOs), who report to the Assistant Director. The teams, which are made up of Border Force Higher Officers, Officers and Assistant Officers, cover a range of activities, including fiscal charging, correspondence, stakeholder management, and corporate services.

⁴ The Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) is responsible for leading work on counter-terrorism in the UK, working closely with the police and security and intelligence services.

6. Implementation of the recommendations

Recommendations, Home Office responses, re-inspection findings and conclusions

- 6.1 The Home Office responses to the eight recommendations contained in the original inspection report were published with the report in October 2016. The recommendations and responses are set out in full below, together with the findings of the re-inspection team and ICIBI's conclusions and assessment of whether the recommendation can now be considered "Closed".

Recommendation 1

- 6.2 The Home Office should agree with Royal Mail Group a joint action plan to address the negative impact on working relationships of Royal Mail Group's use of agency staff.

Home Office response: "Accepted"

- 6.3 The use of agency workers by Royal Mail and Parcelforce is an intrinsic part of their business model given the seasonal nature of their work. Discussions are already underway to ensure that there is continuity of staff, with the appropriate training and security clearance, working within Border Force areas at all times. To consolidate this approach, it will be set out in an action plan to be agreed and implemented between Border Force and Royal Mail by November 2016.

Re-inspection findings

- 6.4 The original inspection found that the working relationships at Coventry and at Langley were qualitatively different. At Coventry, Royal Mail Group's (RMG) use of agency staff made the building of long-term relationships and trust more difficult. Collaborative working was much more evident at Langley, where some of RMG's permanent staff had been provided with additional training and special security passes to allow them to enter the secure customs area.
- 6.5 On 20 June 2016, Border Force agreed an eight-point joint Action Plan with RMG to try to address the negative impact on working relationships of the latter's use of agency staff. Under the Action Plan, Border Force sought and received confirmation from RMG that it intended to continue using agency staff in Border Force areas where fiscal charging⁵ was calculated, so to improve working relationships a 'single phase' Monday to Friday charging operation was introduced in September 2017.⁶ This enabled Border Force and RMG to staff the fiscal charging work area more consistently so that staff would become more familiar with one another.

⁵ Royal Mail Group is required by law to present all items arriving from outside the EU to Border Force. These may be checked and subject to customs charges. Any charges are calculated and applied by Border Force on behalf of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). The charges depend on the contents, where the item came from and who sent it. This process is called fiscal charging.

⁶ The fiscal charging area had operated a two shift system Monday to Friday 07:30 – 16:00.

- 6.6 The move to a single shift was made easier as greater volumes of parcels were being charged digitally rather than manually. Since 1 April 2015, Border Force, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and RMG have been using the Customs Declaration System (CDS). CDS automates fiscal charging, assessing the declared description and value of the packet against charging regulations and risk rules incorporated into the CDS software.
- 6.7 A Border Force senior manager at Coventry informed inspectors that the fiscal charging area had more RMG staff in it than at the time of the original inspection, but he confirmed that they tended to be the same people.
- 6.8 The joint Border Force – RMG Action Plan contained action points for the training and for the security clearance of agency staff. An RMG manager told inspectors that RMG had tried to recruit agency staff with previous experience of working in the fiscal charging area. The staff had been provided with appropriate training. Since their job was simply to put a parcel on the belt in the best way for its declaration to be read, and there were posters on the walls showing how this should be done, the training required was limited. Border Force described it as “minimal”.
- 6.9 The joint Action Plan referred to RMG changing their preferred supplier of agency workers in July 2017 and providing assurances to Border Force that agency workers had the same security clearance as its RMG's permanent employees. RMG managers have assured Border Force that no one is allowed on site without the necessary security clearance. However, all the checks were done by the agency and a Border Force senior manager told inspectors that he was not sure about the clearance level for agency staff.
- 6.10 Frontline Border Force officers at Coventry expressed mixed views to inspectors. Some said they saw different agency staff, some of whom could not speak English, and they were concerned about their security clearances and training and sometimes had to provide the training themselves. But others said they had noticed improvements since the transfer to the new agency, with more continuity of those working in the fiscal charging area.

Conclusions

- 6.11 Border Force agreed a joint Action Plan with RMG, which had attempted to address the negative impact on working relationships from the use of agency staff, primarily through the move to a 'single phase' operation in the fiscal charging area. Border Force officers expressed mixed views about the RMG agency staff to the re-inspection team, indicating that the working relationship was something that both parties needed to keep under review. A clearer shared understanding of the required security clearance level for all permanent and agency staff employed at the hubs, supported by the wearing of colour-coded photo ID passes, could be helpful in providing further reassurance. **However, the actions already taken in response to Recommendation 1 are sufficient to consider it “Closed”.**

Recommendation 2

- 6.12 The Home Office should ensure that the appropriate authorisation is in place for the continued use by Border Force Postal Command of its 'bulk seizure policy'.

Home Office response: “Accepted”

- 6.13 The current approach to the bulk seizing of tobacco goods has been in place since 2007. Whilst HMRC has confirmed that it is content that such procedures meet both legal and policy

requirements, Border Force and HMRC will review the current process and draw up a specific bulk seizure policy. Once this has been agreed, updated guidance will be published by the end of March 2017.

Re-inspection findings

- 6.14 The original inspection found that ‘bulk seizure’ was a departure from Border Force practice elsewhere, and that the Home Office was unable to provide evidence that it had been formally authorised by HMRC, who own the policy.
- 6.15 A Postal Command senior manager explained to the re-inspection team that he approached HMRC after the original inspection and had asked for the ‘bulk seizure policy’ to be reviewed. There was some delay in dealing with this issue, which HMRC explained was due to other unavoidable pressures and priorities. Inspectors were shown an email dated 12 April 2017 from the Head of Customs Enforcement Policy, stating that HMRC was satisfied with the practices in place at the hubs. The Border Force Regional Director responsible for the Postal Command was content with this written approval.
- 6.16 The April 2017 email recorded the steps in the process and stated:
- “This is perfectly in line with the legal requirements for seizure. The actual legal references for seizure are minimal (CEMA s139 and Schedule 3), it is the policy behind that needs [sic] adhered to and this process is satisfactory.”
- 6.17 The steps as recorded were:
- suspect parcel is identified via x-ray or officers profiling methods prior to it leaving the Int’ Hub
 - parcel is put aside for opening at a later time
 - parcel is scanned to Border Force on the Royal Mail Group system – notifies Royal Mail Group that it is held by Border Force
 - later, parcel is opened by Border Force Officers and any tobacco goods seized and secured into bins or pallets
 - details are noted on the back of the Customs Declaration
 - details are recorded onto a spreadsheet
 - notebook is completed
 - seizure letters are sent to importers
 - CENTAUR⁷ is completed
 - spreadsheets are passed to HMRC Internet for Intel purposes
 - goods are removed to Queen’s Warehouse for disposal
- 6.18 All of the Border Force Officers (BFOs) and Higher Officers (BFHOs) interviewed during the onsite phase of the re-inspection were aware of the guidance relating to bulk seizure. They told inspectors that new officers were mentored and supported when dealing with bulk seizure and that BFHOs carried out assurance checks to ensure that the steps were followed correctly.

⁷ HMRC’s criminal intelligence database.

- 6.19 Assistant Officers (AOs) at Coventry told inspectors they were concerned that they did not have written instructions for the bulk seizure of tobacco arriving from the EU. However, a process map for entering such seizures onto CENTAUR, dated November 2017, was included in the evidence provided to ICIBI at the start of the re-inspection. It was unclear whether the AOs were unaware of this process map or considered it insufficient.
- 6.20 The re-inspection team was told that, since August 2018, Langley had also been applying the bulk seizure process to the cannabis it was finding.

Conclusions

- 6.21 Following the original inspection, Border Force requested HMRC to review its 'bulk seizure' policy. HMRC did so and have stated in writing that it meets relevant legal and policy requirements. Border Force operational managers were aware of the step-by-step instructions for bulk seizures and new staff were mentored and their work quality assured. Border Force still needed to ensure that AOs at Coventry have seen and understand the process map for the bulk seizure of tobacco arriving from the EU, but with "appropriate authorisation" now in place **Recommendation 2 is "Closed"**.

Recommendation 3

- 6.22 The Home Office should explore whether an alternative solution exists for storing goods that have been subject to 'bulk seizure' that would reduce the potential health and safety risks associated with the current arrangements.

Home Office response: "Accepted"

- 6.23 The safety of all Border Force Officers is of paramount importance. In Postal Command all officers receive "Manual Handling" training which is refreshed annually. Risk Assessments are also in place to mitigate any identified risks. As part of the review of the bulk seizure process in recommendation 2, the need for alternative stacking, storing and removal methods will be considered with health and safety advisors. This will be completed by the end of March 2017.

Re-inspection findings

- 6.24 The original inspection found that Border Force operated a 'bulk seizure' policy at both hubs, detaining goods in a secure storage area pending officers being available to make a formal seizure. This was seen as an efficient and effective way of making more detections and seizures than would otherwise have been possible. Officers at both hubs believed that this method of storing 'bulk seizure' goods posed a potential health and safety risk and was less secure and less efficient than the commercial solution (sealable bins) that had been used.
- 6.25 Border Force Postal Command had since carried out a full review in conjunction with the regional Health, Safety and Wellbeing Partner (HSWP).⁸
- 6.26 Border Force managers told the re-inspection team that the method of storage and transportation of tobacco seized at Coventry was dictated by the Queen's Warehouse in South Yorkshire, which is where the hub's seizures were sent. Queen's Warehouse used pallets and

⁸ Health, Safety and Wellbeing Partners (HSWPs) are professionally qualified practitioners who give expert advice to senior managers and staff on all work-related health, safety and wellbeing matters. This will include actions necessary to enable the business to meet any legal obligations.

therefore Coventry had no alternative but to use pallets. The sealable bins could be used only where the seized goods could be removed and immediately destroyed.

- 6.27 At Coventry, on 24 October 2018, inspectors observed the pallets in use and saw a copy of the health and safety risk assessment recommending how pallets should be used and that “all staff to have received manual handling training.” This had last been reviewed on 5 December 2017. Inspectors also saw a copy of the ‘Safe System of Work’ for bulk seizures which had been updated after advice from the Health and Safety Liaison Officer (HASLO) and stated: “parcels should only be stacked onto pallets to a height of two wooden sleeves and such a weight as is not likely to result in the pallet structurally collapsing.” Inspectors were informed that the storage area for bulk seizures had been reconfigured and cleared, creating more space for the staff to operate.
- 6.28 The Health and Safety Lead at Coventry told inspectors that all staff needed to receive manual handling training. She delivered some of the classroom training herself. She was not aware of any recent issues in relation to bulk seizures and the accident statistics did not indicate any problems with manual handling. She “works closely” with the hub’s Trade Union representative and the latter had not raised any issues with her regarding bulk seizures. The Postal Command Assistant Director also had regular meetings with the unions and had not had any negative comments about the current arrangements.
- 6.29 Officers confirmed that they had “completed manual handling training and specific training concerning pallets” and that the training was refreshed on a yearly basis. Some officers had completed an e-learning package a couple of months before the re-inspection visits. Border Force managers told inspectors that the business support team (BST) held records of officers who had had manual handling training and inspectors were given a breakdown of the records. The officers said that the BST training coordinator followed up on any need for this training.

Conclusions

- 6.30 The reinspection found that Border Force had explored alternative solutions for storing bulk seizures, but its options were limited. In order to mitigate the health and safety risks associated with the current arrangements, it had embedded manual handling training alongside a risk assessment and review processes and management, staff and the unions appeared to be content. **Recommendation 3 is therefore “Closed”.**

Recommendation 4

- 6.31 The Home Office should ensure that information and data relevant to the efficient and effective running of the Postal Hubs at Coventry and Langley, and to Border Force as a whole, is routinely captured and made available to those who need it, including:
- a. Data on the accuracy of fiscal charges levied through the automated Customs Declaration System (CDS)
 - b. Data on ‘postal packets’ that are opened and cleared to proceed
 - c. Information known to, or acquired by, frontline officers that is relevant to Border Force’s understanding of threats but is not currently reported

Home Office response: “Accepted”

6.32

- a. The CDS system, which is currently in its infancy, will be enhanced as data from additional countries is received into the system. The accuracy of the data flow is already subject to assurance checks. These will allow any issues to be fed into the CDS system development.
- b. The number of postal packets that are opened and cleared to proceed is significant and at present this data is not collected or recorded routinely. As part of the continuous improvement programme, a review of this practice will be undertaken and a standard operating procedure to capture and assess the data will be implemented by the end of November 2016.
- c. The Border Force led Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU), a multi-agency unit, is working closely with Postal Operations to improve the collection and reporting of information by operational staff in support of wider Border Force and partner law enforcement activity. This will include developing the use of operational risk forums and tasking groups to identify intelligence requirements.

6.33 The new Border Force Target Operating Model includes a section on intelligence handling, a key element of which is to have access to an intelligence platform (Single Intelligence Platform) that will enable the frontline to have direct access to Border Force and Immigration intelligence. This platform will be rolled out to key elements of the Border Force frontline by the end of the financial year.⁹

Re-inspection findings – Recommendation 4a

6.34 Border Force managers told the re-inspection team in early November 2018 that CDS ingests data entered by foreign postal authorities. The data was then available to those with authorised access to the CDS system and was used to raise revenue charges on behalf of HMRC, to target parcels and to run MI reports as needed.

6.35 Inspectors were told by the Border Force CDS Lead and the Correspondence Team at Coventry (which dealt with complaints from the public about charges raised and processes all requests for refunds) that the refunds were “due to declaration problems from the public” (those sending the parcels from overseas, “the exporters”) rather than because CDS was inaccurate. They gave failure to declare a packet as a gift, or that it was being returned to sender, or the wrong description of the goods as examples.

6.36 Inspectors were shown data for the CDS charges raised for 2018 at Coventry and at Langley. These were broken down monthly into the number of charges, and the Excise Duty, VAT and ‘Handling Fee’.¹⁰ However, no data was held for refunds from CDS. As at 20 December 2018, refunds of CDS charges were made manually as the system did not have the facility to do so, but this was being developed. Pending this, the only way to know the total amount of CDS refunds would be to review every piece of correspondence held by the Postal Command.

6.37 The Correspondence Team at Coventry told the re-inspection team that they felt that around 50 per cent of requests for refunds were upheld. As part of the assurance process for CDS, the correspondence team reported any problems (for example, errors in the automated reading of declared descriptions) to the CDS Lead to consider and take any necessary action.

⁹ 31 March 2017.

¹⁰ A fee that RMG charges to cover the costs of clearing an item through the customs process and presenting it to Border Force.

- 6.38 The CDS Lead told inspectors that the system had developed since the 2016 inspection, with improvements in:
- how invoices are calculated
 - the notes fields¹¹
 - the display of tax calculations¹² and banded postage¹³
- 6.39 Since 2016, the number of countries for which CDS is used had increased. At the time of the re-inspection, it stood at five – Australia, Canada, China, New Zealand and the USA. The Regional Director responsible for the Postal Command told inspectors that these were the key countries to have on board as they had the highest postal volumes. Meanwhile, although expansion of CDS use was taking longer than Border Force and RMG had expected, neither has any real influence over its adoption by other countries.
- 6.40 The main barriers to CDS expansion were around improving the data from partner country organisations. The Universal Postal Union, of which 192 countries were members, had agreed to have standards for postal deliveries and data exchange in place by 2023. Currently, senders (“consignors”) were not mandated to provide information on postal packets in a consistent manner. However, inspectors were told that this might change once the USA passes the ‘Synthetics Trafficking and Overdose Prevention (STOP) Act’¹⁴ and eventually refuses all mail without electronic data.
- 6.41 The CDS lead explained to inspectors that the expected benefit of CDS for the Home Office was that fiscal charging responsibilities would, in the long-term, pass from Border Force to RMG, allowing Border Force to redeploy officers and concentrate on anti-smuggling and security at the border.

Conclusions

- 6.42 The CDS system is still a ‘work in progress’. Whatever its future, the continued inability of Border Force to evidence the accuracy of the fiscal charges refunded through the system is a serious weakness. **Recommendation 4a remains open.** Meanwhile, if the development of a system solution to capturing data about refunds is not imminent, Border Force should take alternative steps to ensure that data about the refunds it makes is readily retrievable.

Re-inspection findings – Recommendation 4b

- 6.43 The 2016 inspection report concluded that while managers could say with some confidence that all postal packets that were ‘on check’ would have been opened, Border Force did not record how many packets had been opened each day, or which officer had opened a particular packet that was then cleared to proceed. Apart from its potential intelligence value, the absence of such data left Border Force exposed should it receive any complaints or queries from the public.
- 6.44 At Coventry, Border Force managers told the re-inspection team that a system of RMG scanners had been introduced and had been in place for “a couple of months” before the re-inspection. The data obtained by the scanners belonged to RMG but was put on the shared drive. Border

11 Enabling staff to make free text notes in respect of individual parcels, for example if an enquiry or claim for a refund has been received. This prevents duplication.

12 This is a table that explains the calculations, which helps with customer queries about how the tax was calculated.

13 This uses the weight of the parcel to apply a postage value to be used in calculations.

14 Synthetics Trafficking and Overdose Prevention (STOP) Act would require that all mail sent from foreign countries through the U.S. Postal Service must provide “package level detail information” to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol.

Force officers confirmed that “negative interventions” were scanned and recorded. RMG had this data and Border Force Senior Officers could access it if needed.

- 6.45 Recording had been made easier by the scanners. Previously, it had been time-consuming. Now, Border Force officers scanned the item’s barcode when it was opened, which recorded details of the item and of the team and officer concerned. The officers thought that the scanners had saved them about an hour of work on each shift.
- 6.46 At Langley, the vast volumes of letters without barcodes meant that it was not able to adopt the same system. Instead, officers at Langley used their notebooks to record when they had opened a letter or package. Inspectors were told that Border Force Higher Officers (BFHOs) carried out assurance checks of the notebooks on a weekly basis and also when a notebook was closed. If an item was seized this was logged. Inspectors reviewed a sample of notebooks and management instructions about notebook etiquette to confirm that the process was working.
- 6.47 However, there was no central log of negative interventions, which meant that if Langley received a complaint or query, all of the notebooks would need to be checked in order to find the details of the intervention.

Conclusions

- 6.48 Coventry and Langley each has a system in place for recording negative interventions which provides an audit trail of which postal packets have been opened and by whom. As a result, Border Force is able to respond to complaints or queries from the public, albeit it would be better able to do so if it maintained some form of central log of negative interventions at Langley rather than having to trawl through officers’ notebooks. **Recommendation 4b is “Closed”.**

Re-inspection findings – Recommendation 4c

- 6.49 On 1 October 2016, the Border Force-led multi-agency Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU) assumed responsibility for managing the referral of all Border Force Fast Parcel and Postal seizures to law enforcement partners for adoption, investigation and prosecution, as appropriate.
- 6.50 The re-inspection team was told that the FP JBIU was working closely with the postal hubs to improve the collection and reporting of information by operational staff in support of wider Border Force and law enforcement agency activity.
- 6.51 Border Force managers said that the establishment of the FP JBIU had tightened up intelligence gathering and dissemination because all intelligence that left the Postal Command had to go through the FP JBIU. They told inspectors that there was a process in place requiring officers to complete a Seizure Notification Form (SNF) for high priority seizures (such as firearms or class A drugs).
- 6.52 FP JBIU had introduced the SNF to standardise seizure reporting across Fast Parcels, Postal and Air Freight. The SNF looked to capture key information to support assessment of the seizure and triage and enhancement by intelligence staff. It also resulted in an intelligence product that could be disseminated to law enforcement partners for them to task further investigation and operational activity. Inspectors were told that FP JBIU received approximately 27,000 seizure notifications a year.

- 6.53 Other seizures (those not designated high priority) were referred to FP JBIU on spreadsheets. Meanwhile, when something of interest was discovered but not seized, an officer filled out an intelligence report using a template created by Border Force Intelligence Directorate (BFID). These templated reports provided an audit trail for any follow-up checks.
- 6.54 A senior manager at Coventry was confident that everything of importance was being reported. The postal hubs had local training packages covering these processes. However, FP JBIU managers told inspectors that the quality of information in the SNFs needed to improve. Currently, they had to chase hub officers for additional information. FP JBIU managers also said that the spreadsheet referrals were time-consuming to process and disseminate to partner agencies and some lacked the detail of SNFs, which could impact on partner agency interest.
- 6.55 CT Police officers attached to FP JBIU told inspectors that they were content with the relevance of the referrals they received, but they felt they could benefit from more intelligence about non-seized items, for example weapons like knives and knuckle dusters which are referred directly to the regional crime unit and bypass CT Policing (Borders Policing Service).
- 6.56 Officers at the postal hubs told inspectors that feedback from FP JBIU was sporadic and tended to focus on large seizures. FP JBIU told inspectors this was because of the volumes of referrals it was dealing with. Officers in the Post Seizure Unit (PSU) did not recall receiving any feedback from FP JBIU on referrals, despite requesting it because knowing what resulted from their work incentivised frontline officers to do a good job. PSU understood that FP JBIU maintained a spreadsheet containing feedback and would like access to it to disseminate feedback on seizures. FP JBIU was happy for PSU officers to view the spreadsheet but would not grant unsupervised access to ensure the integrity of their records.
- 6.57 Border Force senior managers recognised there were sometimes tensions between the FP JBIU and the postal hubs and there was a need to manage expectations in both directions. The postal hubs Assistant Director (AD) and FP JBIU Senior Officer both recognised that closer joint working and developing a better understanding of each other's pressures and priorities were key. At the time of the re-inspection, they were exploring:
- job shadowing opportunities at both hubs and at the FP JBIU
 - postal hubs sending a member of staff to the FP JBIU office once a month
 - FP JBIU to provide presentations to all new staff arriving at the hubs
 - FP JBIU to deliver 'awareness' briefings in addition to the strategic and tactical intelligence briefing already provided
- 6.58 Inspectors were told that two FP JBIU officers used to be based at the Coventry site but had moved to new roles and their replacements opted to work at a different location. This had not helped the relationship with FP JBIU. Senior managers at the postal hubs felt that there should be an intelligence officer on each shift at each hub. At the time of the re-inspection, an officer from PSU at Coventry was planning to visit FP JBIU to get a better understanding of its work, current pressures and to explore how to improve the working relationship between the hubs and FP JBIU.

Conclusions

- 6.59 Feedback to the re-inspection team from managers and staff at the postal hubs and FP JBIU indicated that, at the time of the re-inspection, there had been a concerted effort from both to ensure that intelligence was captured and disseminated effectively. But, while there had

been process improvements since the original inspection, more work was needed to improve the quality and operational value of the information being passed by the hubs to the FP JBIU. **Recommendation 4c is therefore still “Open”**. However, improvements to the feedback to the hubs from FP JBIU and the job shadowing, visits, presentations and briefings being considered by the hubs and FP JBIU, if followed through, could go a long way to closing it.

Recommendation 5

- 6.60 The Home Office should ensure that the flow of intelligence to frontline officers at Coventry and Langley is managed, so that officers receive (in good time) only those assessments and reports that are relevant to their work and are encouraged to provide regular feedback.

Home Office response: “Accepted”

- 6.61 The Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU) is a multi-agency unit, led by Border Force, providing an intelligence-led coordinated approach to the threats posed to the UK Border by the use of fast parcel and postal traffic.

FP JBIU works closely with partners to coordinate intelligence and operational activity. This includes the collection, enhancement and dissemination of intelligence within postal operations to support both strategic decision making and tactical operational activity.

A review of the intelligence approach for postal operations will be undertaken to ensure that it is relevant and timely and that there are appropriate mechanisms for feedback. This review will be concluded by the end of December 2016.

Re-inspection findings

- 6.62 Border Force Intelligence Directorate gathers, researches and disseminates intelligence on trends and emerging threats to frontline teams to inform target selection. However, officers at Coventry and Langley told the original inspection team that they relied on their own knowledge and experience and were frustrated with the large amounts of intelligence they received every shift, much of it “regurgitated” information. Often, they had no time to read it and not all of it was relevant to them (for example, they received reports about trends that had been identified in illegal entry).
- 6.63 The re-inspection team was told that a distribution list for intelligence products had been agreed with Postal Operations senior management. Coventry intelligence was now routed to a single email inbox monitored by the team leaders. Only relevant intelligence or urgent reports were forwarded to team members, but all officers at Coventry had access to the inbox and could read any of the reports when they had the time.
- 6.64 Langley received specific intelligence alerts from FP JBIU, for example, alerts regarding parcels being delivered to a certain address. There was also an intelligence inbox and the Duty Officer distributed relevant intelligence to the frontline officers. In addition, the briefing meeting at the beginning of each shift was used to disseminate intelligence. As at Coventry, intelligence that was not relevant was not disseminated.
- 6.65 Inspectors were told that requests from the postal hubs for specific intelligence products were now being serviced by the FP JBIU. But, managers at the FP JBIU said they were seldom contacted about developing specific intelligence products for targeted operations involving

the postal hubs. Officers at the hubs told the re-inspection team they did not receive a great deal of good quality intelligence from FP JBIU. What they did receive added little to the overall intelligence picture and merely confirmed what they already knew. It had not produced any significant operational results. However, FP JBIU felt it received little feedback from frontline officers and what it did receive tended to be negative.

Conclusions

- 6.66 Border Force responded to the original recommendation by making a number of changes to the way intelligence is disseminated to and handled by the postal hubs: an agreed single distribution list, managed inboxes at Coventry and Langley with only relevant intelligence passed on to frontline officers and included in daily shift briefings at Langley. The changes had gone some way towards ensuring that information reaching frontline officers was timely and relevant.
- 6.67 However, feedback was still not working properly in either direction and officers at the hubs did not value the intelligence they received from FP JBIU and seldom tasked it to produce specific intelligence products for targeted operations. Both parties clearly had work to do to create an effective mutually supportive relationship. In order that this receives appropriate attention, **Recommendation 5 remains “Open”**.

Recommendation 6

- 6.68 The Home Office should work with Police Forces, and other relevant partner agencies, to increase the number of referred detections and seizures that are adopted, investigated and, where appropriate, prosecuted.

Home Office response: “Accepted”

- 6.69 Border Force will work with law enforcement partners to increase the number and quality of referred detections and seizures. It is important to note that the decision to adopt, investigate and prosecute rests with partner agencies.

From 1 October 2016, the Fast Parcel Joint Border Intelligence Unit (FP JBIU) assumed national responsibility for managing the referral of all Fast Parcel and Postal seizures made by Border Force to law enforcement partners for adoption and prosecution as appropriate. This will provide national oversight for the delivery of a standardised process of referral and follow up of outcomes.

A review of this referral process will be undertaken after the first six months of the operation and will include adoption rates by law enforcement partners.

Re-inspection findings

- 6.70 The original inspection found that Border Force Postal Command had made a significant number of detections and seizures, preventing drugs, potentially harmful weapons and counterfeit goods from entering the UK. However, the proportion of seizures adopted by police forces for further investigation and prosecution was low and the adoption rates needed to improve to present an effective deterrent to those seeking to exploit postal packages as a means of importing prohibited or controlled goods.

- 6.71 Officers at Coventry and Langley told the re-inspection team that they felt adoption rates had actually decreased since referrals were made via FP JBIU. In the week prior to the inspection team's visit to one of the hubs, only one police force had adopted any packages for prosecution and locally the adoption rate was believed to be between 10 and 18 per cent. However, in its written evidence the Home Office informed the re-inspection team that "Postal operations senior management reported an increase of over 30 per cent in the rate of seizures at Heathrow Worldwide Distribution Centre (HWDC) at Langley that were adopted in the 12 months after FP JBIU took on this [referral] role." The Home Office later added that the increase was also attributable to the work by the HWDC post Seizure Team to improve working relationships with local police forces.
- 6.72 At the time of the re-inspection, in addition to a Seizure Notification Form (SNF) for each high priority seizure (such as firearms or class A drugs), FP JBIU received three spreadsheets (two from Langley and one from Coventry) listing all low priority/low harm seizures. FP JBIU converted the information from the spreadsheets into SNFs, which it disseminated at the end of each month. Meanwhile, SNFs for high priority/high harm seizures were disseminated to law enforcement partners on the day they were received by the FP JBIU.
- 6.73 Officers at the hubs told inspectors they felt FP JBIU was not disseminating intelligence to law enforcement partners quickly enough, which they put down to it being under-resourced. They said they had received complaints from police forces. There was also the risk that the evidence would have been destroyed before the partner agency had been able to collect it. Due to storage capacity at the hubs, evidence was held onsite at Coventry for only 14 days and at Langley for one month¹⁵ before being sent to the Queen's Warehouse, where it may be destroyed.
- 6.74 FP JBIU officers accepted that there was a delay with low priority referrals, which they said they were not resourced to action and disseminate as soon as they were received. However, inspectors were told that before FP JBIU had introduced its monthly process the hubs were taking more than 14 days to refer low priority seizures. At the time of the re-inspection, FP JBIU was in the middle of a recruitment campaign to bring it up to full complement.
- 6.75 The willingness of law enforcement agencies to adopt referrals varied from agency to agency and was subject to competing priorities. However, FP JBIU thought interest in adopting a case might be affected by the hubs' use of the spreadsheets for reporting low priority seizures as officers did not provide as much detail about the seizure (such as photographs). The location of the Queen's Warehouse (in Kent) was also cited as an issue, as some police forces could not spare an officer for the time it would take to travel to collect the evidence.
- 6.76 When seizures were adopted, Border Force officers felt they worked well with police forces. Officers produced witness statements when requested, and also attended court to give evidence. In such cases, they often received direct feedback from the police, which was welcomed.
- 6.77 The Regional Director responsible for the postal hubs told inspectors that he and his senior team recognised the need to engage more closely with external agencies at a strategic level, particularly the police. In July 2017, the Border Force national lead for Fast Parcel operations had written to the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) seeking support for a conference to highlight recent successes in Border Force postal operations, share best practice, and raise awareness of Border Force's capabilities with a view to improving adoption rates by police forces. However, there was no evidence that this was progressed. More recently, a former police superintendent had been recruited to the Border Force management team to take forward discussions with the NPCC.

¹⁵ Except for cannabis which was held for 14 days.

Conclusions

- 6.78 The re-inspection team received conflicting evidence about whether moving the dissemination of all law enforcement referrals to FP JBIU had increased adoption rates. Ultimately, the decision whether to adopt a case does not rest with Border Force, but the timeliness and quality (level of detail) of Border Force referrals can make a difference. The same day dissemination by FP JBIU of Seizure Notification Forms (SNF) for high priority seizures is therefore appropriate.
- 6.79 By the same token, the system in place for reporting low priority seizures seems all but guaranteed to discourage their adoption, and risks involving a lot of effort for little reward. Border Force should re-examine the spreadsheet reporting by the hubs and at least ensure that it is sufficiently detailed to be actionable, and FP JBIU should look to identify amongst the spreadsheet items those which are time-sensitive or ‘easy wins’ and disseminate them promptly.
- 6.80 There is clearly more work to be done at both the strategic and operational levels to ensure that Border Force and the police service understand one another’s needs and priorities. While the idea of a conference was not taken up in 2017, it is worth pursuing as a catalyst for a more effective collaborative response to postal seizures.
- 6.81 **Recommendation 6 remains “Open”.**

Recommendation 7

- 6.82 The Home Office should ensure that a Data Protection Act 1998 compliant data sharing agreement with Royal Mail Group is in place (and regularly reviewed) and covers the information shared to assist the sifting of ‘postal packets’ and Royal Mail Group’s handling of such information.

Home Office response: “Accepted”

- 6.83 Border Force has a power to disclose information made for the purposes of a customs function under section 16(3) (a) of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009. The agreement in place with Royal Mail will be urgently reviewed (by the end of October 2016) to ensure it is compliant and fit for purpose.

Re-inspection findings

- 6.84 The original inspection found that Border Force provided Royal Mail Group (RMG) with information about individuals, companies, countries and declared goods of interest to assist the latter’s efficient and effective sifting of postal packets. RMG displayed the information on the walls at the hubs for the benefit of its staff doing the sifting. While this was functional, it was questionable from a security perspective, the more so as the personal information that was included was covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 and, at the time of the inspection, Border Force did not have a data sharing agreement in place with RMG.
- 6.85 In October 2018, Border Force managers and staff at the hubs told the re-inspection team that fiscal trader lists were no longer shared with RMG. The only information shared with RMG was the list of “on check” countries.¹⁶ On their visits to both hubs in November 2018, inspectors confirmed there were no longer any lists displayed on the walls.

¹⁶ When a country or location is “on check”, perhaps because of some specific intelligence, Border Force will ask that all products from/to that destination to be referred to Border Force. This is normally for a period of one week.

6.86 In mid-November 2018, the Border Force Data Protection officer (BFDP)¹⁷ told the re-inspection team that he was completing a twelve-month secondment reviewing assurance and risk within Border Force Central Region.¹⁸ According to the BFDP, a Senior Officer was being selected to be responsible for data protection for the Region and sharing arrangements were being reviewed. A higher-level document was being prepared which would cover all aspects of data sharing between Border Force and RMG at the postal hubs. To the best of the BFDP's knowledge, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Border Force and RMG had not been reviewed since it was signed in 2014, but a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) would be completed "soon" which will outline review periods and "probably" determine that another MoU is required.¹⁹

Conclusions

6.87 At the hubs themselves there had been some tightening up of data sharing and target lists were no longer displayed on the walls. This was an important and necessary change in working practices. However, Border Force had not done what it had committed to do in its response to this recommendation and although work was underway at the time of the re-inspection to review data sharing between the postal hubs and RMG, the timing and outcome of this was uncertain. **Recommendation 7 therefore remains Open.**

6.88 Since the original inspection, there have been legislative changes in the form of Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) that have reinforced the importance of ensuring that appropriate data protection and data sharing arrangements are in place and seen to be working. The outstanding actions should therefore be prioritised, completed and subject to review and updating, as necessary.

Recommendation 8

6.89 The Home Office should review internal communications at Coventry and Langley and make sure that frontline officers are made fully aware of the rationale for particular Border Force priorities and targets, and of the purpose of any initiatives or pilots.

Home Office response: "Accepted"

6.90 A review of all internal communications will be undertaken at Coventry and Langley by the end of November 2016. Full briefings will continue to take place prior to any exercise, operation or pilot commencing and, where appropriate, regular updates will be communicated to all staff on the progress of any pilot or ongoing exercise through to its conclusion.

Re-inspection findings

6.91 The 2016 inspection identified that more regular and better communication was needed with frontline staff.

6.92 The re-inspection team was told that, at an organisational level, the Staff Engagement Plan had contributed to improved internal communications. The Plan contained four key streams:

¹⁷ The BFDP is part of a network of officers who have completed three days training and provide support in relation to data protection.

¹⁸ The Postal Command falls within Border Force Central Region.

¹⁹ At the factual accuracy stage, Border Force stated that "the DPIA is currently in draft and going through the clearance process. Once approved an MoU will be drawn up with RMG."

Strategic Narrative, Employee Voice, Integrity and Enabling Leaders. The Assistant Director responsible for both postal hubs was driving its implementation at Coventry and Langley. To support the Plan, Postal Command now had a slogan: “See – Seize – Secure. Delivering border security with integrity.” Inspectors found that officers at both hubs were aware of the Staff Engagement Plan, but not everyone had seen it.

- 6.93 Based on the Staff Engagement Index ‘scores’,²⁰ Border Force officers at both hubs were motivated and generally engaged. Between 2014 and 2015, staff engagement at Langley had dropped off, but Border Force management was aware of the reasons for this (which included limited opportunities for career progression) and had taken steps to address them.
- 6.94 Inspectors were told that a lot of work had been done on internal communications in the Postal Command since the original inspection and were provided with written evidence of numerous means of communication, including: Staff Fora, Higher Officer meetings, Senior Officer weekly updates, Senior Management Team meetings, and Assistant Director drop-in sessions. Inspectors were also told there were briefings before the start of every shift and were shown the bulletin boards at both hubs which showcase ‘Seizures of the Week’.
- 6.95 In interviews and focus groups it was evident that these measures were working more effectively at Langley, where officers believed they were kept up to date with information about targets, exercises, pilots, training and senior management team movements. They told inspectors that there had been an improvement in the last few years. Internal communications at Langley were boosted by the provision of smartphones to all staff and the installation of wi-fi.
- 6.96 Assistant Officers (BFAOs) and Officers (BFOs) at Langley agreed that they had “a voice” and believed they would be listened to. They cited the Staff Forum meetings as an example. These meetings were run by frontline officers and the minutes were passed on to senior managers for consideration. At the August 2018 Forum, officers raised the need for a new rest-room inside the International Logistics Centre (ILC)²¹ for staff welfare reasons. At an earlier Forum they had raised the need for replacement keyboards for the Fiscal Charging area, as the letters on the existing ones were no longer legible. Both requests were met: a rest-room was set up and twenty new keyboards were obtained.
- 6.97 At Coventry, the general view was that internal communications could be better. One group of managers described them as “abysmal”. In November 2018, officers told inspectors that there should be a Staff Forum every month or six weeks, but it seemed to them there had not been one for about six months. However, this was contradicted by a senior manager who said that the last one had probably been at the end of August. According to the senior manager, there had been a problem with getting staff to organise them. He could not explain why. However, the officers at Coventry were unable to provide inspectors with any examples of any tangible benefits that had resulted from the Staff Forum meetings.
- 6.98 The Postal Command’s senior management recognised that there were different “cultures” at the two hubs. They explained that the workforce at Coventry was more experienced and had some entrenched views and was unhappy about the way management had tackled some instances of unfairness. Officers at Langley were generally more engaged and positive. When inspectors put it to a senior manager that some officers had criticised internal communications at Coventry, he said that this was a familiar refrain and cited a recent example of officers saying

²⁰ The Staff Engagement Plan is produced in response to the ‘Staff Engagement Index’, which measures ‘pride, advocacy, attachment, inspiration and motivation’ using a five-point scale, ranging from Strongly disagree = 0; Disagree = 25; Neither agree nor disagree = 50; Agree = 75; Strongly agree = 100. The Staff Engagement Index is the average engagement score in the organisation or selected sub-group.

²¹ The ILC is where Border Force’s anti-smuggling and post-seizure work is carried out.

that they had not been informed about something but when management reviewed their communications, the topic had, in fact, been raised.

- 6.99 Overcoming the cultural differences and achieving greater consistency across the hubs was a key priority for senior management. The Postal Command's Regional Director wanted to create a team ethos with a distinct identity that everyone in the Postal Command recognised and bought into.
- 6.100 The Assistant Director (AD) responsible for both hubs told inspectors that she wanted the hubs to "mirror each other." She had been in post since November 2016 and officers told inspectors they found her approachable and easy to talk to. She had introduced AD drop-in sessions at both sites. Based on the numbers attending, there was more interest in these at Coventry than at Langley, although overall take-up was not high. Officers were also encouraged to attend Senior Management Team meetings and received the minutes from them. The AD explained to inspectors that she was replacing the Staff Fora with a "governance board". Once it started, she wanted the staff to run it.

Conclusions

- 6.101 The re-inspection team found plenty of evidence of efforts to improve internal communications. A range of means had been developed to facilitate and encourage 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' communication and ensure that frontline officers at the postal hubs were made aware of the rationale for Border Force priorities, targets, initiatives or pilots. This appeared to have been largely successful at Langley. However, there were still issues at Coventry, where officers were more doubting. Senior management was aware of this, and recognised it still had some work to do to achieve its vision of a single Postal Command identity. Therefore, while maintaining effective internal communication will require constant care and attention, **Recommendation 8 may be considered "Closed"**.

Annex A: Recommendations from the original inspection and Home Office responses

'An inspection of Border Force operations at Coventry and Langley postal hubs (March to July 2016)' was published on 13 October 2016. It examined the efficiency and effectiveness of Border Force operations at the two postal hubs. The inspection report contained eight recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Home Office. These were that the Home Office should:

1. Agree with Royal Mail Group a joint action plan to address the negative impact on working relationships of Royal Mail Group's use of agency staff.
2. Ensure that the appropriate authorisation is in place for the continued use by Border Force Postal Command of its 'bulk seizure' policy.
3. Explore whether an alternative solution exists for storing goods that have been subject to bulk seizure that would reduce the potential health and safety risks associated with the current arrangements.
4. Ensure that information and data relevant to the efficient and effective running of the Postal Hubs at Coventry and Langley, and to Border Force as a whole, is routinely captured and made available to those who need it, including:
 - a. Data on the accuracy of fiscal charges levied through the automated Customs Declaration System (CDS)
 - b. Data on 'postal packets' that are opened and cleared to proceed
 - c. Information known to or acquired by frontline officers that is relevant to Border Force's understanding of threats but is not currently reported
5. Ensure that the flow of intelligence to frontline officers at Coventry and Langley is managed, so that officers receive (in good time) only those assessments and reports that are relevant to their work and are encouraged to provide regular feedback.
6. Work with Police Forces, and other relevant partner agencies, to increase the number of referred detections and seizures that are adopted, investigated and, where appropriate, prosecuted.
7. Ensure that a Data Protection Act 1998 compliant data sharing agreement with Royal Mail Group is in place (and regularly reviewed) and covers the information shared to assist the sifting of 'postal packets' and Royal Mail Group's handling of such information.
8. Review internal communications at Coventry and Langley and ensure that frontline officers are made fully aware of the rationale for particular Border Force priorities and targets, and of the purpose of any initiatives or pilots.

Annex B: Role and remit of the Independent Chief Inspector

The role of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (until 2012, the Chief Inspector of the UK Border Agency) was established by the UK Borders Act 2007. Sections 48-56 of the UK Borders Act 2007 (as amended) provide the legislative framework for the inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the performance of functions relating to immigration, asylum, nationality and customs by the Home Secretary and by any person exercising such functions on his behalf.

The legislation empowers the Independent Chief Inspector to monitor, report on and make recommendations about all such functions. However, functions exercised at removal centres, short-term holding facilities and under escort arrangements are excepted insofar as these are subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons or Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary (and equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland).

The legislation directs the Independent Chief Inspector to consider and make recommendations about, in particular:

- consistency of approach
- the practice and performance of listed persons compared to other persons doing similar activities
- the procedure in making decisions
- the treatment of claimants and applicants
- certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum act 2002 (c. 41) (unfounded claim)
- the law about discrimination in the exercise of functions, including reliance on section 19D of the Race Relations Act 1976 (c. 74) (exception for immigration functions)
- the procedure in relation to the exercise of enforcement powers (including powers of arrest, entry, search and seizure)
- practice and procedure in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of offences
- the procedure in relation to the conduct of criminal proceedings
- whether customs functions have been appropriately exercised by the Secretary of State and the Director of Border Revenue
- the provision of information
- the handling of complaints; and
- the content of information about conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom, which the Secretary of State compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration officers and other officials.

In addition, the legislation enables the Secretary of State to request the Independent Chief Inspector to report to him in writing in relation to specified matters.

The legislation requires the Independent Chief Inspector to report in writing to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State lays all reports before Parliament, which he has committed to do within eight weeks of receipt, subject to both Houses of Parliament being in session.

Reports are published in full except for any material that the Secretary of State determines it is undesirable to publish for reasons of national security or where publication might jeopardise an individual's safety, in which case the legislation permits the Secretary of State to omit the relevant passages from the published report.

As soon as a report has been laid in Parliament, it is published on the Inspectorate's website, together with the Home Office's response to the report and recommendations.

Annex C: ICIBI's expectations

Background and explanatory documents are easy to understand and use

(e.g. Statements of Intent (both ministerial and managerial), Impact Assessments, Legislation, Policies, Guidance, Instructions, Strategies, Business Plans, intranet and GOV.UK pages, posters, leaflets etc.)

- They are written in plain, unambiguous English (with foreign language versions available, where appropriate).
- They are kept up to date.
- They are readily accessible to anyone who needs to rely on them (with online signposting and links, wherever possible).

Processes are simple to follow and transparent

- They are IT-enabled and include input formatting to prevent users from making data entry errors.
- Mandatory requirements, including the nature and extent of evidence required to support applications and claims, are clearly defined.
- The potential for blockages and delays is designed out, wherever possible.
- They are resourced to meet time and quality standards (including legal requirements, Service Level Agreements, published targets).

Anyone exercising an immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function on behalf of the Home Secretary is fully competent

- Individuals understand their role, responsibilities, accountabilities and powers.
- Everyone receives the training they need for their current role and for their professional development, plus regular feedback on their performance.
- Individuals and teams have the tools, support and leadership they need to perform efficiently, effectively and lawfully.
- Everyone is making full use of their powers and capabilities, including to prevent, detect, investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute offences.
- The workplace culture ensures that individuals feel able to raise concerns and issues without fear of the consequences.

Decisions and actions are 'right first time'

- They are demonstrably evidence-based or, where appropriate, intelligence-led.
- They are made in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance.

- They are reasonable (in light of the available evidence) and consistent.
- They are recorded and communicated accurately, in the required format and detail, and can be readily retrieved (with due regard to data protection requirements).

Errors are identified, acknowledged and promptly ‘put right’

- Safeguards, management oversight, and quality assurance measures are in place, are tested and are seen to be effective.
- Complaints are handled efficiently, effectively and consistently.
- Lessons are learned and shared, including from administrative reviews and litigation.
- There is a commitment to continuous improvement, including by the prompt implementation of recommendations from reviews, inspections and audits.

Each immigration, asylum, nationality or customs function has a Home Office (BICS) ‘owner’

- The BICS ‘owner’ is accountable for:
 - implementation of relevant policies and processes
 - performance (informed by routine collection and analysis of Management Information (MI) and data, and monitoring of agreed targets/deliverables/budgets)
 - resourcing (including workforce planning and capability development, including knowledge and information management) o managing risks (including maintaining a Risk Register)
 - communications, collaborations and deconfliction within the Home Office, with other government departments and agencies, and other affected bodies
 - effective monitoring and management of relevant contracted out services o stakeholder engagement (including customers, applicants, claimants and their representatives)

Acknowledgements

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Inspection Team

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Lead Inspector | Paul David |
| Oversight | Mark Rich |
| Project Manager | Phillip Hallwood |
| Inspector | David Tomlinson |

