



**An independent Review
of Border Force**
by Alexander Downer

July 2022
CP 700



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by Alexander Downer

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for the Home Department
by Command of Her Majesty

July 2022

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Foreword

by The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP,
Home Secretary



I welcome Alexander Downer's report and thank him for undertaking the review of Border Force. He has conducted useful research and analysis and brought his significant experience and judgement to make a number of constructive recommendations.

Border Force was created a decade ago and has served the UK well, protecting the country from a range of threats and dangerous goods such as drugs, guns, counterfeit products and people that seek to come to our country to cause harm or abuse our public services. They have faced significant challenges over the years, from Ebola quarantine, fighters returning from Syria and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic. Many threats are enduring, and new challenges are continually emerging. Border Force has risen to these challenges and continues to deliver.

I asked Alexander to consider whether Border Force is operating as effectively and efficiently as it can, and as it needs to for the future. Our world continues to require strong and effective border control, and I want to ensure that Border Force is well placed to fully exploit emerging technologies and remain at the forefront of border control worldwide, so that we enjoy the highest levels of security while having a border that is welcoming to people and facilitates legitimate trade. We are Global Britain and we need a border that fully supports our vision, and we can deliver that with full control of our own borders.

The recommendations in the review are wide ranging. I welcome the overall thrust of the report and the vast majority of the recommendations. I have tasked my department to develop a robust and swift implementation plan for how we will deliver against the review. This will be a truly important step in achieving the vision for the future of Border Force set out in the review; as a high performing organisation delivering efficiently and effectively for the prosperity and security of the UK.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the assistance of a number of people who worked with me on this review. Paul Chandwani led the review team supported by Victoria Fullerton-Batten, Rachel Leighton, Stephanie Smith, Gemma Duffy, Louise Underwood and Matthew Hibbert. Commodore Robert Vitali was seconded from the Royal Navy. Thomas Ashbee, Daniel Shapiro and Clare Lyne contributed to the analysis elements of the review. The combined efforts and input from this team have enabled the delivery of a complex and broad review within a short period of time.

The Home Office as a whole have been supportive of my work, and I would like to thank the many Home Office civil servants who I have met and those who have provided information to my team. Tricia Hayes, Second Permanent Secretary of the Home Office has been a helpful sponsor to this review. I am also grateful to Tim Robinson, Home Office Non-Executive Director, for his thoughts.

I appreciated the discussions I had with those who have knowledge of Border Force over a number of years, including my conversations with the past leaders of Border Force; Paul Lincoln, Sir Charles Montgomery and Tony Smith. I welcomed their insights and expertise. I am also grateful to David Neal, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration.

There were a number of Members of Parliament who took the time to talk to me about Border Force and where they saw the challenges and strengths within the organisation. I am also grateful to the senior civil servants, both former and current, who provided me with their insights for this review.

Andrea Lockett, Deputy Director for Operational Assurance in Border Force has been our formal link with the Home Office and she has been respectful of our independence and assisted in progressing issues within the department. I was very grateful to the wider Operational Assurance Directorate who assisted with logistics and coordinated my visits to various Border Force locations.

Finally, but most importantly I would like to thank Border Force staff, from the Director General and his senior team to the many operational managers and frontline officers that I met and who hosted me on fantastic visits to their operations. They are a committed group of individuals serving the UK, and like me, want to improve Border Force so that it can be the best. They embraced this review constructively, with honesty and openness. I hope this review provides them with the direction needed to create the improvements they told me are needed.

Introduction

The Home Secretary commissioned me to conduct a review of Border Force to ensure that Border Force is in the best place to respond to current and future challenges. The context of this review is the exceptional circumstances that Border Force has faced in the past two years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK's departure from the EU and the ongoing illegal entry to the UK by people using small boats across the English Channel. These have been faced alongside the activities that Border Force undertakes to counter the enduring threats of immigration abuse, illegal drugs, firearms, organised crime and protecting national security. And the majority of Border Force's effort goes into the facilitation of millions of legitimate border crossings by goods and people which, more than ever, must be conducted efficiently in a timely manner, as the UK seeks to re-enforce its reputation as a global hub and trading nation.

The way that Border Force operates at the border is adapting, with the ever-increasing use of data and the implementation of technology. The "border of the future" will be significantly different to the current arrangements. Border Force has historically been at the forefront of implementing technology, such as the introduction of e-gates. I was asked to see if Border Force are well placed to maximise the potential of emerging technology and deliver of the UK Government's 2025 Border Strategy, delivering their key role of facilitating legitimate travel and trade with as little friction as possible, while fully exploiting the border as a key intervention point to prevent entry where required.

Ten years since the creation of Border Force, this review seeks to determine whether its mission is still the right one, whether the governance and structure are still appropriate to effectively manage the organisation and whether Border Force has the right capabilities (such as staff, training, equipment and access to data) to deliver.

The time period for the review was relatively brief. Whilst I have been afforded excellent access by staff across Border Force, the wider Home Office, the travel industry and beyond, due to the breadth of Border Force's work I have not been able to speak to everyone or visit every port that I would have liked to in the time that I had available. I have had many interesting conversations with Border Force Officers, but I would have enjoyed more time hearing from them. I visited all four nations of the UK and explored the different challenges that face Border Force Officers depending on where they are located. There are consistent themes which came through.

I have focused on a few key issues and made a number of evidence-based recommendations that I feel, if addressed, will have a positive impact on Border Force,

making it more resilient to future challenges and enabling delivery of the 2025 Border Strategy.

Overall, my impression of Border Force is an organisation which is performing at a sub-optimal level. It appears to be struggling to get out of a cycle of crisis management, reacting to the last challenge and bracing itself for the next, regardless of how predictable the next challenge may be. Although Border Force is largely delivering what is required of it on a day-to-day basis, it does so by stretching its resources in an unsustainable and highly inefficient way.

Despite examples of excellence and a dedicated, capable workforce, Border Force seems to be less than the sum of its parts with significant systemic challenges. There is little capacity for strategic planning or workforce development. The inability of Border Force to plan effectively is further impacted by the delivery failures of enabling functions such as recruitment and procurement. Steps should be taken to address the administrative issues that are continuing to distract the organisation so that it can focus on its core mission.

To be the best, and to deliver the UK's border 2025 ambitions the following improvements are needed:

- A **clear identity for Border Force** – a single unified workforce reinforced by a training academy and career path to professionalise the role of a Border Force Officer and make Border Force an attractive employer, similar to the police or army.
- To be supported by better **system leadership** from the Home Office and other parts of government for which Border Force delivers, giving the organisation a clear mandate, clear priorities and targets. A stronger voice for Border Force within the Home Office, along with increased accountability.
- Better **workforce planning** and a proper understanding of the **capabilities** which Border Force need, including consistent standards and operating procedures across different ports allowing better planning for procurement so that the right number of people are in the correct locations with the equipment they need.
- Establish meaningful **partnership working** with industry built on trust, enabling joint working on border policy development and the implementation of technology at a strategic level and better information sharing and at a tactical level,
- A stronger sense of purpose, professionalism, team, skills and planning to allow Border Force to face challenges on the front foot, such as **Heathrow passenger queues** and **small boats**, rather than these challenges impacting the capability of the whole organisation.

Scope and purpose

This review considered the following issues and challenges for Border Force:

- The mission of Border Force as an organisation and how it could be better defined, including the status and powers of Border Force and the capabilities required at the frontline and at leadership level.
- Levels of accountability and transparency to task and direct Border Force, and the appropriateness of processes to do so.
- The role of Border Force in dealing with the issue of small boat crossings.
- Oversight for balancing the full range of priorities including security, immigration, fiscal and health.
- Appropriateness of the funding model to ensure delivery of long-term investment in capabilities.
- Legacy issues from previous organisational structures (Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Border & Immigration Agency, HM Excise & Customs and UK Border Agency) often proving a barrier to workforce changes.
- Whether Border Force is well placed to deliver on the 2025 Border Strategy, including fully exploiting technology to deliver across all its areas of responsibility.



Methodology

With the support of a small team of civil servants, I undertook the following activities between February and May 2022:

- spoke to relevant operational and policy teams across the Migration and Borders System (M&B) as part of the evidence gathering process for this review
- reviewed relevant open-source information, plus data and documentary evidence requested from Border Force, covering policies and operational guidance
- consulted the Home Secretary and Home Office Ministers, the Home Office Permanent Secretary and Second Permanent Secretary, and other government departments with an interest in the border
- throughout the course of the review, regularly met senior managers from Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, Migration and Borders, Home Office Delivery (including Strategy and Transformation), Human Resources, Home Office Analysis and Insight, and Homeland Security Group
- met union representatives from Public and Commercial Services Union, Immigration Service Union and the FDA
- engaged with industry leaders: Eurostar operator, Dover port operator, Heathrow airport operator, Glasgow airport operator, Cardiff airport operator, and Luton airport operator
- engaged with Australian Border Force counterparts as a useful international comparator
- visited a variety of operational locations to observe staff working and processes, including:
 - Heathrow airport (passenger and freight operations)
 - St Pancras Eurostar operations
 - Felixstowe freight operations
 - Dover port
 - Cardiff airport
 - Border Force Manchester training hub
 - Glasgow airport
 - Belfast port and Belfast City Airport

Border Force as an organisation

Border Force is an organisation of circa 9,000 staff, with a target headcount of 10,100, covering airports, seaports and the international rail corridor into the UK. The volumes of freight and people that cross the UK border each year are impressive for a country the size of the UK, indicating the UK's role as both a trading nation but also a hub for people from across the world.

In 2008, the government brought together customs, visas and immigration functions into the UK Border Agency (UKBA), an 'arm's length body' of the Home Office. This change aimed to make border controls more effective to protect the public and promote economic interests¹ and integrate the previously disparate functions of immigration and customs to establish a single detection force at the border.

Border Force as a separate entity outside of UKBA was created in 2012, and in 2013 the remaining parts of UKBA were disbanded to create Immigration Enforcement and UK Visas and Immigration. These new organisations, including Border Force, were created as Home Office directorates, directly accountable to Home Office Ministers. This accountability was designed to strengthen Ministers' oversight of border security operations following a report by the Independent Chief Inspector in 2012², who found that border controls at Heathrow and other ports had been relaxed without ministerial consent.

The way in which Border Force was created has had a lasting impact on the current workforce. Ten years on, some of the staff from the different precursor organisations maintain their previous terms and conditions, there are different IT systems for customs and immigration, and organisational priorities are set independently by two different government departments. Border Force Officers exercise their powers as either an Immigration Officer or Officer of Customs & Excise in legislative terms, depending on what role they are carrying out.

Border Force continues to be subject to change. During the course of this review, plans to bring Border Force and Immigration Enforcement together under one Director General have been scrapped and the two organisations will remain separate, though they will look for opportunities for closer alignment. Various other relevant reviews are taking place and strategies being developed, including a goods strategy and a review of the government

¹ 2007 Cabinet Office Report: Security in a Global Hub

² An investigation into border security checks (publishing.service.gov.uk)

bodies that are present at the UK border, both of which will have implications for Border Force.

Throughout its existence Border Force has been subject to various improvement plans, some of which have never been fully delivered on. There are outstanding actions from a 2013 NAO report³ which remain relevant today, including addressing staff shortages, and concerns regarding an inflexible resourcing model which focuses on passenger queues to the detriment of other important activities.

Compared to other nations with which Border Force enjoys a close relationship, it is a relatively lean organisation considering the high number of passenger arrivals which are received in the UK. Comparative data prepared informally by Border Force suggests that Border Force has a lower staff to passenger and goods volume ratio than Australia, New Zealand or the USA.



³ The-Border-force-securing-the-border.pdf (nao.org.uk)

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Border Force needs a clear identity

Border Force describe their mission as follows: *to protect the public through a secure border, facilitate legitimate travel and trade and adapt to face the challenges of an increasingly uncertain world*. Border Force's competing responsibilities has confused frontline officers' understanding of its purpose, as well as the understanding of partner organisations. Messaging around Border Force's activities in relation to health and environment measures, customer service in facilitating legitimate travel for passengers and goods, and contributing to the prosperity agenda of 'Global Britain' do not resonate with some staff to the same degree as their role in security and enforcement. Border Force's identity is split between being a law enforcement organisation versus a customer service, administrative organisation. It is also still informed by its precursor organisations with Border Force Officers frequently still referring to themselves as an immigration or customs officer. This includes staff who have joined since the inception of Border Force.

In the latest survey of Border Force staff (the People Survey⁴), Border Force continually scored below the Home Office average on questions regarding understanding their work objectives. This evidences a lack of clarity among staff, which accords with my conversations with staff. This in turn, in my opinion, has impacted negatively on the morale of staff as they need to pick up new tasks without a clear sense of how it applies to Border Force's wider priorities. This lack of clarity contributes to the confused identity of the organisation.

The People Survey results demonstrate the admirable commitment of Border Force Officers, which I also sensed through my own engagement. Border Force predominantly have an internal ethos as a law enforcement body and identify less strongly with the wider Home Office. It is the Home Office that views and portrays Border Force as an administrative and customer service body, similar to the way the Home Office sees itself. This has an influence on the tasks and the priorities that are set for the organisation. There is sometimes a disconnect between Border Force and its parent organisation. I fear that a focus on aligning Border Force's identity too closely with the Home Office risks diluting the Border Force brand and its sense of cohesion, which is important for staff morale.

Border Force should have a distinct identity and voice within the Home Office which reflects its role as a uniformed force. The Home Office and Border Force should jointly

⁴ Civil Service People Survey Hub - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

agree Border Force's purpose and role, ensuring this is widely communicated to staff and regularly reinforced to ensure that Border Force has clarity of purpose and is delivering on all its objectives. A clearer sense of purpose may help boost the morale of its staff.

Recommendations

1.1 Border Force should have a distinct identity and voice within the Home Office, based around their unique characteristics as a uniformed force

Border Force officers are both civil servants and warranted officers, with powers of arrest, detention and search in specific environments and circumstances. In some situations they have the ability to issue civil penalties. As head of a significant operational command, the Head of Border Force needs a distinct voice in the Home Office to represent the large operation, which should be given equal weight to policy leaders who dominate the senior level of the Home Office and corporate decision-making.

1.2 Border Force need clear leadership on priorities and purpose

Border Force and the Home Office should work together to agree Border Force's purpose and how their responsibilities should be prioritised accordingly, ensuring they are delivering against government objectives for an effective border. If Border Force wants to be the best in the world, they need to remove any ambiguity from their messaging and communicate effectively to all staff exactly what their responsibilities are and how they should be prioritised. All Border Force officers should feel connected to the organisation's overall mission and how their role contributes to the success of that.



2. Border Force needs professional training and a career development pathway

Border Force has a clear well-defined foundation programme to induct new officers and cross-train them in both customs and immigration functions. Unfortunately, due to operational pressures, frequently new staff complete the immigration part of the training and are then deployed to passenger controls at the border before they are able to undertake customs training. Although the customs training is then delivered in the months that follow, generally I found that training beyond the foundation programme is inconsistent and staff are not required to be trained to the same standards, with variations, for example, in the required level of personal safety training. There is not a clear training pathway for development that officers could describe to me.

The 2021 People Survey shows that around half of Border Force staff feel that they have access to the right learning and development opportunities, which is lower than the wider Home Office score for this question. There appears to be no set training for new managers, meaning that staff are required to learn management-skills on the job. This is a concern as People Survey data shows us that some Border Force officers feel that poor performance is not dealt with effectively and bullying and harassment rates in the organisation are higher than the Home Office average. Various forms of bullying and harassment were identified in the survey, but the highest number of reported incidents related to staff being made to feel incompetent, less valued or excluded in some way. Two thirds of staff felt that no action would be taken if they reported bullying or harassment, suggesting a permissive environment. More than a third of staff who reported their negative experiences felt penalised for doing so. Better training for managers is key to resolving this.

Specialist training is delivered at some ports, for example on Border Force's world-leading deep rummage capabilities. This is positive but opportunities to specialise should be accessible to officers across the organisation. And career pathways for specialist officers appear to be limited. More thought needs to be put into career development, recognising the value in a fully flexible organisation with staff that can undertake a wide variety of functions along with the need for staff that can undertake specialist tasks with a high level of competence.

Under investment in training, be that for core skills, specialist skills or management capability limits the flexibility of the workforce, exacerbates the resourcing issues and further stretches the organisation inefficiently. This manifests as a demoralised workforce and, from my conversations with staff, a lack of willingness to engage with the organisation and challenge constructively. The workforce seems held back from fulfilling their potential by these issues.

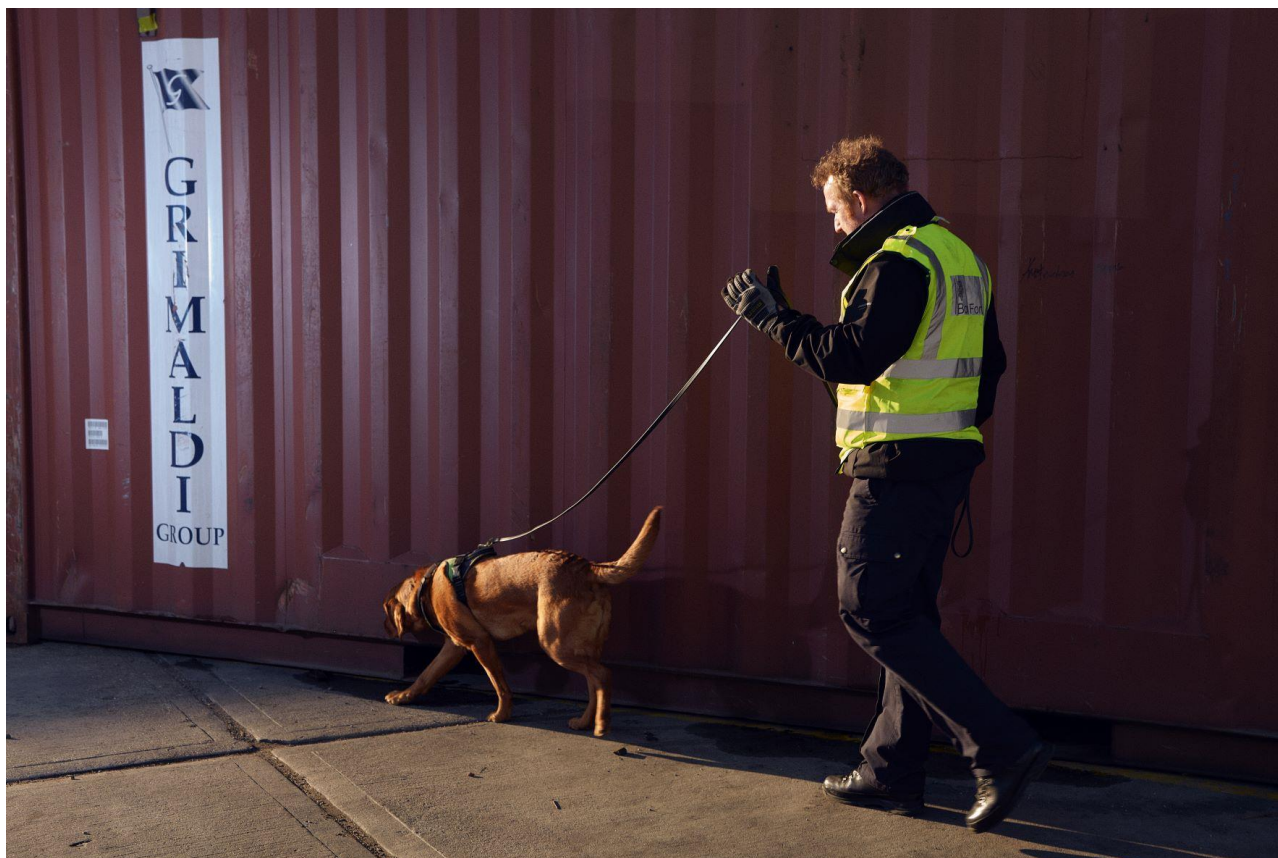
Recommendation

2.1 Border Force must refresh their learning strategy, developing a foundation programme and an ongoing professional development pathway for the Border Force Officers of the future.

There should be a training academy to deliver a new learning strategy that supports a structured career pathway for officers and managers across Border Force. This learning strategy must consider not only what Border Force needs today, but how their role is likely to change over the next 5-10 years.

As well as inducting new entrants in a consistent and professional way, the academy should provide continuing professional development and support opportunities for specialisation and secondments to Headquarters, different ports and modes as part of a recognised career journey. This will provide consistency of training standards across the organisation. To inform the training requirement, Border Force must produce clear role profiles and updated job descriptions, including attributes and responsibilities for a variety of grades.

The training academy could bring together training provision for Immigration Enforcement, whose training overlaps in part, to create cohesion, professionalisation and join-up in the law enforcement directorates within the Home Office.



3. Border Force needs a unified workforce

Even though I observed the commitment to their task from most Border Force Officers, I also observed aspects of Border Force which created tension within the workforce. There is fundamental unfairness created by the different terms and conditions that staff are on; some staff are on significantly better terms than the colleagues they are working alongside, performing the same role in the same location. This is due to staff remaining on the terms and conditions of the pre-cursor organisations which no longer exist. The impacts of these differences include the shifts that people are required to work, the compensation that they are given for working unsociable hours and the degree of flexibility they are required to provide to their employer. I consider this issue in more detail in the Heathrow chapter of this review, where this problem is most acute, but Border Force will be a more effective organisation if steps are taken to unite the workforce with a sense of joint-endeavour and fairness.

Differing levels of training are also apparent. It is quite right that staff will have differing levels of expertise in specialist areas, but there should be more common standards across staff for more basic functions. Most troubling to me was Physical Safety Training; level 3 enables staff to intervene to protect a colleague in a confrontation, or to physically apprehend a person. But this level of training is not mandated, so colleagues cannot be confident that all colleagues wearing the same uniform as them will necessarily be able to assist them in a situation where that is required. A significant number of staff I met were not trained to this level.

I feel that staff morale would be improved with a greater sense of unity and comradery across the workforce. Along with clarity through a joint sense of purpose, staff should feel like “they are in it together” with their colleagues. Although that appears to be the case initially, beneath the surface I found lots of differences in the way that individual officers work and relate to the organisation, which is divisive.

Recommendation

3.1 There should be equity in the workforce

Training to a set standard should be mandated so that colleagues can fully support each other in delivery of the mission. Terms and conditions should be unified so that staff are compensated equally for working unsociable hours or providing flexibility to the organisation. Expectations on staff should match the requirements of the organisation and reward should be based on the contribution that each individual makes.

4. Governance structure

Border Force, as with any government entity, needs a docking point for management and democratic accountability. Border Force is managed as a Home Office directorate, alongside Immigration Enforcement and other “Capabilities” within the Home Office such as Customer Services, Communications and Corporate Enablers. The Home Office is often seen to be a policy department and it has significant policy responsibilities across policing, counter terrorism, drugs, modern slavery and immigration, to name a few. But the majority of staff in the Home Office work in the operational directorates which together make up the immigration system.

Border Force is an integral part of the immigration system, sitting after UK Visas and before Immigration Enforcement in an end-to-end customer journey. It is the face of the UK Border for both British Citizens and foreign nationals at the point of entry and makes millions of decisions each year on whether a person meets the criteria to be granted entry to the UK. Along with this immigration function, Border Force is also conducting a security function while processing arriving passengers, ensuring that those entering not only have the right to do so, but are not known to be intent on doing harm. These checks are done using data from the police and security agencies; Border Force are implementing activities on behalf of other bodies.

Border Force also have a role in protecting the environment, plant and animal health through phyto-security checks that are undertaken on behalf of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Various illegally imported products are confiscated at the border. Border Force also implement the UK’s commitments under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to tackle the illegal trade in wildlife.

In recent times we have also seen Border Force enforce health controls at the border. In the past they have been involved in checking that requirements set by public health bodies have been met (such as TB tests for some students entering the UK and screening during the 2014 Ebola outbreak for certain arriving passengers). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Border Force enforced public health controls at the border through the proxy of checking passengers had completed a Passenger Locator Form. This measure was delivered on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

Less seen by the public, but hugely important, is the role of Border Force on the importation of goods. Whilst Border Force undertake revenue protection and security activities on passenger baggage in the customs channels at ports, this activity is done at scale at sea, and air and rail ports where the volumes are significant. Revenue protection activity is tasked to Border Force by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC), whilst

security checks are the primary concerns of the non-immigration parts of the Home Office (Homeland Security Group and Public Safety Group).

Overall Border Force serves five government agendas at the UK border:

- Immigration
- Revenue Protection
- Security
- Public & Animal Health protection
- Prosperity

Only HMRC have a formal process for articulating, negotiating and tasking Border Force with their requirements. This is done through a formal letter from the Chancellor to the Director General of Border Force on an annual basis, setting targets for outcomes from detection activity on revenue protection and percentage of checks required on certain goods movements. This tasking is supported by a quarterly Partnership Committee which is jointly chaired by Border Force and HMRC, engagement through other forums and regular bi-lateral discussions.

In discussions with Directors General from relevant departments outside of the Home Office, I was made aware of other negotiations that had taken place to ensure that Border Force was delivering on other vital government business. In the case of both COVID-19 and EU Exit, Border Force was required to do specific activities at the border to support the wider government agenda. These tasking discussions were described as constructive and delivered what was required, but the conversations were bilateral, between Border Force and one given “system owner” at a time. What is missing from this process is a structured conversation to consider prioritisation and trade-offs across the entirety of Border Force’s role.

Border Force has a finite resource to deploy against activity at the border. Activity is prioritised based on a number of processes: the Operating Mandate is an agreement between the Home Secretary and Border Force that describes the checks that will be done on arriving passengers and goods. This clearly sets out which tasks are mandatory. A second process, underpinned by the Control Strategy, then sets out a hierarchy for other tasks so that Border Force has a framework for prioritising activity, with any discretionary resource available following the undertaking of the mandate activity.

This process results in two challenges:

Firstly, the Operating Mandate does not appear to be regularly updated and although I saw draft updates and information notes to staff (Interim Operational Instructions), a new full version of the Operating Mandate has not been agreed with Ministers since 2015, prior to

EU Exit. This cannot reflect new tasks which have been set for Border Force in recent years, nor reflect advances in technology and therefore may be of limited value for frontline managers.

Secondly, Border Force are sometimes making strategic decisions on prioritisation which should be taken by Ministers. Too often they are having to accept tasks from elsewhere in Government without a proper process to ensure that it is activity which Ministers want prioritised to the detriment of other tasks. Whilst tactical decisions should sit with Border Force, the overall approach to prioritisation should be set for the organisation to ensure that they meet ministerial priorities and expectations. Border Force has very limited capacity for new activities. If new, additional tasks are not reflected in the prioritisation processes yet are absorbed by the organisation, there is a significant risk that Border Force is not delivering what is expected of them by different government system owners.

Recommendations

4.1 A new Advisory Board should be created.

This board can consider the competing demands that are being placed on Border Force at any given time, the resources that are available to Border Force, and provide considered, risk-based advice to the Home Secretary and the relevant Home Office Minister of State. This board will include senior representatives (Director General-level) from each of the government departments and agencies that own the policy areas which rely on Border Force delivery at the border. The Board should be chaired by the Director General of Border Force.

Where a department requires Border Force to deliver additional activity beyond that agreed at the start of the planning cycle, this can then be considered in a multilateral forum where the new task can be considered alongside all the existing tasks, recognising the resource is finite and other activities will need to be reduced. This board should meet on a monthly basis to reflect shifting threats, resource availability at any given time and government priorities. Advice can then be provided to Ministers who will decide how Border Force resource should be targeted and what trade-offs should be made at any given time.

This provides better visibility and control for Ministers, accountability for the strategic decisions made by Border Force and enables risks to be exposed and managed at an appropriate level.

4.2 The Operating Mandate should be reviewed and updated

The mandate is a useful document and provides clarity for Border Force on Ministerial expectations and commands. It was surprising to me that the document has not been formally updated and agreed with ministers since 2015, given the changes to the UK

border over the past few years. Ministerial expectations of the activities that Border Force will undertake have changed in this period and a revised document should be produced. The Operating Mandate should be updated immediately and on an ongoing yearly basis, to reflect the current intentions of ministers.

4.3 The Migration and Borders mission should provide systems leadership in policy development across the borders landscape

When developing policy, implementation should be considered at the design phase. As the teams in the Home Office responsible for Migrations and Borders leadership develop their role, they should ensure that new policy proposals include advice to Ministers on conflicts or trade-offs in Border Force delivery. There is a role for these teams in reaching out both across the Home Office and to other Government Departments to ensure that Border Force impacts are considered and reflected in policy development. The new Advisory Board will provide a useful springboard for that thinking.



5. Ministerial oversight

In addition to Border Force's prioritisation difficulties responding to the multiple demands of different government departments, some of its lack of focus comes from there being no single Home Office Minister covering the whole of Border Force's remit. Border Force is required to meet at least three Ministers in addition to their accountability to the Home Secretary. No one in the Home Office Ministerial team beyond the Home Secretary, has a full view of the challenges within Border Force or is responsible for holding them to account for the longer-term delivery. Ministers are primarily interested in specific outcomes that Border Force will deliver on a given agenda, for example immigration, modern slavery or counter terrorism. This can drive unintended behaviours with different Ministers requesting conflicting or competing asks and no one looking at the overall picture.

A single lead Minister for Border Force would address this, ensuring that there is ministerial oversight for overall prioritisation and those aspects of Border Force which might fall between the gaps, particularly for non-output issues such as long-term planning and procurement. The appointment of such a ministerial role would also be an opportunity to review the way in which Border Force communicates with the Ministerial team and their offices. I witnessed frustrations on both sides about the timeliness of communications in both directions on operational issues. A protocol should be agreed to ensure there is a balance between space for Border Force to deliver on the ground whilst also ensuring the elected officials have the confidence that Border Force are delivering and flagging issues that Ministers need to be alive to.

Recommendation

5.1 A single Home Office minister should be appointed with complete oversight of Border Force

One Home Office minister should have responsibility for the entirety of Border Force as an organisation so that its effectiveness can be judged as a whole and decisions made with a full view of Border Force's remit and responsibilities. Border Force should still report to the Home Secretary, but the addition of a dedicated minister should help cover the vast portfolio of Border Force work, ensure that the organisation is in a healthy state in terms of recruitment, training, procurement and long-term planning.

6. Leadership of Border Force

Under the Home Office Transformation Programme it was originally proposed that Border Force and Immigration Enforcement should merge under one Director General. During this Review, the Home Office decided to move away from this proposal and to maintain two separate Directors General. There would be advantages if these two operational commands reported to a single leader. As with the original proposal, this would not require the two organisations to merge but to have a higher degree of interoperability especially with regards to training, recruitment and procurement as well as the already shared intelligence functions. By the two organisations coming under one Director General, this should give the organisations greater interoperability and therefore the flexibility to provide mutual support for each other in times of pressure.

I have looked at different models of command and control, including from the UK Armed Forces, UK Police Forces and comparable border organisations in other countries. Border Force's status as a Home Office directorate strongly influences the current leadership model. Whilst there are options which might offer benefits to Border Force such as making it an arm's length entity of the Home Office, similar models have been tried in the past and were ultimately unsuccessful. I am not convinced that such an approach would outweigh the disruption and expense of making large organisational changes. Border Force was brought into the Home Office in 2012 to strengthen ministerial oversight of border security operations. In my view, it is right that the Home Secretary has a close relationship (including oversight and direction) with Border Force and the organisation would benefit from being closer to Ministers, especially whilst the UK realises the benefits of EU Exit and takes greater control of the border.

What I saw in the Ministry of Defence is a well-designed system bringing together operational and policy advice in the decision-making process. Departmental advice to the Secretary of State for Defence is a joint product of two elements: the Defence Permanent Under Secretary is responsible for advising the Secretary of State on matters of policy and strategy, while the Chief of Defence Staff provides military advice. Advice on issues which impact operations do not go to the Secretary of State without being agreed by both sides of the house.

I think this is an attractive model for the Home Office and Border Force to adopt. Too frequently I saw and heard of examples where Border Force were consulted about how new border initiatives would be implemented too late, often after Ministerial approval. Border Force should be involved in parallel when policy proposals are put to ministers which they will be responsible for implementing. Their voice in the department needs to be distinct from policy advice and on an equal footing. I also saw examples of policy teams

not reacting in a timely manner to requests from Border Force to address emerging issues, resulting in wasted effort and poor operational outcomes. This is not good policy making.

Whilst Border Force will need an operational strategy function, this should be focused on planning and long-term future thinking for the organisation, not working through the implementation of ill-considered policy initiatives, which is where a lot of effort seems to be expended currently. The current structure also places Border Force in the unenviable position of having to explain to Ministers, sometimes in other Departments, why their policy aims cannot be realised as described, even though they could have pointed out such challenges in the policy development process if they were given the opportunity, enabling remedies to be identified from the outset.

Recommendations

6.1 Border Force Director General should report directly to Home Office ministers

To ensure Border Force's operational voice is fully heard within the Home Office reporting structures, a similar structure to the way the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence operate should be introduced. This would elevate the head of Border Force and ensure that the operational view is given equal representation to that of policy in departmental decision making. The new Border Force Director General position should report directly to the dedicated Border Force Minister and Home Secretary rather than to the Home Office Second Permanent Secretary and all advice to ministers pertaining to Border Force work should capture the views of policy and operational colleagues equally. Thought should be given to a more apposite title for this role such as "Commissioner".

6.2 Border Force Director General should have responsibility for Immigration Enforcement operational teams

To maximise the benefit of an elevated senior leader position providing a strong operational voice, Border Force and Immigration Enforcement should report into the same Director General. This should be a medium-term goal, following the implementation of some of the core recommendations from this review to make Border Force more robust, which will require significant short-term effort. I would also recommend further thought is given to moving the case-working functions, currently undertaken in both Immigration Enforcement and Border Force to another part of the Home Office.

7. Planning and Capabilities: Getting the Basics Right

Border Strategy: Delivery of the Border 2025 Strategy and Future Borders and Immigration Programme

The Government's Border 2025 Strategy was published in December 2020. The strategy sets setting out the vision for the UK border so it can become to be the most effective in the world; one which embraces technology and simplifies processes for those using it whilst also improving the security of the UK.

Delivery of the strategy is being led by the Cabinet Office with interested parties across government. At its conception, the driving force of the strategy was the Border & Protocol Delivery Group which has since been dismantled. Whilst there are several Cabinet Office teams with an interest, this potentially leaves a void at the centre of Government for delivering the strategy and ensuring ongoing progress across Government.

Data will continue to become an increasingly important asset to Border Force under the strategy, especially for freight where realising the full benefits of the future model are dependent on acquiring accurate and timely pre-arrival data. This will require full integration of both the Home Office's immigration systems and those of the other systems which Border Force serves, such as HMRC data on goods, as well as access to industry data. This did not appear to be on track. The UK has relatively limited access to pre-arrival data for freight movements, particularly for goods from the EU, limiting its targeting capability for border security purposes. I have heard from Industry about a lack of meaningful discussion with them on the technology which will power this transformation (I explore the relationship with industry further in chapter 8). I have also observed challenges on system join-up between the different parts of government that Border Force works with. I do not therefore have confidence that the entire strategy will be delivered by 2025. Whilst this is not Border Force's fault, the impact on them will be great and as the face of the border they are liable to be at the forefront of criticism.

Data is also at the heart of the digitise strand of the Future Borders and Immigration Programme, but policy makers need to think through what this means for Border Force. During the course of the review, I spoke to a number of experts who are approaching border technologies in an innovative way, but activity must not be driven by technical implementation alone and it was not clear to me where the detailed policy thinking is being done to turn the Home Secretary's vision for the border into reality and understanding the impact of what this means for the front line. This is particularly important when set against some of my other recommendations – the new training academy will need a long-term vision of the skills a Border Force officer needs in order to develop new programmes, new capabilities must take this vision into account when new technology is deployed and

resource-planning must be fit for the future, especially in an environment where there is pressure on staff numbers across the civil service.

What does the Border Force officer of the future look like?

Digitising the Border promises a genuine transformation to border processes and technology which will allow the Home Office to know more about people before they travel, use this information to inform management of interventions at the border and maximise the use of upstream (pre-travel) interventions.

At its simplest, moving checks upstream and increasing reliance on automation could dramatically change the role of a Border Force officer, moving them away from the Primary Control Point. An increased presence away from the desks would give officers more time to develop specialisms and apply their wider skillset, for example applying their behavioural detection training to identify passengers for intention testing, to focus on safeguarding checks or increasing baggage and goods searches.

Funding

Border Force is funded like any other Home Office directorate, through an allocation from Her Majesty's Treasury in the spending review cycle. Whilst I saw problems with both procurement and staffing levels, the amount of funding allocated to Border Force appears to be adequate.

Planning

It has been clear during my conversations with ministers and industry that the strategic efforts of Border Force are seen as short-term and broadly focused on the next crisis or immediate busy period. This immediacy means Border Force is always running to catch up and are not having the conversations required to look at the medium term let alone the longer-term vision. It is concerning that some aspects of modelling and planning for summer 2022 were taking place in May 2022 and not earlier; especially as recruitment and training takes on average 9 to 10 months to get an individual operating solo and therefore any shortfall in resources cannot be quickly resolved.

The impact of this approach can be seen throughout the organisation, from its interaction with industry partners to its failure to deliver on long term recommendations and strategies. For instance, a key finding in the 2013 National Audit Office report was the need to address the Border Force flexible resourcing model. In 2013 it was found that almost a fifth of Border Force's workforce were employed under terms and conditions restricting working hours to fixed periods during the week. At Heathrow in spring 2013, less than half the

workforce was contractually obliged to work before 5am without being paid additional benefits in kind, despite a number of long-distance flights arriving at that time. I have found similar problems in my engagements, although those figures have improved slightly through natural attrition and attempts to move staff onto more modern contracts. I considered this in Chapter 3 in relation to morale and team-working and return to this in the chapter on Heathrow. Whilst the issue itself needs resolving, I would also suggest that Border Force consider the reasons that change has been slow over the last 10 years and address those barriers change.

Border Force are aware that they need to improve their strategic planning. I have seen some green shoots of positive activity in this area and efforts need to be maintained to fully deliver on these initiatives.

The frustration about the short-term planning is felt significantly at port level, and I heard from several port operators, as well as Border Force staff, about the impact this lack of data had on day-to-day operations as well as longer term investment in the infrastructure of the immigration hall. Not sharing the expected Border Force resources with port operators or working together in advance to overcome resourcing shortfalls can result in a poor customer experience as well as frustrations between partners. We have seen several examples of port operators blaming Border Force staffing for queues - whether always entirely fairly is another matter – which neither helps the current situation on the ground nor helps to foster trust and positive relationships. However, as I discussed earlier, the lack of operational management training leaves the Border Force staff in charge of the flow of passengers on the back foot because they have not been properly and consistently trained in how to plan and resolve these situations.

The lack of confidence in information sharing extends into future policy changes as well. One port operator raised how they did not feel confident to make changes to the directional signage at ports because they were uncertain what changes might be on the horizon and whether the investment would be wasted.

Recruitment

At most locations I visited I heard about the challenges with recruitment. Border Force's recruitment is currently handled by the Home Office's central HR team. This is a disadvantage to Border Force who should have greater control and autonomy around their recruitment as well as accountability for it. "Time to hire" (from advertisement to job offer) is taking on average 106 working days⁵ – this does not include any notice period or availability of a suitable training course. It was also reported that several vital recruitment campaigns at Heathrow, Gatwick and in the South-East & Europe region were failing to

⁵ March 2022 HORC quarterly data

deliver the numbers needed. Whilst there was initial interest, people fell away through the recruitment process as there was little or no, on-going contact with the candidates, who got other roles due to the slow process. These short falls occurred at ports where the need is particularly acute and has exacerbated an already difficult situation. Consequently, existing Border Force staff view their workload as excessive.

There are various reasons for this including the state of the labour market making Border Force roles less attractive, but Border Force are not getting the recruits. Border Force have not been brave enough with the volume of their recruitment requests - attrition is factored into recruitment numbers at a basic level but senior staff are failing to recognise the time-lag of recruitment and to over recruit appropriately. In addition, Border Force may not present themselves as a desirable employer. For those interested in law enforcement, other options such as the police or army may seem more desirable and in some locations, I was told about other government departments paying a similar salary for more accommodating hours.

Even though the Government intends to decrease the headcount of the civil service I would advise that Border Force continues recruiting at certain locations. The current staffing issues faced by Border Force have in part arisen due to a self-imposed recruitment freeze in late 2019. This, as well as other instances where recruitment was either slowed or failed, arose from uncertainty about funding. The effect of this today is significant understaffing at some ports. Border Force need a steady stream of new recruits to fill their vacancies and to ensure they have sufficiently trained resource in place to mitigate what is an aging workforce.

Protracted staff shortages result in an over reliance on surging resources from within the organisation to hotspot areas to cope with demand. Moving staff around dynamically to respond to heightened pressures is a good idea, but flexible resource teams were not designed to be continually deployed to plug permanent staff shortages in business-as-usual circumstances. Non-mandatory work or tasks which are not deemed to be time-critical are deprioritised to cope with passenger queues. This is neither an efficient nor effective way for the organisation to run for sustained periods of pressure.

Capabilities and technology

I understand that there are no new detection capabilities used or being developed elsewhere internationally which the UK is not already exploring. However, what was clear during my visits was that there were significant capability and technology disparities between ports. This is supported by the People Survey where only approximately half the staff who responded felt they had the tools available to do their job effectively. These manifested themselves in three ways.

Firstly, the lack of working technology. I encountered a number of locations where there were obsolete items and either no plan to fix them or staff having to spend a disproportionate amount of time trying to resolve the issue. This takes them away from front line work. Although the eGates are generally reliable when they fail the impact is significant. I acknowledge that Border Force took a risk to deploy an upgrade early in order to permit checks against the Covid-19 Passenger Locator Form on the gates. However, the level of disruption this caused was unacceptable.

I also saw failed procurement to replace some equipment. A major procurement failed to deliver, resulting in front line officers having to continue to battle with equipment which is already at the end of its lifetime. The failed procurement took three years to reach this point.

Secondly, there are inconsistencies in approach due to a lack of common standards in certain key areas. This displayed itself in a number of ways including a lack of national minimum standards for staffing and equipment to run a port and perform core duties. The need for this was reinforced during my visits where I heard on several occasions about the difficulties faced by teams to land their requirements for equipment – they were missing some equipment but had an abundance of something else which was in short supply elsewhere. The teams had raised the requests but the bureaucracy they needed to battle to get the request delivered meant it often didn't appear to make it to the final purchasing team. Having a clear set of expectations of what it takes to run an airport or port which sees 'x' number of passengers and handles 'y' volume of freight should be the norm.

Inevitably a much smaller percentage of goods are checked at the border than the 100% of passengers that are examined upon entry to the UK. Whilst 100% seeks to reduce the risk posed by a person as close to zero as is possible, it is not clear to me what impact the checks on goods aim to achieve. This was not specified. I recognise it is unreasonable to expect 100% of goods to be checked – this is not proportionate and would be wasteful. But what is the risk reduction from goods that is sought? And is the approach to people proportionate? Use of data and the introduction of estimated times of arrival will make the checking of people much more efficient and so a reduction in human effort will be achievable without reducing the effectiveness of the border. I am less convinced that there is a clear plan for what will change on goods, how this will impact risk and what efficiencies through technology are planned in this area. I would expect the Home Office, HMRC, Border Force and other relevant partners to develop a goods strategy to consider this issue.

Additionally, there is no consistency on issues like screening rates and depth of search. I heard from industry that hauliers are aware of this lack of consistency and if possible will choose their port of entry based on lighter levels of checks or a perceived lower chance of being stopped.

Thirdly, there was a lack of standardisation for specialist skills. This inconsistency impacts effective deployment of staff and creates a risk that Border Force do not have the correct skills on a shift or in a port.

A lack of through-life consideration in technology deployment was also apparent from my visits. I was told about equipment that had been procured at great expense which was sitting redundant because of insufficient staff training. The team talked of being given a short tutorial and the expectation was that they would then train others. Unsurprisingly the equipment was left in a room and not used. Whilst this is a relatively small example of how change is managed in the organisation it does not surprise me that the last People Survey showed approximately a third of the organisation thought leadership and managing change was done well.

Border Force appear to recognise the failure of this approach and has ensured that appropriate training has been put in place to manage the changes resulting from EU Exit. However, this should be the expectation for every policy change and every new piece of technology introduced as opposed to a rarity.

In general, I was impressed by the leaders I engaged with, and they came across as competent and capable. However, Border Force has lacked consistent leadership in the last year to 18 months and is still not stable. This has resulted in a relatively inexperienced senior team. A number of the issues raised in this section are fundamental to the good running of the organisation and many would rightly expect these to be already nailed down. Whilst they are business as usual improvements – and some progress has been made - all of these areas will require a laser-like focus supported by consistent and robust leadership to resolve.

As I mentioned earlier Border Force has a history of failing to deliver transformation and change recommendations. If they are to get themselves out of the cycle of simply lurching from one crisis to another, they need to demonstrate a change in mindset. When the recruitment for the Director General goes ahead, it will be important to appoint someone with sound experience of running an organisation of this nature who can support Border Force to get the basics right but also have an awareness of the highly political nature of this role and how to navigate between the operational and political. In an operational command of this type, junior grades have significant management and leadership responsibility and set the tone for the organisation, so it is important that they are led well. Border Force would benefit from some broader experience to help increase its diversity of experience and thought to bolster its innovation and skills base.

Recommendations

7.1 Border Force need to improve their planning capability and have greater autonomy over corporate functions.

A significant portion of Border Force issues have arisen due to constantly running to catch up. This does not allow Border Force to be on the front foot in either their own planning or being an intelligent client of others. Border Force need to clearly establish and articulate their requirements, giving confidence to both Ministers and the enabling teams (for example Human Resources) that they understand their business, have an appropriate grip and are thinking long-term, rather than looking towards the next crisis.

7.2 Corporate enablers need to understand and respond to the operational uniqueness of Border Force

The service provided must be tailored to Border Force requirements. A vacancy in Border Force impacts directly on the customers standing in an immigration hall or waiting at the border for their goods to be checked and also has a direct impact on the security of the UK. Border Force staffing requirements and procurement needs must be delivered at pace.

7.3 The Border Force Executive Committee needs to be revitalised with the new Border Force Minister in the chair

The Border Force Executive Committee should be focused on leading a refresh of the organisation with particular responsibility for recruitment, capabilities planning and delivery of the Border Strategy 2025 to enable proper workforce planning which should be more than a year in advance. The Executive Committee should also be used to hold the Director General Border Force to account for implementing and embedding a clear set of milestone targets in relation to delivering the recommendations agreed from this Review with quarterly reviews of progress against plans.

7.4 Embed a new through-life management approach to all equipment that supports Border Force activity

There is a need to improve planning across all capabilities and components including new policies and a through-life management process will help support this. Every time equipment is purchased whether that is hardware e.g., eGates, cars, or IT software etc, a full lifecycle plan needs to be in place including refurbishment, replacement milestones and training for staff. This should also have clear plans for future procurement processes, and awareness of the time these can take.

7.5 Develop a set of standards

Border Force outlines the minimum standards that Border Force should be achieving through its Expectations Document. However, more consistency of approach is required

across all ports in how tasks are undertaken, with what equipment, and a clear understanding of the needs of each location.

7.6 Greater consideration of novel staffing approaches to increase pool of available applicants

Border Force primarily attracts and recruits from too narrow a section of the population and should endeavour to recruit from a broader cross-section of society. It needs to consider how to become an attractive proposition in a crowded labour market. Whilst the significant investment I have suggested in the training of Border Force officers of all grades is one aspect, greater consideration of novel staffing approaches should also be looked into to meet known shortfalls and help increase diversity of workforce e.g., holiday time only workers (may attract university students) or set shifts to increase the workforce at known pinch points e.g. evenings. Border Force is a great place to work with a significant number of opportunities for staff to undertake meaningful roles and this should be advertised.

7.7 Create a recruitment and onboarding system owner

Border Force also needs to improve its end-to-end workforce planning and look at its resourcing on a system-wide basis so that staff are arriving sufficiently trained when needed at ports. A resourcing system owner is required for onboarding bulk new recruits (owning the process from job description, advert, recruitment through to training and into port) as well as to reduce attrition, building an awareness of what keeps Border Force staff in role to minimise turnover.

7.8 Border Force, in its recruitment and promotion policies, needs to ensure there is no element of discrimination in terms of protected characteristics

To provide a workforce that is representative of the UK's diverse population, Border Force also need to make sure that its recruitment and promotion policies are designed to encourage the broadest range of applicants and prevent any elements of discrimination in terms of protected characteristics.

8. Working in true partnership with industry

The private sector facilitates millions of consignments of goods and passenger movements across the border every year. Successful operation of the border is dependent on the public and private sector working in partnership to ensure that it operates smoothly and efficiently, whilst maintaining essential safety and security standards.

During the review I was able to visit and speak with a variety of operators at ports with different characteristics. Whilst the time available was too short to hear voices from the whole transport sector, there were some issues which came up again and again including short-term planning and under-resourcing, poor customer service and the quality and timing of communications from Border Force and other government departments and agencies working at the border.

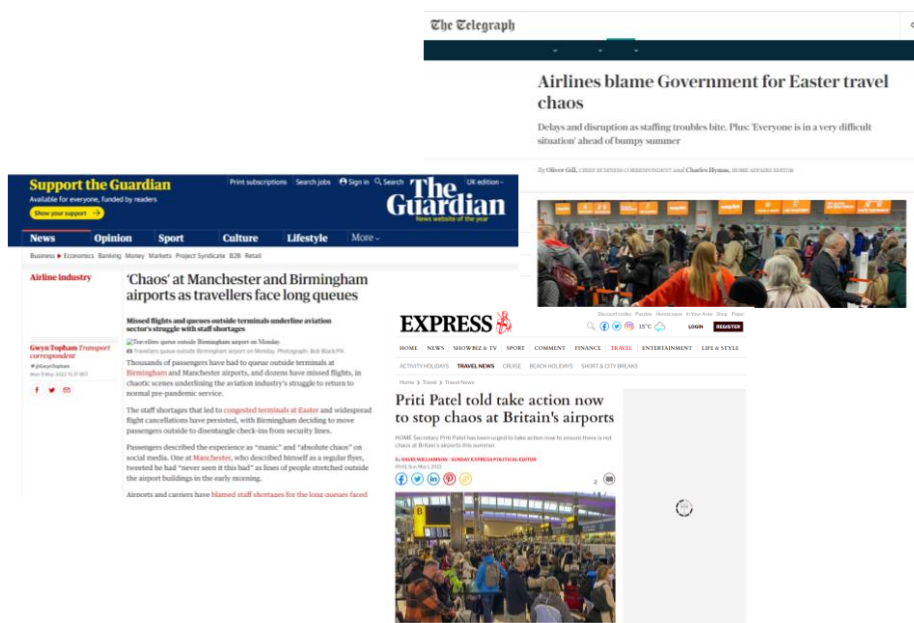
Problems with short-term planning, resourcing and information-sharing

In general relationships between Border Force and port operators are productive. However, there are frustrations about short-term planning and under-resourcing experienced in some ports. To manage staff shortages at particularly busy times, Border Force send staff from all over the UK to manage shortages at Heathrow and ports in the South-East of the country, taking staff away from their home ports, reducing resilience at those ports and the ability to perform discretionary but important work that the public expect from Border Force such as customs checks in passenger channels at airports.

Over the 2022 Easter period, passengers experienced significant queues and delays as airports struggled to meet the post-Covid-19 demand for holidays. Whilst these delays stemmed from a lack of security staff employed by airports, with Border Force able to surge resource to manage pressures in the immigration halls, operators have raised concerns about resourcing over the 2022 summer period and beyond. These concerns are valid. Long delays at immigration negatively impact the travelling public, deter business travellers and send out a message of inefficiency, rather than welcome, to the UK.

I have covered the need for Border Force to get on top of their resourcing issues and to plan more effectively elsewhere (See Chapter 7) but there are particular issues here in relation to the way that Border Force works with partners in the transport sector. During my visits I heard positive examples where Border Force officers and port operators were sharing data on a day-to-day basis to understand crunch points, manage queues and improve resilience. There are some particularly good examples of this kind of partnership during the Covid-19 pandemic. This sharing generally focuses on near-time resilience though and Border Force leaders do not feel empowered to share information and in fact are often dissuaded from a more open approach by stories in the press quoting port

operators and airlines that cite Border Force staff shortages; even when delays are not a result of Border Force activity (for example outbound queues at security).



To move forward we need a different approach. There are many areas where the public and private sectors work together to share commercial or privileged information and there is an appetite for this from the transport sector. However, more openness from Border Force carries risks and partners must enter collaboration with an understanding of their responsibilities.

Operational management skills

Industry representatives also questioned whether the Border Force leadership at port, and in central teams, had the skills required to manage operations, asking if Border Force could learn from the crowd management and workforce planning approaches in industry. My proposals for better training (See Chapter 2), including ensuring that Border Force officers have the skills they need on promotion to a management role, should go some way to addressing this issue and improving the professionalism of the force. This should also help attract qualified candidates from different sectors to roles in Border Force. However, this is an area where Border Force could look again at whether there is more that they can do with partners, including through better data-sharing and secondments.

Customer Service culture

For many of the industry leaders I spoke to, excellent customer service is a priority, both to their brand and to preserving the UK's role as the gateway to Europe, post EU Exit. A number of port operators, airlines and industry groups questioned whether Border Force see customer service as integral to their role or as a bonus, citing examples such as a failure to prioritise checks on fresh goods leading to spoilage, queues at immigration and

poor communication about vehicles seized for examination. There is a role here for better technology, but also a culture question for Border Force.

The range of risks from which Border Force look to protect the public has expanded and much of the port infrastructure was not designed for the purposes it is now used. Border Force officers must strive to balance protecting the public and delivering excellent customer service. The sector can help Border Force to do that by recognising that there are duties and responsibilities on industry too, both through regulation and guidance. Speeding the flow through an airport, or reducing the time taken for goods to be screened and pass through a port benefit everyone, as does ensuring that Border Force officers have the infrastructure necessary to do their job effectively.

This is a good time to look again at the Service Level Agreements covering immigration activities in airports (currently suspended), but there should also be clear expectations and measurable targets for goods movements through the border. Border checks on goods can involve a number of teams from multiple government departments and without transparency for the customer on the end-to-end process, the value of each check and shared targets, examples of slow activity and poor customer service will persist undetected.

Whilst this review looks at Border Force, I did have some interesting discussions about the multiplicity of government agencies operating at the border and the need for coordination and streamlining of processing. This should be addressed in part through the coordination structures for the management of Border Force that I have recommended elsewhere in this report. The Cabinet Office is also currently reviewing the UK Border in a holistic way, considering the responsibilities and opportunities for the multitude of agencies that operate there. The way that Border Force works with partner agencies at the border is something which that review will usefully consider.

A partnership approach

Speaking to industry leaders from the aviation, maritime and international rail sectors, I heard that at every level, Border Force and the wider Home Office see industry as a customer to be managed, rather than as a partner in delivery of the Border Strategy 2025. Whilst there were examples of good communications approaches, much of the messaging was too late; implementation focused; and 'broadcast only', rather than an opportunity to work together to shape policy.

Some of the examples cited by industry representatives included Government messaging about travel during Covid-19 and border changes relating to EU Exit and the Northern Ireland protocol. Cross-border travel messages during the Covid-19 pandemic are a good example of the difficulty communicating changes in a timely way. It is inevitable that

governments will sometimes make changes at short-notice in such a fast-moving environment, but the National Audit Office report into *Managing Cross-Border Travel During The COVID-19 Pandemic*⁶ found that 'processes for communicating those changes in advance of a public announcement to those with operational responsibilities for implementing were not timely' and Carriers, who have been responsible for implementing some government measures at the border, told the NAO that they were unclear how decisions were ultimately made nor whether their feedback was considered.

As in the example above, it is worth stressing that whilst some of the messaging that industry representatives spoke about directly related to Border Force activity, in other cases Border Force were acting as the messenger or are simply the most visible face of the Government at the border.

A key aim of the Border 2025 Strategy is to provide the border industry with clarity about government's Target Operating Model for the border, giving them the ability to make long-term investment decisions and innovate. The Home Office does not always do this successfully. Partners commented that messaging on some topics can be generic, high level and often repetitive, for example citing the same presentations on the new Future Border and Immigration System being repeated at multiple Border Force-led meetings. Effective partnership requires more than providing information at meetings. If the Home Office teams developing immigration and border policy want to forge a partnership with industry, they will need to take ownership of routine consultation with industry representatives at an early stage to help shape developing policy concepts. I understand some of this happens but does not appear to be successful. This is particularly important in areas of rapid technological change where industry leaders may be investing heavily in data-systems or technologies such as facial recognition with a development timetable of 5-10 years out. Civil servants working on border policy and technology development need to better understand how industry works, their commercial drivers and timelines.

During the course of the review, I was surprised that even the biggest ports claimed to have had little regular contact with Home Office Ministers. Ministerial meetings do take place with industry but are often focused on immediate issues such as summer pressures or queues. Whilst senior figures in commerce will always seek the ear of politicians to try and resolve issues of concern, effective partnership will mean building a less transactional relationship.

⁶ [Managing cross-border travel during the COVID-19 pandemic \(nao.org.uk\)](https://nao.org.uk)

Recommendations

The border is a space where many of the government's policy objectives to protect the public, take back control and advance Britain's place in the world come together and the transport and security industry can help the Government deliver more effectively. In order to meet the ambitious agenda the Government has set out in the Border 2025 Strategy, Home Office leaders need to build a true partnership with industry on border policy development, and at port level, to reflect the integral part border security plays in trade.

8.1 Recast the current Border Force industry groups with regular communications from Director General Border Force and a new industry forum, chaired by the Border Force Minister

As we emerge from Covid-19-restrictions and the Government moves to take advantages of the opportunities offered by EU Exit, existing communications approaches must be reset and recast to start of two-way dialogue with industry, led by the Minister with responsibility for Border Force.

A regular Ministerial forum with representation from across the border, travel and transport sector would allow a more strategic dialogue about the future of border policy and the implications of moving more checks upstream. This should be reinforced by a refreshed approach to the current modal border facilitation boards allowing Border Force to focus on operational matters.

8.2 Routine consultation with Industry on border and immigration by policy teams, as well from Border Force on implementation.

Whilst Border Force led forums may continue to be the best route to speak to representatives from across the sector, policy and technological programme teams should build in routine consultation with industry into policy development.

This must go further than telling industry about future changes; it is important that this consultation happens at an early stage and that the sector understand how their feedback is used.

8.3 Local Border Force managers must be empowered to be part of the conversation

Partnership is required at all levels to improve the user experience at the border and deliver value for money. Messaging from Ministers and senior officials must empower local Border Force managers to be part of the conversation and closer working also needs to extend to operational delivery.

8.4 Better local data-sharing (supported by a Memorandum of Understanding) and more transparency at a port-level about resourcing to improve local resilience

There is appetite from both port operators and Border Force officers to share information about staffing levels at the local level. Local agreements around data sharing would increase confidence of both parties about what data is needed, how it will be used and how it can be shared.

8.5 Build understanding of Border Force responsibilities and the corresponding duties and responsibilities of industry in how they work with Border Force

In addition to data-sharing, industry need to better understand the full range of Border Force's responsibilities and the corresponding duties and responsibilities of industry in how they work together. This is a timely moment to refresh the Service Level Agreements governing Border Force's work, but also to ensure that industry fully deliver their responsibilities, for example around minimum infrastructure standards.

8.6 Civil servants working on border policy and technology development need to understand better how industry works, their commercial drivers and timelines

Both Border Force and Home Office policy teams would benefit from a better understanding of how industry think and their commercial drivers. Secondments into and out of the Home Office, recruitment from the sector into positions at all levels and training can help improve commercial awareness.



9. Heathrow

Heathrow is the UK's flagship airport and is the primary entry point to the UK for many tourist and business travellers. In 2019, there were 80.9million passenger movements through Heathrow, 94% of which were from international flights along with 1.6 million metric tonnes of freight passing through the airport.

The Border Force operation is spread across the passenger terminals, cargo sheds and the other locations both on and off the airfield, including covering general aviation arrivals from many nearby airfields. In organisational terms, Border Force Heathrow is a standalone region with a target headcount of more than 1600 staff.

The complex and diverse Border Force operation at Heathrow was observed and there were many positives. Officers interacting with passengers were observed to strike a good balance between their immigration and security functions while maintaining good customer service, interacting with passengers politely and were welcoming. Border Force at Heathrow have a significant role to play in the government's *Prosperity agenda* which seems to be understood at an individual level. The focus on the Safeguarding agenda was also positive, with officers interacting with young people as their training suggests.

However, Border Force Heathrow has a number of significant problems, most notably the long queues which frequently form at the Primary Control Points while people wait for a Border Force Officer to examine their passport. These queues undermine any customer service efforts that are made by officers and were more than three hours long at some points during the review period. The Service Level Agreements previously set by Border Force for the maximum queuing time (which are currently suspended) were frequently breached.

The long queues are the visible manifestation of more systemic issues, many of which apply to Border Force as a whole and have been addressed elsewhere in this report, such as poor long-term planning and ineffective recruitment rounds. But some of the causes appear to be unique to Border Force Heathrow.

The “Heathrow problem”.

When Border Force was created, people from different precursor organisations were brought together. While the officers in the newly created Border Force were given matching uniforms, their terms and conditions were not harmonised. Ten years on, this issue has not been resolved, despite multiple attempts that lacked conviction. Officers doing the same job, at the same airport are getting paid different salaries, working different shift patterns and providing different levels of flexibility to the organisation, due to legacy terms and conditions. As well as creating significant challenges for rostering staff and utilising the available resources effectively, this situation creates unfairness between colleagues and has a negative impact on morale and teamwork.

According to Border Force’s data, 60% of the Heathrow workforce who work on the Primary Checkpoint have agreements in place on top of their standard contracts that limit the type of work that they can undertake or the shifts that they are able to be rostered for. These were referred to as reasonable adjustments or local agreements. Whilst it is good practice that an employer should make adjustments for an individual for short periods of time to enable employees to continue to contribute while they recover from an injury or navigate through a particular circumstance, it is surprising to see arrangements in place on a semi-permanent basis where these are not in accordance with employment law or business need. These arrangements are an additional challenge to effectively staffing the airport and limiting the flexibility that Border Force can extract from the workforce, despite having compensated employees for that flexibility in their contracts.

To manage the limited resources available to Border Force Heathrow at particularly busy times (such as towards the end of the school holidays when passenger numbers entering the UK peak), Border Force send staff from other regions to Heathrow. This includes officers from all over the UK. In the 2022 Easter holiday period this process was successful at one level, and the unacceptably long queues predicted in the modelling were avoided thanks to the additional officers available. However, this “solution” is problematic for a number of reasons.

Moving officers across the country is expensive. Even where the working hours are covered by flexibility already compensated for in people’s contracts, the cost of travel, accommodation and the unproductive travel time is all inefficient use of funds. Officers were deployed from as far afield as Glasgow Airport to Heathrow.

A further problem is the opportunity cost. Nearly all staff that are able to work at the Primary Control Point at Heathrow are deployed to that task in peak periods. Similarly capable staff from other ports across the country are also deployed to the Primary Control Point at Heathrow. These staff are taken away from other activity which is deemed as

discretionary for these periods. Whilst a peak in demand should drive resources to flex in order to meet that demand, the opportunity cost of managing these predictable peaks is significant. The inter-regional deployments take place frequently and for long periods of time. The challenges at Heathrow are having a negative impact not only on the effectiveness of Border Force Heathrow but are impacting the entire Border Force operation nationally.

Queues at Heathrow are a frustration for passengers and are a significant problem for the airport operator and airlines. The operator is in competition with other UK airports in the UK and importantly also with other hub airports in Europe. A poor passenger experience will drive passengers who have a choice to an airport elsewhere. The airlines that operate at Heathrow rely on a positive passenger experience and also a timely passage through Border Force checks to enable flight connections to be made. Queues at the border can result in a poor experience for passengers and a financial hit for the airline.

The relationship that Border Force has with private companies operating at Heathrow Airport, including the airport operator itself was observed to be problematic. While examples of good positive relationships were seen between individuals, the operator (Heathrow Airport Limited) expressed dissatisfaction in Border Force, specifically their openness. At a tactical level, they found Border Force unwilling to discuss operational challenges that might occur during busy periods. At a strategic level, they did not feel that Border Force engaged well on issues such as future systems and information requirements. It did not feel like a partnership between Border Force and Heathrow Airport Limited.

Recommendations

Although the focus of this case study was the particular circumstances at Heathrow, the recommendations should be adopted across all Border Force teams and commands to ensure equality and fairness for staff and the efficiency and effectiveness of Border Force operations.

9.1 Border Force Officers need to be brought under a single set of terms and conditions

Border Force officers at Heathrow, along with other officers across the organisation still on “legacy” terms and conditions, should be brought under a single set of terms and conditions. This has been attempted in the past but has never been seen through. Whilst there will be some challenges, a negotiation with the unions should be entered into as soon as possible. There is a significant risk of disruption in this process, which appears to be why it has not been done previously. The disruption should be planned for and mitigated against as far as possible.

9.2 Border Force Officers need to be able to do the tasks that they are paid to do at the times that they need to be done

Whilst short term adjustments to working patterns and tasks are understandable, long term individual adjustments beyond what is required by legislation and unhelpful to the business are not. Where staff are unable to work according to their contract for long periods of time, they should be moved into a role that they can fulfil, with a salary appropriate to the role they are actually undertaking.

9.3 Border Force Heathrow and other busy terminals need to be resourced appropriately to be self-sufficient

Busy Border Force terminals such as Heathrow should be fully resourced to be self-sufficient rather than having to draw resources from elsewhere in Border Force during peak periods. Border Force Heathrow also should consider recruiting its own reservists or contingency workforce for predictable demand peaks as it has done in the past, to avoid diverting staff from the wider organisation. Border Force Heathrow cannot afford further rounds of failed recruitment and recruitment processes need to be fixed by Home Office headquarters. Border Force should look to expand their contingency pool beyond those who have previously worked in the Police for example retired armed forces personnel.

9.4 Border Force Officers at the Heathrow Primary Control Point and elsewhere should work in teams

Elsewhere in Border Force I saw team-working in action. Officers who are part of a team told me that they have a sense of responsibility to their teammates and more positive relationship with the wider organisation. Border Force Heathrow have resisted introducing team working for their Primary Control Point staff; its introduction would contribute to the morale of the workforce, motivating and supporting officers in small and more personal units to foster positive relationships within the organisation.



10. Border Force Maritime and the small boats migration threat

The attempted illegal entry of people travelling from Northern France to the UK across the English Channel by small boats is an enduring and increasing threat to the integrity of the immigration system. This issue first emerged at scale in December 2018 and numbers have continued to rise with record numbers predicted for 2022. This is a very high-risk method of entering the UK; the English Channel is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. The craft that are used to make the crossing are unstable, frequently unseaworthy, overloaded and poorly navigated. The risk to life is significant as was demonstrated by the loss of 27 lives in November 2021.

Migrants entering the UK from France are entering the UK from a safe country. There is no reason for people to be using this dangerous route and its use needs to be disincentivised. The overall approach to this problem over the past few years has been ineffective and possibly counter-productive in preventing these journeys. The Border Force Maritime command has been drawn into a challenge that it is ill-equipped to deal with and yet all consuming.

Border Force Maritime is a command of around 230 sea going staff and 30 vessels with responsibilities for delivering Border Force objectives across the coastline and in the waters around the UK. This involves preventing and detecting attempted illegal entry to the UK by sea and supporting the police and other government departments through maritime operations. The activities that Border Force Maritime undertake include preventing the entry of prohibited and restricted goods into the UK with a focus on firearms and Class A drugs; tackling organised immigration crime with a focus on safeguarding and human trafficking; supporting the coast guard on search and rescue operations and revenue protection.

The size and capability of the Border Force Maritime command predates the escalation in small boat crossings and the task in the Channel now consumes nearly all available resource to the command, with other operational activity being undertaken on an exceptional basis only. A further frustration is that to sustain the Border Force operation in the English Channel, officers from elsewhere are being drafted into the maritime command which detracts from other important activities that should be undertaken at ports across the country. The current resource requirements in the Channel are not sustainable.

The problem of illegal entry by small boats is not solvable in the Channel by Border Force. A whole-system approach is needed and the New Plan for Immigration appears to have the required components to resolve the issue, albeit with some challenges and risks remaining.

Border Force activity

I have met with the Immigration Enforcement Channel Clandestine Threat commander, staff within his command and have visited the Border Force and Immigration Enforcement operations in Dover. Border Force are deployed to support landside operations as well as their operations on the water. I am impressed by the effort and commitment that officers are applying but there are a number of issues of concern. Border Force, which exists to protect the UK border, is effectively rescuing people and then escorting them into port and enabling them to enter the UK. It is unsurprising that there is some public disquiet about this issue.

Border Force vessels (cutters) are not designed for conducting search and rescue operations. They are designed for high-speed interception of vessels for law enforcement purposes. They are not particularly stable in the rough waters of the Channel which makes it particularly difficult for the safe boarding of people (including children) from small vessels that sit low on the water. HM Coast Guard, which is the agency which has primacy for search and rescue operations, tasks the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), a charity organisation crewed by volunteers, or Border Force to respond when coordinating such operations. The Coast Guard does not have any vessels of its own in the Channel. The Coast Guard only has aerial assets including drones and helicopters.

In addition to the lack of Coast Guard assets, there appears to be a lack of coordination across the different parties involved in maritime security. The current response to deal with this challenging phenomenon does not appear effective and has impacts on staffing resources across the whole of Border Force and capability across the maritime command. I feel the current operational arrangement needs to be reviewed, with the most appropriate assets used for tasks, rather than what might be readily available.

Earlier this year, the Home Secretary reasonably requested support from the military in addressing the small boats issue. The Royal Navy now have primacy of operations in the Channel, including command and control of Border Force vessels. Military primacy is positive in terms of public reassurance and perception, although I was broadly impressed with the operational command that was running prior to this transfer. The Royal Navy bring additional reconnaissance and command capabilities which are undoubtedly a positive addition to the existing, exhausting effort by Border Force. The Armed Forces are also contributing to the breakup of the criminal gangs that are trafficking migrants

Both the operating and legal environments in the Channel are challenging, with the busiest shipping lane in the world passing through juxtaposed territorial waters. While the UK Government should keep all tactics to protect its border “on the table”, turning boats around in the Channel will be a very rare occurrence, when environmental, circumstantial and legal requirements are all met concurrently. Therefore, along with turnarounds, a range of activities are required to combat the problem. It demands a comprehensive

policy, an implementation plan and a significant scale of coordinated practical effort. I recognise that considerable effort is already being expended and a National Strategy for Maritime Security is being developed which should bring some of this together. This problem is far from solved.



Recommendations

10.1 Border Force maritime should not be providing an ongoing search and rescue function in the English Channel. Neither Border Force nor Royal Navy vessels are appropriate to this task. Appropriate vessels and crews should be sought under contract to conduct this task

While any maritime asset should of course be made available for search and rescue when required, where it is predictable that search and rescue operations will be stood up on a semi-permanent basis, a more appropriate resource should be deployed to the task. Vessels that are better suited to the task should be contracted for and placed under the command and control of either the Coast Guard or Royal Navy so that Border Force are not used as the primary resource for such operations. I was pleased to see plans for this being developed while I was still working on the review.

10.2 Turnaround tactics should be available to deter migrant crossings

Taking any given tactic off the table is unhelpful where one of the desired outcomes is a deterrent effect. All legal and operationally feasible options should be on the table. The government should maintain the option of turnaround tactics when it is safe and legal to do

so. Contracted vessels and specialist crews may be more effective in conducting these challenging operations.

10.3 Third country processing should be fully implemented

People that have entered the UK should be moved to a third country rapidly for assessment under the UN Convention and other relevant legislation. The rapid movement of people that have entered the UK illegally to a third country reduces the risk of the removal process being frustrated. The eligibility for removal should embrace all cohorts of people who enter the UK illegally.

The lessons from Australia's experience on this issue suggest that the pace with which people are moved, along with avoiding a running commentary on numbers, is useful in achieving success. The discussion of numbers at various stages of operational implementation will potentially look like the odds are still in favour of attempting dangerous, illegal migration journeys and the deterrent effect is lost.

10.4 A strategic, mutually beneficial agreement with France would be desirable to secure a sustainable solution to the challenge of illegal migration by small boats

Ideally there should be revised partnership between France and the UK in order to identify mutually beneficial "wins". It is not in France's interests to have migrants congregating on its north-west coast, so an agreement is conceivable and has been very close in the past.

Some years ago, an agreement between the UK and France was discussed, which entailed a returns arrangement between the UK and France. Migrants picked up in The Channel would be taken back to a French port, ultimately making the journey futile. In return, there is no doubt that the French would look for assistance with the amelioration of the migrant situation in France. The UK could also contribute to the French/EU effort upstream in the Mediterranean, with the deployment of vessels, as was the case historically.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve this problem jointly with France would be a significant contribution to a sustainable solution and should be revitalised to benefit both countries and ultimately the plight of migrants.

In the interim, every migrant boat making the journey to UK shores needs to be tracked and intercepted. There should be no uncontrolled beach landings. And those entering the UK illegally should be removed as soon as is practicable, in line with the New Plan for Immigration. The application of additional resource through a military surge operation may give public confidence, but it is generally recognised as a temporary measure requiring an exit strategy and an effective future sustainable model needs to be built.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Border Force needs a clear identity

1.1 Border Force should have a distinct identity and voice within the Home Office, based around their unique characteristics as a uniformed force

Border Force officers are both civil servants and warranted officers, with powers of arrest, detention and search in specific environments and circumstances. In some situations they have the ability to issue civil penalties. As head of a significant operational command, the Head of Border Force needs a distinct voice in the Home Office to represent the large operation, which should be given equal weight to policy leaders who dominate the senior level of the Home Office and corporate decision-making.

1.2 Border Force need clear leadership on priorities and purpose

Border Force and the Home Office should work together to agree Border Force's purpose and how their responsibilities should be prioritised accordingly, ensuring they are delivering against government objectives for an effective border. If Border Force wants to be the best in the world, they need to remove any ambiguity from their messaging and communicate effectively to all staff exactly what their responsibilities are and how they should be prioritised. All Border Force officers should feel connected to the organisation's overall mission and how their role contributes to the success of that.

2. Border Force needs professional training and a career development pathway

2.1 Border Force must refresh their learning strategy, developing a foundation programme and an ongoing professional development pathway for the Border Force Officers of the future

There should be a training academy to deliver a new learning strategy that supports a structured career pathway for officers and managers across Border Force. This learning strategy must consider not only what Border Force needs today, but how their role is likely to change over the next 5-10 years.

As well as inducting new entrants in a consistent and professional way, the academy should provide continuing professional development and support opportunities for specialisation and secondments to Headquarters, different ports and modes as part of a recognised career journey. This will provide consistency of training standards across the organisation. To inform the training requirement, Border Force must produce clear role profiles and updated job descriptions, including attributes and responsibilities for a variety of grades.

The training academy could bring together training provision for Immigration Enforcement, whose training overlaps in part, to create cohesion, professionalisation and join-up in the law enforcement directorates within the Home Office.

3. Border Force needs a unified workforce

3.1 There should be equity in the workforce

Training to a set standard should be mandated so that colleagues can fully support each other in delivery of the mission. Terms and conditions should be unified so that staff are compensated equally for working unsociable hours or providing flexibility to the organisation. Expectations on staff should match the requirements of the organisation and reward should be based on the contribution that each individual makes.

4. Governance structure

4.1 A new Advisory Board should be created.

This board can consider the competing demands that are being placed on Border Force at any given time, the resources that are available to Border Force, and provide considered, risk-based advice to the Home Secretary and the relevant Home Office Minister of State. This board will include senior representatives (Director General-level) from each of the government departments and agencies that own the policy areas which rely on Border Force delivery at the border. The Board should be chaired by the Director General of Border Force.

Where a department requires Border Force to deliver additional activity beyond that agreed at the start of the planning cycle, this can then be considered in a multilateral forum where the new task can be considered alongside all the existing tasks, recognising the resource is finite and other activities will need to be reduced. This board should meet on a monthly basis to reflect shifting threats, resource availability at any given time and government priorities. Advice can then be provided to Ministers who will decide how Border Force resource should be targeted and what trade-offs should be made at any given time.

This provides better visibility and control for Ministers, accountability for the strategic decisions made by Border Force and enables risks to be exposed and managed at an appropriate level.

4.2 The Operating Mandate should be reviewed and updated

The mandate is a useful document and provides clarity for Border Force on Ministerial expectations and commands. It was surprising to me that the document has not been formally updated and agreed with ministers since 2015, given the changes to the UK border over the past few years. Ministerial expectations of the activities that Border Force

will undertake have changed in this period and a revised document should be produced. The Operating Mandate should be updated immediately and on an ongoing yearly basis, to reflect the current intentions of ministers.

4.3 The Migration and Borders mission should provide systems leadership in policy development across the borders landscape

When developing policy, implementation should be considered at the design phase. As the teams in the Home Office responsible for Migrations and Borders leadership develop their role, they should ensure that new policy proposals include advice to Ministers on conflicts or trade-offs in Border Force delivery. There is a role for these teams in reaching out both across the Home Office and to other Government Departments to ensure that Border Force impacts are considered and reflected in policy development. The new Advisory Board will provide a useful springboard for that thinking.

5. Ministerial oversight

5.1 A single Home Office minister should be appointed with complete oversight of Border Force

One Home Office minister should have responsibility for the entirety of Border Force as an organisation so that its effectiveness can be judged as a whole and decisions made with a full view of Border Force's remit and responsibilities. Border Force should still report to the Home Secretary, but the addition of a dedicated minister should help cover the vast portfolio of Border Force work, ensure that the organisation is in a healthy state in terms of recruitment, training, procurement and long-term planning.

6. Leadership of Border Force

6.1 Border Force Director General should report directly to Home Office ministers

To ensure Border Force's operational voice is fully heard within the Home Office reporting structures, a similar structure to the way the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence operate should be introduced. This would elevate the head of Border Force and ensure that the operational view is given equal representation to that of policy in departmental decision making. The new Border Force Director General position should report directly to the dedicated Border Force Minister and Home Secretary rather than to the Home Office Second Permanent Secretary and all advice to ministers pertaining to Border Force work should capture the views of policy and operational colleagues equally. Thought should be given to a more apposite title for this role such as "Commissioner".

6.2 Border Force Director General should have responsibility for Immigration Enforcement operational teams

To maximise the benefit of an elevated senior leader position providing a strong operational voice, Border Force and Immigration Enforcement should report into the same Director General. This should be a medium-term goal, following the implementation of some of the core recommendations from this review to make Border Force more robust, which will require significant short-term effort. I would also recommend further thought is given to moving the case-working functions, currently undertaken in both Immigration Enforcement and Border Force to another part of the Home Office.

7. Planning and Capabilities: Getting the basics right

7.1 Border Force need to improve their planning capability and have greater autonomy over corporate functions.

A significant portion of Border Force issues have arisen due to constantly running to catch up. This does not allow Border Force to be on the front foot in either their own planning or being an intelligent client of others. Border Force need to clearly establish and articulate their requirements, giving confidence to both Ministers and the enabling teams (for example Human Resources) that they understand their business, have an appropriate grip and are thinking long-term, rather than looking towards the next crisis.

7.2 Corporate enablers need to understand and respond to the operational uniqueness of Border Force

The service provided must be tailored to Border Force requirements. A vacancy in Border Force impacts directly on the customers standing in an immigration hall or waiting at the border for their goods to be checked and also has a direct impact on the security of the UK. Border Force staffing requirements and procurement needs must be delivered at pace.

7.3 The Border Force Executive Committee needs to be revitalised with the new Border Force Minister in the chair

The Border Force Executive Committee should be focused on leading a refresh of the organisation with particular responsibility for recruitment, capabilities planning and delivery of the Border Strategy 2025 to enable proper workforce planning which should be more than a year in advance. The Executive Committee should also be used to hold the Director General Border Force to account for implementing and embedding a clear set of milestone targets in relation to delivering the recommendations agreed from this Review with quarterly reviews of progress against plans.

7.4 Embed a new through-life management approach to all equipment that supports Border Force activity

There is a need to improve planning across all capabilities and components including new policies and a through-life management process will help support this. Every time equipment is purchased whether that is hardware e.g., eGates, cars, or IT software etc, a full lifecycle plan needs to be in place including refurbishment, replacement milestones and training for staff. This should also have clear plans for future procurement processes, and awareness of the time these can take.

7.5 Develop a set of standards

Border Force outlines the minimum standards that Border Force should be achieving through its Expectations Document. However, more consistency of approach is required across all ports in how tasks are undertaken, with what equipment, and a clear understanding of the needs of each location.

7.6 Greater consideration of novel staffing approaches to increase pool of available applicants

Border Force primarily attracts and recruits from too narrow a section of the population and should endeavour to recruit from a broader cross-section of society. It needs to consider how to become an attractive proposition in a crowded labour market. Whilst the significant investment I have suggested in the training of Border Force officers of all grades is one aspect, greater consideration of novel staffing approaches should also be looked into to meet known shortfalls and help increase diversity of workforce e.g., holiday time only workers (may attract university students) or set shifts to increase the workforce at known pinch points e.g. evenings. Border Force is a great place to work with a significant number of opportunities for staff to undertake meaningful roles and this should be advertised.

7.7 Create a recruitment and onboarding system owner

Border Force also needs to improve its end-to-end workforce planning and look at its resourcing on a system-wide basis so that staff are arriving sufficiently trained when needed at ports. A resourcing system owner is required for onboarding bulk new recruits (owning the process from job description, advert, recruitment through to training and into port) as well as to reduce attrition, building an awareness of what keeps Border Force staff in role to minimise turnover.

7.8 Border Force, in its recruitment and promotion policies, needs to ensure there is no element of discrimination in terms of protected characteristics

To provide a workforce that is representative of the UK's diverse population, Border Force also need to make sure that its recruitment and promotion policies are designed to encourage the broadest range of applicants and prevent any elements of discrimination in terms of protected characteristics.

8. Working in true partnership with industry

The border is a space where many of the government's policy objectives to protect the public, take back control and advance Britain's place in the world come together and the transport and security industry can help the Government deliver more effectively. In order to meet the ambitious agenda the Government has set out in the Border 2025 Strategy, Home Office leaders need to build a true partnership with industry on border policy development, and at port level, to reflect the integral part border security plays in trade.

8.1 Recast the current Border Force industry groups with regular communications from Director General Border Force and a new industry forum, chaired by the Border Force Minister

As we emerge from Covid-19-restrictions and the Government moves to take advantages of the opportunities offered by EU Exit, existing communications approaches must be reset and recast to start of two-way dialogue with industry, led by the Minister with responsibility for Border Force.

A regular Ministerial forum with representation from across the border, travel and transport sector would allow a more strategic dialogue about the future of border policy and the implications of moving more checks upstream. This should be reinforced by a refreshed approach to the current modal border facilitation boards allowing Border Force to focus on operational matters.

8.2 Routine consultation with Industry on border and immigration by policy teams, as well from Border Force on implementation.

Whilst Border Force led forums may continue to be the best route to speak to representatives from across the sector, policy and technological programme teams should build in routine consultation with industry into policy development.

This must go further than telling industry about future changes; it is important that this consultation happens at an early stage and that the sector understand how their feedback is used.

8.3 Local Border Force managers must be empowered to be part of the conversation

Partnership is required at all levels to improve the user experience at the border and deliver value for money. Messaging from Ministers and senior officials must empower local Border Force managers to be part of the conversation and closer working also needs to extend to operational delivery.

8.4 Better local data-sharing (supported by a Memorandum of Understanding) and more transparency at a port-level about resourcing to improve local resilience

There is appetite from both port operators and Border Force officers to share information about staffing levels at the local level. Local agreements around data sharing would increase confidence of both parties about what data is needed, how it will be used and how it can be shared.

8.5 Build understanding of Border Force responsibilities and the corresponding duties and responsibilities of industry in how they work with Border Force

In addition to data-sharing, industry need to better understand the full range of Border Force's responsibilities and the corresponding duties and responsibilities of industry in how they work together. This is a timely moment to refresh the Service Level Agreements governing Border Force's work, but also to ensure that industry fully deliver their responsibilities, for example around minimum infrastructure standards.

8.6 Civil servants working on border policy and technology development need to understand better how industry works, their commercial drivers and timelines

Both Border Force and Home Office policy teams would benefit from a better understanding of how industry think and their commercial drivers. Secondments into and out of the Home Office, recruitment from the sector into positions at all levels and training can help improve commercial awareness.

9. Heathrow

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Diplomatic efforts to resolve this problem jointly with France would be a significant contribution to a sustainable solution and should be restarted to benefit both countries and ultimately the plight of migrants.

In the interim, every migrant boat making the journey to UK shores needs to be tracked and intercepted. There should be no uncontrolled beach landings. And those entering the UK illegally should be removed as soon as is practicable, in line with the New Plan for Immigration. The application of additional resource through a military surge operation may give public confidence, but it is generally recognised as a temporary measure requiring an exit strategy and an effective future sustainable model needs to be built.

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