



Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

Annual Report for the period 1 April 2023
to 31 March 2024

David Bolt

Independent Chief Inspector of
Borders and Immigration (Interim)

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to 31 March 2024**

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Our purpose

To help improve the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of the Home Office's border and immigration functions through unfettered, impartial and evidence-based inspection.

All Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration inspection reports can be found at www.gov.uk/ICIBI

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Foreword

I took up post as the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration on 3 June 2024 on an interim basis until a new Independent Chief Inspector is appointed. At the time of writing, the process of selecting a new Independent Chief Inspector is on hold pending the general election, and the timing of a new appointment is uncertain.

The previous Independent Chief Inspector, David Neal, was in post until 20 February 2024, and all of the inspection reports published in 2023-24 were submitted to the Home Secretary by him.¹ The key findings and recommendations from these reports are summarised in this Annual Report. In total, 21 inspection reports were published in 2023-24, 12 of which were published together on 29 February 2024.²

1 The Home Secretary terminated David Neal's appointment on 20 February 2024, before his term in office was due to end on 21 March 2024. See 'Update on Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration' (21 February 2024, Statement UIN HCWS269), <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-02-21/hcws269>.

2 The ICIBI Annual Report 2022-23 was also published on 29 February 2024. It had been sent to the Home Secretary on 27 June 2023.

Overall, the 21 reports contained 104 recommendations, of which 77 were fully accepted, 21 partially accepted, and six not accepted. The percentage of fully accepted recommendations (74%) is an improvement on the previous year (69%), while the percentage of 'partially accepted' recommendations fell (to 20% from 29% in 2022-23). Six recommendations were not accepted, compared with just one in 2022-23.

While the statistics suggest that Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration's (ICIBI's) recommendations largely hit the mark, as ever, the numbers tell only part of the story. Acceptance is not the same as implementation, as the inspectorate has too often found when it has returned to re-inspect an area, and again in 2023-24 re-inspections identified that earlier recommendations had been accepted but had not been implemented. However, I was pleased to learn that during the year there had been a renewed focus within the department on tracking progress with implementing recommendations from the ICIBI and from other bodies, and that the inspectorate is again receiving regular updates, as it had done up until 2019. As well as providing some measure of ICIBI's impact, this should be a useful indicator of where future inspections could add value.

There have been long-standing problems with the time it takes for reports to be published. The delays have attracted widespread criticisms, from parliamentarians, from stakeholders, and in the media. The negative

effects of delayed publication have been well-rehearsed, including by the first Independent Chief Inspector, John Vine, and by me in previous Annual Reports, in particular how it is seen to undermine ICIBI's independence and to reduce the impact of the inspections, especially where it is evident from the Home Office's published response that it has not used the time since it received a report to make necessary improvements.

Of the 21 inspection reports published in 2023-24, only three were published within eight weeks of receipt, as ministers had committed to Parliament to do in 2015, after the Home Office had removed the Independent Chief Inspector's right to publish their own reports. All three were published following David Neal's departure, at a time when questions were being asked in both Houses of Parliament and in the media about the number of unpublished reports. For the 21, the longest time taken to publish was 44 weeks, the shortest six weeks. The average was almost 18 weeks.

David Neal made no secret of his frustrations with the delays. I am aware that he was also concerned about the extent to which the Home Office sought to use the formal process of checking the factual accuracy of draft reports to push for changes that were not factual inaccuracies but regarded what the ICIBI had concluded from the evidence it had collected. And he felt that the provision within the UK Borders Act 2007 for the Secretary of State to make redactions on national security grounds had become overused. Of the 21 reports, ten contained

redactions, which in some cases were extensive. To put this in context, between 2008-09, when the ICIBI was created, and 2022-23 only 11 (out of a total of 179) inspection reports contained redactions.

In terms of these concerns, my approach will be the same as it was when I was previously Independent Chief Inspector (2015-21): to press for the timely publication of reports (within eight weeks wherever possible, accepting that both Houses of Parliament must be sitting for a report to be laid), but also to encourage the Home Office not to wait until a report is published before implementing its recommendations; to examine the Home Office's factual accuracy responses objectively, making changes to draft reports where the evidence supports this, and noting the Home Office response in the final report but without changing the original text where this helps understanding; and to challenge redactions where I believe them to be unwarranted, accepting that the judgement of what is a national security concern rests with the Secretary of State. From experience, I do not expect navigating these issues will be easy, and no doubt there will be disagreements, but I do firmly believe it is in the interests of the Home Office as well as of the ICIBI, and of our many stakeholders, to try to make it work.

The fact that my appointment is on an interim basis has affected the forward-looking parts of this Annual Report, specifically the preparation of a 2024-25 Inspection Plan. Since taking up post, my priorities have been to complete the inspections begun in 2023-24 that were

still ‘live’ at the time of my appointment, and, as soon as possible, to begin a new series of inspections. However, in order not to tie the hands of the incoming Independent Chief Inspector, neither I nor the Senior Sponsor have wanted to set a plan for the whole of 2024-25.³ Instead, I intend to use my time in post to work with stakeholders, the Home Office, and ministers to identify the areas and topics where a future inspection would add most value, in order to help inform the new Independent Chief Inspector’s thinking.

The past few months have not been easy for the inspectorate. In the absence of an Independent Chief Inspector, it has not been possible to complete the inspections that were ‘live’ when the post became vacant or to begin any new inspections. I was concerned about the effect that this might have had on staff morale and retention, which was one of the reasons why I agreed to return to the role as interim Independent Chief Inspector. In fact, I found that morale was high and that a lot of useful work had been done to ensure that the inspectorate remained ‘match fit’. The entire team should take credit for the professional way it has dealt with this period of uncertainty, with particular recognition due to ICIBI’s Chief of Staff, Lamees Abu-Hayyeh, for her calm and positive leadership. I believe that David Neal also deserves recognition for having built a strong and

3 The ICIBI’s Senior Sponsor is the Home Office’s Second Permanent Secretary, who is the departmental lead for the Migration and Borders system.

resilient group of staff who are fully committed to the important work that the ICIBI is charged with doing. I am very much looking forward to working with them.

David Bolt

Independent Chief Inspector (Interim)

June 2024

Role and remit

Legislative framework

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

The UK Borders Act 2007 empowers the Independent Chief Inspector to monitor, report on, and make recommendations about all such functions, with the exception of those exercised at removal centres, short-term holding facilities and under escort arrangements, unless directed to do so by the Secretary of State. The latter matters are subject to inspection by His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons or His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (and equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland).

The UK Borders Act 2007 directs the Independent Chief Inspector to consider and make recommendations about, in particular:

- consistency of approach

- the practice and performance of listed persons compared to other persons doing similar things
- practice and procedure in making decisions
- the treatment of claimants and applicants
- certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (c. 41) (unfounded claim)
- compliance with law about discrimination in the exercise of functions, including reliance on paragraph 17 of Schedule 3 to the Equality Act 2010 (exception for immigration functions)
- practice and procedure in relation to the exercise of enforcement powers (including powers of arrest, entry, search, and seizure)
- practice and procedure in relation to the prevention, detection, and investigation of offences
- practice and procedure in relation to the conduct of criminal proceedings
- whether customs functions have been appropriately exercised by the Secretary of State and the Director of Border Revenue
- the provision of information
- the handling of complaints

- the content of information about conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom which the Secretary of State compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration officers and other officials

In addition, the legislation enables the Secretary of State to request the Independent Chief Inspector to report to them in writing in relation to specified matters, referred to as 'Home Secretary Commissions'. While no inspections were commissioned by the Home Secretary during the period covered by this report, the former Independent Chief Inspector, David Neal, acting in response to a request from the Home Secretary at the end of 2022-23, initiated an investigation into the poor conditions experienced by migrants detained at Manston between December 2021 and November 2022. ICIBI's work on this ceased in March 2024 when the Home Secretary decided to hold a public inquiry into the deterioration of conditions at Manston.

Section 51 of the UK Borders Act 2007 covers the inspection planning process, which includes the requirement to consult the Secretary of State when preparing a plan. In practice, this relates to the inspection programme for the coming year, but it also makes it clear that this does not prevent the Independent Chief Inspector from doing anything that is not mentioned in the plan. Inspection protocols are agreed with the Home Office and define responsibilities, processes,

and timescales that satisfy the legislation and ensure inspections proceed efficiently.

The legislation specifies that the Independent Chief Inspector shall submit to the Secretary of State an annual report on the performance of immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs functions in general, as well as reports on specific matters prepared at their request, with the Secretary of State responsible for laying these reports before Parliament. In 2014, the Secretary of State assumed control of the publication of all inspection reports, deciding when to lay them before Parliament.⁴ Following this change in practice, the Secretary of State committed to laying ICIBI reports in Parliament within eight weeks of receipt, subject to both Houses of Parliament being in session.

Reports are published in full except for any material that the Secretary of State determines is undesirable to publish for reasons of national security or where publication might jeopardise an individual's safety. In such cases, the legislation permits the Secretary

4 As soon as they are laid in Parliament, inspection reports are published on the ICIBI website, together with the Home Office's formal response to the report and its recommendations.

of State to omit the relevant passages from the published report.⁵

5 During 2023-24, ten inspection reports contained redactions: An inspection of visit visa operations (December 2022 – January 2023), published on 20 April 2023; An inspection of the Border Force intelligence functions at the Humber ports (June 2022 – November 2022), published on 11 May 2023; A re-inspection of Border Force’s management of Project KRAKEN at small seaports (January – February 2023), published on 15 June 2023; A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats, including at Western Jet Foil and Manston (January – February 2023), published on 15 June 2023; An inspection of Border Force insider threat (January – March 2023), published on 7 September 2023; An inspection of the Home Office’s Afghan resettlement schemes (October 2022 – April 2023), published on 29 February 2024; An inspection of the use of deprivation of citizenship by the Status Review Unit (April – June 2023), published on 29 February 2024; An inspection of Border Force’s fast parcels operations (May – July 2023), published on 29 February; 2024; A spot check inspection of Border Force operations at Portsmouth International Port (29 August 2023), published on 29 February 2024; and A spot check inspection of Border Force’s operational response to general aviation flights at London City Airport (January to February 2024), published on 26 March 2024.

Statement of purpose

ICIBI's statement of purpose aims to capture the intention behind the legislation, which is for the Independent Chief Inspector to use the evidence gathered during inspections to challenge inefficiency, ineffectiveness, or inconsistency, but to do so constructively and with the aim of helping bring about improvements. The statement of purpose guides ICIBI's focus and approach. It has remained the same since 2015 and appears at the beginning of each inspection report.

“To help improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency of the Home Office's border and immigration functions through unfettered, impartial, and evidence-based inspection.”

The inspection process

The legislation covers in detail what the Independent Chief Inspector is directed to consider, but it does not prescribe how inspections are to be conducted.

During 2023-24, the ICIBI worked to four inspection formats: a 100-day (long) inspection, a 40-day (medium) inspection, and a 30-day (short) inspection. A 10-day ('spot check') inspection was introduced during the year, allowing for short-notice and light-touch observational inspections of some of the Home Office's busy operational settings. By having these different types of inspections, the ICIBI aimed to deliver a more flexible

and relevant programme, with increased reach across the different areas it is mandated to inspect.

The three stages of ICIBI inspection

The 100-day inspection follows the inspection stages detailed below. The short, medium and spot check inspections also consist of planning, inspecting and reporting stages, but follow only some of the sub-stages, based on the topic and requirements of the specific inspection.

Stage 1: Planning

- Scoping
- Open-source research
- Preliminary evidence request
- Familiarisation visit(s)
- Formal notification to the Home Office and full evidence request
- Stakeholder engagement – requests for written submissions
- Website ‘Call for evidence’

Stage 2: Inspecting

- Evidence analysis, including sampling of case files
- Stakeholder meeting(s)
- Onsite visit

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Observations
- Surveys
- Review by the Independent Chief Inspector
- Further evidence request (if required)

Stage 3: Reporting

- Presentation of emerging findings to the Home Office
- Drafting of report
- Factual accuracy checks of draft report by the Home Office
- Report finalised and sent to the Home Secretary (the ICIBI's response to the Home Office's factual accuracy return is sent separately to the relevant Director General)

ICIBI 'expectations'

The ICIBI continues to work to its 'expectations' of asylum, immigration, nationality, and customs functions (see Appendix 4).

Inspection Plan for 2023-24

The Inspection Plan for 2023-24 was published on the ICIBI website on 3 April 2023. The rationale for

publishing a single-year inspection plan was to allow the maximum flexibility and the targeting of resources on topics and areas of the Home Office's borders and immigration operation that require the most focus. The 2023-24 Plan was informed by observations; findings from previous inspections; discussions with ministers, officials, and external stakeholders; and input from ICIBI inspectors.

As referenced above, section 51 of the UK Borders Act 2007 requires the Independent Chief Inspector to consult with the Home Secretary when preparing the Inspection Plan. The Independent Chief Inspector wrote to the Home Secretary on 1 March 2023 with a proposed 2023-24 Inspection Plan, and a response was received on 3 April 2023. The latter noted that “the implementation of significant changes to be brought by the passage, if successful, of the Illegal Migration Bill may, dependent on scope, impact on some planned areas of inspection”. It also requested that, if possible, the planned inspection of the use of hotels in Northern Ireland to house asylum-seeking families with children be brought forward, and the inspection of contingency asylum accommodation be moved to Quarter 3.⁶ The Independent Chief Inspector agreed to these changes, recognising that there would be advantages to examining contingency asylum accommodation later in the year, as suggested, as it was expected that the large sites programme would be at a more advanced stage at that point.

6 October to December 2023

Inspection findings 2023-24

Overview

During 2023-24, 21 inspection reports were published, 12 of them on the same day (29 February 2024). The key points from each inspection report published in 2023-24 are summarised below. The reports are listed in the order in which they were completed and sent to the Home Secretary, rather than by publication date.

An inspection of visit visa operations (December 2022 – January 2023)⁷

This inspection examined the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of UK Visas and Immigration's interim workflow routing solution in visit visa operations. The routing solution was introduced in 2020 to replace a streaming tool previously used by the Home Office, which was withdrawn following a Judicial Review.

The inspection found that the routing solution was largely compliant with the Equalities Act 2010, but the Home Office needed to maintain up-to-date reviews of compliance and ensure that its ways of working remained consistent with its policy. The workflow solution was generally accurate in routing work to the correct

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-visit-visa-operations-december-2022-to-january-2023>

decision-making resource based on the information contained within it, and inspectors understood that ethical issues identified in the previous streaming tool had been 'designed out'. Overall, applications were being decided on individual merit and with sound consideration of evidence. However, there was a lack of first-line assurance to monitor the effectiveness of the routing solution. The Home Office was aware of this and had incorporated risk management processes into the solution, but it needed to be able to incorporate new risks alongside existing ones.

The inspection resulted in five recommendations, including to: review the 'interim' status of the Complexity Application Routing Solution (CARS) and declare the Home Office's long-term intentions regarding its use; review equality impact assessments and risk profiles regularly; and improve first-line assurance to include all operational grades and processes, with focus on routing and decision quality. The Home Office fully accepted all five recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 10 February 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 20 April 2023.

An inspection of the Border Force intelligence functions at the Humber ports (June 2022 – November 2022)⁸

This inspection focused on the Border Force intelligence functions at the Humber ports, including: the Border Force intelligence strategy for collecting, developing, targeting, handling, and analysing intelligence, and how the strategy is communicated to and operationalised by staff at the Humber ports; and the Border Force intelligence tasking process, including handoffs to law enforcement agencies (LEAs) for intelligence development.

The inspection found that business transformation within Border Force intelligence had led to improved intelligence flows but had created silos between different intelligence functions, and that the tasking process was bureaucratic. Staff were motivated and loyal and there was good joint working in the multi-agency hubs, but staff retention was an issue as other agencies offered higher salaries. There was a lack of management information due to poor data and inefficient IT systems. Industry stakeholders were keen to work more closely with Border Force and provide intelligence to them, but there was a lack of strategic level engagement, routine local interaction,

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-border-force-intelligence-functions-at-the-humber-ports-june-2022-to-november-2022>

and confusion about who in Border Force had the responsibility for industry engagement.

The inspection resulted in seven recommendations, including to: improve the tasking processes; improve the processes for the management and dissemination of intelligence; and review the training and accreditation provision for Border Force intelligence staff. The Home Office fully accepted five recommendations and partially accepted two.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 18 January 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 11 May 2023.

A re-inspection of Border Force's management of Project KRAKEN at small seaports (January – February 2023)⁹

This re-inspection focused on the effectiveness of Project KRAKEN following its relaunch in 2022, including strategic and tactical project delivery, engagement with stakeholders (pre- and post-relaunch), publicity materials, reporting mechanisms and outcomes.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-re-inspection-of-border-forces-management-of-project-kraken-at-small-seaports-january-february-2023>

The re-inspection found that the project's relaunch and updated branding had re-energised it and had led to a significant increase in reports received by Crimestoppers, although the national team responsible for the project did not have any clearly defined or ongoing measures of its success. Field Intelligence Officers (FIOs), who shared responsibility for the operational delivery of the project, were proactive in identifying ways to reach stakeholders, but they were overstretched, and levels of awareness of the project by FIOs varied in the locations visited. Challenges remained with linking project reports to outcomes and sharing them to encourage further reporting.

The re-inspection resulted in four recommendations, including to: develop a mechanism to track the outcomes of intelligence generated through Project KRAKEN; and allocate an annual budget to the Project. The Home Office fully accepted one recommendation, partially accepted one, and did not accept the other two. The latter concerned developing an engagement strategy and a social media campaign to raise awareness of Project KRAKEN. The Home Office accepted the importance of engagement and communication but argued that this was already covered by existing forums and plans.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 16 March 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 15 June 2023.

A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats, including at Western Jet Foil and Manston (January – February 2023)¹⁰

This re-inspection examined the Home Office’s progress on recommendations made in the ICIBI’s report, ‘An inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at Tug Haven and Western Jet Foil (December 2021 – January 2022)’,¹¹ which covered security, vulnerability, collection and use of information, and resourcing. The inspection also considered developments since the Independent Chief Inspector’s visit to Manston short-term holding facility in October 2022.

The re-inspection found that new appointments had provided more senior leadership capacity for the small boats’ operation, but the new leadership structure was not yet embedded and had not been stress-tested when

10 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-re-inspection-of-the-initial-processing-of-migrants-arriving-via-small-boats-including-at-western-jet-foil-and-manston-january-february-2023>

11 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-initial-processing-of-migrants-arriving-via-small-boats-at-tug-haven-and-western-jet-foil-december-2021-january-2022>

arrival volumes were high. There was no clear overall strategy and delivery plan for small boat operations and the Small Boats Operational Command (SBOC) needed to develop a cultural identity. There were some improvements to staff awareness of vulnerabilities, but these had been hampered by staff being overstretched and a lack of training. The strategy for data collection was unclear, and there was still no single reliable system in place. Conditions at Manston had improved since October 2022, including in the provision of heated purpose-designed marquees, food and medical support.

The re-inspection resulted in three recommendations: to publish a strategy for SBOC and the processing of small boat arrivals, covering Western Jet Foil and Manston; to develop a data strategy for the small boats operation; and to conduct a training needs analysis for SBOC operations to produce a comprehensive training and development plan. The Home Office fully accepted two recommendations and partially accepted one.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 4 April 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 15 June 2023.

An inspection of the Home Office's operations to effect the removal of Foreign National Offenders¹²

This inspection examined the Home Office's operations to effect the removal of foreign national offenders (FNOs), looking at the effectiveness and quality of the services provided by the Immigration Prison Teams (IPTs), the prioritisation of cases for removal, and the effectiveness of the Early Removal and Facilitated Return Schemes. It also examined the Home Office's strategy for the collection, monitoring, and reporting of FNO data, and how this data was used to capture best practice and drive improvements, and the role of caseworking teams in prioritising and progressing FNO cases towards removal.

The inspection found that the FNO Returns Command (FNORC) had a complex structure, and that shifting priorities prevented caseworking teams from focusing on making deportation decisions. Data and performance reporting was not accurate or effective, and there was a reliance on local spreadsheets instead of a central database. The IPTs were motivated and proactive, but their wide geographical spread hindered their ability to carry out certain functions and left them isolated.

12 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-home-offices-operations-to-effect-the-removal-of-foreign-national-offenders>

The IPTs promoted the Facilitated Return Scheme (FRS) effectively, but a lack of a clear processes and standardisation meant FRS cases were not expedited.

The inspection resulted in four recommendations, including to: produce a data strategy; undertake a monthly review of FNORC performance; carry out an end-to-end review of the FNORC caseworking functions; and develop a process to track foreign national offender cases from referral to decision outcome, with clear ownership and timelines. The Home Office fully accepted three recommendations and partially accepted one.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 13 April 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 June 2023.

An inspection of Border Force insider threat (January – March 2023)¹³

This inspection examined the measures available to Border Force to identify insider threat and how Border Force mitigates and responds to the risk of insider threat. It considered the insider threat posed by Border Force staff. It did not include threats posed by staff employed by private contractors and did not look at physical security or insider risk to physical critical assets.

13 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-border-force-insider-threat-january-march-2023>

The inspection found that the relevant organisational structures were confused, with complex inter-relationships and unclear lines of accountability. Border Force had demonstrated a willingness to build organisational trust and develop a supportive culture, but the People Survey results suggested wide-level disaffection among staff. Drug and alcohol testing and random searching of staff was a key objective of the Border Force insider threat programme when it was set up in 2018, but these measures had not been introduced. Border Force had assessed the risk of insider threat to the organisation, which resulted in the creation of a 'control strategy' in 2021, but this did not appear to have been updated. There were numerous ways in which allegations, behaviours, or concerns could be investigated or processed, but limited ability to share data between teams.

The inspection resulted in eight recommendations, including to: conduct a review of insider threat in Border Force to facilitate the development of a strategic vision and annual plan; make better use of vetting data to create a comprehensive insider threat picture for Border Force and drive early intervention; ensure there is a clear escalation route to a single Home Office leader for issues that cut across Border Force and the wider Home Office; introduce mandatory insider threat awareness training for staff; conduct role-based risk assessments in key areas; and update social media policy for Border Force operational staff. The Home Office fully accepted six recommendations and partially accepted two.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 26 May 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 7 September 2023.

An inspection of the Home Office's Afghan resettlement schemes (October 2022 – April 2023)¹⁴

This inspection examined the effectiveness, efficiency, and consistency of the Home Office's processing of applications to Afghan resettlement schemes. As eligibility for the schemes is determined by other government departments and the UNHCR, the inspection focused on the aspects of the routes that related to Home Office decision making.

The inspection found that the Home Office did not have a single accurate dataset for applicants in the Operation PITTING cohort and caseworkers did not have access to all the systems they needed, although the data relating to applications made after Operation PITTING was of a good standard.¹⁵ Home Office staff were passionate

14 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-home-offices-afghan-resettlement-schemes-october-2022-april-2023>

15 Operation PITTING was a British military operation to evacuate British nationals and eligible Afghans from Afghanistan following the 2021 Taliban offensive. In August 2021, over 15,000 people were airlifted to safety in the UK and third countries.

about their roles, teams were well resourced and there was a culture that allowed decisions to be challenged. However, the teams had no performance targets, and one team did not have a case allocation process, allowing staff to choose the cases they processed. Equality Impact Assessments were of a good quality and there was good evidence of compliance with the public sector equality duty.

The inspection resulted in nine recommendations, including to: publish information regarding the pause to processing overseas applications and a proposed timeframe for when decision making on applications will recommence;¹⁶ develop an accurate dataset for the Afghan resettlement schemes; establish a consistent assurance regime with a focus on decision quality; publish updated guidance relating to those who were relocated during Operation PITTING with whom the Home Office had lost contact in order to ensure they would not be subject to enforcement action solely because of a failure to regularise their immigration status; and develop robust contingency plans to prepare for future crisis events.

The Home Office fully accepted seven recommendations, partially accepted one recommendation, and did not

16 During the course of this inspection the Home Office paused the issuing of entry clearances to successful applicants due to a lack of suitable accommodation in the UK.

accept one recommendation. The latter called for the Home Office to contact all those who were unilaterally transferred ('flipped') to the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) from the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) to advise them of the change. The Home Office assessed that there were no advantages or benefits for the individuals or the department to contact those who were transferred to ACRS retrospectively to advise them of that change, as there was likely to be no substantive material disadvantage suffered as a result of being flipped from UKRS to ACRS.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 9 June 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 29 February 2024.

A re-inspection of ePassport gates (May 2023)¹⁷

Through onsite observations, this re-inspection examined the effectiveness of ePassport gates at three ports of entry (Terminal 4 Heathrow Airport, Luton Airport, and Stansted Airport) and assessed progress against the recommendations made in the ICIBI's report, 'An inspection of e-Passport gates (June 2020 – January 2021)'.¹⁸

17 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-re-inspection-of-epassport-gates-may-2023>

18 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-epassport-gates-june-2020-january-2021>

The re-inspection found that Border Force Officers were distracted from key duties at the ePassport gates as they were drawn into customer service and queue management activity. The deployment of Border Force staff to the three roles relevant to the operation of the ePassport gates (roving officer, monitoring officer, and referrals officer) was inconsistent and not always in line with Home Office guidance and policy. Communication between Border Force staff was inefficient, hampered by a lack of basic equipment such as radios and desk telephones in some locations, with unprofessional workarounds in place, including waving or signalling to each other. The new Border Crossing system did not allow Border Force managers to extract data that would help them to recognise patterns and therefore be able to plan and manage the flow of passengers more effectively. The recommendations from the 2021 inspection report had not been delivered, even though they had been accepted by the Home Office, demonstrating that monitoring progress through routine assurance activity was inadequate.

The re-inspection resulted in six recommendations, including to: train staff deployed to the three ePassport gates roles in vulnerability and behavioural detection; implement effective oversight and assurance mechanisms for the roving officers; ensure rostering is robust so officers carry out their roles in line with Border Force guidance and Standard Operating Procedures; review communication requirements at ports; and improve the quality of management information on

ePassport gate performance. The Home Office fully accepted five recommendations and partially accepted one recommendation.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 16 June 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 February 2024.

An inspection of the use of deprivation of citizenship by the Status Review Unit (April – June 2023)¹⁹

This inspection examined the management of deprivation of citizenship cases by the Home Office’s Status Review Unit (SRU), focusing on the referral and progression of cases, quality assurance, training, and guidance. The inspection excluded deprivation of citizenship cases managed by the Special Cases Unit.

The inspection found that this was an area of the Home Office that was working well. SRU decision makers were knowledgeable, engaged, and felt supported in their work. A dedicated training team was in place to ensure a solid foundation and follow-up training provision for staff. Decision makers conducted thorough investigations and issued well-written decision notices. SRU’s record of having decisions upheld on appeal

19 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-use-of-deprivation-of-citizenship-by-the-status-review-unit-april-june-2023>

was good, and the team had feedback loops in place to ensure learning from appeal outcomes. More could be done to reduce data errors and ensure that cases were managed and stored in an orderly and secure manner, and a review of resourcing and benchmarks could also result in greater efficiencies and help reduce the work in progress backlog.

The inspection resulted in four recommendations, including to: review mechanisms for recording case data to ensure that record keeping is consistent, quality assured, and allows for proper analysis to inform planning; implement a plan to manage the backlog of cases 'on hold'; review benchmarks and work allocations in the Deprivation Team to ensure efficient and effective management of resources and outputs; and review the resourcing and role-specific training required by the training team. The Home Office fully accepted all four recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 24 July 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 29 February 2024.

An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation for families with children in Northern Ireland (May – June 2023)²⁰

This inspection was initiated following a request from senior officials in the Home Office who were responding to concerns from local statutory services and non-governmental organisations about safeguarding issues in hotels in Northern Ireland occupied by family groups of asylum seekers. It examined key safeguarding concerns; provider compliance with the requirements of the accommodation contract, and supporting guidance and standards relating to safeguarding; sharing and reporting of safeguarding data and information; and Home Office governance and assurance processes for safeguarding. The inspection also considered progress on the implementation of relevant recommendations from the 2021 ICIBI inspection of contingency asylum accommodation.²¹

The inspection found that, in common with a previous inspection of hotels used to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on the south

20 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-contingency-asylum-accommodation-for-families-with-children-in-northern-ireland-may-june-2023>

21 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-contingency-asylum-accommodation>

coast of England, basic clearances and training for some contractor staff had not been undertaken, resulting in a number of staff working with children and vulnerable adults in hotels for many months without undergoing checks or training. Health visitors reported that young people were losing weight as they were refusing to eat culturally unfamiliar food, and the Home Office needed a sufficiently responsive assurance regime to tackle this. The Home Office's solution to improved communication with service users in hotels was not working, despite this having been raised in the 2021 inspection. Welfare support staff employed by the accommodation provider went beyond the contractual requirements to assist families, and charities working in hotels were bridging gaps in statutory service provision that were exacerbated by inadequate data-sharing arrangements with the Home Office.

The inspection resulted in five recommendations, including to: clarify the responsibilities of all agencies involved in safeguarding; ensure the views of children and young people inform service delivery; review the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility contract; improve data quality, recording, and sharing; and strengthen assurance and monitoring arrangements. The Home Office fully accepted two recommendations and partially accepted three recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 8 August 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 February 2024.

A spot check inspection of Border Force operations at Portsmouth International Port (29 August 2023)²²

This inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of Border Force operations at Portsmouth International Port, a facility handling both passenger ferry arrivals and a significant amount of freight. The inspection was a pilot of a proposed new ‘spot check’ methodology for short-notice, light-touch observational inspections of some of the Home Office’s busy operational settings.

The inspection found that the Border Force team at Portsmouth appeared to benefit from a culture of strong management and leadership, and that staff worked effectively and with enthusiasm in conducting required checks on arriving passengers and freight. Inspectors observed that, while facilities were adequate overall, some key improvements would enhance operational efficiency and staff welfare.

The inspection resulted in three recommendations. One was fully accepted, one partially accepted, and one was not accepted. The Home Office accepted a recommendation that the car lane inspection booths be improved, and partially accepted a recommendation

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-spot-check-inspection-of-border-force-operations-at-portsmouth-international-port-29-august-2023>

that port operators be provided with greater clarity on responsibility for the cost of border facilities. It did not accept a recommendation to review resourcing processes at Border Force South Central to ensure consistent deployment to all operational priorities within the region, arguing that it already had a “mature” resourcing process in place.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 6 September 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 29 February 2024. In its formal response, the Home Office stated that these figures gave a misleading picture of performance because of a specific issue at London City Airport, where GA flights were being assessed and recorded in a manner that was contrary to standard practice. The Home Office response indicated that national leads had already identified this issue and were seeking to address it.

An inspection of Border Force’s fast parcels operations (May – July 2023)²³

This inspection examined Border Force’s capability to detect prohibited and restricted items arriving in the UK in fast parcels. A ‘fast parcel’ is a consignment where a premium has been paid to send it quickly, providing

23 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-border-forces-fast-parcels-operations-may-july-2023>

the customer with a timebound, door-to-door service, as opposed to a 'postal packet' sent via a national postal service.

The inspection found that the emphasis on immigration checks in Border Force's Operating Mandate has an impact on its capacity to address other border security risks, including those arising from fast parcels entering the UK. The inspection concluded that the level of Border Force staffing to check arriving fast parcels was inadequate, and that improvements to detection equipment were needed. Inspectors also found that the recording of data was inefficient and that managers were unable to extract meaningful management information from systems owned by His Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC). The inspection also identified shortcomings in the governance and assurance regime around fast parcels and in Border Force's engagement with stakeholders at the strategic level.

The inspection resulted in ten recommendations, including to: review and refresh the Border Force Operating Mandate; review the resourcing for fast parcel operations; establish a baseline understanding of the levels of prohibited and restricted items in fast parcels in order to be able to measure Border Force's operational effectiveness; introduce a digital solution to record fast parcel examinations in real time; designate a single national team to manage detection equipment; set and assure performance expectations for all staff working in

fast parcels; and establish a national working group to improve stakeholder engagement.

The Home Office accepted six recommendations and partially accepted three. The department did not accept a recommendation that Border Force should work with HMRC to obtain management information from the latter's system for recording goods seized from fast parcels, as the system was due to be decommissioned and the Home Office had its own system from which management information can be obtained.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 28 September 2023 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 29 February 2024.

A re-inspection of the use of hotels for housing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (September – October 2023)²⁴

This re-inspection examined the Home Office's use of hotels to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) children, with a particular focus on the

24 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-re-inspection-of-the-use-of-hotels-for-housing-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-september-october-2023>

implementation of the recommendations from ICIBI's inspection of this area in 2022.²⁵

The 2022 inspection report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 9 June 2022 and published on 19 October 2022. It made four recommendations aimed at ensuring the operation was fully centred on the UAS children accommodated in the hotels. It recommended that the Home Office should: (immediately) prevent individuals without a clear enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check from residing or working in hotels being used to house UAS children; (within one month) assess the collective needs of children in hotels to inform the development of standards, service design and operational delivery; (within three months) develop a challenge and scrutiny mechanism to monitor delivery of the operation with a specific focus on safeguarding children's welfare; and (within six months) develop and begin delivering an exit strategy to end the use of hotels to house unaccompanied children. The Home Office accepted the first of these recommendations. It partially accepted the other three as it was unable to meet the prescribed timescales.

One year on, the re-inspection found that the Home Office was still grappling with the challenges of managing

25 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-use-of-hotels-for-housing-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-uasc-march-may-2022>

an operation that was only ever envisaged to be a short-term solution to the need to provide UAS children with safe and appropriate accommodation. With respect to implementing the four recommendations, inspectors found that there had been limited progress. The re-inspection concluded that: steps taken by the Home Office to monitor DBS checking of staff by contractors fell short of effective oversight; the recommended assessment of the collective needs of children had not taken place, and no equality impact assessment of the use of hotels to accommodate UAS children had been completed; a challenge and scrutiny mechanism had not been established; and although the Home Office had been open to external scrutiny and invited organisations into hotels to challenge the safeguarding arrangements and to promote the welfare of children, it had often been too slow to implement the recommendations arising from these visits. Finally, the re-inspection found that the Home Office still did not have an exit strategy when litigation was brought to challenge its practices. As a result of that litigation, at the time of the re-inspection, the Home Office was being supervised by the High Court as it reduced its use of hotels to accommodate unaccompanied children.

The re-inspection resulted in five recommendations. Three were new, including to: review the role of team leaders in hotels housing children and introduce professional supervision; work with partners to provide advocacy support for children; and provide written information to children in their own first language on

what would happen to them next and how to raise any concerns they may have. One reiterated the recommendation to set out a clear strategy for ending the use of hotels to house UAS children, taking account of the High Court's directions, and working in partnership with Kent County Council.

The Home Office fully accepted these four recommendations. The fifth recommendation was to strengthen assurance and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that contractors were meeting safeguarding and other requirements, again stressing the importance of DBS checks. This was partially accepted, with the Home Office's response indicating that it was already doing what was recommended.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 7 November 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 February 2024.

An inspection of Border Force practice and procedures in relation to firearms (September – October 2023)²⁶

This inspection examined the availability and quality of the training, equipment, and guidance provided to Border

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-border-force-practice-and-procedures-in-relation-to-firearms-september-october-2023>

Force officers in relation to the identification, handling, and storage of firearms.

The inspection found that, while Border Force's Firearms Border Steering Group provided a forum to discuss emerging issues and operational challenges to Border Force around firearms, there was no clear governance structure for, or strategic oversight of, this area. The inspection also found that risks associated with firearms were not managed effectively. Risk assessments reviewed by inspectors were out of date, and firearms risks were not recorded on regional risk registers. Ownership of the Border Force firearms policy was unclear, and the review of several key policy documents was overdue. The inspection also concluded that training packages on firearms needed to be updated and professionalised, and that many staff were overdue refresher training.

The inspection resulted in eight recommendations, including to: appoint a senior responsible owner to oversee firearms-related activity; review risk management practice to drive consistency; and conduct a training needs analysis to ensure that the quality and availability of training delivery met the demand. The Home Office fully accepted all eight recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 7 November 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 February 2024.

An inspection of illegal working enforcement (August – October 2023)²⁷

This inspection examined the Home Office’s illegal working enforcement activities, including the planning and operationalisation of ‘visits’ by Immigration Enforcement to businesses where illegal working was suspected, as well as the activities that followed those visits.

The inspection found that the volume of illegal working enforcement activity had increased significantly in 2023, and that enforcement visits were generally well planned and executed. Planning for operations was carried out in line with the relevant guidance and procedures, and, in the visits observed by inspectors, officers demonstrated professionalism and courtesy while carrying out their roles. Inspectors found that post-operation debriefs were well-delivered, but that the recording of information gleaned from visits was inconsistent. More broadly, there was a lack of clarity about how the effectiveness of illegal working enforcement activity could be measured and about the wider strategic objectives to which it was meant to contribute.

27 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-illegal-working-enforcement-august-october-2023>

The inspection resulted in six recommendations, including to: implement a system to provide officers in the field with easy access to up-to-date and succinct guidance; ensure that officers are using and recording use of coercive powers accurately; improve first- and second-line assurance and review how feedback is delivered to operational staff; and set out clear objectives for illegal working enforcement activity and establish metrics against which performance could be measured. The Home Office fully accepted all six recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 22 November 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 February 2024.

An inspection of asylum casework (June – October 2023)²⁸

This inspection examined asylum decision making since the implementation of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (NABA), including how the NABA was operationalised, and whether the Home Office was adequately resourced (with staff sufficiently trained) to make decisions efficiently and effectively, and the effectiveness of measures taken by the Home Office to address delays and clear the initial decision backlog, such as new workflow and case progression processes.

28 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-asylum-casework-june-october-2023>

The inspection found that the introduction of new ways of working and the use of staff from other government departments to process straightforward asylum claims had enabled a higher volume of decisions to be made, helping almost to clear the backlog of ‘legacy’ asylum claims in 2023. However, the initial focus on processing Albanian claims at the expense of those from other nationalities, under Operation BRIDORA, stalled productivity. A new withdrawals policy saw a large increase in the number of claims classified as ‘withdrawn’, although a significant number subsequently required further processing by the Home Office. Only one withdrawn claim was quality assured over a period of 17 months, quality assurance of asylum decisions fell overall, and Asylum Operations missed its own target to assure 3.5% of interviews and decisions every month in 2023.

There had been no evaluation of the new streamlined asylum process before it was implemented for ‘flow’ claims, and the concise interview project was introduced without consultation or transparency, so staff and legal representatives did not understand its purpose. Large numbers of claimants were stuck in the inadmissibility process, but only a tiny number of people were removed to a safe third country. Despite this, no evaluation had been carried out of the efficiency and effectiveness of the inadmissibility process and its impact on the asylum backlog. While the target to triple the number of asylum decision makers was met and productivity increased, this was at the expense of the recruitment of administrative

and technical support staff, and the relentless pressure to meet targets meant that staff attrition rates remained high. A new senior management structure in Asylum Operations had brought stability, greater accountability and the ability to ‘speak truth to power’, but Home Office IT systems and the quality of the data they produced continued to be a significant concern.

The inspection resulted in six recommendations, including to: introduce a published service standard for deciding asylum claims; identify and prioritise vulnerable asylum claimants; increase the quality assurance of asylum decisions (including withdrawn claims) to meet Asylum Operations’ own target of 3.5%; and collect data on vulnerability and protected characteristics to inform equality impact assessments and the Home Office’s understanding of how its policies impact protected groups. The Home Office fully accepted four recommendations and partially accepted two.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 11 January 2024 and laid in Parliament on 29 February 2024.

An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector (August 2023 – November 2023)²⁹

This inspection examined the interaction between the UK's immigration system and the social care sector. It assessed the effects of the addition of senior care workers, care workers and home carers to the Shortage Occupation List (SOL), which made those roles eligible for recruitment through the Skilled Worker immigration route. The inspection focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of the sponsor licensing process, the quality of services provided by the compliance teams, including the provisions in place to safeguard care sector employees from exploitation, and the extent and quality of engagement and communication between the Home Office and the social care sector.

The inspection found that the Home Office's limited understanding of the social care sector and shortcomings in its capacity to ensure sponsor compliance left migrant care workers at risk of exploitation and modern slavery. The high recruitment fees charged by agencies operating abroad, poor pay and conditions in the sector, and the lack of information available to migrant workers regarding

29 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-immigration-system-as-it-relates-to-the-social-care-sector-august-2023-to-november-2023>

their employment rights worsened their position, but they feared reporting unscrupulous employers because of the risk of their visas being revoked. The Home Office compliance function was weak, with approximately one compliance officer for every 1,600 licensed sponsors at the time of the inspection. While the Home Office placed greater reliance on remote, digital compliance checks, these were relatively new, and inspectors heard that operational staff were sceptical about their effectiveness.

The inspection resulted in five recommendations, including to: review the addition of care workers and home carers to the Skilled Worker route; review the sponsor licensing application and decision-making process; and review its compliance function to minimise blockages and ensure an efficient workflow. Two recommendations were concerned with improving partnership working: the Home Office should work with enforcement and regulatory partners to develop and agree a multi-partner memorandum of understanding, and it should work in partnership with the responsible government departments and agencies to agree a concise 'migrant's guide to UK employment rights'. The Home Office fully accepted all five recommendations.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 6 February 2024 and laid in Parliament on 26 March 2024.

A spot check inspection of Border Force's operational response to general aviation flights at London City Airport (January – February 2024)³⁰

This inspection examined the efficiency and effectiveness of Border Force's operational response to general aviation (GA) flights at London City Airport (LCY), including record keeping, compliance with the Border Force Operating Mandate and general aviation policies, and assurance.

The inspection found that Border Force at LCY was not complying with the guidance relating to the number of high- and low-risk flights that should be physically met by staff. The figures for 2023 were significantly below what was required.³¹ In its formal response, the Home Office stated that these figures gave a misleading picture of performance because of a specific issue at London City Airport, where GA flights were being assessed and recorded in a manner that was contrary to standard practice. The Home Office response indicated that national leads had already identified this issue and were

30 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-spot-check-inspection-of-border-forces-operational-response-to-general-aviation-flights-at-london-city-airport-january-to-february-2024>

31 The figures were redacted in the published report.

seeking to address it. Inspectors sampled flight records and identified concerns around the misclassification of passengers by nationality and incorrect criteria used to clear high-risk flights remotely. Record keeping was poor and did not follow the requirements stated in Border Force guidance, and there was no assurance regime for GA work. The Border Force national GA team was aware of the issues at LCY, but it was unclear to inspectors what action was being taken by them or by regional management to address them. Staff were unfamiliar with Border Force GA guidance, which contradicted the Operating Mandate, and there was no formal training in GA work, although a course was due to be introduced during 2024.

The inspection resulted in four recommendations. Three were accepted fully, including to: roll out a national training package in GA work to ensure consistency and resolve the discrepancies between the Border Force Operating Mandate and GA guidance; complete GA records in line with the guidance; and review national assurance expectations to ensure that first- and second-line assurance of GA activity is sufficient. The fourth recommendation was partially accepted. It was to review GA guidance to enable the Border Force national GA team to evaluate how guidance is followed nationally and evaluate, and where necessary escalate, any non-compliance, and for managers at LCY to inform the team when they have insufficient resources to meet the required number of risk-assessed GA flights. The Home

Office argued that reviews were already being done and risks actively managed.

The report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 14 February 2024 and laid in Parliament, with redactions, on 26 March 2024.

‘Live’ inspections as at 31 March 2024

Two inspections begun during 2023-24 were ‘live’ as at 31 March 2024:

- An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation
- An inspection of the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority

Inspections not commenced

Five inspections that had been included in ICIBI’s 2023-24 Inspection Plan had not commenced by the end of the business year:

- A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving by small boat
- An inspection of the Home Office’s use of age assessments
- An inspection of ‘Adults at risk in immigration detention’ policy
- An inspection of the High Potential Individual visa route
- An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the fishing industry

The vacancy in the post of Independent Chief Inspector from 20 February 2024 meant that it was not possible for the inspectorate to initiate new inspections after that date. These topics will be considered for inclusion in future Inspection Plans.

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Purpose

Section 48(2)(j) of the UK Borders Act 2007 states that the Independent Chief Inspector shall consider and make recommendations about “the content of information and conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom which the Secretary of State compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration and other officials”.

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was established in 2009 to advise the Independent Chief Inspector on the content and quality of country of origin information (COI) and guidance notes produced by the Home Office and relied upon by decision makers.

How the IAGCI works

The IAGCI follows the following process when carrying out reviews of Home Office country of origin information:

- Stage 1: Taking account of the volume of asylum claims in relation to particular countries and of when particular COI products were last reviewed, the Chair of the IAGCI proposes to the Independent Chief Inspector which countries/products should next be reviewed by the Group.

- Stage 2: Independent reviewers, typically academics with relevant knowledge and expertise, are commissioned to review the products and to recommend amendments (additions, deletions, clarifications), citing their evidence. (The Inspectorate manages the tendering process and funds the reviews, and the Independent Chief Inspector has to sign off on the IAGCI's recommended reviewer from those replying to the tender.)
- Stage 3: The IAGCI quality assures the submitted reviews and sends them to the Home Office unit responsible for producing COI material (the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT)) for it to consider and respond to the reviewer's recommendations.
- Stage 4: The IAGCI (with the Independent Chief Inspector) holds a meeting with CPIT and the reviewers to go through the reviews and to consider, in particular, any points of disagreement.
- Stage 5: Where the meeting identifies that these are required, the IAGCI commissions any further inputs from the reviewer, before signing off the reviews as complete.
- Stage 6: The Independent Chief Inspector produces a covering report with their recommendations, and sends this, with the IAGCI reviews and the CPIT responses, to the Home Secretary to be laid in Parliament in the normal way.

Membership

Membership of the IAGCI is by invitation of the Independent Chief Inspector. It is voluntary and unpaid. Members are respected academics and representatives of organisations with a working interest in country information and how it is used by the Home Office. The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) is grateful to the members of the Group for their commitment and for the valuable contributions they make to its work. The ICIBI is particularly grateful to Professor Mike Collyer, who continued in the role of IAGCI chair in 2023-24.

List of members, 2023-24

- Professor Mike Collyer, University of Sussex (Chair)
- Dr Ceri Oeppen, University of Sussex
- Professor Nando Sigona, University of Birmingham
- Dr Julie Vullnetari, University of Southampton
- Professor Giorgia Dona, University of East London
- Judge Susan Pitt, Upper Tribunal, Immigration and Asylum Chamber (*until January 2024*)
- Judge Mark Blundell, Upper Tribunal, Immigration and Asylum Chamber (*from January 2024*)
- Judge Roxanne Frantzis, First-tier Tribunal, Immigration and Asylum Chamber (*from October 2023*)

- Katinka Ridderbos, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Geneva)
- Larry Bottinick, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UK)
- Harriet Short, Immigration Law Practitioners Association
- Zoe Bantleman, Immigration Law Practitioners Association

Meetings

The IAGCI aims to meet two or three times a year, and the Independent Chief Inspector and ICIBI staff engage regularly with the Chair between meetings. During 2023-24, the Group met in October 2023 to discuss reviews of COI on Albania and Pakistan, and in January 2024 to discuss a review of the 2022 Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) on Rwanda.

Published reviews

Three inspection reports on Home Office COI were published in 2023-24:

- a report on selected COI on Iraq and Myanmar (Burma) was submitted to the Home Secretary on 6 April 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 June 2023³²

32 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-report-on-home-office-country-of-origin-information-iraq-and-myanmar-burma-january-2023>

- a thematic report on the coverage of statelessness in Home Office COI was submitted to the Home Secretary on 26 April 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 February 2024³³
- a report on selected COI on Albania and Pakistan was submitted to the Home Secretary on 15 December 2023 and laid in Parliament on 29 February 2024³⁴

All three reports presented recommendations from expert reviewers commissioned through IAGCI to evaluate the quality, completeness, and accuracy of selected Home Office COI. The published reports include the Home Office's response to each recommendation.

The ICIBI also made two overarching recommendations to the Home Secretary arising from the reviews of COI relating to Albania and Pakistan. One called for the establishment of a mechanism to allow reviewers to comment on the accuracy of objective factual material contained within the 'assessment' section of country policy and information notes, and the other recommended that the Home Office should expand

33 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-report-on-home-office-country-of-origin-information-thematic-report-on-the-coverage-of-statelessness-february-2023>

34 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspection-report-on-home-office-country-of-origin-information-albania-and-pakistan-october-2023>

its country information team's capacity to engage with foreign language material. The Home Office partially accepted the first recommendation but did not accept the second, asserting that it already had a degree of capacity to translate foreign-language material and that the need for, and value of, translation had to be balanced against the cost to the public purse.

Further details on the IAGCI and past COI inspection reports can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-independent-advisory-group-on-country-information-iagci>

Working with others

Stakeholders

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) inspection reports and recommendations are addressed to the Home Secretary. In practice, the recommendations are aimed primarily at the operational arms of the Home Office's Migration and Borders System, in particular Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, and Customer Services Group.

However, the immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs functions performed by and on behalf of the Home Secretary involve and affect a wide range of other bodies, and impact on everyone living in the UK, or wishing to settle here, or coming as a visitor, or to work or study, or to seek protection. To inform individual inspections and the overall inspection programme, as well as engaging effectively with the Home Office, it is essential that the ICIBI reaches out to these other stakeholders to understand their many perspectives, interests and concerns and to capture relevant evidence.

As with its dealings with the Home Office, the ICIBI aims to develop strong stakeholder relationships, based on trust and openness, while remaining impartial and objective.

Established ICIBI stakeholder forums

The ICIBI has four established stakeholder groups that meet periodically, each of which shares the same terms of reference:

- to inform and advise the Independent Chief Inspector regarding any issues of interest or concern to members or those they represent
- to propose topics for inspection and advise on their relative importance and urgency
- to assist the Independent Chief Inspector with the scoping and evidence collection for individual inspections

The Refugee and Asylum Forum (RAF) was created in 2009. Its membership comprises mostly voluntary sector organisations with an interest in and knowledge of the Home Office's work with refugees and asylum seekers, and related issues. The RAF met in July 2023 and February 2024.

The Aviation Stakeholder Forum was created in 2011. Membership comprises UK airport and airline industry umbrella bodies. The Maritime Stakeholder Forum was also created in 2011. Membership comprises UK seaports and shipping industry umbrella bodies. Meetings of the Aviation and Maritime forums scheduled for February 2024 were cancelled following the dismissal of the Independent Chief Inspector.

The Adults at Risk Forum (AARF) was established in 2019 following the Home Secretary's commission to produce an annual review of the 'Adults at risk in immigration detention' policy. Membership comprises non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that focus specifically on detention issues. The forum is usually held to coincide with the Adults at Risk inspection, but the commission to review this topic was discontinued by the Home Secretary in December 2022. An inspection of Adults at Risk was included in the ICIBI's inspection plan for 2023-24 but had not started as of 31 March 2024.

In addition to these four forums, in 2021 the Independent Chief Inspector established the Migration Forum. This is divided into three sub-groups: education sector; strategic migration partnerships (local authority-led partnerships established following the introduction of a regional dispersal policy in 1999 for people seeking asylum); and business. The business sub-group met in June 2023, the education sub-group met in October 2023, and the strategic migration partnerships sub-group met in December 2023.

During the year, a number of individual meetings were held with forum members, as well as with other organisations, both in relation to specific inspections and to discuss general issues and priorities.

Website

The ICIBI uses its website to reach out to stakeholders and to the wider public, including 'customers' of the

Home Office's immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs functions. One of the main ways of doing this is via 'calls for evidence'. In 2023-24, three calls for evidence were made via the website.³⁵

The ICIBI uses X (formerly Twitter) to publicise the start of an inspection, to draw attention to a call for evidence, to notify that an inspection report has been sent to the Home Secretary, and when a report has been laid in Parliament.

Stakeholder survey

The annual ICIBI stakeholder survey collects views from stakeholders who have previously engaged with the inspectorate by submitting evidence and/or participating in focus groups or forums. It asks questions relating to stakeholders' experience of engaging with the ICIBI, and

35 Call for evidence: An inspection of the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-evidence-an-inspection-of-the-immigration-enforcement-competent-authority>;

Call for evidence: An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-evidence-an-inspection-of-the-immigration-system-as-it-relates-to-the-social-care-sector>;

Call for evidence: An inspection of asylum casework 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-evidence-an-inspection-of-asylum-casework-2023>

also asks for views on inspection reports and the value of the recommendations contained within them.

The ICIBI published its survey on 31 October 2023 and received responses from 20 stakeholders, ranging from NGOs, trade associations, trade unions, people with direct experience of the Home Office’s asylum and immigration systems, and Home Office contractors.

The findings again showed that stakeholders were satisfied with the engagement they had with inspectors and the Independent Chief Inspector. They valued the access that the ICIBI had to Home Office information, and its “genuine approach to fact finding”. However, confidence in the Home Office’s responses to ICIBI recommendations had deteriorated compared to previous years. Stakeholders said that the Home Office did not “meaningfully engage with evidence-based recommendations”, or “take the ICIBI recommendations seriously enough”. Some observed that the Home Office’s lack of engagement with recommendations limited the effectiveness of the ICIBI.

Stakeholders provided suggestions for future inspection topics, which were recorded and will feed into future inspection planning.

Engagement with other inspectorates and similar bodies

The ICIBI continued to meet with other inspecting and monitoring bodies to remain abreast of their work, share

best practice, and identify ways in which the ICIBI can complement, rather than duplicate, their work. Such bodies include His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, the National Audit Office, the Government Internal Audit Agency, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and the Independent Examiner of Complaints. These meetings were also used to explore opportunities for further joint working with other inspectorates on overlapping areas of interest. Regular meetings were also held with His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services.

Other engagement

In May 2023, the then Independent Chief Inspector, David Neal, appeared before the House of Lords Horticultural Sector Committee to provide evidence on the ICIBI's inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the agricultural sector, the report of which was published in December 2022.³⁶ In July 2023, David Neal appeared before the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Africa to provide evidence on the ICIBI's inspection of visit visa operations, the report of which was published in April 2023.³⁷ In November 2023, he provided evidence

36 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-the-immigration-system-as-it-relates-to-the-agricultural-sector-may-to-august-2022>

37 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-inspection-of-visit-visa-operations-december-2022-to-january-2023>

to the Home Affairs Select Committee on the work of the ICIBI.

On 27 February 2024, the Home Affairs Select Committee held a one-off session with David Neal, as the former Independent Chief Inspector.

During 2023-24, the Independent Chief Inspector and inspectors visited a number of Home Office sites, as well as stakeholders from NGOs, local authorities, academic institutions, and those with lived experience of the asylum and immigration systems. Meetings were also held with several MPs.

These exchanges provided valuable insights into some of the issues and challenges people are encountering in the areas ICIBI is responsible for inspecting. ICIBI would like to extend its thanks to everyone who took the time to share their knowledge and views.

Resources and planning

Budget and staffing 2023-24

The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration's (ICIBI's) budget is determined by the Home Secretary and delegated to the Independent Chief Inspector. The budget is issued in the form of an annual delegation letter. The delegation letter for the 2023-24 financial year was signed on 24 October 2023.

Delegation letters and other sponsorship functions come through the Second Permanent Secretary, who is the ICIBI's Senior Sponsor within the Home Office.

The budget for 2023-24 was £2.214 million.

'Pay Costs' (staff salaries and employer's pension and National Insurance contributions) account for the bulk of the total. In 2023-24, £2.08 million (94%) was designated for 'Pay Costs', with £130,000 for 'Non-Pay'. There was no allocation for capital expenditure. The inspectorate recorded an overall underspend of £55,598 (2.5%) in 2023-24. See 'Expenditure report for financial year 2023-24' at Appendix 2.

The agreed headcount for 2023-24 remained at 30 full-time equivalents (FTEs), including the Independent Chief Inspector. Of these, 24 (77%) are Grade 7 or Senior Executive Officer (SEO) inspector posts. The remaining six posts consist of the Independent Chief Inspector, a Chief of Staff (Grade 6), a Research and Strategy

Manager (Grade 7), a Communications and Engagement Lead (SEO), and two corporate services posts (one Executive Officer and one Administrative Officer).³⁸

As of 31 March 2024, ICIBI had 27 staff in post.

The staff profile was:

- 44% female, 56% male
- 79% white, 21% minority ethnic
- 10% disabled, 90% non-disabled
- 15% LGB, 85% heterosexual/straight

38 The Independent Chief Inspector is a public appointment. By agreement with the Independent Chief Inspector, all other inspectorate staff are employed as permanent or temporary Home Office civil servants. Those recruited, loaned, or seconded from elsewhere become Home Office civil servants on joining the ICIBI.

- age bands:
 - 25-34 14%
 - 35-44 29%
 - 45-54 41%
 - 55+ 15%
- 48% not married, 52% married
- 48% Christian, 52% other religions
- 59% with no caring responsibilities, 41% with caring responsibilities
- 70% flexible working pattern, 30% non-flexible working pattern
- 7% part time, 93% full time

Training and development

During 2023-24 the ICIBI held three dedicated study/away days. Colleagues learnt about collaborative working, maintaining resilience through change, and wellbeing, and discussed topics for the inspection programme for 2024-25. Key speakers included internal and external stakeholders, non-governmental organisations, and the Home Office's Second Permanent Secretary.

Members of the senior leadership team attended a Chartered Management Institute senior leadership programme and participated in the 'Each One, Reach

One' mentoring programme. Six members of staff undertook training at the Royal Armoury in Leeds as part of the inspection of Border Force practice and procedures in relation to firearms. All members of staff attended mental health awareness training provided by MIND.

Internally, training and refresher courses were provided for bespoke IT packages and other subjects, as were 'listen and learn' sessions from a number of Home Office and external organisations. Inspectors also have access to the Civil Service Learning platform and external resources that provide training in a range of subjects.

Development opportunities have been offered to team members who have provided temporary cover at a higher grade, taken on line management responsibilities, undertaken training to become mental health first aiders and acted as a Graduate Aspiration Programme mentor.

The induction programme has been refreshed and updated. New team members are led through the induction by their managers, and colleagues run sessions on a variety of topics that cover inspection processes, familiarisation with the Home Office, introductions to corporate responsibilities and an overview of current inspections. Feedback from colleagues who have gone through the induction process has been universally positive and reflects the welcoming and supportive environment created by all staff.

As part of the Civil Service Fast Stream Summer Internship Programme, the ICIBI hosted an intern for seven weeks in summer 2023, who joined inspection teams on their onsite work, attended meetings and undertook bespoke project work.

Vision Statement

ICIBI's 'Vision Statement' is intended to sit alongside its stated purpose (see 'Role and Remit'). It remained unchanged for 2023-24:

“The ICIBI will:

- be highly skilled, professional and effective, with a reputation for the highest standards of work and conduct
- operate thorough, rigorous and transparent processes to reach sound, evidence-based conclusions
- deal with others consistently and reliably
- be efficient, forward-thinking, committed to continuous improvement and focused on delivery
- enable and develop its people”

Values

The ICIBI adheres to the Civil Service values:

- integrity
- honesty

- objectivity
- impartiality

Equality and diversity

In carrying out its statutory functions, as set out in the UK Borders Act 2007, the ICIBI has three equality objectives:

- to monitor and report on compliance with the Equality Act 2010 by the Secretary of State, their officials and others exercising functions relating to immigration, asylum, nationality or customs on their behalf, including reliance on paragraph 17 of Schedule 3 of the Equality Act 2010 (exception for immigration functions)
- to ensure that the ICIBI's policies, processes, and practices are fair and transparent and comply with the Equality Act 2010
- to promote equality, diversity and inclusion through its inspections and within the Inspectorate

Through these objectives the ICIBI seeks to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- foster good relations between people from different groups

ICIBI equality, diversity, and inclusion statement

The ICIBI is committed to promoting the letter and spirit of the Equality Act 2010 by embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in everything it does.

The immigration, asylum, nationality, and customs functions performed by and on behalf of the Secretary of State involve and affect a wide range of other bodies, and touch everyone living in or seeking to enter the UK.

To inform individual inspections and the overall inspection programme, the ICIBI will reach out through its website, and directly where possible, to capture relevant evidence and to try to understand and reflect a diverse range of perspectives, interests, and concerns.

The ICIBI has one inspector who also acts as the inspectorate's equality and diversity adviser, supporting the Independent Chief Inspector to ensure that the ICIBI's policies, processes, and practices are consistent with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

ICIBI's equality objectives and equality, diversity and inclusion statement should be read in conjunction with its 'Statement of Purpose', 'Vision', 'Values' and 'Expectations'.

Appendix 1: Inspection reports published in 2023-24

- An inspection of visit visa operations (December 2022 – January 2023), published on 20 April 2023
- An inspection of the Border Force intelligence functions at the Humber ports (June 2022 – November 2022), published on 11 May 2023
- A re-inspection of Border Force’s management of Project KRAKEN at small seaports (January – February 2023), published on 15 June 2023
- A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats, including at Western Jet Foil and Manston (January – February 2023), published on 15 June 2023
- Inspection report on Home Office country of origin information, Iraq and Myanmar (Burma) January 2023, published on 29 June 2023
- An inspection of the Home Office’s operations to effect the removal of Foreign National Offenders, published on 29 June 2023
- An inspection of Border Force insider threat (January – March 2023), published on 7 September 2023

- Inspection report on Home Office country of origin information – Thematic report on the coverage of statelessness (February 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- An inspection of the Home Office’s Afghan resettlement schemes (October 2022 – April 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- A re-inspection of ePassport gates (May 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- An inspection of the use of deprivation of citizenship by the Status Review Unit (April – June 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- An inspection of asylum casework (June – October 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- A re-inspection of the use of hotels for housing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (September – October 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation for families with children in Northern Ireland (May – June 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- An inspection of Border Force’s fast parcels operations (May – July 2023), published on 29 February 2024

- An inspection of Border Force practice and procedures in relation to firearms (September – October 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- An inspection of illegal working enforcement (August – October 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- A spot check inspection of Border Force operations at Portsmouth International Port (29 August 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- Inspection report on Home Office country of origin information, Albania and Pakistan (October 2023), published on 29 February 2024
- A spot check inspection of Border Force’s operational response to general aviation flights at London City Airport (January – February 2024), published on 26 March 2024
- An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the social care sector (August 2023 – November 2023), published on 26 March 2024

Appendix 2: Expenditure report for financial year 2023-24

Resource pay total (£)	1,934,910
Resource non-pay total (£)	223,492³⁹
Travel and subsistence	87,115
Training and recruitment	8,934
Conferences	6,285
Estates	39
Marketing	864
IT and Comms	1,966
Office supplies and services	64,257
Legal costs	27,878
Contracted out services	320
Other costs and services	25,526 ⁴⁰
Other costs	1,159
Research ⁴¹	23,800
Interpreter and translator	194
Couriers	114
Major contracts	258
Resource departmental expenditure limits write offs	307
Grand total (£)	2,158,402

39 Minor differences in total values are due to rounding.

40 Minor differences in total values are due to rounding.

41 This figure reflects the cost of commissioning expert reviews of Home Office country of origin information (COI), an activity led by the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information in support of ICIBI's scrutiny of this material.

Appendix 3: ICIBI Inspection Plan 2023-24

Published 3 April 2023⁴²

a. Completed inspections – reports awaiting publication:

- An inspection of the Border Force intelligence functions at the Humber ports (18 January 2023)
- An inspection of visit visa operations (10 February 2023)
- A re-inspection of Project KRAKEN (16 March 2023)

b. Inspections begun in 2022-23:

- A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats, including at Western Jet Foil and Manston
- An inspection of the Home Office's operations to effect the removal of foreign national offenders
- An inspection of Border Force assurance measures against insider threat
- An inspection of the Home Office's Afghan resettlement activity

42 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/icibi-inspection-plan-2023-24>

- A re-inspection of ePassport gates
- An inspection of the use of the power to deprive British nationals of citizenship
- Inspection report on Home Office country of origin information, Iraq and Myanmar
- Inspection report on the treatment of statelessness in Home Office country of origin information

c. New inspections for 2023-24:

- An inspection of asylum casework
- An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation
- A re-inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving by small boat
- A re-inspection of the use of hotels to house unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- An inspection of the use of hotels to house asylum-seeking families with children in Northern Ireland
- An inspection of the Home Office's use of age assessments
- An inspection of Border Force fast parcel operations
- An inspection of Border Force practice and procedure in relation to firearms
- An inspection of 'Adults at risk in immigration detention' policy

- An inspection of the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority
- An inspection of the Home Office's illegal working enforcement activity
- An inspection of the Health and Social Care visa route
- An inspection of the High Potential Individual visa route
- An inspection of the immigration system as it relates to the fishing industry
- Inspection reports on Home Office country of origin information relating to Albania, Pakistan, and Rwanda
- Inspection report on the thematic coverage of trafficking in Home Office country of origin information
- Re-inspections or unannounced inspections to reflect in-year developments and areas of emerging interest (topics and timings to be determined)

Appendix 4: ICIBI's 'expectations' of asylum, immigration, nationality, and customs functions

Background and explanatory documents are easy to understand and use (e.g. statements of intent (both ministerial and managerial), impact assessments, legislation, policies, guidance, instructions, strategies, business plans, intranet, and GOV.UK pages, posters, leaflets etc.)

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

Processes are simple to follow and transparent

- They are IT-enabled and include input formatting to prevent users from making data entry errors
- Mandatory requirements, including the nature and extent of evidence required to support applications and claims, are clearly defined

- The potential for blockages and delays is designed out, wherever possible
- They are resourced to meet time and quality standards (including legal requirements, Service Level Agreements, published targets)

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

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

Decisions and actions are ‘right first time’

- They are demonstrably evidence-based or, where appropriate, intelligence-led

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


Errors are identified, acknowledged and promptly ‘put right’

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

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

The Home Office ‘owner’ is accountable for

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



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