Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

An inspection of the Future Border and Immigration System benefits realisation

March 2026 – July 2026

John Tuckett

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Foreword by the Independent Chief Inspector

The Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) programme represents one of the most significant transformation initiatives undertaken across the UK's borders and immigration system. Through the delivery of capabilities such as Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs) and eVisas, the programme has modernised the way those seeking to enter the UK interact with the UK immigration system and aims to continue supporting greater border automation while improving security, efficiency, and customer experience.

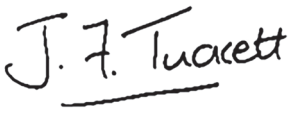
With FBIS due to end in March 2027, this inspection was undertaken to assess whether the many benefits arising out of the technical capabilities developed, have been and will continue to be delivered after programme closure.

The implementation of ETAs, eVisas, and associated fee income benefits represents a considerable achievement and there are clearly valuable lessons to be learned from this programme that may assist future Home Office transformation activity. Equally, the technical capabilities

developed through FBIS will be a major enabling factor in the wider transformation of the border work that is now needed to deliver across the UK the vision of an end-to-end system and digitally-enabled contactless border.

The recommendations in this report focus on capturing and embedding the good practice demonstrated by FBIS, clarifying responsibility for benefits realisation beyond programme closure, and significantly strengthening the arrangements for driving forward the transformation work needed to deliver the full potential of a modernised border. The last of these will be the most challenging and will require a step change in approach working across the Migration and Borders system, building on existing achievements and momentum.

This report was sent to the Home Secretary on 21 July 2026.



John Tuckett
Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

1. Background

Introduction to the Future Border and Immigration System programme

1.1 The Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) is a Home Office programme established to design and deliver a modernised, digital border and immigration system. The programme has continued to develop and enhance the global points-based immigration system, which came into place on 31 December 2020, alongside developing a digital, end-to-end customer journey, including the delivery of eVisas and Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs).

1.2 FBIS has been delivered in stages through successive programme business cases. Earlier business cases, including the 2024 iteration, set out options to extend delivery beyond initial milestones, with a preferred option to continue delivery until 31 March 2027. This closure date is confirmed in the 2026 FBIS business case and in programme documentation, which describe the programme as being in its final phase, with a focus on completing delivery and transitioning capabilities into business-as-usual arrangements.

1.3 The 2026 business case estimates total cashable benefits of approximately £9 billion over a ten-year

appraisal period, alongside a broader set of non-cashable and enabled benefits, including improvements to border security, customer experience, and operational productivity. The 2026 business case states that 17 benefits had been quantified since the programme began, of which 11 had started to be realised and six had not yet been realised.

1.4 This inspection has been undertaken to ensure that eight specific benefits upon which the FBIS programme was set up to deliver, have been delivered, or are in the process of being delivered, with demonstrable efficiency and effectiveness enhancements to operations.

Inspection methodology

1.5 Inspectors:

- analysed documentary evidence from the Home Office
- held familiarisation calls with Home Office staff and undertook a familiarisation visit to 2 Marsham Street
- held in-person and remote interviews and focus groups with the FBIS programme team and wider Home Office staff

- held a feedback session with Home Office senior management, sharing initial thoughts and indicative findings

1.6 This inspection used the ICIBI Inspection Framework.[1]

1.7 This report was sent to the Home Office on 26 June 2026 for factual accuracy checking prior to submission to the Home Secretary to be laid before Parliament.

Benefits in scope for this inspection

1.8 FBIS benefits are a combination of income generation, cost reduction, and operational efficiency improvements, each underpinned by different delivery mechanisms and tracking approaches. Benefits are linked to specific programme milestones and are measured using a combination of financial reporting, operational data, and modelled assumptions. Inspectors noted that while some benefits, particularly fee income, are supported by established financial tracking, others rely on modelled assumptions or are contingent on future delivery, reflecting the interdependent and evolving nature of the programme's benefits framework.

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1 ICIBI Inspection Framework, updated 10 February 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/icibi-expectations-for-inspection

1.9 This inspection was formally launched in March 2026. It focused on the benefits arising from, and enabled by, the FBIS programme, including the effectiveness of:

- the transition of benefits from the Digital Permissions delivery area into business-as-usual operations
- the realisation of ETA and eVisa Fee Income benefits
- the arrangements to track the Border Vision project benefits delivered and enabled by FBIS

1.10 Figure 1 outlines the eight benefits the inspection scope relates to. These eight benefits were selected for feasibility, and the remaining FBIS benefits are summarised in Annex A.

Figure 1: Benefits in scope for this inspection

Benefit detail	Purpose	Success criteria
ETA Fee Income Delivered (£332 million as of December 2025)	To generate income from travellers granted permission to travel under the ETA scheme	• ETA scheme fully implemented across all applicable cohorts • Sustained fee income in line with business case forecast

Benefit detail	Purpose	Success criteria
Fee Income (excluding ETA) Delivered (£1.7 billion as of December 2025)	To generate revenue from visa routes and changes to charging structures	• Visa routes and charging changes operational and generating income • Fee income realised at or above forecast levels • Policy and route changes embedded
Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) Removal (non-full-time-equivalent (FTE)) Delivered (£14 million as of December 2025)	To remove the non-staff costs associated with the production and management of BRPs, including printing, materials, and contractual arrangements	• Cessation of BRP production • Contracts, materials, and associated costs removed • Digital status replacing physical BRPs
BRP Removal (FTE) Delivered (£14 million as of December 2025)	To reduce staff effort associated with BRP processing and administration	• Reduction/ redeployment of staff working on BRP processing • End-to-end digital status replaces the need for BRP caseworking and processing

Benefit detail	Purpose	Success criteria
Vignette Removal (non-FTE) To be delivered	To remove non-staff costs associated with physical vignette production and issuance as part of the transition to digital status	• Vignette printing decommissioned • Contracts, materials, and associated costs removed • Digital status replacing vignettes
Vignette Removal (FTE) To be delivered	To reduce staff effort associated with the processing and issuing of vignette documents	• Reduction/ redeployment of staff working on vignette processing • End-to-end digital status replaces physical vignette processing
eGates and Primary Control Point Leisure Time (U12s) Delivered (£35 million as of December 2025)	To improve passenger flow and reduce queue times at the border through increased use of eGates	• Increased use of eGates due to expanded passenger cohorts • Modelled reduction in queue and processing times at the border

Benefit detail	Purpose	Success criteria
Efficiencies at the Border To be delivered	To improve operational productivity and reduce processing effort at the border	• Realisation of time savings equivalent to 1,395 FTE • BF workforce reductions of 563 FTE enabled by automation and process improvements[2]

2 Monetary values and income are not reported or broken down for every individual benefit.

2. Discussion of findings

Introduction

2.1 The Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) programme is producing new capabilities based on digital technology that can be applied across the entire passenger journey for those seeking to enter the UK. FBIS has included the implementation of new capabilities with the realisation of benefits, wherever possible, most notably in the introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs) and eVisas.

2.2 Benefits fall into two categories: those that have or will be delivered by the FBIS programme while it is still running, and those that will be delivered after the programme closes in March 2027. Most notable in the latter will be the efficiencies and workforce reductions projected for Border Force Officers working at the border itself.

Benefits already delivered/being delivered by FBIS

2.3 This inspection has found that many of the projected benefits arising out of new capabilities have been successfully delivered, already transforming the passenger experience. These have been achieved by FBIS itself or by associated

partners within the Migration and Borders system, such as Visa Status and Information Services.

2.4 The inspection identified areas where a degree of housekeeping is needed to ensure that specific responsibilities for continued delivery of benefits are clarified. However, these are not seen as risking the future or ongoing delivery of benefits.

2.5 Overall, the success in implementing major changes such as the introduction of ETAs and eVisas and delivering considerable benefits is highly commendable. There are clearly many lessons to be learnt as to how this has been achieved and the scope for ensuring these are captured in best practice for other Home Office programmes.

Benefits yet to be delivered at the border

2.6 The overarching strategy for FBIS is to deliver an end-to-end experience for passengers, including a transformed digital contactless border. However, a transformed border is wider than the scope of the FBIS programme and its benefits. There is a considerable body of work still to be done to achieve a transformed digital contactless border, and this is work that will extend for some time after FBIS itself closes. As an example, much of the focus to date has been on airports, where

over 90% of passenger arrivals occur, and while there has been some initial work at maritime ports, including technical trials and proof of concepts, transformation will therefore continue beyond the life of the FBIS programme.

2.7 Two separate but linked challenges lie ahead. First is the transformation of the infrastructure of all maritime and airports with the full cooperation of owners, carriers, and operations staff; in this regard, this inspection, coupled with inputs to separate ICIBI stakeholder forums, found a mixed degree of awareness and commitment to the nature and timing of future developments and changes. Second is the changes for Border Force's working practices, culture, roles, and skills to deliver both efficiencies and workforce reductions at the border.

Spending Review workforce reduction requirements

2.8 The Spending Review (SR) settlement requires Border Force to reduce its overall workforce significantly in the next three years. While the implementation of the FBIS benefit enabled capabilities is potentially a vehicle for achieving workforce efficiencies, the challenges of such a significant reduction, coupled with a major transformation in how the border is configured

and works, are considerable and should not be underestimated.

2.9 The inspection found that one of the target states for the Efficiencies at the Border benefit, a 563 reduction in FTE, has been subsumed within the overall SR reductions. While this appears sensible and pragmatic, for audit purposes, there would need to be formal ratification by those authorities that had previously approved the formal 563 FTE target as an FBIS benefit, of this revised approach.

2.10 Currently there is a lack of clarity over who is accountable for achieving workforce efficiency reductions at the border itself, as opposed to elsewhere within Border Force and whether this falls to the Border Transformation team or a different area.[3]

Border transformation

2.11 A Border Transformation team is working alongside the FBIS programme to address organisational implementation and how benefits will be realised at the border. However, the scale of the change and the challenges of organisational transformation needed across

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3 The Home Office, in its factual accuracy response, stated: "The Passenger Transformation & Readiness Board is accountable for achieving the efficiency reductions at the border … as a collective responsibility."

Border Force are very considerable, especially in the SR environment. Inspectors were of the view that these challenges have been under, rather than overestimated. This is especially relevant to the cultural change required as operations place greater emphasis on activity beyond the Primary Control Points. These are organisational transformation issues that normally require extensive staff engagement to ensure lasting commitment, which cannot be achieved by simply introducing new technologies.

2.12 Currently FBIS is seen by many as the prime driver of change, rather than the Border Transformation work, and the inspection found a lack of clarity within stakeholders and some Border Force staff as to which implementation issues are being driven by FBIS and which by the Border Transformation team. The risk is that as the FBIS programme winds down, enthusiasm and commitment may wane and the impetus for cultural change declines.

2.13 The delivery of long-term benefits at the border can only be achieved when transformation of the border is complete and all FBIS capabilities have been implemented and their potential realised. It is therefore crucial that there are robust measures to ensure that transformation completes in what will be a fiscally and operationally challenging

environment for the next few years after FBIS closes in March 2027.

2.14 Furthermore, the challenges now are primarily about organisational transformation in implementing new technologies at the border. The challenges involved now are of a different nature to those of a programme developing technical capabilities and solutions, such as FBIS, and require a different approach. Wide-scale change of this nature needs to be led by and involve operational staff at all levels to build the long-term commitment required.

2.15 This inspection has therefore concluded that there is an urgent need to build on the existing Border Transformation work to provide a robust platform that will ensure the long-term delivery of benefits. The current work needs to develop and grow its own profile and presence as the implementation vehicle driving forward implementation. This will enable the current momentum to be significantly enhanced in ways that are needed to ensure long-term success and address some of the communications and engagement issues this inspection has identified.

A Border Transformation Portfolio/ Task Force

2.16 The work required to transform the border includes all future infrastructure changes at all ports, as well as transforming Border Force as an organisation, linking in with wider SR workforce reduction work. Border Transformation work could continue in its current form through existing business-as-usual (BAU) governance structures. The risks are that transformation work, including the drive for the essential cultural change, gets lost among other BAU priorities, especially SR reductions, and the full potential of the FBIS capabilities and efficiency benefits are not realised.

2.17 A suggested alternative is to adopt a portfolio approach where a high-profile central team (Task Force) is established to plan and coordinate all the various workstreams run from within the business, needed to bring about full transformation, with individual directors responsible for delivery within their respective areas. This central team would be responsible for ensuring all the various parts move forward together in a planned and phased way with a direct line to the Director General. This builds on the current coordinating model of the Border Transformation team and lifts it to a higher level. To have credibility across all operational teams, the central team/Task Force should be led by an

operationally experienced individual supported by a transformation-experienced programme/portfolio director.

3. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that as the Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) programme closes, a lessons learnt exercise identifies the many elements of good practice that have underpinned its success to date, and that these be embodied within Home Office assurance methodologies to provide a template of best practice and to test transferability into other projects and programmes.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that before FBIS closes, work is undertaken to identify exactly who will be responsible for any ongoing delivery of all benefits, including those that have been/are being delivered and those yet to come to fruition.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that the work and momentum of the Border Transformation team be significantly enhanced with resources and support to enable it to take on oversight of delivery of all aspects of transforming the border in ways that fully utilise the potential of the capabilities FBIS has produced, and delivers the efficiency benefits at the border in conjunction with Spending Review requirements, across all ports.

It is for consideration that this is best achieved by adopting a portfolio approach, with the current team migrating to a Border Transformation Task Force, led by and involving operations staff at all levels.

4. Inspection findings: Overall aim

Articulation of overall aim

4.1 Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) staff understood the aim of the programme to be to deliver the capability for a seamless, digital, end-to-end border system that would be more streamlined, secure, and efficient. However, this was not reflected consistently as a clear, overarching aim statement in official programme documentation. Inspectors noted that the articulation of the programme's aim had evolved over time, with adjustments to scope, and shifting from a focus on delivering capabilities to a greater emphasis on the outcomes and benefits those capabilities intend to achieve.

4.2 FBIS staff were aware of and confident in the programme's strategic direction. This confidence was often caveated by staff that delivery remained uncertain given the scale of work still required, specifically in delivering the Efficiencies at the Border benefit enabled by FBIS.

4.3 At the individual benefit level, there was clear articulation of each benefit aim, as summarised in Figure 1. FBIS staff stipulated that the full

realisation of all benefits depended on the completion of all aspects of the programme.

Visa, Status and Information Services (VSI)-related benefits

4.4 The VSI benefits were either delivered or advanced. The Fee Income (excluding Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)) benefit was delivered against clear success criteria, while the ETA Fee Income benefit was also considered delivered while remaining dependent on underlying demand assumptions.

4.5 FBIS programme documentation stated that the full-time-equivalent (FTE) and the non-FTE Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) removal benefits were delivered, reflecting the completion of physical BRP decommissioning and significant reductions in associated costs and staffing. However, a small amount of residual BRP-related activity remained, requiring a limited FTE resource. On this basis, the continued requirement for residual work and resource meant that the point at which the BRP benefits could be considered fully delivered was not clearly defined.

4.6 FTE/non-FTE vignette decommissioning benefits were not yet delivered at the time of this inspection. 30 June 2026 was identified as a key milestone, marking the final vignette print run

and the start of stock destruction. However, there was uncertainty as to when residual cohorts, particularly Crown Dependencies, would be fully integrated into the eVisa system. As a result, uncertainty remains regarding both the success criteria for these benefits and the point at which they will be considered fully delivered.[4]

Border-related benefits

4.7 The eGates and Primary Control Point Leisure Time benefit was delivered, with success measured through modelled time-saving calculations, based on analytical assumptions, and projected forward beyond an initial two-year tracking period.

4.8 The Efficiencies at the Border benefit is the least mature benefit and requires substantial further work that will extend beyond the closure of the FBIS programme. Its delivery is dependent on a wide range of interrelated factors, including

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4 The Home Office, in its factual accuracy response, stated: “Crown Dependencies will no longer receive a vignette from 30 June, so VSI benefits from decommission are not uncertain and will be realised. There is some uncertainty about when full integration into eVisas for Crown Dependencies will happen, but that does not impact the delivery of vignette decommission benefits.”

automation and technology, legislative change, infrastructure readiness, and workforce transformation. As a result, it represents a greater test of the end-to-end transformation ambitions enabled by FBIS.

4.9 Senior Border Force personnel highlighted wider transformation activity, which made it difficult to attribute improvements specifically to FBIS. Although the success criteria for the Efficiencies at the Border benefit were defined as the equivalent of 1,395 FTE time savings and FTE reductions of 563, these were less clearly evidenced in practice. The FTE reduction criterion has been subsumed into the wider Spending Review workforce reductions, making it difficult to assess progress against that criterion or to attribute outcomes directly to FBIS. This raises questions about the ongoing relevance of this success criterion in the current delivery context.

4.10 There were acknowledged issues of being able to track and measure Border Force Officer time in the 2026 FBIS business case, potentially impacting the ability to track the 1,395 FTE time savings success criterion.

4.11 Effective tracking and monitoring of the Efficiencies at the Border benefit will be critical to assessing its contribution to the overall success of the FBIS programme.

Conclusion

4.12 FBIS has had a clear and well understood strategic direction and purpose with multiple subsidiary aims as the programme has evolved.

4.13 Most FBIS benefits had defined aims and were delivered or progressing well towards delivery. The Efficiencies at the Border benefit remains less certain because success criteria other than FTE reductions have not clearly been defined. The original FTE reduction success criterion has been absorbed into wider Spending Review workforce reductions, making the benefit harder to track and creating a risk to the ability to demonstrate full benefits realisation.

5. Inspection findings: Roles and identity

Ownership of Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) benefits

5.1 The FBIS programme had a clear structure with defined roles and responsibilities. There was a Senior Civil Servant in charge of the programme, a director, and a clear organogram.

5.2 At a programme level, the responsibility for transitioning benefits was distributed across FBIS, with FBIS acting as a coordinating function rather than the sole owner of delivery. Analysts, finance teams, commercial leads, and business areas all had defined roles in modelling, tracking, validating, and closing benefits.

5.3 Each benefit should have a programme owner and a business owner. The ownership of long-term benefit realisation was agreed between FBIS and the business area receiving the benefit, in advance of the benefit being delivered and handed over to business as usual (BAU). The FBIS programme team intended to finalise the arrangements for all benefits by the end of summer 2026, although it can be difficult to source owners for benefits post-delivery, due to churn in senior leadership positions.

Visa, Status and Information Services (VSI)-related benefits

5.4 Ownership and tracking arrangements were in place for the benefits relating to VSI, and VSI had a lead single point of contact for the FBIS programme.[5]

5.5 Each of the six VSI-related benefits had named business benefit owners in benefit profile documentation. Benefit owners also had oversight of all VSI operations for which FBIS benefits had enabled transformation and effectively engaged with all aspects of benefit delivery. Despite this general clarity, there was still some uncertainty among VSI staff as to who had benefit ownership.

5.6 There are established systems in place for tracking the FBIS benefits in VSI as they move into BAU. For example, both fee income benefits will be tracked in perpetuity.

5.7 Work is currently underway within the System Design team in Migration, Borders and International Policy and Programmes to determine how work transitions from a programme to

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5 These six benefits are the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) Fee Income, Fee Income (excluding ETA), BRP removal non-FTE, BRP removal FTE, Vignette decommissioning non-FTE, and Vignette decommissioning FTE.

business ownership. The intention is that products and services developed within programmes like FBIS are integrated into Service Groups, meaning that rather than siloed functions, whole services are managed holistically, with multidisciplinary teams. These are designed to be enduring structures that do not default to programmes such as FBIS.

5.8 This model involves dual ownership of Service Groups by a Business Service Owner and a Digital Service Owner, and emphasises the 'digital first' ambitions of the FBIS system. FBIS staff recognised that getting the Service Groups concept right is a crucial part of taking onward ownership of products and services and improving them in the future.

5.9 As the FBIS programme closes, VSI is undertaking a concurrent piece of work to reset ownership of products and processes. The VSI Business Plan 2026-2027 outlined how VSI will be structured up to 2030. VSI's Business Development team, who contributed to the Business Plan, were described as the key interface with the FBIS programme. FBIS was referred to throughout this plan, illustrating how the changes enabled by the programme are being considered in how VSI plans for the future.

Efficiencies and benefits at the border

5.10 The wider benefits at the border of efficiencies and full-time-equivalent (FTE) reductions are not yet being delivered and will depend upon future FBIS capabilities being implemented. However, inspectors found there was uncertainty regarding who will own and track the 563 FTE reductions into the future, especially as this figure has been subsumed within overall SR requirements, and who will own and track the 1,395 Border Force Officer time efficiency savings.

The Border Transformation team

5.11 The Border Transformation team operates alongside the FBIS programme and has responsibility for implementing the changes at the border enabled by the FBIS capabilities, including delivering benefits. Currently, both FBIS and the Border Transformation team come under the same Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). The inspection found there was confusion within some operational teams as to what the respective roles of the FBIS programme and the Border Transformation team are, and who was the lead on implementation.

5.12 The role of the Border Transformation team is one of implementation and organisational transformation, which is very different from a

programme developing and delivering a technical capability, such as FBIS. As such, it requires different skills, a different mindset, and a different approach to engagement and communications; this will become increasingly relevant as implementation with changing roles and working practices takes over from capability development.

5.13 As FBIS looks to close in March 2027, there is a case for strengthening the Border Transformation team to develop its own identity and profile suited to its implementation task.

Conclusion

5.14 There is a need for clarity regarding who precisely owns and tracks each of the FBIS benefits as and when the FBIS programme closes in March 2027, with a refresh of the benefit profiles in consultation with the named benefit owners.

5.15 The role of the Border Transformation team in the future needs to be clarified as the prime delivery agent for implementing FBIS capabilities and delivering the associated benefits.

6. Inspection findings: Values and priorities

Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) prioritisation and delivery milestones

6.1 FBIS established a clear programme of priorities and milestones for the remainder of its delivery period. FBIS has maintained focus on completing several key delivery components, with major milestones being tracked and programme staff broadly confident about what still needs to be delivered. The remaining programme priorities include completing the final phases of eVisa delivery and Electronic Travel Authorisation rollout, and the capabilities needed to support greater automation at the border.

6.2 FBIS confirmed that it used successive Strategic Planning Rounds and the MoSCoW rating scale – Must have, Should have, Could have, Won't have – to propose, review, and prioritise delivery commitments. Deliverables not considered critical to the FBIS strategic objectives or benefits were descoped. This affected seven Border Vision deliverables: five relating to the Intelligent Border, one to eGates, and one to maritime.

Border Force

6.3 Operational priorities are based on the 2015 Border Force Operating Mandate (BFOM), which was under review by Border Force and the Migration, Borders and International Policy and Programmes Group, and on the Border Force Control Strategy 2025, which outlines the system for prioritising Border Force tasking, resources, and assets once mandated and essential activity has been completed. Border Force recognised the need to update the BFOM to reflect future immigration and customs trends, advances in technology, and the changing role of Border Force Officers (BFOs), arising out of the implementation of FBIS benefits.

6.4 Inspectors found there is uncertainty regarding how FBIS-related change will be prioritised, communicated, and embedded into day-to-day operations, particularly as Border Force priorities are currently being reviewed and Border Transformation team activity is seen as still developing. Inspectors observed operational concerns that FBIS had a siloed approach and was too entrenched in prioritising the delivery of technology over addressing the impact it will have on the front line. While on an operational level Border Force was confident that FBIS responded to feedback where possible, there were concerns

that updates on resulting actions were not always timely.

6.5 Inspectors found that some operational pressures may not have been fully accounted for. These included the potential risk of increased casework at Heathrow Airport, and the timely rollout of eGates across regional air and maritime ports in Border Force North. This highlights a potential gap between central programme prioritisation and the capacity of operational areas to absorb and embed change.

Cultural change

6.6 There is widespread recognition that for the full realisation of benefits there needs to be a fundamental shift in culture within BFOs, whose buy-in and commitment is essential to realising the efficiencies at the border. In the future, BFOs will not only have to use new technology and processes but also understand and accept the operational direction they represent; for example, undertaking more activity beyond the Primary Control Points.

6.7 While embedded regional change leads, multiple communication channels, the piloting of technology at regional ports, and the phased rollout of training have all been used to support adoption, cultural change is recognised as the biggest challenge for Border Force in realising

the Efficiencies at the Border benefit. Senior leaders recognised the challenge of securing staff acceptance alongside technological implementation, as well as the challenges of managing change fatigue and cascading messages across large and geographically dispersed areas, such as Border Force North.

6.8 However, while the need for cultural change is widely recognised, what was not apparent to inspectors is a clear articulation of any new culture or values, or of the organisational behaviours that will be required. Deriving these in an organisational transformation is normally a major issue involving extensive engagement with staff to bring about commitment and embedding of enduring change. These are not aspects that can be imposed by the introduction of new technology. It would seem there is still much to be done in defining the culture change and deciding how to engage with staff on these issues.

Spending Review

6.9 The Spending Review has added complexity to how some FBIS priorities are understood, particularly in Border Force.[6] Although FBIS

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6 GOV.UK, Policy paper, 'Spending review 2025'. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2025-document

was established before the Spending Review requirements, the perception of the relationship between FBIS and the Spending Review varies across business areas.[7] Visa, Status and Information largely cited the Spending Review as having no direct impact on FBIS benefits realisation. In Border Force, the Spending Review was perceived by some as the mechanism for delivering full-time-equivalent reductions.

6.10 The Spending Review set the Border Force Operations budget for 2026 to 2029, and the 2026 Business Plan showed the regional allocations. The Spending Review raised concerns for senior leaders that this could make it harder to deliver the Efficiency at the Border benefit locally, with one senior leader saying they had protected BFO roles by reducing support posts and lower-priority activity where possible.

6.11 There is a need for staff to understand what FBIS intends to deliver, why efficiencies are being pursued, and how they relate to workforce reductions. If FBIS is perceived primarily as a mechanism for reducing posts, confidence in the

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7 House of Commons library, 'Main estimates: Government spending plans for 2026/27', https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2025-document

programme may be undermined and resistance to change may increase.

Conclusion

6.12 Overall, FBIS has maintained a clear focus on delivery of the new capabilities and coordinating their implementation and realisation of benefits. However, the realisation of benefits at the border are very dependent upon the cultural changes needed within Border Force as an organisation.

7. Inspection findings: Resources

Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS)

7.1 The FBIS programme is due to close on 31 March 2027. Between April 2026 and March 2027, 15 FBIS projects will close, with nine of those closing in the final month. Up to the point of closure the FBIS full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff numbers are due to reduce by 124, with approximately 60% of staff being released in the final two quarters of the 2026/2027 financial year.[8] Over the same period, FTE numbers will decrease as the volume of FBIS programme projects coming to a conclusion increases.

7.2 Leaders acknowledged the challenge and risk of resourcing in FBIS, and capacity plans were being managed against a full roadmap. Furthermore, the FBIS closure plan detailed the remaining milestones to be delivered before programme staff would be considered for release.

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8 Full-time-equivalent (FTE) represents the number of full-time employees, based on total hours worked and regardless of employment type.

Visas, Status and Information Services (VSI)-related benefits

7.3 The removal of Biometric Residence Permits (BRP) resulted in reduced operational costs associated with existing handling and manual status checks of BRPs and a resultant net reduction in staffing costs. The benefit also reduced the number of transactions and casework queries. Consequently, the number of staff working on BRP-related work reduced from 320 FTE to 2 FTE.[9] This was due to be reduced to zero by the end of 2026. The Biometric Immigration Document Management Unit (260 FTE) was transitioned in phases into the eVisa Management Unit with an FTE complement of between 170 and 175. There were also 90 fewer FTE, achieved through a mix of releasing agency staff, natural wastage, and attrition of permanent staff. A further FTE reduction of ten was anticipated, as other processes were automated.

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9 The Home Office, in its factual accuracy response, stated that staff working on BRP-related work reduced from 320 FTE to 2 FTE. This superseded the evidence supplied to inspectors onsite, which showed FTE was reduced to 0.7 FTE.

7.4 Vignette decommissioning resulted in an FTE reduction of 55.[10,11] Additional reductions in agency staffing levels were expected in June 2026 when vignette printing was due to cease. However, there were uncertainties surrounding when non-UK Crown Dependency customers would be fully integrated into the eVisa system, with the possibility this could go beyond the FBIS closure date.

7.5 VSI capacity planning achieved a reduction of 60 FTE for overseas visa writers through a

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10 There were difficulties in quantifying the FTE reduction caused by vignette decommissioning. This was partly due to FTE reductions occurring prior to vignettes being decommissioned, and as such certain savings, such as the move to commercial printing partners in some areas, were realised before vignette decommissioning took place.

11 The Home Office, in its factual accuracy response, stated: “This is the latest programme position as of April end 26. As per the latest business case calculation, vignette decommissioning is expected to deliver a 99 FTE efficiency saving for the department. Since this is not cash releasing, the FTE would be available for redeployment to higher priority areas.”

mix of redundancy and redeployment.[12] It was envisaged that there would be additional FTE savings through the automation of administrative processes. An FTE saving was also expected for commercial partners, which was not tracked by the Home Office.

Border Force

7.6 A reduction of the Border Force workforce is now being driven primarily by the Spending Review, with FBIS providing the capability to enable the reduction of 563 FTE as stated in the 2026 FBIS programme business case. Workforce changes are now seen as part of broader strategic workforce planning rather than a standalone border efficiencies exercise.

7.7 There is a risk that the reduction of Border Force Officers (BFOs) at the border, as originally envisaged, may not be achieved. Inspectors found, for example, that there was no guarantee passenger-facing roles would be reduced, and there were also regional variations. For example,

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12 The Home Office, in its factual accuracy response, stated: “This is the latest programme position as of April end 26. Within the benefit calculation for the programme business case, 63 of the 99 FTE were based in International Networks (the others in Decision Making Centres).”

one region referred to plans to ring-fence front-line BFO roles and to seek to reduce support staff roles. This region would only reduce BFO FTE numbers if mandated to, and only when all the required automation infrastructure was in place.

7.8 There were also operational uncertainties as to the number of FTE that would be required to run shifts at the border. The Concept of Operations model will define how BFO roles and deployment arrangements will work alongside modern technology. This will be part of the information required by workforce planners to model FTE requirements. At the time of the inspection, Concept of Operations (CONOPS) had not been fully defined. Some modelling has been undertaken, but this has not yet been shared with operational managers.

7.9 The Border Force Strategic Workforce Plan for 2026-2029 describes the need to manage the two competing priorities of the imperative on Border Force to get smaller while maintaining a resilient border. The strategic workforce plan set out an eight-step reduction strategy that would be used to reduce FTE in Border Force, with a national recruitment decision due to be made in Q4 of 2026.

7.10 However, as of May 2026, the only FTE reduction method available was natural attrition. Senior managers were aware that this could not be relied

upon as the sole mechanism to reduce FTE. Voluntary exit schemes and redundancies had not yet been introduced as there remained a need to know what skills Border Force would require post-FBIS-enabled benefits delivery. Without proactive control of the mechanisms to lower FTE numbers, Border Force risked losing the wrong people in the wrong areas, resulting in skills and knowledge gaps.

Skills and training

7.11 Border Force has a transformation training strategy and, in July 2025, conducted two learning needs analysis exercises to identify the current learning and highlight future requirements for officers working within Primary Control Points. As of March 2026, two of five transformation modules had been launched, the third module was due to be delivered, and the classroom-based fourth and fifth modules were still being developed. There were delays in development due to the need for final policy decisions to be made, including the development of operational processes. Despite this, leaders were confident that the learning and development modules would deliver the training required.

7.12 The Learning and Development team had made efforts to make the training more interactive, due to a negative perception among Border Force

staff of online training. In-person training was viewed as important for achieving cultural change, but inspectors heard there was a possibility that training could become paper-based because of time constraints.

7.13 While there was an expectation that all passenger-facing BFOs would complete the training, it was not mandatory. The overall 70% completion target had been achieved for Module 1, with inconsistencies across the regions. Regions with a mainly maritime port-based profile were anticipated to have a lower uptake.[13]

7.14 There was an effective working relationship between Learning and Development and FBIS, which enabled the training team to influence how the training is designed to ensure it reflected what Border Force wanted to achieve and the logistics around delivering the training.

Conclusion

7.15 FBIS benefits related to BRPs and vignettes has enabled planned reductions in FTE across BRP, eVisa, and vignette-related work.

7.16 As the planned FTE reduction of 563 BFOs has been absorbed into the Spending Review staffing reduction figures, FTE reductions are

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13 It was not clear if this was an average across all Border Force staff or across passenger-facing BFOs.

not guaranteed to be passenger-facing roles, with regional differences in how FTE reductions will be made.

7.17 FBIS was described as a transformational vehicle and as being the biggest lever available to Border Force to reduce FTE numbers while maintaining the security of the border. While some training for the future border has started, much now depends upon the completion of the CONOPS to determine future work force patterns, skills, and training requirements.

8. Inspection findings: Operating processes

Operating processes supporting benefits realisation

8.1 A review by the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) of the Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) programme, shared with the Home Office in January 2026, noted that the Home Office needed to define a transition and handover plan with critical steps and activities to secure a successful handover of services to business as usual.

Visas, Status and Information Services (VSI)-related benefits

8.2 For the decommissioning of Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs), the systems and contracts in place to produce and distribute the cards have been dismantled, as there are no valid BRPs left in circulation.

8.3 Vignettes were due to be decommissioned in June 2026, except for forms for affixing a visa. At the time of this inspection, standard operating procedures for British Overseas Territories had yet

to be finalised and are due to be ready by the end of 2026.[14]

8.4 New procedures are in place to run the digital systems that have replaced vignettes and BRPs.

Border-related benefits

8.5 As the Efficiencies at the Border benefit has not yet been delivered, and Border Transformation work to realise FBIS benefits and capabilities is ongoing, changes to operating processes in this area have not yet been completed.

8.6 A first draft of the design of Border Force's new Aviation Concept of Operations (CONOPS), which refers to the new role for the Border Force Officer, was completed in May 2026, with iterations due to be completed by September 2026.

8.7 Two months prior to the eligibility changes to ePassport gates to allow eight- and nine-year-olds to use them, safeguarding guidance for Border Force Officers had not yet been updated, although this was not anticipated to be substantively different from the guidance for safeguarding children aged ten and over.

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14 The Home Office, in its factual accuracy response, stated: "Vignettes are due to be decommissioned in June 2026, except for forms for affixing a visa (FAVs) which will transition to a new product at the end of June [2026]."

8.8 Inspectors found that work to engage with front-line Border Force staff to familiarise them with the upcoming future ways of working was in its infancy and was done concurrently with the changes being introduced. Guidance and assurance expectations for Border Force staff were also a work-in-progress, due to the planned timing of the changes.

Conclusion

8.9 As the FBIS programme moves towards closure, most FBIS benefits had been realised within VSI, with some final changes still to be made. FBIS will enable systemic changes of operating procedures at the border; these have yet to be finalised.

9. Inspection findings: External environment

Stakeholders

9.1 The Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) programme fostered good working relationships with other Home Office teams, including Home Office policy, Home Office Digital (HOD) and Learning and Development, with teams praising FBIS for inviting their involvement at the early stages of the programme. Examples of collaborative working also included the service management board, which encouraged collaboration between policy, operations, HOD, and Border Force colleagues to successfully deliver and transition the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) Fee Income benefit to business as usual.

Home Office policy team

9.2 While the FBIS programme had a positive relationship with the Home Office policy team, the capacity of the policy team was an acknowledged issue and a red rated risk on the FBIS programme Risk Register. Although a mitigating action was to ensure transparency with upcoming policy requirements, agreement was needed between

policy and FBIS to ascertain what residual policy risks will remain post FBIS closure.

9.3 For Visa, Status and Information (VSI), there were still outstanding policy issues regarding the removal of Biometric Residence Permits and the decommissioning of vignettes. This reflected previous policy capacity issues, as the timeliness of responses was challenging in delivering the ETA Fee Income benefit.

9.4 For Border Force, policy work was outstanding for the eGates age requirements, although this was not considered to be a concern by Border Force leaders. However, the timeliness of some policy decisions did affect the learning and development preparations for Border Force Officers.

Home Office Digital

9.5 While FBIS had a positive relationship with HOD, HOD's capacity was cited as a concern for some VSI and Border Force staff in light of the Spending Review, and capacity issues were also raised by FBIS programme staff. HOD capacity was also acknowledged as a risk if operational and delivery requirements were to change and as an issue in the testing pipeline on the FBIS programme Risks and Issues register. However, HOD concluded they were funded adequately for capacity delivery.

9.6 There was a concern that policy and HOD capacity could be impacted by potential shifts in ministerial priorities, which could direct resource away from FBIS, particularly given the volume of delivery required prior to FBIS closure.

Conclusion

9.7 The capacity of policy and Home Office Digital teams is an acknowledged risk, particularly as FBIS approaches its final few months.

Annex A: Future Border and Immigration System (FBIS) benefits not reviewed as part of this inspection

FBIS benefits not reviewed as part of this inspection		
Benefit detail	Cashable/ non-cashable (as of December 2025)	Realisation from date
Wider socio-economic impact – Skilled Worker Route This benefit reflects increased volumes of European Economic Area (EEA) and non-EEA nationals travelling to the UK through work-related routes, resulting in a net fiscal contribution to the UK	Non-cashable (£7.3 billion)	Delivered Financial year 2020 to 2021
Wider socio-economic impact – Graduate Route This benefit reflects increased volumes of EEA and non-EEA nationals travelling to the UK through undergraduate-related routes, resulting in a net fiscal contribution to the UK	Non-cashable (£7.9 billion)	Delivered Financial year 2021 to 2022

Benefit detail	Cashable/ non-cashable (as of December 2025)	Realisation from date
Tourists deterred from visiting the UK (ETA disbenefit) An ETA impact assessment identified two disbenefits linked to tourists being deterred from visiting the UK by the ETA fee	Disbenefit	Disbenefit Financial year 2023 to 2024
Call centre demand reduction (ETA) Deliverables under FBIS Customer Journey Support enabled more efficient resolution of customer queries and supported operational efficiency gains	Cashable (£1.2 million)	Delivered Financial year 2023 to 2024
eVisa operational efficiency (Update My Details and Account Recovery Online) FBIS investment has enabled automation services, leading to the removal of manual checks and procedures, and freeing up FTE capacity for redeployment	Cashable (£1.1 million)	Delivered Financial year 2024 to 2025
Call centre demand reduction (eVisas) Technology enhancements introduced through FBIS have made eVisa query resolution more efficient, reducing call centre demand and generating operational and commercial savings	Non-cashable (£3.3 million)	Delivered Financial year 2024 to 2025

Benefit detail	Cashable/ non-cashable (as of December 2025)	Realisation from date
Removal of commercial contracts for an in-house solution (non-FTE) Replacing commercial contracts with in-house interview and appointment booking systems has reduced commercial costs	Cashable (£0.02 million)	Delivered Financial year 2025 to 2026
National Insurance Number (NINo) transformation efficiency This Department for Work and Pensions efficiency, delivered through FBIS, will align NINo issuing with digital status, reducing administrative burden	Non-cashable	To be delivered Financial year 2026 to 2027
Upstream detection ETAs and Carrier Integration will support upstream detection of inadequately documented passengers and those without permission to travel, reducing refusals and associated costs at the border	Non-cashable	To be delivered Financial year 2025 to 2026
Differentiation and Workflow (D&W) operational efficiency The D&W project is expected to reduce casework time across safeguarding referrals, delivering operational efficiency savings	Non-cashable	To be delivered Financial year 2026 to 2027

Annex B: Role and remit of the Independent Chief Inspector

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

- consistency of approach
- the practice and performance of listed persons compared to other persons doing similar activities
- the procedure in making decisions
- the treatment of claimants and applicants
- certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum At 2002 (c. 41) (unfounded claim)

- the 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)
- the procedure in relation to the exercise of enforcement powers (including powers of arrest, entry, search, and seizure)
- practice and procedure in relation to the prevention, detection, and investigation of offences
- the procedure in relation to the conduct of criminal proceedings
- whether customs functions have been appropriately exercised by the Secretary of State and the Director of Border Revenue
- the provision of information
- the handling of complaints; and
- the content of information about conditions in countries outside the United Kingdom, which the Secretary of State compiles and makes available, for purposes connected with immigration and asylum, to immigration officers and other officials.

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

The legislation requires the Independent Chief Inspector to report in writing to the Secretary of State. The

Secretary of State lays all reports before Parliament, which they have committed to do within eight weeks of receipt, subject to both Houses of Parliament being in session.

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

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

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