

Inspection Report Published: An inspection of the initial processing of migrants arriving via small boats at Tug Haven and Western Jet Foil December 2021 – January 2022

Three years into the small boats crisis, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration has found the Home Office response is both ineffective and inefficient, exposing gaps in security procedures and leaving vulnerable migrants at risk.

In 2021, 28,526 people arrived on the south coast in small boats, according to Home Office statistics – a significant increase from 236 in 2018.

An inspection of the Tug Haven processing facilities, which have since closed, along with those at Western Jet Foil, both in Dover, found the Home Office's response to the challenge of increasing numbers of migrants was poor, particularly in terms of systems, processes, resources, data collection and accurate record keeping. A new processing centre for migrants opened in January 2022 at a former Ministry of Defence site at Manston, also in Kent, and further facilities are also due to open later this year at Western Jet Foil.

David Neal, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI), said:

These migrants crossed the Channel in dire circumstances. Many were vulnerable and at risk, including children and women on their own, and when they arrived in Dover the way they were dealt with was unacceptable. This is because the Home Office has failed over the past three years to move from a crisis response to having better systems and procedures in place and treating this as business as usual.

Data, the lifeblood of decision-making, is inexcusably awful. Equipment to carry out security checks is often first-generation and unreliable. Biometrics, such as taking fingerprints and photographs, are not always recorded.

The Home Office told our inspectors that 227 migrants had absconded from secure hotels between September 2021 and January 2022, and not all had been biometrically enrolled. Over a five-week period alone, 57 migrants had absconded – two-thirds of whom had not had their fingerprints and photographs taken.

Put simply, if we don't have a record of people coming into the country, then we do not know who is threatened or who is threatening.

To move migrants quickly through Tug Haven, effective safeguarding was sacrificed because of the large numbers of migrants from small boats coming into the country. There was limited reflection by staff at all grades of the connection between vulnerability and security – that identifying a trafficking victim could feed the intelligence cycle and reveal intelligence about organised criminal gangs. The ability of staff to identify and safeguard vulnerable migrants was also hindered by the fact that no interpreters were used in the procedures carried out at Tug Haven.

Many of the issues identified were also picked up in a [separate inspection](#) undertaken last year by [Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons](#), which found that migrants were being held in unsatisfactory conditions, with weak Home Office systems relating to governance, accountability and safeguarding.

Mr Neal added that the Home Office team charged with responding to the crisis, the Clandestine Channel Threat Command, is pulled between day-to-day operations and developing a deterrent, as well as responding to the constant requests for strategic briefings. The majority of its Campaign Plan objectives focus on strategic effects at the expense of delivering security and dealing humanely with the here and now. In simple terms, the focus on the 'Prevent' function has eclipsed the need to do simple things well on the quayside in Dover.

He added that although staff were doing their very best, they were tired, and high volumes of migrants led to poor record keeping and data collection and processes that do not work.

The workforce can do no more. They have responded with enormous fortitude and exceptional personal commitment, which is humbling, and they are quite rightly proud of how they have stepped up. However, we found there was a lack of effective and visible leadership.

This is not about rank and file staff working hard on the quayside at Dover, this is about effective leadership, grip and the ability to bring in systems that work. Border Force and Immigration Enforcement officers at home and overseas are doing a great job on a daily basis.

He added:

A new model for Borders and Enforcement is desperately required if our border is to be secured and vulnerability effectively addressed. There needs to be a strategic approach by the Home Office to regularise their response to small boats, as this has

become business as usual and moved beyond an emergency response.

The inspection was undertaken between December 2021 and January 2022 and the report made four recommendations, all of which the Home Office has accepted, with priority placed on ensuring that staff received training and updated guidance by March 2022 in security matters, including how the Biometric Recording Stations are operated.

By June 2022 further improvements needed to have been made, including identifying migrants who are vulnerable such as children, single women and families, and ensuring information is properly recorded and acted upon. Further detailed recommendations call for the improvement of overall data quality and resourcing needs.

Our recommendations are not intended to supersede those provided by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Home Office's own Joint Review, but clearly point to a need for the Home Office to urgently implement all recommendations as a priority.

We will reinspect the processing facilities later this year.