THE UK BORDER AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE CHIEF INSPECTOR’S REPORT ON AN UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF CROYDON PUBLIC ENQUIRY OFFICE
THE UK BORDER AGENCY RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHIEF INSPECTOR’S REPORT ON AN UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF CROYDON PUBLIC ENQUIRY OFFICE

1. Recommendation 1: We recommend that the UK Border Agency:

   i) sets a clear target for the end-to-end process
   ii) communicates this to customers and
   iii) measures its performance against this target.

1.1 i-ii: accepted; iii accepted in principle

1.2 We accept the Inspectorate’s findings that customer expectations about the length of their visit to the Croydon Public Enquiry Office are not as well managed as they could be at present, and that there is ambiguity between the internal target (to process 90% of premium applications within 24 hours) and external references to a same-day service.

1.3 The UK Border Agency will take forward a number of actions to address these areas for improvement, including:

   • Ensuring that information on the website, and provided through the call centre and within Public Enquiry Offices around the UK, is regularly updated to accurately reflect average waiting times and better manage customer expectations of processing times (see recommendation 2 below).
   • Developing a “stretch target” for Croydon Public Enquiry Office’s end-to-end processing of applications as part of our strategy to achieve customer service excellence.
   • Reviewing processes within Croydon Public Enquiry Office to ensure that all opportunities to make the process as quick as possible for the customer are exploited.
   • Clarifying in our communications that the service standard for the UK Border Agency’s premium route is decision of an application within 24 hours for 90% of cases (allowing for cases that may require further investigation), but that for the vast majority of individuals presenting themselves to a Public Enquiry Office in person (i.e. not through a third party representative) this will mean leaving with their decision on the day of their appointment.

1.4 A national lead has been appointed to oversee the Public Enquiry Office network nationally, and will review service standards and performance as part of this work.

1.5 The UK Border Agency accepts in principle the need to measure end-to-end processing times in Public Enquiry Offices. Recent systems changes to facilitate the introduction of online booking (which the inspection report indicates has been favourably received by customers) mean that there is no longer the facility to generate management information about processing times for the end-to-end premium service process. As an interim measure, we propose to undertake manual sampling of a proportion of the customers in Croydon Public Enquiry Office to get a picture of processing times. (It would be prohibitively costly and time consuming to do this for all customers visiting Croydon PEO given the volume of customers seen every day).
2. Recommendation 2: We recommend that the UK Border Agency review the information on its website and in the Croydon PEO to ensure it accurately reflects the level of service being provided, with particular reference to waiting times.

2.1 Accepted

2.2 In response to the inspection, we have already undertaken a full review of the information on the UK Border Agency website relating to the premium service offered in Public Enquiry Offices to ensure that this accurately reflects the service provided and gives a better idea of likely processing times for our customers.

2.3 We have already introduced a daily check in the Croydon PEO to ensure that information displayed is accurate and appropriately branded.

2.4 There are screens displaying pre-recorded information in the Public Enquiry Office in Croydon. These are now out of date. In the short term, we have arranged for the screens to be turned off. We will take forward action with the commercial provider to update the information on the screens, including branding and information relating to expected processing times.

3. Recommendation 3: We recommend that the UK Border Agency takes steps to make improvements to its accommodation and facilities for customers and staff. In particular, to:

   i) ensure customer service desks are more visible and are used appropriately to support customers who access this service
   ii) improve office facilities for staff, especially photocopiers and printers
   iii) address consistent problems with IT, microphone and tannoy failures
   iv) make improvements to the accommodation on the first and second floor for both customers and staff.

3.1 i-iii: accepted; iv: accepted in principle

3.2 Action is already underway to improve the customer service desks in the Croydon Public Enquiry Office. The desks have been relocated to opposite the entrance to the floor where they are now easily identifiable to customers. We are improving signage, inviting messengers to direct customers to the desks for information and enquiries, and ensuring that the desks on each floor are staffed at all times while the PEO is open to the public. We will be prioritising staff who work at the customer service desk for refresher training in customer service skills and are looking at the possibility of getting people out from behind the desks floor-walking. Finally, we are exploring ways to ensure that information about the final stage of the non-biometric premium process (insertion of the appropriate vignette in the passport) can be relayed regularly to customers via the customer service desks.

3.3 Additional photocopiers and printers are on order to enhance the facilities available to staff in Croydon Public Enquiry Office. We are also engaging with staff to identify other priorities for improvement to the working environment, including staff seating.

3.4 We will review the way that IT and equipment failures are logged internally and addressed in conjunction with a range of commercial partners to ensure that problems can be rectified more swiftly. For much of the IT in Croydon PEO, any failure is already treated as a “priority 1 call” by Home Office IT owing to the fact that failures in PEO have a direct impact on the UK Border Agency’s customers. We recognise the importance of sharing information with our customers when technical failures impact on our service delivery and will ensure that any
such information forms part of regular announcements. We will also seek to identify whether some old equipment may need replacing rather than repairing to reduce the occurrence of these failures as part of our actions to improve the working environment for staff.

3.5 The UK Border Agency accepts in principle the broader recommendation to improve the physical environment on the first and second floor of the Croydon PEO for customers and staff, and is extremely keen to take this forward, an initial assessment of cost already having been undertaken. A strategic outline business case is already under development for consideration of investment into this project which will be considered amongst other priority property projects. A decision on affordability will inevitably have to be taken given the current economic climate.