

Inspection report published: An inspection of UK Refugee Resettlement Schemes

When I began this inspection of the UK's refugee resettlement schemes, the Home Office was on the verge of launching a new scheme to replace the Gateway Protection Programme (Gateway), Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). It also appeared that the target for VPRS to resettle 20,000 refugees from the conflict in Syria by May 2020 would be achieved.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic derailed both the launch of the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) and VPRS. In mid-March 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) announced a temporary suspension of all resettlements, which they lifted in June 2020.

Despite pleas from NGOs and others for the government to resume refugee resettlements as a matter of urgency there has been none under any UK scheme since 12 March 2020. On 9 November, the government confirmed in a House of Lords debate on the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill that it will restart refugee resettlement "as soon possible", but gave no indication of when this might be.

Against this backdrop, and in anticipation of the eventual launch of UKRS, the inspection looked at how the various long-running schemes had performed up to March 2020, at the particular difficulties and issues each had encountered, and at what lessons the Home Office should be taking forward into any new scheme. This included a look at the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS).

I last inspected VPRS in 2017-18. At that time, I commented that everyone concerned with the scheme (UNHCR, IOM, UK local authorities and their delivery partners, NGOs, the Home Office and other government departments, and CSS groups) deserved credit for what they had achieved. There was no doubting their hard work and commitment, or the very real challenges they faced. However, there were several areas where improvements were needed, some of which were directly within the Home Office's control, while others required it to be more active in co-ordinating, cajoling and incentivising others.

In 2018, Home Office managers and staff felt that my criticisms were unfair, and may well feel the same about the findings from this latest inspection.

For the record, I again found that those working on the resettlement schemes were knowledgeable, competent and highly committed. It was clear that they all derived a great deal of satisfaction from helping vulnerable refugees. Operationally, every resettlement presents a host of challenges, the greatest

of which is securing the required accommodation and support. Each arrival is therefore an achievement.

Nonetheless, I found there was still considerable room for improvement, and a risk that the Home Office would roll into UKRS without confronting some of the fundamental concerns about the previous schemes, particularly the range of accommodation and support available and its impact on the time taken from acceptance of a refugee family to their resettlement in the UK.

As I observed in 2018, while the UK resettlement process may be quick compared with other international schemes, the Home Office should not regard this as an answer to concerns about timescales, not least as these have continued to lengthen, especially for larger families and refugees with complex needs. Eight months (to date) without any resettlements has simply made this worse, particularly for those already accepted for resettlement and waiting for news.

My report was sent to the Home Secretary on 14 September 2020. It contains ten recommendations. The Home Office has accepted all of the recommendations, albeit only partially in some cases. Implementation will involve a great deal of effort. While UKRS remains paused, the Home Office should press ahead with as much of this work as possible, resisting the temptation to redeploy key staff, so that when the new scheme is eventually launched it is as good as it can be.

[Regulator praises Sellafield progress](#)

News story

The UK's chief nuclear inspector has highlighted progress in our decommissioning programme in his annual report.



The demolition of the First Generation Reprocessing Plant Stack was mentioned as a key decommissioning milestone in the report.

Mark Foy, of the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) noted our preparation work for retrievals from our legacy silos for praise.

He also referenced the completion of key decommissioning work including:

- demolition of the First Generation Reprocessing Plant Stack
- removal of contaminated plant and equipment from a Special Nuclear Materials facility
- the start of operations in our Cyber Security Operations Centre, the first of its kind in the nuclear industry

The report also highlighted our focus on improvements to ageing facilities and construction of new facilities to safely treat, store, and dispose of waste.

Mark Neate, Sellafield Ltd's environment, safety and security director said:

We welcome the publication of the ONR Chief Nuclear Inspector's Report.

It is pleasing to see our regulator acknowledge the complexity of our mission and highlight our progress in accelerating hazard and risk reduction in our legacy facilities.

Having a mature and constructive relationship with our regulators is fundamental to our ability to remain safe, learn from our experiences, and adapt to new thinking. Such scrutiny helps us to trend our performance, identify areas for improvement and close any gaps.

Sellafield is the UK's most complex nuclear site. Our daily work presents substantial nuclear, environmental, radiological, chemical, and conventional safety and security challenges.

Keeping our workforce, supply chain partners, facilities, and the environment safe and secure is a continuous pursuit that requires the focus and attention of everyone involved at Sellafield, every day.

As reprocessing concludes our mission is evolving to a focus on waste management and clean up. We look forward to working with the ONR and others to sustain and improve our performance in the future.

Be flood aware during Flood Action Week 2020

The awareness campaign is aimed at providing essential advice about what people should do if they live in an area at risk of flooding.

It's especially hoping to encourage those who live in areas at risk of flooding, but who have not experienced flooding before, to take action now to protect their home, possessions and family from the devastating effect of flooding in the future.

Over 5 million homes are at risk of flooding in England alone, the average cost of flooding to a home is £30k and the mental health-impacts are long-lasting.

The campaign – called Prepare. Act. Survive. – advises those in flood risk areas to create their own simple flood plan.

Leila Huntington, Environment Agency Flood Risk Manager in the North East, said:

How many times have you heard those infamous words being spoken by your friends, family or even by yourself saying '...it won't happen to me'.

Flooding is one of the worst circumstances that many people will experience during their lifetime. Being flooded not only impacts on homes, livelihoods and day-to-day lives but the impacts can have a long lasting effect on people's overall mental health and wellbeing.

Flood Action Week is a vital way for the Environment Agency to shine a spotlight upon the issue of flooding, and to highlight the important ways residents, business owners and communities can prepare for severe weather conditions that can be caused by seasonality or the effects of climate change.

If people are to do just one or two things during Flood Action Week then I'd urge everyone to find out if they are at risk of flooding and if so, prepare a simple flood plan as this could not only be a lifesaver but could also guide people during a time of crisis.

One person who knows all about the importance of Flood Action Week is local flood warden and County Councillor for Prudhoe South, Gordon Stewart.

Mr Stewart has recently become a Prudhoe flood warden, joining forces with seven other volunteers in the area. He also experienced flooding first-hand when his daughter was evacuated back in 2012, after a culvert collapsed in

Newcastle upon Tyne, during severe weather conditions.

Gordon talks about the attraction of becoming a flood warden. He said:

I want to help our local community to prepare for any possible flooding, and to prevent the loss of life and property.

Gordon, who was born and brought up in Northumberland, has been a County Councillor with Northumberland County Council for over three and a half years, and in this time he has championed a number of local projects including the reopening of the Riverside Café in Prudhoe after it was flooded during Storm Desmond.

The charity-run café plays an important role in the community by providing a safe environment for adults with additional needs to work and enjoy their independence. Gordon said:

Historically some areas of Northumberland have always been susceptible to flooding due to their proximity to rivers or other water courses. This is still the case but with high rainfall now more often, this has to be taken into account.

The current number of regional flood wardens stands at over 160. They are part of 42 flood groups across Durham and Darlington, Cleveland and Northumberland.

The North East has a beautiful array of different rivers including the Coquet, Derwent, Gaunless, Pont, Rede, Skerne, Tyne, Tweed, Wear, and Tees but during bad weather conditions the Environment Agency monitors the potential for flood risk, which includes fluvial flooding.

There is also increased risk in urban areas from surface water and groundwater flooding caused by the effects of climate change.

In many areas at risk in the region there are flood alleviation schemes in place, which include a variety of different measures ranging from debris screens, flood walls and embankments, temporary flood barriers through to a dam, which is the case at Mitford near to Morpeth in Northumberland, and natural flood management solutions.

The Environment Agency is currently building new or improved flood defences in many locations, including Ponteland, Corbridge, Hexham, Acomb, Stokesley, Middlesbrough and Yarm.

These works form part of the current 6 year capital investment programme which has seen government funding of £2.6bn to better protect 300,000 homes from flooding and coastal erosion between 2015 and 2021. Beyond 2021 record government investment of £5.2bn has been announced. This will better protect 336,000 properties, through the creation of around 2,000 new flood and

coastal defences, in England by 2027.

During Flood Action Week the Environment Agency is urging people to download an action pack that will help them prepare their simple flood plan ahead of the seasonal bad weather conditions.

To find out if you are living in a flood risk area and for information about how to sign up for flood alerts please visit the Environment Agency website

Please follow the online activities of the Yorkshire and North East Environment Agency teams on [Twitter](#)

[Avian influenza identified in wild birds in South West of England](#)

The UK's Chief Veterinary Officer has confirmed that routine monitoring has detected the H5N8 strain of avian influenza in a very small number of wild birds in Gloucestershire, Devon and Dorset.

Wild geese near Stroud in Gloucestershire and swans near Dawlish in Devon have tested positive for highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N8. In addition, a wild goose near Weymouth in Dorset has tested positive for H5N8 (pathogenicity yet to be determined). Birds were tested posthumously and were found to have been infected with the strain of avian influenza virus which is currently circulating in wild birds in Europe.

The Chief Vets from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have urged bird keepers to maintain and strengthen their farm biosecurity measures in order to prevent further outbreaks of avian influenza in the UK. The advice follows a decision to [raise the risk level for avian influenza incursion in wild Birds in Great Britain from 'medium' to 'high' last week.](#)

There have been a number of confirmed reports of avian influenza in wild birds including geese and swans in the Netherlands and northern Germany in recent weeks. These wild birds are all on the waterfowl flyway from breeding grounds in western Russia, where the H5N8 strain was reported in poultry in mid-October.

Wild birds migrating to the UK from mainland Europe during the winter period can spread the disease to poultry and other captive birds. All bird keepers and members of the public are being urged to prevent direct or indirect contact with wild birds.

Public Health England (PHE) advises that the risk to public health from the virus is very low and the Food Standards Agency advises that avian influenzas pose a very low food safety risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry

and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

An H5N8 strain of avian influenza has been confirmed in wild geese in Gloucestershire, swans in Devon and a wild goose in Dorset. It is important now more than ever that bird keepers ensure they are doing all they can to maintain and strengthen good biosecurity on their premises to ensure we prevent further outbreaks.

Public Health England has confirmed that the risk to public health is very low and the Food Standards Agency advises that bird flu poses a very low food safety risk for UK consumers.

We ask that people continue to report findings of dead wild birds so that we can investigate the extent of infection.

Dr Gavin Dabrera, Consultant in Acute Respiratory Infections at PHE said:

To date, there have been no human cases of infection with influenza A(H5N8) confirmed by the WHO and the risk to public health is very low.

Our advice regarding contact with wild birds remains the same – make sure to wash your hands thoroughly with soap after coming into contact with any animal and do not touch any sick or dead birds.

A Food Standards Agency spokesperson said:

We advise that, on the basis of the current scientific evidence, avian influenzas pose a very low food safety risk for UK consumers.

Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, remain safe to eat.

Wild birds migrating from mainland Europe during the winter period can spread the disease to poultry and other captive birds. There are some simple measures that all poultry keepers, whether they are running a large commercial farm, keeping a few hens in their back garden, or rearing game birds, should take to protect their birds against the threat of avian flu.

These include:

- Keeping the area where birds live clean and tidy, controlling rats and mice and regularly cleansing and disinfecting any hard surfaces
- Cleaning footwear before and after visits
- Placing birds' feed and water in fully enclosed areas that are protected

- from wild birds, and removing any spilled feed regularly
- Putting fencing around outdoor areas where birds are allowed and limiting their access to ponds or areas visited by wild waterfowl
 - Where possible, avoid keeping ducks and geese with other poultry species.

Further information on how to [help prevent the spread of the disease can be found on gov.uk.](#)

If you find dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, you should report them to the Defra helpline (03459 33 55 77).

Notes to editors:

- The government's outbreak assessment following recent cases England can be accessed [here.](#)
- For further details of findings of HPAI in wild birds we routinely publish a report on findings of [HPAI in wild birds in Great Britain.](#)
- These cases in wild birds are unrelated to the case of Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI) H5N2 at a small commercial premises in [Kent](#) last week. The Animal and Plant Health Agency is investigating whether the finding is related to the recent the HPAI H5N8 case in broiler breeder chickens in [Cheshire.](#)
- Avian influenza of the H5N2 strain was [confirmed on 2 November](#) in a small commercial poultry premises in Kent where a 1km Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza LPAI Restricted zone has been put in place all birds at the small mixed species commercial premises have been humanely culled to limit the spread of the disease.
- A separate and unrelated case of avian influenza of the H5N8 strain was later [confirmed at a site in Cheshire](#) and 3km and 10km temporary control zones were put in place and all 13,500 birds at the premises have been humanely culled. Testing has confirmed this is a highly pathogenic strain related to the virus currently circulating in Europe.
- Bird flu is a notifiable animal disease. If you suspect any type of bird flu you must report it immediately. Failure to do so is an offence.

You can report suspected or confirmed cases in:

England by calling the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301, Scotland by contacting your [local Field Services Office](#), Wales by calling 0300 303 8268, Northern Ireland by calling the DAERA Helpline on 0300 2007840

[**Good progress on Burton's £30 million**](#)

flood defences

Press release

A further section of the £30 million Burton-upon-Trent flood defence project has been opened to the public by the Environment Agency.



- Environment Agency opens further section of £30m flood defence project
- Public access to embankment and local nature reserve
- Project on target to be completed spring 2021

Members of the public are now able to access the embankment between the Riverside Hotel and the edge of the golf course. The path through Toad Hole Nature Reserve has also been reopened.

It is hoped to open the remainder of the section near the golf course by the end of the year.

The whole project, which started in June 2019, is scheduled to finish next spring and will improve flood defences for over 4,500 homes and 1,000 businesses.

Construction work is continuing throughout the latest national lockdown with Environment Agency staff and contractors following government guidelines.

William Groves, senior flood advisor for the Environment Agency, said:

The work on this important infrastructure for the town is progressing very well.

We will be opening further sections as they are completed to minimise the inconvenience to members of the public.

With the onset of winter weather in recent weeks, we are also urging people to check their flood risk, sign up for free flood warnings and keep up to date with the latest situation at this link <https://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding> or follow @EnvAgencyMids.

The Environment Agency has adopted COVID-19-safe ways of working in helping to protect people from flooding and are calling for people to be prepared this winter.

Simple steps should be taken, such as checking if you live in an area at high risk of flooding, preparing a bag with medication and important documents and moving valuable and sentimental items upstairs or to a safe place.

Know your risk:

- Find out if you're at risk – [Use this postcode checker](#) to see if you live in flood risk area
- If you do live in a flood risk area [sign up for flood warnings](#). These warn of the risk of flooding from rivers, the sea and groundwater. You'll be alerted by phone, email or text when flooding is expected.
- The Environment Agency has specially trained Flood Support Officers across the country who provide information and advice during and after floods. Call Floodline (24-hour service) on 0345 988 1188 or type-talk (for the hard of hearing) on 0345 602 6340 to find out if they're active in your area.

Notes to editor

- The Burton scheme is part of the £2.6 billion being spent over 2015-21 across the country, delivering more than 1,500 projects to better protect 300,000 homes. This is on top of £1 billion by 2020 to maintain flood defences.
- We will be doubling this investment to a record £5.2 billion between 2021-27, creating around 2,000 new flood and coastal defences to better protect 336,000 properties across England.
- In July 2020, the government published a new long-term policy statement on flood and coastal erosion risk management. This long-term plan to tackle flooding is the most comprehensive in a decade, with 5 ambitious policies and over 40 supporting actions to accelerate progress to better protect and prepare the country for future flooding and coastal erosion.
- Flood defence investment takes place where the risk is highest, wherever it is across the country. Each scheme is carefully considered to where it will benefit the most people and property.
- Further information about the Burton scheme is available at this link <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/west-midlands/copy-of-burton-f-rms-information-page/>

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