



Home Office

Permanent Secretary

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Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair, Home Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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10 January 2022

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your Committee's letter of 14 December about the Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI).

As you and the public would expect, I place great emphasis on the Inquiry's independence from the Home Office in relation to the conduct of its investigations. However, as Accounting Officer, I am also aware that inquiries need to deliver in the public interest, including on time and with value for money. I have personally raised this matter with the Inquiry Chair on several occasions.

In his letter, Tim Loughton raises a number of questions on the Inquiry's progress, timescales, costs, and governance that I address below. I've taken each in turn and hope that you find the responses helpful.

There are 53 years within scope of the Inquiry. In 6 years of the Inquiry's operation, there have so far been only 19 days of evidence hearings which cover the period 1968-1982. What do you understand to be the reasons for this apparently slow rate of progress?

Delivery of the Inquiry is the responsibility of the independent Chair under Section 17 of the Inquiries Act 2005. In making decisions on the procedure and conduct of the Inquiry, the Chair must also act with fairness and the need to avoid any unnecessary cost.

The Inquiry has dealt with a number of preliminary issues since it was established. As set out on its website, it has designated 248 Core Participants, with the most recent being designated in November last year. It has undertaken 18 days of both open preliminary and directions hearings and published a total of 2,903 evidential files and documents, in addition to over 200 directions, rulings and notes. In June 2021, the Inquiry referred its first suspected miscarriages of justice case to the dedicated panel set up by the Home Office and more cases may be identified as the Inquiry progresses its investigations.

The Inquiry publishes update notes which provide information about its progress and changes to its timetable on its website. These are available at: <https://www.ucpi.org.uk/news/>.

Why has the Inquiry timeline become so delayed?

As set out above, the Inquiry publishes on its website updates which include detail on the Inquiry's recent, current, and planned work.

In January 2019, the Inquiry Chair published a statement providing detail on why the timetable set out in the inquiry's Strategic Review of 2018 had been delayed, including difficulties in obtaining and attributing intelligence files for investigations.

In July of the same year, the Inquiry published an update note which further explained that another issue which has impacted its timescales is the considerable time it has devoted to considering how to have proper regard for the privacy of individuals without undermining the public interest in the Inquiry being conducted as transparently as possible.

The pandemic also caused the postponement of some of the Inquiry's hearings in 2020.

The extent of the Inquiry's investigation has become clearer than was the case in 2015 but it is of course a concern that the Inquiry is taking longer than first anticipated and I am engaged with the Chair on this matter.

When do you expect the Inquiry will now produce its final report? When do you expect redacted publication of the report will take place?

My officials and I are working very closely with the Inquiry Chair with regards to the timescales for publication of the final report. I hope to be in a position to provide a further update on this soon.

How many people are working on the Undercover Policing Inquiry?

You can find details of the Inquiry's staffing resources on its website, which currently states there are a team of approximately 90 staff supporting the Inquiry Chair.

What is the Home Office's current forecast for the total cost of the Inquiry? The average annual expenditure for the inquiry to date is £6.9 million. Do you expect that costs will continue to be this high per year for the length of the Inquiry and in what areas of expenditure will those costs be concentrated?

In terms of the expected total cost of the Inquiry, we remain in discussions with the Inquiry on delivery timescales which will determine the anticipated total cost. As with all Inquiries, this information will be published in full, at the close of the Inquiry.

As you have noted, the Inquiry's average annual expenditure is around £6.9 million per annum. We anticipate that annual costs may be higher than this as the Inquiry delivers its evidence hearings, which will attract increased legal costs such as those under Section 40 of the Inquiries Act. This is a key cost driver for Inquiries. We expect costs

will reduce once hearings conclude.

Have you as the Accounting Officer had discussions with the Senior Responsible Owner for the inquiry in the Home Office about the risk that delays to the progress of the inquiry may impact on witnesses' availability to give evidence, bearing in mind that witnesses may be asked to testify to events forty to fifty years ago?

I have met and corresponded with the Inquiry Chair and Secretary regarding the timescales for delivery of the Inquiry. There are also quarterly meetings between the Department's Senior Responsible Officer, who I work closely with, and the Inquiry Secretary to discuss the Inquiry's progress, expenditure and risks to delivery of the Inquiry. Officials in the Home Office Sponsorship Unit also meet monthly with the Inquiry team to discuss progress and finances.

I note your concerns on the availability of witnesses to give evidence given the time that has passed since some of the events that fall within the Inquiry's scope for investigation. The Inquiry is aware of its obligations to consider the individual circumstances of its core participants, including diverse support needs, and is working chronologically through its investigations, so that elderly witnesses can be heard from at the earliest opportunity.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IISCA), for which the Home Office is also a sponsor, publishes an Annual Report with a more granular breakdown of spending categories than the UPI publishes. This includes breakdowns of staffing and legal costs, Chair and panel costs, and more granular spending information on estates, IT, and consultancy/specialist services. Does the UPI provide the Home Office with more detailed spending information along these lines, and will you provide it to the Committee?

All Inquiries are expected to comply with Home Office financial processes and to ensure proper and efficient use of public funds. There is also a requirement in the Inquiries Act 2005 (s17.3) for the Inquiry Chairman to have regard for the need to avoid any unnecessary cost. As with all Inquiries the Home Office sponsors, the UCPI utilises the Department's finance system to conduct its business. This means we have access to detailed spending information and my teams meet regularly with the Inquiry team to discuss forecasts and expenditure.

I am satisfied that the UCPI provides detailed monthly expenditure for review and scrutiny by my officials. The Department can share a more detailed breakdown of spending categories if that would be helpful.

I hope this provides the Committee with reassurance that the Home Office is committed to monitoring and reviewing the Inquiry's progress and use of public funds.

Yours sincerely,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew Rycroft", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Rycroft
Permanent Secretary