

HOME OFFICE

Immigration enforcement

The Minister for Immigration (Mark Harper): The Home Office's Immigration Enforcement command ensures that the immigration rules are complied with and that those with no right to be in the UK are removed. It is better for both the UK taxpayer and offenders themselves if offenders leave the country voluntarily rather than in an enforced manner. Immigration Compliance and Enforcement teams are therefore working to identify how they can promote the visibility of enforcement operations to drive compliance and encourage more immigration offenders to leave the UK voluntarily.

A pilot operation, Operation Vaken, took place between 22 July and 22 August 2013 in six London boroughs to test whether different communications could encourage any increases in voluntary departures. It included a number of communications techniques, such as mobile billboards highlighting the risk of arrest, postcards in shop windows, adverts in newspapers and magazines, leaflets and posters advertising immigration surgeries in faith/charity group buildings.

The pilot period ceased on 22 October 2013 and a full evaluation report has now been produced, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House. As of 22 October, there have been 60 voluntary departures which can be directly attributed to this pilot. The report also identifies a further 65 cases that are currently being progressed towards departure.

The total cost of the pilot was £9,740. Data held by the Home Office indicate that the average cost of a voluntary removal is £1,000, and the average cost of an enforced removal is up to £15,000. The 60 voluntary removals connected to this pilot therefore represent a notional saving of approximately £830,000 compared to the costs of enforcing those removals.

The most cost-effective communications were the adverts, leaflets and posters that advertised immigration surgeries in faith and charity groups, rather than the advertising vans or other forms of advertising used in the operation. In addition, as my Rt Hon Friend the Home Secretary told the House of Commons on 22 October, the advertising vans in particular were too much of a blunt instrument and will not be used again.

During this period, a separate pilot was conducted in two immigration reporting centres, in Hounslow and Glasgow. These centres are principally used to ensure that those suspected of immigration offences are kept in regular contact whilst their case is progressed to removal. This pilot used a variety of communication materials to encourage those reporting to enquire about leaving the UK voluntarily and ceased on 4 October. The activity is being evaluated separately but there are no plans to repeat it.

The Government will continue to enforce the immigration rules and promote voluntary departure schemes to those who have no right to be in the UK – backed up with arrest, detention and enforced removal where individuals refuse to comply with the immigration rules or present a danger to the UK public.