

UK Border Force and ACC Engagement

What this paper is about

This paper provides an update on the work of UK Border Force (UKBF) and national UKBF passenger queuing time performance targets since the matter was last considered in 2012. It also highlights the engagement some member ACCs have had with UKBF and issues of concern.

Points for Discussion

- Do member ACCs have any issues with UKBF's new initiatives?
- Delegates are asked to report on the nature of their engagement with UKBF at their airports and improvements made since 2012.

Possible Action

Depending on the discussions at the meeting.

Background

1. The prime responsibility for the Border Force at UK airports is to maintain border security to protect the UK from criminality, terrorism and illegal migration. Its challenge is to balance rising passenger volumes and legitimate customer service expectations at major airports whilst continuing to maintain a safe and secure border. The Border Force is committed to becoming an increasingly intelligence-led and risk-focused business and it aims to meet this challenge by delivering improvements around three themes: Technology, People and Targeting the Threat.

2. In 2012 there was much concern across member ACCs about the performance of UKBF in terms of providing a good passenger experience and the length of time air passengers had to queue on arrival at UK airports at border control. At that time performance of border control had come under increasing scrutiny and there were a number of issues of concern to airports, their consultative committees and the industry as a whole. The paper presented to the Annual Meeting in 2012¹ highlighted a number of issues of concern and the Gatwick ACC shared the proactive working partnership arrangements that had been put in place at Gatwick Airport. UKACCs agreed to write to the Head of the UKBF at the time to encourage similar working partnerships to be put in place at other UK airports. No response was ever received.

Current situation

3. Since that time it appears that the performance of UKBF has improved and engagement with various aviation stakeholders at a national level is well established. The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration is also working with aviation stakeholders and has created an Aviation Stakeholder Forum to develop opportunities for stakeholders to engage with his office and help drive forward his inspection programme by:

- providing regular opportunities for key aviation stakeholders to have an input into the Chief Inspector's wider inspection programme;
- ensuring key aviation stakeholders who have strong interests in the Home Office working to the highest standards can use their knowledge and experience to suggest possible areas/themes for inspection; and
- bringing their expertise and evidence about the performance of the Home Office to the group so that key aviation issues are brought to the attention of the Chief Inspector.

4. The national targets set by the Home Office for maximum queuing times at UK immigration remain the same as in 2012. The current targets are:

- 95% of non EU passengers are processed in 45 minutes or less
- 95% of EU passengers are processed in 25 minutes or less

5. It is understood that UKBF now publishes its performance against these targets at UK airports.

6. UKBF has also brought forward a number of initiatives which has helped improve the passenger experience at Border Control such as fast track queuing times, digital signage showing real time queuing times in airports' immigration halls so passengers know what to expect on arrival, the roll out of egates including the recent trial revising the age limit of UK passport holders using egates to age 12 and over and information provision on the ways in which passengers prepare to use the egates e.g. discouraging the use of EU ID cards which currently slows the pass through rate.

7. As regards UKBF at a local level, it is understood that some member ACCs and their airports now have a much improved working relationship with the local UKBF teams. Earlier this year, Newcastle ACC enquired about the experience of other member ACCs' airports in engaging with UKBF. A handful of responses were received from colleagues and is given below:

¹ <http://www.ukaccs.info/12almfiles/12border.pdf>

ACC	ENGAGEMENT	COMMENTS/ISSUES
Aberdeen	Has not been necessary	Passenger experience is now much more friendly and personal
Gatwick	Yes – regular engagement through the Passenger Advisory Group. Gatwick Airport Limited also has a positive working relationship with UKBF and agreement reached to also work to local performance targets	Concerns about the impact of reductions in UKBF resource against a backdrop of significant growth in passenger numbers.
Heathrow	No direct contact	No current issues
Manchester	Yes – UKBF attends the Airport Users Advisory Group and the Head of UKBF attends the quarterly MACC meetings	<p>Progress with the installation and improvements to the technology for the use of egates in all three terminals, including how queues are managed and the availability of staffed desks as an alternative, together with the benefits and disbenefits for incoming passengers, and the freeing up of resources for other aspects of the BF's work.</p> <p>Queuing times, the use of Bluetooth technology for the measurement of queues, and BF's performance under the targets set for "processing" inbound passengers.</p> <p>Passenger feedback and complaints scores for the inbound security service, including the monitoring of the scores and ongoing trends.</p>
Robin Hood Doncaster	Some engagement – UKBF attended last ACC meeting to give a security update	No current issues but there could be an impact with the expected growth in passenger throughput
Stansted	Yes – regular engagement	Mutual trust has been gained. This has resulted in UKBF being willing to share confidential information. A small group of STACC's User Experience Group (a sub group of STACC looking at passenger issues) meet UKBF in advance of each UEG meeting and are given a confidential briefing. This may also involve a behind the scenes tour of UKBF facilities to provide UEG members with greater insight. UKBF attend both UEG and STACC meetings. It has also been agreed that the STACC Chairman and the UKBF Regional Director meet on an annual basis.

8. Based on the small response from member UKACCs, it appears that there has been some improvement in the engagement some airports now have with UKBF. Delegates are asked to share experiences at the meeting so that a clearer picture can be obtained of UKBF's engagement across the 23 member ACCs.

Paula Street
UKACCs Secretariat