

Sir Alex Allan review: executive summary

[Emphasis added]

This report has been produced in response to Sir Philip Rutnam's request to undertake a fact finding review into the circumstances surrounding the former Home Secretary's evidence to the Home Affairs Committee on 25 April 2018

Preparations before the hearing

The written and oral briefing sessions before the hearing did not cover the issue of removals targets. I do not find that surprising given the focus was on Windrush children and the issue of removals targets had not been raised in previous statements and questions. Nonetheless, as events showed, officials should have been better prepared to answer questions when the issue was raised.

Support during the hearing

In preparations immediately before the hearing, the Home Secretary asked "are there removals targets" and was told "no". That led to her firm denial ("we do not have targets for removals") in the hearing. I cannot establish how she was given this reply: **the most likely explanation is crossed wires between her special adviser and her private office.**

During the session before hers, an official sitting in on that hearing spotted the questioning about removals targets and emailed the team with the Home Secretary. The import of this was missed due to misunderstandings amid the pressures of dealing with other urgent issues. The opportunity to alert the Home Secretary was therefore missed.

After the Home Secretary had given her answer in the hearing, there were confused email exchanges trying to establish the position on targets. The initial line that there were indeed no targets was undermined when it emerged that there had been a target until a few weeks previously. It proved impossible to establish a clear answer on whether targets had been allocated out regionally. The Home Secretary (and Glyn Williams who was appearing with her) were never provided with briefing that might have allowed them to put the correct position on the record.

The Home Secretary was not, therefore, supported as she should have been during the hearing.

After the hearing

The Home Secretary returned to her room in the House of Commons after the hearing. Hugh Ind was put on speaker-phone to explain the position. He initially repeated the line that there were currently no targets, but, when pressed, was not

able to bring clarity to the issues being raised. The Home Secretary became frustrated at not getting clear answers.

Following further email exchanges that failed to clear up the position, the Immigration Enforcement team was tasked with producing chapter and verse on targets and the history. They worked through the night, and produced a note which took the position forward but left several questions unanswered.

The Urgent Question

By now, the Home Secretary and her special advisers had lost confidence in the official advice coming forward. An Urgent Question (UQ) had been put down for that morning, and **she and her advisers worked on her answer without officials present. This was dangerous**, and though the UQ session went well in the House, the answer did not deal with the issues around targets as clearly as it could have done. For the first time, she said she had not been aware of targets.

The leak to the Guardian and the Home Secretary's tweets

After a quieter 24 hours, the press office was told that the Guardian had a leaked submission, copied to the Home Secretary, which referred to targets for enforced removals. The special advisers discussed with the Home Secretary how to deal with this. She was adamant that she had not seen the document and had not been aware of targets.

The special advisers drafted tweets to say this, which were shown to her private secretary. He agreed them on the basis that standard private office practice made it most unlikely she would have seen the document. He felt the question whether she was aware of targets was a question for her – though there had not, at that stage, been a full trawl of documents she might have seen and which would have cast doubt on her assertion. This was risky, but I accept that, given her earlier public statements and assertions, there was little alternative to the line in the tweets.

Possible misconduct

I was asked to make recommendations as to whether investigations into potential misconduct by specific employees should be undertaken. For reasons set out in the report, I do not recommend any such investigations. **I do, however, criticise Hugh Ind for less than satisfactory performance in his role as Director General for Immigration Enforcement. And I would have expected Patsy Wilkinson, as a permanent secretary, and the line manager of someone who was clearly in an exposed position, to play a more proactive role.**

Alex Allan 23 May 2018