

How To Deal With Passport Chaos

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Staff at the Passport processing offices have issued over three million in three months. Good but not good enough. Consider the 45,000 applicants waiting over ten weeks. The scandalous experience is illustrated by one family in the constituency. A group had booked to travel with their children together. Everyone received their passport except one child in one family.

When travel was within two weeks, they paid for quick processing. No result. My constituency team is among the most effective at Westminster. They had not got the Passport Office to process, produce and deliver the necessary passport by Saturday morning.

The day before, they had tried to make arrangements but, because of what I believe was miscommunication between two or three of their offices, what they said would be done was not done and what they said would not be done was done.

Exceptionally, the team who support constituents, who support me in my efforts to serve constituents, inspired me to send a message on Saturday morning to someone who might know the route through bureaucracy. Within an hour, a way through the difficulties was found. By late afternoon, after a rushed mixed mode journey from the south coast during the rail strike, the person collecting the printed passport was locked out of the office because doors closed half an hour early. More phone calls; an understanding supervisor resolved that: a relieved family could join their group for the holiday.

What would work better? Do not have a system that relies on multi-office processing? Design procedures that can work 'just in case' as well 'just in time' – as if everything goes right.

A knowledgeable observer feels for the customers, the travelling public, who have already jumped through the hoops set by the Passport Office. They can have paid twice to have a passport application found and processed as a priority for urgent travel, having waited weeks and weeks while trapped in a roulette system that fails too often.

In our worst case, the passport printed in the wrong place on Thursday was not sent, and the constituent was not told where it was in case they could have travelled to collect it on time. It was sitting on a table, tantalising and destroying a family's summer.

I will put forward the proposal that HMPO Her Majesty's Passport Office create a system for MPs to have access to senior managers so we can flag trapped cases. This could also help reduce the suggestions of possible bullying of staff who face the high levels of demand as international travel returns after years of Covid restrictions.

Recruit extra staff and incentivise existing employees to volunteer for higher levels of weekend working. HMPO people can rightly point to all they succeed in doing. By working for the victims when problems occur unnecessarily and when the arrangements to overcome them are impossibly complicated, slow and subject to communication blocks, we can help reduce waste and delay.

Parts of government administration are impressively user-friendly and effective. Finding the level of a prospective state pension and many functions of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency work well.

Think of the elements involved in a family holiday that involves travel abroad by airplane. Rely on the train to the airport? No strikes please. We rely on the airline for a safe on time flight: good maintenance and accurate air traffic control, with alert professional flight crew.

Rely on the airport security systems – first we need to rely on receiving a passport for every traveller. On Monday the Home Secretary kindly acknowledged my team's efforts.