



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

Harriett Baldwin MP
Minister of State

23rd September 2018

Our ref: MIN/18650/2018

Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Tom:

Thank you for your letter of 13 August. I welcome the opportunity to provide further detail on our assessment of our consular provision for the 2018 World Cup in Russia and how the experience will influence our planning for future events.

Our targeted 'Be on the Ball' (BOTB) campaign was designed to ensure our practical information and travel advice reached as many fans who were actually intending to travel to Russia as possible. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials met fans at several pre-World Cup events organised by the Football Association (FA) and the Football Supporters' Federation (FSF). We secured media coverage of our advice through outlets with a total combined reach of over 120 million people, and engaged a range of key partners to promote our messages within their own content. This exposure is in addition to more than 46,000 views of our BOTB page and 96,000 engagements with our related social media posts from May to July 2018. We know from experience that good partnerships with organisations and brands known to football supporters are an effective way to ensure our messages reach a high proportion of those who travel. For future tournaments we will continue to review our strategies to ensure we are using the best possible channels, including possible options for using other fan-based advocates.

We engaged with fan groups and other partners in Russia and the UK before and during the tournament, issuing regular updates to our advice to ensure it remained

up to date as England fans prepared to travel to new host cities. Feedback from conversations between our staff and British fans including LGBT and BAME fans, at matches and other events, indicated that most fans were enjoying their visit, had not experienced significant difficulties and were pleased with the support and visibility of British Embassy staff during the tournament. FCO officials are currently working with the FSF to conduct a joint survey of travelling fans to help us better understand how they accessed and used our campaign materials, which will help inform our plans for future events.

Our primary aim for BOTB was to minimise the number of preventable problems experienced by fans, particularly the more serious difficulties that would normally require consular assistance. Reflecting on previous international tournaments and factors specific to the Russia World Cup, a key success measure we set was for fewer than 1 in 100 British fans (1 percent) who attended a match to require consular assistance. In fact, the final figures showed that fewer than 1 in 500 fans (0.2 percent) required assistance from our consular teams. In the cases that arose, our experienced consular staff supported British nationals in line with our normal processes and policies and all fans we assisted have since returned to the UK. We welcome feedback from recipients of consular assistance through our established customer feedback channels.

The government response to the Committee's report acknowledges that the expulsion of our diplomats was the main challenge we faced in the build-up to and during the tournament. We responded by reviewing our well-developed plans, restructuring our operations in London and Russia and calling on support from our regional network. The England team's progress to the semi-finals meant we needed to resource and deploy consular teams for seven matches in six different cities over the full four weeks. But thanks to our early preparations; the targeted deployment of trained, specialist (and in many cases Russian-speaking) staff from across our network; and the good operational co-operation maintained between the UK and Russian police, we were able to deliver a full consular operation throughout the tournament in line with our plans. I do not underestimate the value of early planning and preparation for events of this scale; we will continue with this approach in future.

One particular challenge for our consular operations was the group match against Belgium in the Kaliningrad exclave. We became aware in the build-up to the match that many fans were planning to travel overland to this fixture, from both the UK and the Russian mainland. We adapted our plans to deploy additional staff to our Embassies in Vilnius and Riga, and a consular team from the Embassy in Warsaw was present in Gdansk on the day of the match. Given the multi-country approach for the UEFA European Championship in 2020 and the expanded World Cup format from 2026, this was a useful precedent in delivering our services for a major sporting event across multiple locations and countries.

Our crisis response plans are tried and tested. We conducted exercises with our World Cup team in Russia and London and key contacts in advance of the tournament. Thankfully, with a relatively small number of consular cases and a World Cup that passed off largely without incident, we did not need to mount a full crisis response during the event.

I am immensely proud of the hard work and dedication shown by FCO staff, UK police and our partners to help British fans enjoy a safe World Cup and to deliver professional, timely and individual support when it was needed. As the Committee, Parliament and the public would expect, while we rightly recognise success we will always strive to learn from every event and identify any areas for improvement. We have an established internal lessons learned process for reviewing the FCO's response following every major event, and I can assure you that consular services are a central feature of our review.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Baldwin'.

Harriett Baldwin MP