

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

First Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY
(FEES) (AMENDMENT) ORDER 2017

Monday 27 February 2017

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: MRS MADELEINE MOON

† Allan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)
 Austin, Ian (*Dudley North*) (Lab)
 † Brazier, Sir Julian (*Canterbury*) (Con)
 Clwyd, Ann (*Cynon Valley*) (Lab)
 Coyle, Neil (*Bermondsey and Old Southwark*) (Lab)
 † Dakin, Nic (*Scunthorpe*) (Lab)
 † Goodwill, Mr Robert (*Minister for Immigration*)
 † Griffiths, Andrew (*Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury*)
 † Harris, Carolyn (*Swansea East*) (Lab)
 † Lopresti, Jack (*Filton and Bradley Stoke*) (Con)

McDonald, Stuart C. (*Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East*) (SNP)
 † Pursglove, Tom (*Corby*) (Con)
 Stevenson, John (*Carlisle*) (Con)
 † Streeting, Wes (*Ilford North*) (Lab)
 † Villiers, Mrs Theresa (*Chipping Barnet*) (Con)
 † Warman, Matt (*Boston and Skegness*) (Con)
 † Wragg, William (*Hazel Grove*) (Con)

Jonathan Whiffing, Lauren Boyer, *Committee Clerks*

† **attended the Committee**

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Monday 27 February 2017

[MRS MADELEINE MOON *in the Chair*]

Draft Immigration and Nationality (Fees) (Amendment) Order 2017

4.30 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Immigration and Nationality (Fees) (Amendment) Order 2017.

I apologise at the outset for the rather dull nature of today's debate. I generally do dull quite well all on my own, but today I will not even have to try very hard.

The draft order will make minor technical changes to the Immigration and Nationality (Fees) Order 2016, which remains in place and which continues to set out the overall framework and maximum amounts that can be charged for immigration and nationality functions, as agreed by Parliament last year. The draft order does not itself set fees; those are set by regulations that are updated annually. The regulations for the 2017-18 fees are due to be laid before Parliament in March.

The technical changes made by the draft order include express provision for the Secretary of State to charge for an approval letter in respect of applications for entry clearance to the Isle of Man as a tier 1—exceptional talent—migrant, and amendments to bring fees for entry clearance to the Channel Islands within the scope of the 2016 order. This change is being made following the extension of provision in the Immigration Act 2014 to those jurisdictions by way of Orders in Council, the effect of which is to enable the Secretary of State to set fees in relation to them. It will ensure that the scope of the charges set under the 2014 Act for above-basic Border Force officer services, such as attendance at premium airport lounges or port-owned fast-track services, is broadened to meet future demands, for example to cover above-basic services provided at sea.

The draft order will also permit a charge to be set for providing information, in addition to the current services, which involve providing advice, training and assistance. We consider that that change will better reflect the nature of the information and services provided. It will not affect the Home Office's basic status checking services, for example those provided to employers or landlords in the United Kingdom, which will continue to be provided free of charge; the in-country service, for example calls to employers' or landlords' helplines or the nationality helpline, which will continue to be charged at local rates; or the availability of information for sponsors and educators. The services provided in this category, in respect of which the draft order makes provision, relate to the international service only. Customers using these services are able to access more detailed information than that relating to the basic operation of the service, which is available online. There is a standard free-to-use service available on the gov.uk website in all cases.

We are also changing the way in which the fees for certain information and advice are structured, adding scope for a fixed fee in addition to the per-minute fee currently provided for in the 2016 order. This is to accommodate likely changes to the overseas contact centre services, where a new service provider, which will assume responsibility for the service in May 2017, may offer and charge for web-chat and email services in the future. The proposed maximum amount that can be charged for these new services is based on the per-minute rate set out in the 2016 order. There are no plans to increase the per-minute fee charged for accessing telephone services overseas under the new contractual arrangements.

Finally, the draft order will also update the description of an electronic visa waiver so that it accurately matches the process and policy intent, as set out in the immigration rules. This service enables visitors from Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar to travel to the UK without a visa.

I emphasise that we do not seek to change the overarching framework for immigration and nationality fees or the maximum fee levels that were agreed by Parliament and set out in the 2016 order. As I mentioned, the immigration fees regulations, which are due to be laid in Parliament in mid-March and will come into force in April, will remain completely within the parameters agreed by Parliament and in line with the impact assessment published with the 2016 order.

It is important that we strike a balance between the economic interests of the UK and the need to maintain a sound immigration system. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will be reassured that the Government will ensure that fees for immigration and nationality services enable the UK to retain its position as an attractive destination for work, study and visits. I commend the draft order to the Committee.

4.35 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): In contrast to the Minister, who seems to be satisfied with dull and boring, I aim to spice up your life. In that vein, just to be controversial, I will say that there seems to be an irony in the fact that we can so easily discuss this order affecting the Channel Islands but we were unable to extend the same attention to tax evasion involving those very same islands in the Criminal Finances Bill that is passing through Parliament. However, the Opposition are by no means opposed to the measures.

The amendment to the 2016 order and the extension of measures to the Channel Islands are both sensible and proportionate. We particularly welcome the setting of a maximum fee. The cost to individuals and families has become extortionate. Although we recognise the need for fees, we must also acknowledge that anecdotal evidence has shown that we are losing students and tourists, particularly to other European countries. Those groups would contribute massively to our economy and it must be argued that their loss is owing to the level of fees and the complexity of the visa system. Nevertheless, we will not oppose the order today.

Question put and agreed to.

4.36 pm

Committee rose.