Government Project Delivery Function

Project delivery: guidance

The role of the senior responsible owner

Version 2.0

11 April 2023

Approved for internal government trial

This document is published by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority as the centre of the Government Project Delivery Function and supports the Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery, which sets expectations for the direction and management of portfolios, programmes and projects across government.

The full suite of functional standards, and associated guidance, can be found at GOV.UK government functional standards.

The full set of project delivery guidance, templates, tools and good practice can be found on the Government Project Delivery Hub.

This document describes the role of the senior responsible owner, a project delivery leadership role.

References are shown in square brackets [ ] and are listed in Annex A.

The meaning of words are as defined in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, except where defined in the Glossary at Annex B or where a government specific definition exists in the Functional Standards Common Glossary.

Version 2.0 of the role of the senior responsible owner replaces version 1.0 and has the same purpose, scope and intent. The main changes relate to general enhancements derived from feedback, use and updates to the expectations of senior responsible owners of projects in the government major projects portfolio.

For more information, please contact IPA@ipa.gov.uk or visit the Infrastructure and Projects Authority's pages on GOV.UK.

Contents

About this guidance

Purpose of this guide

The purpose of this project delivery guide is to explain what is expected of senior responsible owners when leading projects or programmes in government.

The guide provides direction and advice for:

- Senior responsible owners in fulfilling their duties
- Accounting officers and sponsoring bodies when appointing and overseeing senior responsible owners
- Those who work with senior responsible owners, such as project and programme directors or managers.

Scope of this guide

This guide applies to all senior responsible owners of projects and programmes in government. It also contains mandatory expectations for those appointed to projects and programmes in the government major projects portfolio. These expectations are still good practice and should be observed by those leading other types of government projects.

This guide is not for those who are leading and providing direction to portfolios. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority and the Government Project Delivery Function does not consider those leading portfolios as being senior responsible owners as the role is different. This difference is explained in this guide and further reading on this can be found in the Government Functional Standard 002: Project delivery [1].

Context

Strong leadership with clear accountability is a key element of successful project delivery. The requirement to appoint a senior responsible owner for a programme or project has been established in government for over two decades and is mandated in the government functional standard for project delivery [1].

The purpose of this guidance is to expand on the expectations in the functional standard by setting out clearly in one document:

■ the requirements and supporting guidance for senior responsible owners of projects in the government major projects portfolio; and

■ guidance for senior responsible owners of other projects.

Senior responsible owners and the government major projects portfolio

There are specific obligations and expectations for the senior responsible owners of major projects which form part of the government major projects portfolio. These are highlighted throughout this guide and are summarised at annex C for easy reference.

The government major projects portfolio is an evolving portfolio of the most complex and strategically significant projects and programmes across the UK government. It is overseen by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and, as of 2022, covers around 235 major projects with a total whole life cost approaching £678 billion [2].

This guidance describes the role of the senior responsible owners and its relationship to other key leadership roles in project delivery and the wider organisation. Confusion about these leadership roles has the potential to create risk in terms of strategic project governance, undermine accountability, and so jeopardise success in project delivery. Clarifying what each role is accountable for and how they relate to each other is therefore a key area of focus.

The guidance also sets out current requirements on the appointment of senior responsible owners and appointment letters, and provides additional information to help with the selection, support, and development of senior responsible owners.

The content of this guidance complies with the government functional standard for project delivery. This sets expectations for the direction and management of portfolios, programmes, and projects within government, and is an essential reference for all senior responsible owners, accounting officers and project directors.

Other than when clearly stated, this document uses the term project to denote programmes and projects, and the guidance applies equally to both. Similarly, the term project director is used in this guidance to mean both project director and programme director. A project director is a mandatory role for projects in the government major projects portfolio. For projects not in this portfolio, the role may be called a project manager or a programme manager.

This guidance also draws on guidance for civil servants, giving evidence to select committees, issued by the Cabinet Office in September 2014, also known as the Osmotherly rules [3]. These require that the key project accountabilities and responsibilities should be clearly defined and set out particular requirements for senior responsible owners of projects in the government major projects portfolio.

Project leadership and management practices

Project leadership is important at all phases of the project or programme life cycle, and the nature of this will evolve through the different phases. The key activities are:

- Identifying the need for a project or programme, providing oversight, authorising a project, programme or a stage within a project and reviewing outcomes
- Directing a project or programme
- Managing a project or programme, including initiation and closure
- Managing a work package within a project

A specific project delivery leadership role is responsible for each of these activities and for making sure that the activities work together effectively. This relationship can be seen in figure 1 below.

The senior responsible owner specifically provides direction for a project or programme. They do this by taking ownership of the business case and objectives, successful delivery and benefits on behalf of the organisation and:

- Chairing the project or programme board and making decisions regarding the future of the project while considering changes to the overall political, social, environmental or technological context and prevailing risk
- Ensures the project remains justifiable and assurance reviews and approvals are undertaken at the right time
- Takes corrective and preventative actions if needed
- Ensures the solution fulfils government policy and meets the needs of the organisation
- Ensures the project represents value for money, has continuing strategic fit and relevance
- Keeps the sponsoring body informed of progress, risks and issues and refers to them any decisions which are above their delegated authority.

HM Treasury business cases

Project brief · Strategic outline case · Outline business case · Full business case · Full business case update · Full business case update

Gates / decision points

Policy (concept) — Feasability → Appraisal → Definition → Delivery → Operation — Operations

Identifying — Overseeing — Reviewing

Sponsoring body — Authorising

Senior responsible owner — Directing

Project director — Initiating | Managing | Closing

Team manager — Managing a work package

Note: authorising is part of overseeing a project or programme but has been shown here separately as bodies or individuals other than the sponsiring body may also provide authorisation without providing oversight.

Figure 1: The relationship between project leadership roles and management practices

Accountability and responsibility

A key principle in the government functional standard for project delivery is that all accountabilities and responsibilities are defined, mutually consistent and traceable across all levels of management.

Having a clear understanding of what accountability and responsibility means is essential to understanding project delivery leadership, including the role of the senior responsible owner and its

relationship with the accounting officer, sponsoring body and project director which is explained later in this guide.

Both accountable and responsible, in relation to a person, have been defined for government through the government functional standard for project delivery [1].

An accountable person has been defined for the context of government work as:

accountable (person)

Someone who is accountable is required and expected to justify actions or decisions to a person or body with greater authority, from who the accountability has been formally assigned.

This means that the accountable person is the individual who is ultimately answerable for an activity or decision. For senior responsible owners, this means being answerable for the activities and decisions taken in the context of the project they are leading. This includes yes and no authority and veto powers. There can only be one accountable person who can be held to account and this accountability cannot be delegated or shared.

Where a role is established formally as a job share between two individuals, however, the role is treated as a single entity in terms of accountability.

However, it is possible to have a hierarchy of accountabilities with a higher-level role having overall accountability over lower-level accountabilities. A project delivery example of this could include the accountability of the project director to establish the project organisation in line with an agreed design which feeds into the senior responsible owner's higher-level accountability for the overall design and effectiveness of the project organisation.

A responsible person has been defined for the context of government work as:

responsible (person)

Someone who is responsible has some control over or care for an action, or the obligation to do something as part of a wider job role.

A responsible person has to be responsible to someone who is accountable. This can include to themselves if that individual is both the accountable person and the person with responsibility for

actually undertaking the task. Responsibility can be shared, and the degree of responsibility is determined by the individual with the accountability.

The role of the senior responsible owner

The senior responsible owner is accountable for a programme or project meeting its objectives, delivering the projected outcomes and realising the required benefits within the policies set by ministers. The senior responsible owner is the owner of the business case and accountable for all aspects of governance.

The government standard for project delivery [1] explains that responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- defining and communicating the vision and objectives in line with policy or strategic intent
- ensuring a real policy or business need is being addressed
- assuring ongoing viability
- engaging key stakeholders
- providing the team with leadership, decisions and direction
- ensuring the delivered solution meets the needs of the business and stakeholders

A summary of the key responsibilities of this role, and the role of the project director, can be found at annex C.

The functional standard also requires it to be clear who the senior responsible owner is accountable to. For all projects the senior responsible owner is accountable to the accounting officer and through them to Parliament. The relationship with the accounting officer may be a direct reporting line or may be through others in the organisation's management line, known as the sponsoring body, such as a more senior individual or investment board (see Figure 1).
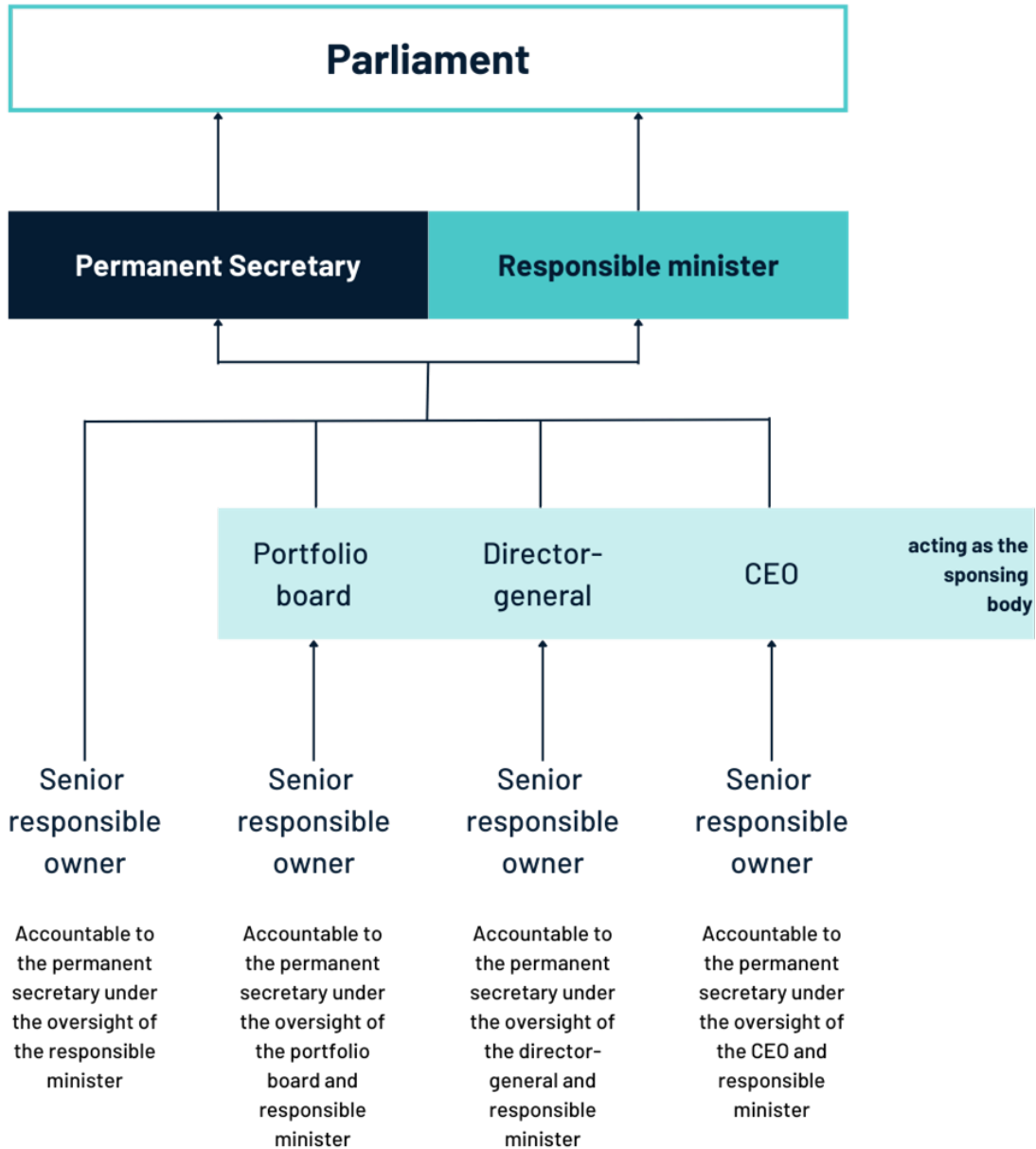
Figure 2: Example line of accountability for government projects

Accountability and the government major projects portfolio

The senior responsible owner of a project in the government major projects portfolio, as well as being accountable to their own organisation's management, also has personal accountability to Parliament for the implementation of the government's policies as assigned to them by the relevant accounting officer and under the oversight of the responsible minister (see Figure 2). This accountability could still be under the oversight of a sponsoring body. This accountability is recorded in the senior responsible owner's letter of appointment which is covered in the section on appointments.
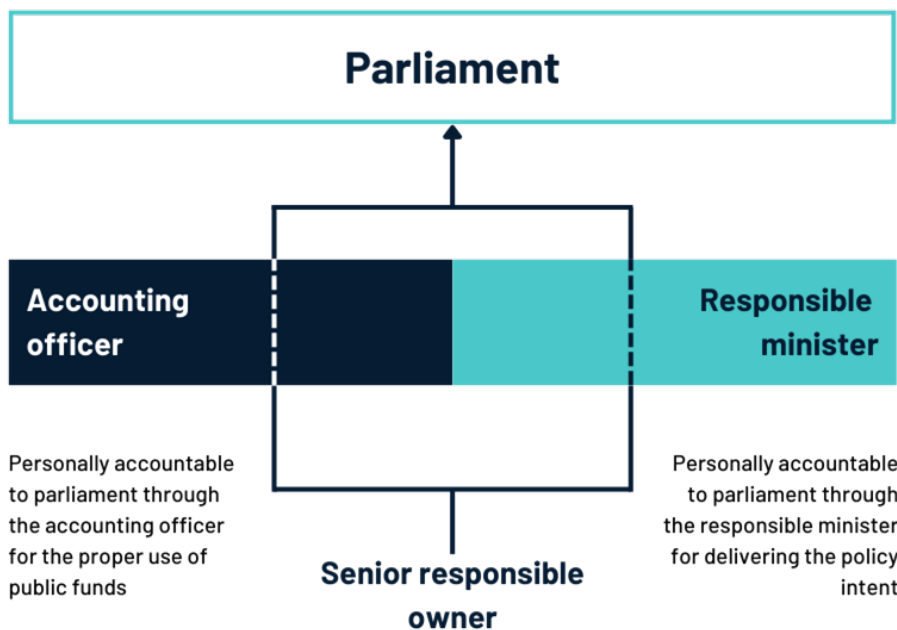
Figure 3: The personal accountability to parliament for senior responsible owners of projects in the government major projects portfolio flows through the accounting officer and responsible minister

Ownership of the business case

The senior responsible owner is the owner of the project's business case, is the primary risk owner, and is responsible for ensuring that the project meets its objectives, delivers the required outcomes, and realises the required benefits. This not only means monitoring progress on the project, but also the context within which the project will deliver. Sometimes a valid project can become redundant because the reason for its initiation no longer exists or has changed substantially. In this case, the senior responsible owner should consider whether to take the decision to stop the project.

While the project director may take responsibility for the drafting and development of the business case, the senior responsible owner is accountable for approving the business case and taking it through any internal and external business case approvals. The senior responsible owner should assure that the business follows HM Treasury Green Book [4] rules on business cases, including the application of the 5-case model and applying the right type of business case to the investment, such as:

- Programme Business Case for programmes
- Strategic Outline Case, Outline Business Case and Full Business Case process for projects
- Business Justification Case for lower risk and cost projects

Templates for these business case types are included as part of the Green Book collection [4].

Business cases and the HM Treasury approval process

Projects which have one or more of the following characteristics are likely to qualify for the HM Treasury approval process and be a candidate for the government major projects portfolio:

- above delegated authority limit, and
- could create pressures leading to a breach in departmental expenditure limits, administration cost limits, or estimates provision
- would entail contractual commitments to significant levels of spending in future years for which plans have not been set
- could set a potentially expensive precedent
- is novel and contentious; or could cause significant repercussions, posing risks to the public sector
- requires primary legislation or where HM Treasury consent is a statutory requirement

The senior responsible owner must make sure HM Treasury and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority are contacted if their project meets one or more of these characteristics. Projects defined in this way will be entered on to the government major projects portfolio unless an exemption is agreed with the chief operating officer for the civil service and the director-general for public spending.

Ownership of the benefits

The senior responsible owner is accountable not only for delivery but also for the realisation of the

benefits. This means that the senior responsible owner needs to understand what the benefits are, how delivery of the project will lead to the required benefits and how they are quantified and measured.

Linked to the business case, the senior responsible owner is accountable for understanding how any changes to the project could impact on the benefits and to consider whether this means the project continues to be valid.

The senior responsible owner is accountable for ensuring that the benefits are aligned to policy or strategic intent, such as departmental objectives.

The senior responsible owner remains accountable for the decisions they made, and the impact that had on the overall success of the investment, after the project or programme ends. However, the responsibility for benefits realisation may be transferred to another person or persons after project closure. As such, the senior responsible owner needs to understand who will own each benefit and how they will be reported on.

Ownership of the requirements

The senior responsible owner owns the requirements for the project by defining what success looks like and so providing a common understanding of the outcomes for all phases of the project for the project director, project team and stakeholders. This may involve the senior responsible owner having to negotiate and reach compromises with senior stakeholders who have conflicting requirements or needs. The senior responsible owner may also have to make decisions on the relative priority of requirements and consider which will be met and which will not, such as through defining a minimal viable product.

The senior responsible owner is accountable for ensuring that the solution delivered meets these requirements and achieves the outcome in the business case.

Championship and ownership of senior relationships

The senior responsible owner must champion the project to ensure ongoing support from internal and external stakeholders. This can include building relationships and collaborating with suppliers, delivery partners, senior leaders in the department and end users and, potentially, members of the public. The senior responsible owner should use these relationships to make sure the objectives and benefits of the project are communicated and understood and to address any concerns.

Governance and assurance

The senior responsible owner is accountable for ensuring that the project has in place a governance and assurance regime that is effective, proportionate, and appropriate. This will enable the project to deliver successfully and allow them to discharge their duties in terms of accountability. When designing the governance and assurance of the project, the senior responsible owner should observe the three lines of defence model described in the Orange Book [5].

The three lines of defence model

The three lines of defence model provides a systematic approach that helps clarify the specific roles and responsibilities that are necessary for the effective management of risk. It does this by setting out how these roles and responsibilities should operate in an integrated way to manage risk, design and implement internal control and provide assurance through ongoing, regular, periodic and ad-hoc monitoring and review.

Typically, assurance should be on at least three separate and defined levels including:

- By, or on behalf of operational management that own and manage risk to ensure appropriate standards are being use
- By, or on behalf of senior management, independent of operational management to ensure first level of assurance is properly designed, in place, and operating as intended
- By independent audit, or other impartial body, to provide senior management with an objective opinion on the effectiveness of governance, risk management and internal controls, including the effectiveness of the first and second levels

More information on the three lines of defence model can be found in the Government Standard for Project Delivery [1] and the Orange Book [5].

The senior responsible owner chairs the project board and is responsible for ensuring there is the right representation throughout the life cycle of the project. When designing the governance of the project, the senior responsible owner needs to make sure they apply departmental and external governance arrangements, policies and procedures or to obtain formal approval where there is justification to not apply some or all of these arrangements. This could include reporting on progress to a portfolio board and following set business case assurance and approvals processes.

Whilst the project director or project office might recommend how governance is designed for a particular project and put such governance in place, it is the responsibility of the senior responsible owner to ensure that it is effective, proportionate, and appropriate.

Governance, assurance and the government major projects portfolio

For projects in the government major projects portfolio, the senior responsible owner is accountable for ensuring there is an integrated assurance and approvals plan (IAAP) in place for the life of the project and that it has been agreed by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. This must include milestones for formal assurance reviews and approvals and authorisations, including HM Treasury approval points.

Guidance on assurance for projects in the government major projects portfolio can be found in the Infrastructure and Projects Authority's assurance toolkit [6].

Delivery of objectives, outcomes and benefits

The policy intent behind the project must be understood by the senior responsible owner who, in turn, should ensure the vision and objectives for the project are clarified and defined. These objectives and any performance criteria must be agreed and recorded in the appointment letter.

The senior responsible owner needs to ensure that the project director has defined a project's management and working practices so that they lead to the planned outcomes. In addition, the senior responsible owner will need to ensure that project risk is managed throughout the project lifecycle by invoking appropriate stage gates, assurance reviews and decision points.

Finally, the senior responsible owner is responsible for ensuring successful transition to live service or operations. This includes delivery of the agreed project outcomes and benefits or ensuring that accountability is transferred to appropriate business ownership, for example through the senior business owner, to ensure that benefits are realised after the project has closed.

More information on the role and responsibilities of the SRO can be found in the government project delivery capability framework, managing successful programmes [7] and in the accompanying survival guide for senior responsible owners [8].

Extent and limit of authority

A department or organisation may put a number of controls in place that limits the senior responsible owner's authority. These could be approved expenditure limits before authorisation is needed or scheduling tolerances. Controls can also be put in place from outside the department or organisation, such as conditions put in place by HM Treasury or Cabinet Office controls.

A senior responsible owner needs to be clear on what their extent and limit of authority to act is and make sure that it is agreed with the accounting officer and ministers, where appropriate, and recorded in their appointment letter.

Reporting and transparency requirements

For all projects, there will be the need to observe reporting requirements set by their department or organisation and to comply with UK Government transparency requirements.

Reporting and the government major projects portfolio

For all projects in the government major projects portfolio, there is a requirement for senior responsible owners to ensure reports are provided to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority each quarter and to publish key data in support of their annual report [9]. If the project contributes to the cross-government net zero and climate change strategy and falls within scope of the net zero portfolio, there is a requirement to report on performance to the Net Zero National Security Implementation Group Sub-Group and the Climate Action Implementation Committee.

More information on the reporting requirements from being part of the government major projects portfolio can be obtained from the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

Transparency and the government major projects portfolio

Projects in the government major projects portfolio are required to ensure that an accounting officer assessment is completed alongside the approval of the Outline Business Case and at any time after if there is a material change in the project (see section on the relationship with the accounting officer for more information)[11]. A summary of this accounting officer assessment must be published to GOV.UK which the senior responsible owner's department or organisation will be able to assist with.

Transparency, infrastructure and the government major projects portfolio

If a project in the government major projects portfolio includes a substantial infrastructure and construction element, then there is a requirement on the senior responsible owner to publish on GOV.UK a summary of the approved Full Business Case and closure report. Support for this requirement can be obtained by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

Relationship with other roles

A number of roles are involved in the delivery and leadership of projects and programmes in government and the senior responsible owner will need to understand their relationship with them.

The relationship with ministers

Ministers have four main roles:

- To act as the political managers of their departments, progressing and taking responsibility for the government's policies and priorities
- To act as the ultimate decision makers on any issue within their department
- To act as the link between their department and the legislature, accounting to parliament for their decisions and providing the highest level of accountability for their department's work
- To act as the ultimate departmental representative of the government in public

Senior responsible owners are accountable to ministers for delivering the policy intent driving the need for the project. Where the project forms part of the government major projects portfolio, this accountability is directly to parliament through the relevant minister who is responsible for the policy area.

All senior responsible owners must make sure that they direct their project within the wider government context, understanding and delivering the intended government policy and priorities and this can normally be done through the standard governance structure in a government department. However, for major projects, and certainly for those which form part of the government major projects portfolio, a more direct relationship may need to be developed with the minister responsible for the policy area.

This will be particularly relevant where policy decisions need to be taken through the life of the project or legislation is needed.

Senior responsible owners should always observe the business as usual governance structures, seek direction from their sponsoring body and accounting officer, and make use of accounting officer assessments which can be used to seek a formal steer and decision from a minister on a given issue.

The relationship with the accounting officer

Each government organisation is required to appoint an accounting officer who must be able to assure Parliament and the public of high standards of probity in the management of public funds, including all programmes and projects sponsored from that department. This person is usually its most senior official, the permanent secretary or chief executive, who is required routinely to scrutinise significant policy proposals, projects, or plans.

Accounting officer assessments are required for all major projects prior to submission to HM

Treasury for approval for the outline business case, and subsequently if there are any material changes.

For a project in the government major projects portfolio, the senior responsible owner is accountable directly to the accounting officer but for other projects, this might be through others in the organisation's management structure, for example another senior official or sponsoring body. In all cases, there should be no doubt as to the formal relationship and reporting required between the senior responsible owner and the accounting officer; this should be defined in the project initiation documentation and kept up to date.

Further guidance on the responsibilities of the accounting officer can be found in HM Treasury guidance on managing public money [10].

To enable the accounting officer to fulfil their obligations, in accordance with guidance on managing public money, a senior responsible owner needs to advise them of any significant issues relating to regularity, propriety, feasibility and value for money, as well as any significant deviations from the approved business case, which might lead them to reassess the project. Full guidance on the preparation of an accounting officer assessment, and publication of summary assessments, can be found in HM Treasury guidance on making an accounting officer assessment [11].

The relationship with the sponsoring body and portfolio

The sponsoring body acts as the higher level authority for a project or programme and is accountable to a defined higher-level authority, normally the accounting officer. The sponsoring body acts as the driving force for a project or programme, creating the link between the organisation and senior responsible owner, and provides:

- Top-level endorsement for the programme or project and its rationale and objectives
- Direction to the senior responsible owner, monitoring progress, providing support and addressing escalated risks and issues
- Decisions, or referring decisions, that are above the senior responsible owner's delegated authority

The sponsoring body provides oversight of the senior responsible owner and project. Usually, the sponsoring body will be the group or individual the senior responsible owner is accountable to for the delivery of the project and its objectives. However, for projects in the government major projects portfolio, the senior responsible owner remains accountable to the accounting officer, but the accounting officer may delegate the responsibility for overseeing a project to a sponsoring body.

A sponsoring body can be an individual or a group and where it is formed as a group, a lead individual within the sponsoring body may be nominated as the senior sponsor.

A project or programme should only ever have one sponsoring body and the sponsoring body may also be the governance body for a portfolio. The organisation should make sure there is the right representation on the sponsoring body and governance structure for the senior responsible owner to operate within so that there is no potential for conflicting direction.

This does not mean that there must not be any other bodies involved in providing authorisation to a senior responsible owner and project. There may be both internal and external authorisations that a senior responsible owner needs to seek, such as for commercial and financial approvals, and these approvals may come with direction and conditions in relation to the specific areas they are approving, but this does not make them a sponsoring body. Due to the role of the sponsoring body, these authorisations from other bodies should be sought before asking for any authorisation from the sponsoring body. The exception to this is for projects which require HM Treasury spending approval which should be sought only after internal approvals have been granted.

For the relationship between the sponsoring body and senior responsible owner to work, there needs to be a culture of transparency through the proportionate and timely reporting of progress. It is essential that all reporting includes the risks and issues to delivery. In turn, the sponsoring body must create a culture of trust and safety by championing senior responsible owners who are honest about issues, risks and delivery confidence.

The portfolio

Where a project or programme forms part of a portfolio, there should be joined up governance between the sponsoring body and the portfolio board. This is good practice as the types of decisions that portfolios need to take to be effective at portfolio management, such as prioritising, authorising and terminating projects, are similar to those of the sponsoring body and so conflict and confusion could arise if there are separate groups involved in providing oversight to the same project. This can be done in one of two main ways:

- The sponsoring body and the portfolio governance board are the same group
- Sponsoring bodies for projects and programmes in a portfolio are represented on the portfolio governance board

Although directly accountable for their own project, a senior responsible owner is also expected to support delivery of the organisation's overall strategic objectives as determined by ministers. This means that they are expected to support the delivery of the organisation's totality of change by working with other projects and the portfolio to manage

- dependencies
- resources
- schedules and
- funding

Sometimes this may mean slowing down the delivery of one project to support delivery of another. While this may appear to be in tension with the senior responsible owner's personal accountability for delivery of their project, it is entirely consistent with their responsibility to respond to changes in the operating context. If conflicting priorities between projects cannot be resolved between the senior responsible owners concerned, however, they may ultimately need to be referred to the sponsoring body, accounting officer or ministers for a decision.

Senior responsible owners with more than one project

An individual may have responsibility for more than one project or programme which may be distinct but, more commonly, are linked within an overall portfolio. However, this does not mean the individual is responsible for or managing a portfolio as the senior responsible owner's accountabilities are specific to the project or programme for which they are responsible, and each should be considered and managed as a separate appointment.

A senior responsible owner must not be appointed to manage a portfolio, as this is led by the portfolio director role which has a different purpose, accountability and responsibility in relation to project delivery.

It is important that an individual appointed as senior responsible owner for more than one project or programme is able to commit the sufficient time to lead and direct those projects as required through the different phases of the life cycle. For projects in the government major projects portfolio, there is a presumption that senior responsible owners will be able to commit at least half of their time to their project up to the approval of the full business case.

The relationship with the project director

The senior responsible owner's relationship with the project management organisation is through the project director. The project director is a full-time role, accountable to the senior responsible owner for establishing the governance framework and for the day-to-day management of the project, to deliver the outputs and desired outcomes and realise the benefits.

Project directors, project managers and the government major projects portfolio

The project director is a UK government specific role that is mandatory for projects in the government major projects portfolio and is recommended for other major projects that don't meet the criteria for the portfolio. It is a senior role with expert project delivery experience and expertise to reflect the scale and complexity of major government projects. For lower cost and risk projects, this role could be called a project or programme manager and the responsibilities would be similar though in a less complex environment.

The duties of the project director include:

- ensuring the solution is designed and business case and plans prepared
- defining the approach, accountabilities, work scope and targets for the team

- monitoring, forecasting and reporting overall progress against the plan
- resolving risks and issues and controlling change
- delivering the required outputs and outcomes
- monitoring and managing supplier performance
- engaging and communicating with stakeholders
- ensuring the project is appropriately resourced and organised
- ensuring the budget requirements are defined and managed within agreed limits
- identifying and managing risks and issues
- ensuring the project team's activities are lawful and ethical

The project director is responsible for all day-to-day decisions.

In the case of a programme, a programme director is likely to have several project directors or managers reporting to them, with each being accountable to the programme director for the day-to-day management of the project assigned to them. The programme director remains accountable for:

- ensuring all the responsibilities in the programme are adequately assigned and undertaken;
- maintaining the reporting and relationship with the senior responsible owner.

The key to a successful relationship between a senior responsible owner and a project director is understanding each other's role and agreeing how they want to work together:

- the senior responsible owner steers and champions the project;
- the project director directs the project.

The level of trust between the senior responsible owner and the project director needs to be high and it is important that the senior responsible owner allows the project director the freedom to manage the project within agreed tolerances while also providing appropriate challenge and support.

How the senior responsible owner supports the project director

The senior responsible owner is the owner and champion of the project and so needs to provide leadership to the project director through direction, guidance and support. This can be through providing contextual insight into the needs of the organisation and senior stakeholders to the project, for example:

- Using their influence in and outside of the organisation to champion the project to ensure ongoing support and to create the necessary conditions for success
- Interpreting information and providing clarification, especially in the context of the organisation and government priorities, to the project director to facilitate a focus on delivery
- Addressing issues or risks that are outside the authority of the project director to do so and escalate them as appropriate in a timely and efficient manner
- Providing support and direction to the project director through the change control process, especially where changes could impact the time, cost or quality of the project
- Making decisions in a timely manner and provide the required authorisation for the project director to act

Annex D sets out the purpose, profile and accountabilities of the senior responsible owner role and those typical of the project director. This covers the core requirements common across all projects and should be considered a minimum. More information on project delivery leadership and other roles is set out in the government project delivery capability framework [12].

The principles for project success [13] and the 7 lenses maturity matrix [14] should also be referred to for information on where the senior responsible owner can support the project director and wider project team.

Appointing the project director

The senior responsible owner will normally be responsible for appointing the project director. It is good practice for the senior responsible owner to agree an appointment letter with the project director similar to the appointment letter for senior responsible owners. This should set out key responsibilities and expectations in line with this guidance and include any other specific requirements relating to the project.

As part of this, the senior responsible owner and project director should discuss and reach a clear and common understanding of their respective accountabilities and responsibilities. Where the project director does not report directly to the senior responsible owner, it is recommended that the project director's line manager is also included in these conversations.

Appointments

Appointing the senior responsible owner

Accountabilities should be assigned on all new projects from an early stage and shall be formalised before the project seeks initial investment approval. This process starts with the appointment of the senior responsible owner.

Sometimes, the senior responsible owner is someone who holds a leadership position within the organisation into which the project's benefits and outcomes will be delivered and has control or influence over that business area or operating environment. Sometimes it will be necessary to create a new leadership role for an incoming senior responsible owner. In this case, it is important to consider the relationship of the role with the wider business area or operating environment. For all appointments, the senior responsible owner must be able to devote the time needed to the project through the different phases of the life cycle.

In projects using agile delivery methods, the senior responsible owner may also be the service owner or product owner, depending on where the role is best placed. However the senior responsible owner and the associated accountabilities relate specifically to delivery of the project or programme and should not be confused with these other roles.

The decision to appoint a senior responsible owner to a new project, or to an existing project following the departure of a previous senior responsible owner, should be given careful consideration. Arrangements for appointment of senior responsible owners should be clearly set out as part of functional governance for project delivery in each department or organisation.
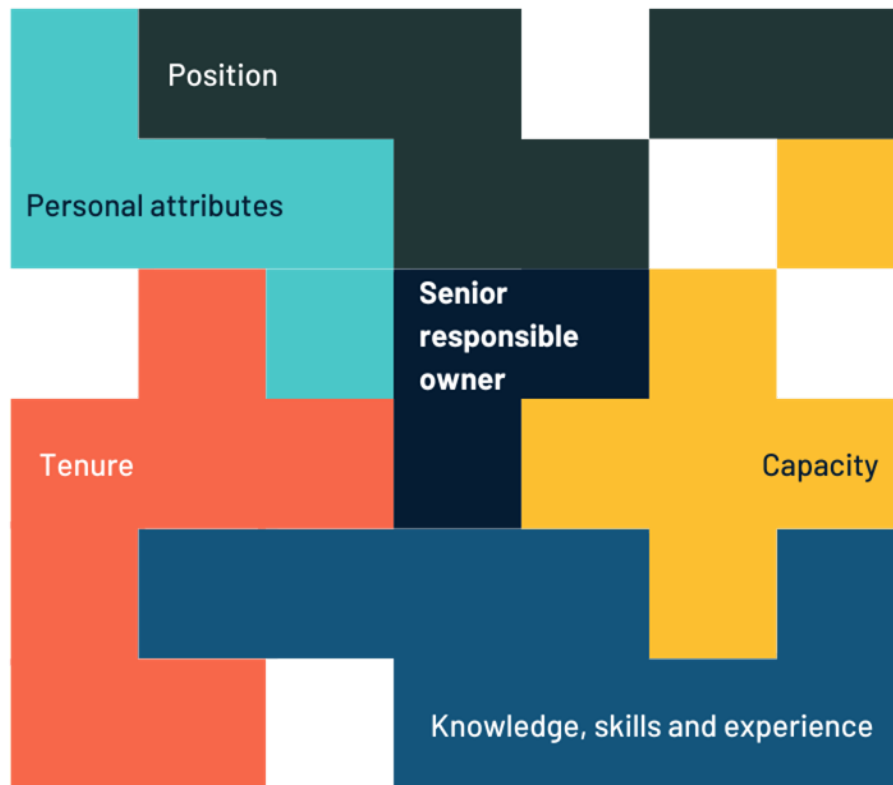
Senior responsible owner appointments and the government major projects portfolio

Decisions on appointments to projects in the government major projects portfolio will need to involve the accounting officer, although the selection may be carried out by a senior panel, and the chief executive officer of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. Appointing senior responsible owners to other projects may be tailored accordingly. Panels must also give full regard to diversity and inclusion when appointing senior responsible owners, as well as the principles of fair and open competition.

Things to consider when appointing a senior responsible owner

Having the right project leadership is a critical factor in the successful delivery of a project, and the choice of senior responsible owner therefore needs careful consideration. When deciding who should be the senior responsible owner for a project, particular consideration should be given to the following factors:

- **Position:** the senior responsible owner will normally hold a leadership position within the permanent organisation and will have control or influence over the business area or resources into which the project outcomes will be delivered.
- **Capacity:** the senior responsible owner must have the necessary time to carry out their responsibilities, taking account of any other responsibilities and commitments they may have.
- **Tenure:** the senior responsible owner needs to be able to commit to leading the project through to completion or to an appropriate milestone.
- **Knowledge, skills, and experience:** the senior responsible owner may need particular subject matter knowledge (for example in a particular sector or policy domain), or professional skills, depending on the nature of the project. SROs are also expected to have prior experience of project delivery and to have completed, or to complete, appropriate development
- **Personal attributes:** the senior responsible owner's key attributes, as defined in managing successful programmes [7], are to:

    - Have the seniority for the responsibilities and accountabilities the role involves
    - Be proactive and visible as the driving force behind the programme
    - Possess strong leadership and decision-making skills
    - Have the experience, character and personality that are right for the programme
    - Combine realism with openness and the clarity of expression to communicate the programme's vision effectively
    - Be able to give purpose and direction to the programme and take strategic decisions
    - Focus on delivery of the benefits and achievement of the end goal
    - Build productive relationships across the programme team
    - Have access to and credibility with key stakeholders.

Figure 4: Factors to be considered when appointing a senior responsible owner

When deciding on who should be appointed as senior responsible owner for a project in the government major projects portfolio, organisations need to involve the chief executive officer of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority in advance to agree their appointment. This is required by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority Mandate [9].

When choosing a senior responsible owner, diversity and inclusion, and fair and open competition, should be given full consideration, both in terms of the design of the role and the process through which it is filled.

Time commitment

The role of senior responsible owner is a substantial time commitment. The role may be full time or part time, depending on the scope, scale and complexity of the project, its relationship with the rest of the organisation, and the relative strength of the combined senior responsible owner and project director team, for example in terms of experience, knowledge, and skills. A person may be a senior responsible owner for more than one project at a time.

The overriding requirement is that the senior responsible owner is able to devote the necessary time to the project to execute their responsibilities in full. The senior official appointing the senior responsible owner should discuss the time commitment needed with the head of profession and/or the accounting officer.

Time commitment and the government major projects portfolio

For government major projects, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority will work with departments to agree whether an appointment should be on a full-time basis, the starting presumption, or alternatively what the appropriate time commitment should be. In all cases, there is an expectation that a senior responsible owner will commit at least 50% of their time to the project up to the approval of the Full Business Case or equivalent unless there is a justification not to. This does not mean that all projects can automatically reduce the time commitment of the senior responsible owner after approval of the Full Business Case as what is most suitable should be considered on a project-by-project basis. For some projects, such as those involved in transformation, it may even be appropriate for the senior responsible owner's time commitment to increase rather than decrease.

While it is useful to set the formal requirements around time commitment in terms of minimum time to drive the right conditions in a project, this should not be seen as a simple check. Instead, real consideration should be given to what time commitment is needed for the project when considering the context of the project. The context could be its complexity, risk profile or operating environment. This means that certain projects may need a senior responsible owner who commits 100% of their time and the commitment needed may change over the life of the project.

Where an individual is the senior responsible owner for more than one project at a time, care should be taken to make sure that each project has the required time commitment and that they do not add up to more than 100% and take into account any business-as-usual activities they are responsible for.

Tenure

When appointing a senior responsible owner, their tenure needs to be clearly set at the beginning which is usually recorded through an appointment letter. Where possible, senior responsible owners should be appointed to the whole life of a project, and where this is not possible or preferable, tenure should be tied to a specific milestone or phase.

The expectation is that the senior responsible owner will be a substantive public service employee, whether on a permanent or fixed term contract, or on loan from another department of arm's length body. Contractors should not be appointed to the role of senior responsible owner.

Change in tenure and the government major projects portfolio

Any change in tenure for a senior responsible owner of a project in the government major projects portfolio needs the consent of the chief executive officer of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority if they are leaving to go to another post in central government [9].

Interim senior responsible owners

Where a suitable senior responsible owner cannot be found in the time available, an interim appointment may be necessary. This should be formalised in the same way as for a permanent appointment, recording that the appointment is interim and its expected term. Arrangements should then be put in place to appoint a permanent senior responsible owner as soon as possible.

Appointment letters for senior responsible owners

The terms of appointment for a senior responsible owner should be set out in an appointment letter and this must be done for appointments to projects in the government major projects portfolio. These letters should cover:

- line of accountability from the senior responsible owner, including the relationship to any governance or sponsoring bodies
- objectives and performance criteria for the senior responsible owner in the delivery of the project
- the point at which accountability starts, the time commitment and tenure of the senior responsible owner
- any succession planning details if it is known at appointment that the tenure will not be for the whole life of the project
- decision powers and any limits on the authority of the senior responsible owner or tolerances that have to be observed
- responsibilities around building effective governance and assurance arrangements and any departmental or organisational governance and assurance arrangements the senior responsible owner must observe
- reporting and transparency requirements
- key interfaces and relationships, particularly with the business owner of the delivered project
- any expected development or other requirements of the senior responsible owner

The appointment letter provides the opportunity for the senior responsible owner to consider the basis on which the project has been, or is being established, and to raise any concerns with the accounting officer, before signing the letter to show they accept these as terms of their appointment.

It is good practice to review appointment letters at least annually, as part of objective setting, or after any significant changes to the business case, to ensure that these remain up to date. A new letter should also be issued if a new senior responsible owner is appointed.

Appointment letters and the government major projects portfolio

For senior responsible owners of projects in the government major projects portfolio, the Osmotherly rules [3] require the terms of their appointment to be set out in a formal letter of appointment. This letter must be approved and issued by their organisation's accounting officer and the chief executive of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and published on GOV.UK within a month of them being issued.

A template appointment letter is available from the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

Should it become necessary to tailor the requirements of the Osmotherly rules [3] to reflect a project's unique circumstances, this should be kept to a minimum, justified, and formally recorded in each case.

The Osmotherly Rules are guidance for civil servants on giving evidence to parliamentary select committees. They take their name from E.B.C. Osmotherly, the civil servant who drew up the first version of the Rules in 1980. Guidance for civil servants on the Osmotherly rules can be found on GOV.UK [3].

The requirement to approve the appointment also provides the opportunity for the accounting officer and chief executive of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, as the senior officer responsible for project delivery across government, to satisfy themselves that the appointment is appropriate and to raise any concerns. Ultimately, however, the decision on appointment rests with the accounting officer.

Appointments for cross-government projects and programmes

Where a project or programme crosses organisational boundaries, there still needs to be a single senior responsible owner who is accountable for the delivery and a single accounting officer who is accountable for the proper use of public funds, even though the project or programme may be delivering benefits for more than one organisation.

What is meant by a cross-government project

A cross-government project in this context is where more than one government organisation commits to jointly delivering a project together which could be due to reasons such as transformation of government services at scale, expediency and/or efficiency or where more than one organisation equally contributes to the same government policy or objective.

Many projects and programmes will need to be delivered in partnership with, have an impact on or deliver benefits for other organisations. In most cases, this is not what we mean by a cross-government project and doesn't need any special consideration as these other organisations can be managed as stakeholders to the project. An example would be the introduction of new IT systems which other organisations interface with.

In most cases, who is the accounting officer is easy to identify as funding for the project or programme will come from HM Treasury into the appropriate department to deliver it. The appointment of the senior responsible owner then follows the usual process. However, the cross-government nature of the project and the need to manage the requirements of multiple organisations and stakeholder groups should be reflected in the appointment letter and the accounting officer and sponsoring body should make sure these organisations are represented with progress fully monitored, not just that for the owing organisation.

If a cross-government project is not directly funded by HM Treasury through a single department, but instead it is being funded through multiple organisational budgets, the owning department which takes accountability for delivery and proper use of public funds should be identified using the four accounting officer tests as set out in the accounting officer assessment guidance [11]. Particular attention should be given to the test of regularity which ensures the organisation has the relevant legal and delegated authorities to act and the test of feasibility which ensures the organisation has the capability to deliver.

From the perspective of the senior responsible owner, their role will not change from how it is described in this guide. However, the organisations embarking on a cross-government project may need to consider the following factors

- **Governance:** formally agreed governance arrangements and agreements which make clear the processes for decision making, representation from each government organisation and to deal with any conflicts of interest
- **Change control:** arrangements for agreeing substantial changes to the project, in particular to objectives, outcomes or approach
- **Benefits and outcomes:** clear ownership and responsibility for the realisation of benefits in each organisation

The role of the senior responsible owner

- **Reporting:** proportionate and joined up reporting on progress, risks and issues and clear understanding on who is responsible for addressing escalated risks and issues

The Infrastructure and Projects Authority is available to provide advice on the governance, accountabilities and senior responsible owner appointments for cross-government projects.

Support and development for senior responsible owners

Project leadership, particularly of major projects, can be complex and challenging, and it is important that senior responsible owners, project directors, and people in their teams, receive appropriate support and development throughout the life of the project.

Support and development for the senior responsible owners should be discussed with the accounting officer, senior manager, or head of profession when they are first appointed to lead the project and then as part of ongoing performance management. Particular consideration should be given to the induction and development of new senior responsible owners:

- A short course, SRO fundamentals, is provided through the government project delivery academy, and attendance is required for all new senior responsible owners
- All senior responsible owners of projects or programmes in the government major projects portfolio are expected to attend, or to have graduated from, the major projects leadership academy, known as the MPLA. The only exceptions to this are where the prospective senior responsible owner is agreed to have recognised 'master builder' experience and/or has an equivalent qualification in major project delivery at master's level or above. Such an exception needs to be formally made to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

Where relevant to the individual senior responsible owner and project or programme, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority also has learning on:

- Transformation for Senior Leaders
- Introduction to Contract Management for SROs and SBOs, and
- 5 Modules on Contract Management for SROs and SBOs

Even where MPLA has been completed, all senior responsible owners should have ongoing development plans and support tailored to their individual requirements. These may include, for example, ongoing mentoring, coaching or buddying arrangements, and participation in other development activities at organisation or cross-government level, and networking.

Senior responsible owners should sign up for an account on the Government Project Delivery Hub to access all the standards, learning, career development, guidance and templates that are available to project delivery professionals.

Senior responsible owners should consider the development and support of project directors. The project delivery capability framework [12] sets out the range of development opportunities open to project leaders and their teams, and additional guidance on this is available on the government project delivery academy webpages on the project delivery hub.

Further guidance on the role of senior responsible owners can also be found in the following

documents:

- [Government functional standard for project delivery](#) [1]
- PRINCE2 [15]
- Managing successful programmes [7]
- [The art of brilliance, a handbook for SROs of transformation programmes](#) [16]
- Assurance review briefing note for SROs [6]
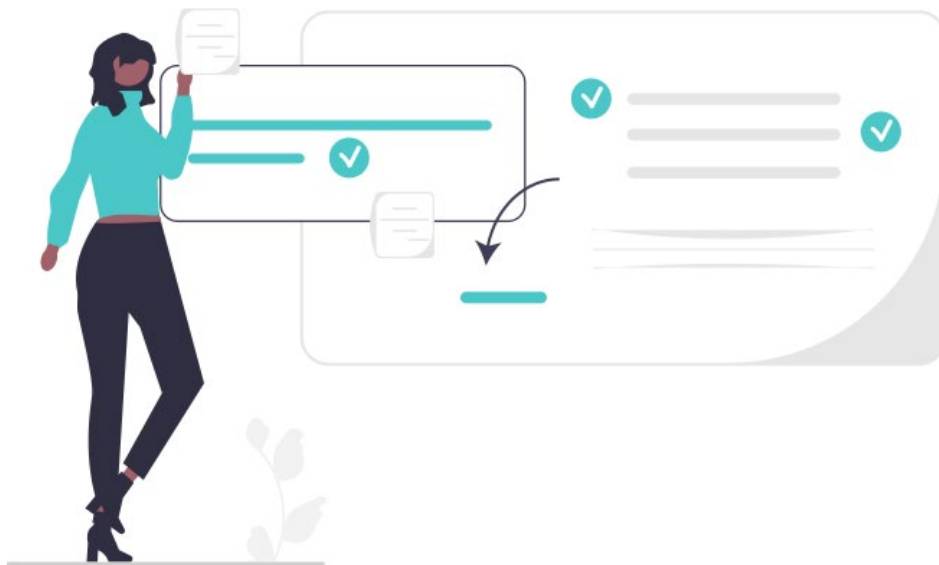
A. References

All references are correct as of the time of publication, users should check for updated versions.

ID	Description
1	Cabinet Office, _Government functional standard for project delivery_, 2021
2	Cabinet Office, _Infrastructure and Projects Authority annual report_, 2022
3	Cabinet Office, _Giving evidence to select committees: a guide for civil servants_, 2014
4	HM Treasury, Green Book (collection)
5	HM Treasury, Orange Book (collection)
6	Infrastructure and Projects Authority, Assurance Toolkit (collection)
7	Axelos, _Managing successful programmes_, 2011
8	Axelos, _MSP survival guide for senior responsible owners_, 2016
9	Infrastructure and Projects Authority, _IPA Mandate_, 2021
10	HM Treasury, _Managing public money_, 2015
11	HM Treasury, _Accounting officer assessments: Guidance_, 2017
12	Infrastructure and Projects Authority, _Project delivery capability framework_, 2018
13	Infrastructure and Projects Authority, _Principles for project success_, 2021
14	Infrastructure and Projects Authority, _7 lenses of transformation_, 2018
15	Axelos, _PRINCE2_, 2017
16	Infrastructure and Projects Authority, _The art of brilliance: A handbook for SROs of transformation programmes_, 2019

B. Glossary

See also the [functional common glossary of definitions](#) which includes a list of defined terms and phrases used across government functional work.

Term	Definition
accountable	Someone who is accountable is required and expected to justify actions or decisions to a person or body with greater authority, from whom the accountability has been formally assigned. Note: accountability is normally associated with a specific scope of work or set of responsibilities and accountabilities can be tiered such that there is a hierarchy of accountabilities, with a higher-level having overall accountability over lower-level accountabilities. An accountable person usually has associated formally delegated authority for their actions and decisions, such as through delegated letters.
accounting officer	A person appointed by the Treasury or designated by a department to be accountable for the operations of an organisation and the preparation of its accounts. The appointee is the head of a department or other organisation or the Chief Executive of a non-departmental public body (NDPB) or other arm's length body.
analysis	Generation, processing and presentation of data, evidence and research, to inform choices and improve outcomes for the UK government and UK citizens.
arm's length body	Central government bodies that carry out discrete functions on behalf of departments, but which are controlled or owned by them. They include executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies, and government-owned companies.
assurance	A general term for the confidence that can be derived from objective information over the successful conduct of activities, the efficient and effective design and operation of internal control, compliance with internal and external requirements, and the production of insightful and credible information to support decision making. Confidence diminishes when there are uncertainties around the integrity of information or of underlying processes.

baseline	A measurement, calculation, or location used as a basis for comparison. In a project delivery context, baselines typically apply to plans and to sets of data relating to the solution.
	Note: examples include schedule baseline, cost baseline, requirements baseline, design baseline.
benefit (project delivery)	In the context of project delivery, benefit is the measurable value or other positive impact resulting from an outcome perceived as an advantage by one or more stakeholders, and which contributes towards one or more objective(s).
board	The highest-level governing body (e.g. a board of directors, a supervisory board, or a board of governors or trustees) charged with the responsibility to direct and/ or oversee the organisation's activities and hold senior management accountable.
business case	The justification for an organisational activity (strategic, programme, project or operational) which typically contains benefits, outcomes, timescales, costs and risks against which continuing viability is tested.
commercial	Commonly used term in central government to define broad procurement activity but does not include wider commercial activity including income generation for the purposes of this document.
constraint (project delivery)	In the context of project delivery, a constraint is a limitation or restriction on planning or undertaking work.
	Note: planning constraints can include, but are not limited to scope, performance, time, cost, resources and risk
contract	A legally binding agreement that sets out obligations between parties. A contract can take any form, such as a licence agreement, memorandum, service agreement.
control (organisational)	Any action taken by management, the board and other parties to manage risk and increase the likelihood that established objectives and goals will be achieved.
defined (way of working)	In the context of standards, defined denotes a documented way of working which people are expected to use. This can apply to any aspect of a governance or management framework. For example, processes, codes of practice, methods, templates, tools and guides.

delegated authority and delegation letter	A standing authorisation by HM Treasury under which a body may commit resources or incur expenditure from money voted by Parliament without specific prior approval from HM Treasury. Delegated authorities may also authorise commitments to spend (including the acceptance of contingent liabilities) and to deal with special transactions (such as write-offs) without prior approval.
delivery strategy (project delivery)	In the context of project delivery, the delivery strategy outlines longer term objectives, outcomes and outputs, and the means to achieve them, to inform future decisions and planning and includes phasing and strategies for commercial, business, societal change and solution delivery aspects.
disbenefit (project delivery)	In the context of project delivery, disbenefit is the measurable value or other impact resulting from an outcome perceived as a disadvantage by one or more stakeholders, and which partially or fully negates the achievement of one or more objective(s).
diversity and inclusion	Diversity provides a focus on championing a broad range of backgrounds and opinions- including those protected by prevailing equality legislation- with the merit principle front and centre and drawing on the talents of the widest possible range of geographical, social and career backgrounds. All diversity and inclusion people policies, processes and practices should be data-driven, evidence-led and delivery-focused.
established (way of working)	In the context of standards, established denotes a way of working that is implemented and used throughout the organisation. This can apply to any aspect of a governance or management framework- for example processes, codes of practice, methods, templates, tools and guides.
executive agency	A type of arm's length body. A public body that acts as an arm of its sponsoring department.
gate	A decision point, carried out as part of formal governance, at significant points in the life cycle to ensure that the decision to invest as stated in an agreed business case and plans is, and remains, valid.
governance	Governance defines relationships and the distribution of rights and responsibilities among those who work with and in the organisation. It determines the rules and procedures through which the organisation's objectives are set and provides the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performances. Importantly, it defines where accountability lies throughout the organisation.

government major project	A central government funded project or programme that requires HM Treasury approval during its life, as set out in Delegated Authority Letters, or is otherwise of special interest to the government. A government major project is listed in the Government Major Project Portfolio (GMPP).
Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP)	The portfolio of the government's largest, complex, innovative, risky and ambitious projects that have been agreed by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, HMT and departments and are delivering the government's main policy initiatives.
government profession	A grouping aligned across government to increase the professionalism and engagement of people with particular skills, knowledge or expertise. A profession sets professional standards, supports professional development and career progress, and provides a consistent way to attract and retain people.
integrated assurance and approval plan (IAAP)	The planning, coordination and provision of assurance activities and approval points throughout the 'policy to delivery' life cycle, proportionate to levels of project cost and risk.
integrated assurance strategy (IAS)	The integrated assurance strategy sets the strategic requirements for assurance provision to ensure agreed and consistent standards across an organisation's portfolio of major projects.
issue	A relevant event that has happened, was not planned and requires management action. It could be a problem, benefit, query, concern, change request or risk that has occurred.
lessons learnt	The practice of continuous improvement based upon organisational learning in a risk management context.
life cycle	The life cycle provides a phased structure for governing the work and underpinning the delivery plan, from start to finish. Life cycles can be applied to a portfolio, service, product, system, programme or project.
lines of defence	An assurance model that defines three distinct groups of stakeholders involved with separate but complementary assurance activity.
outcome	The result of change, normally affecting real-world behaviour or circumstances. Outcomes are desired when a change is conceived. Outcomes are achieved as a result of the activities undertaken to effect the change; they are the manifestation of part or all of the new state conceived in the target operating model.

output	A specialist product (the tangible or intangible artefact) that is produced, constructed or created as a result of a planned activity and handed over to users.
plan	A plan sets out how objectives, outcomes and outputs are to be delivered within defined constraints, in accordance with the strategy.
portfolio	A portfolio comprises part or all of an organisation's investment required to achieve its objectives. Governed through its portfolios (or business) plan, a portfolio comprises work components, such as other portfolios, programmes, projects, other related work and work packages.
portfolio management	Portfolio management is a coordinated collection of strategic practices and decisions that together enable the most effective balance of organisational change and business as usual.
programme	A programme is a unique, temporary, flexible organisation created to coordinate, direct and oversee the implementation of a set of projects and other related work components to deliver outcomes and benefits related to a set of strategic objectives.
project	A project is a unique temporary management environment, undertaken in stages, created for the purpose of delivering one or more business products or outcomes.
project delivery	Collectively, portfolio, programme and project management are referred to in government as "project delivery".
quality	The degree to which the features and inherent or assigned characteristics of a product, person, process, service and/or system bear on its ability to show that it meets expectations or stated needs, requirements or specification.
regularity	Compliant with the relevant legislation and wider legal principles such as subsidy control and procurement law, delegated authorities and the guidance in Managing Public Money.
residual risk	The risk remaining after the risk response has been applied.
responsible	Someone who is responsible has some control over or care for an action, or the obligation to do something as part of a wider job role. Note: a responsible person is responsible to an accountable person, or themselves if they are the accountable person.

risk	The effect of uncertainty on objectives. Risk is usually expressed in terms of causes, potential events, and their consequences: a cause is an element which alone or in combination has the potential to give rise to risk; an event is an occurrence or change of a set of circumstances and can be something that is expected which does not happen or something that is not expected which does happen. Events can have multiple causes and consequences and can affect multiple objectives; the consequences should the event happen- consequences are the outcome of an event affecting objectives, which can be certain or uncertain, can have positive or negative direct or indirect effects on objectives, can be expressed qualitatively or quantitatively, and can escalate through cascading and cumulative effects.
risk appetite	The amount of risk the organisation, or subset of it, is willing to accept.
risk management	Risk management is the co-ordinated activities designed and operated to manage risk and exercise internal control within an organisation.
senior responsible owner	The individual accountable to the sponsoring body for a programme or project meeting its objectives, delivering the required outcomes and realising the required benefits. Note: the senior responsible owner owns the business case and is accountable for governance. The sponsoring body could be a group or individual. The senior responsible owner of a government major project is ultimately accountable to Parliament.
sponsoring body	The driving force behind a programme, which provides the investment decision and top-level endorsement for the rationale and objectives of the programme.
stage (project delivery)	In the context of project delivery, a stage is a subdivision of a project life cycle.
stakeholder	Any individual, group or organisation that can affect or be affected by or perceive itself to be affected by an initiative (programme, project, activity, risk).
strategy	A strategy outlines longer term objectives, outcomes and outputs, and the means to achieve them, to inform future decisions and planning.
termination	Termination is the premature closure of a work component because it is no longer needed or viable, or because the risks associated with it have become unacceptably high.
tolerance	The permissible deviation above and below a plan's target for time and

	cost without escalating the deviation to the next level of management. There can also be tolerance levels for quality, scope, benefit and risk. Tolerance is applied at project, stage and team levels.
tranche (project delivery)	In the context of project delivery, a tranche is a subdivision of a programme designed to enable an incremental approach to delivery of outputs, outcomes and benefits.
transformation	A distinct change to the way an organisation conducts all or part of its business.
validation	An activity that ensures a solution (or part of) meets the needs of the business. Validation ensures that business requirements are met even though these might have changed since the original design.
value for money (project delivery)	Value for money is a balanced judgement based on the benefit cost ratio which brings together social costs over the entire life of a proposal, together with decisively significant unquantifiable deliverables, and unmonetised risks and uncertainties, to deliver a proposal's objectives.
verification	An activity that ensures that a solution (or part of) is complete, accurate, reliable and matches its design specification.
work package	An activity that ensures that a solution (or part of) is complete, accurate, reliable and matches its design specification.

C. Senior responsible owners of government major projects

There are a number of specific expectations and obligations for the senior responsible owners of projects in the government major projects portfolio and these have been highlighted throughout this guide. The table below summarises these obligations in one place for quick reference.

Topic	Expectation or obligation
Accountability	Senior responsible owners of a project in the government major projects portfolio, as well as being accountable to their own organisation's management, also has personal accountability to Parliament for the implementation of the government's policies as assigned to them by the relevant accounting officer.
Appointment	Terms of appointment must be set through the formal issue of an appointment letter from the accounting officer and chief executive of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority The appointment letter must be published on GOV.UK by the organisation appointing the senior responsible owner.
Governance and assurance	Senior responsible owners must ensure an accounting officer assessment is completed alongside the approval of the Outline Business Case and at any time after that where the senior responsible owner deems it appropriate to do so in line with HM Treasury guidance. The senior responsible owner must agree their integrated assurance and approvals plan with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.
Project director	The senior responsible owner must appoint a project or programme director and support them in their role and development.

Reporting	Senior responsible owners must ensure reports are submitted to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority for each quarter their project is in the government major projects portfolio
	If the project contributes to the cross-government Net Zero and Climate Change strategy and falls within scope of the Net Zero Portfolio, there is a requirement to report on performance to the Net Zero National Security Implementation Group Sub-Group and the Climate Action Implementation Committee.
Succession planning	Any senior responsible owner leaving their post must work with the organisation to ensure there is proper succession planning and handover to the new senior responsible owner. Good practice is that there is at least one month of handover for the outgoing and incoming senior responsible owners.
Tenure	Any proposed change in tenure caused by the senior responsible owner moving to take up another post in central government must be agreed with the chief executive of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.
Time commitment	Senior responsible owners are expected to dedicate at least 50% of their time to the project up to the approval of the Full Business Case (or equivalent) unless an exemption can be justified and agreed with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.
Transparency	A summary of the accounting officer assessment completed alongside the Outline Business Case, and any completed after, must be published to GOV.UK by the organisation that has appointed the senior responsible owner.
	The senior responsible owner must ensure quarterly reports are provided to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and that their project's transparency data, which supports the annual report on the government major projects portfolio, is published to GOV.UK
	Where a project is related to infrastructure, the senior responsible owner must ensure that a summary of the Full Business Case is published to GOV.UK once approved and that a summary closure report is published to GOV.UK at the end of the project.

D. Comparison of the senior responsible owner and project director

Purpose

	Senior responsible owner	Project director
Purpose of the role	The senior responsible owner is accountable for a programme or project meeting its objectives, delivering the required outcomes, and realising the required benefits. The senior responsible owner of a government major project is accountable to Parliament. For other projects it shall be clear who (which sponsoring group) the senior responsible owner is accountable to. The senior responsible owner steers and champions the project.	The project director is accountable to the senior responsible owner for establishing the governance framework and for the day-to-day management of a programme/project to deliver the desired outcomes and outputs and realise the required benefits. They are responsible for driving the delivery of the project and overseeing it to ensure that the objectives are clearly defined and achieved within the agreed time, cost, and quality constraints. The project director directs the project.
Typical profile	Should ideally hold a leadership position within the organisation and have control or influence over the business area or resources into which the project outcomes will be delivered.	Should be a project delivery professional with relevant knowledge and experience of the type and complexity of project to be delivered. Will have proven project leadership capabilities.

Accountabilities

	Senior responsible owner	Project director
Leadership	Provides overall leadership, decisions, and direction.	Leads and manages the project and the project team on a day-to-day basis.
Design	Owns the overall design of the project and the temporary organisation	Establishes the temporary organisation in line with the agreed

	needed to deliver it.	design.
Delivery	Delivers the project objectives and projected outcomes, and realisation of the benefits set out in the business case.	Creates and leads the project to deliver the agreed outcomes within time, cost, and quality constraints.
Project management	Provides strategic guidance to the project director and sets key strategic delivery parameters.	Provides effective leadership and management controls. Sets project controls and 'stop / go' decision points. Designs the project structure and organisation appropriate to the stage of the project. Sets appropriate delivery methodologies. Manages effective transition between project phases.
Business case	Owns the business case, ensures, and assures, ongoing viability. Must refer any significant concerns about feasibility, value for money, regularity, or propriety to the relevant accounting officer (AO). Must obtain approval from the AO for GMPP projects.	Develops the business case and supports the SRO in delivering the business case objectives.
Budget	Secures budget against the business case throughout the life of the project.	Develops the budget and delivery within budget.
Resources	Appoints the project director, agrees the responsibilities and authority of the role, and secures other resources necessary to deliver the project.	Identifies skill requirements for all stages of the project. Recruits resources within budget constraints and effectively deploys them. Builds the project team; delegates roles and responsibilities, develops capability and fosters innovation.
Benefits realisation	Oversees and drives benefits realisation, including ensuring benefits ownership following closure of the project.	Translates agreed business case benefits into project outcomes and manages delivery of those outcomes.
Stakeholder	Influences and manages the	Ensures stakeholder interests are

management	environment into which the project outcomes will be delivered, including relationships with key stakeholders, business owners and impacted parties.	identified and addressed. Manages stakeholder communications and ensures buy-in. Forms collaborative relationships with key stakeholders both internally and externally. Works collaboratively with the senior responsible owner to jointly manage senior stakeholders.
Risks and issues	Manages strategic risks in the operating environment.	Manages risks and issues and escalates to the senior responsible owner where appropriate.
Governance	Ensures appropriate project governance is in place and chairs the project board.	Provides all reporting as required by the senior responsible owner. Establishes and manages quality assurance and change control
Assurance	Ensures appropriate assurance and agrees the level and frequency of assurance reviews.	Engages on assurance activities and reviews and acts on recommendations.
Guidance and support	Available to the project director to coach, advise, provide strategic direction, assist with conflict resolution and make timely decisions.	Provides support, guidance and coaching for the project team. Promotes effective individual and team performance.

| Planning and control | Agrees and owns the project vision and success criteria with the Project director. Ensures the strategic direction of the project remains aligned with any changes in political or business priorities. | Develops and agrees the vision and measurable success criteria with the senior responsible owner. Develops and maintains the project plan and integrates with other inter-dependent projects. Monitors and controls project progress and performance and reports regularly to the Senior responsible owner. Ensures appropriate standards, good practice and lessons learned are sought and applied. Ensures the product / transition deliverables are well defined and agreed with stakeholders. Ensures effective change control is in place to agree and document changes to project scope and deliverables as agreed with the senior responsible owner and other stakeholders. Manages project closure and sign-off. |

Contact the **Government Project Delivery Function**

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Government Project Delivery Function