# Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

**Infrastructure and Projects Authority**

To:     **Conrad Smewing,** Senior Responsible Owner for the **Digital Planning Programme**

From:   Jeremy Pocklington, Permanent Secretary of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and

Nick Smallwood, Chief Executive Officer of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority

February 2023

Dear Conrad,

**APPOINTMENT AS SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OWNER FOR THE DIGITAL PLANNING PROGRAMME**

We are writing to confirm your appointment as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the Digital Planning Programme with effect from 28th November 2022. This letter sets out your responsibilities and the support you can expect from your department and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

As SRO, you are directly accountable to the Programme Sponsor, Director General, Emran Mian under the oversight of the Permanent Secretary, Jeremy Pocklington as accounting officer for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and the Secretary of State of State, the Rt Honourable Michael Gove MP.

Where your portfolio involves grant-funded initiatives of any type, you are directly accountable to Matt Thurstan as the Senior Officer Accountable for Grant schemes in DLUHC. This is in addition to any accountabilities you may have from a GMPP and DLUHC governance perspective.

Your programme forms part of the Regeneration Group Portfolio, under the oversight of the Chair of the Regeneration Board and is included in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

You have personal responsibility for the delivery of the Digital Planning Programme and will be held accountable for the delivery of its objectives, with policy intent and outcomes expected. This encompasses securing and protecting its vision, ensuring that it is governed responsibly, reported on honestly, escalated appropriately and for influencing the context, culture, and operating environment of the Digital Planning Programme.

You are also responsible for ensuring any grant-funded initiatives within your portfolio are designed, developed, and delivered in line with the Government Grant Functional Standard and the associated

Minimum Requirements as set out in Annex A. These became mandatory for all government departments on from 30 September 2021.

You are responsible for ensuring the ongoing viability of the programme and recommending its pause or termination if appropriate. Where issues arise which you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these to Regeneration Board.

You remain accountable to Ministers, as set out in the Civil Service Code, and should deliver the programme in accordance with the objectives and policy intent as set by Ministers.

In addition to your internal accountabilities, SROs for GMPP projects and programmes are personally accountable to Parliamentary Select Committees. This means that, from the date of this letter, you will be held personally accountable to and could be called by Select Committees to account for and explain the decisions and actions you have taken to deliver the Digital Planning Programme.

It is important to be clear that your accountability relates only to implementation, within the agreed terms in this letter; it will remain for the Minister to account for the relevant policy decisions and development.

More information on this is set out in Giving Evidence to Select Committees - Guidance for Civil Servants, sometimes known as the Osmotherly Rules. Information on the roles and responsibilities of the SRO are detailed in the Infrastructure and Project Authority's guidance on the role of the senior responsible owner. You should also make yourself familiar with the Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery, the requirements of the Government Project Delivery Framework, and the guidance and requirements for project delivery as set by the Regeneration Group.

## Time commitment and tenure

**This role will require at least 30% of your time to enable effective delivery of the role and execute your responsibilities in full.**

You are required to undertake this role until achievement of programme closure, currently planned for 2027. Progress towards this will be reflected in your personal objectives. Any changes to the agreed time commitment or tenure of the role, as set out above, will require both departmental and Infrastructure & Projects Authority consent.

If you cease acting as SRO for one or more grant-funded initiatives within your portfolio, please email the DLUHC Grants Centre of Excellence Team with details of the replacement SRO. This is to ensure that both departmental and wider Government Grant Information System records are accurate and can be updated. You are also responsible for ensuring there is a smooth, informed handover to the new SRO.

## Objectives and performance criteria

The policy intent supported by the Digital Planning Programme is to act as a significant enabler for the wider-planning reform BIDEN (Beauty, Infrastructure, Democracy, Environment and Neighbourhoods) outcomes and the levelling up missions.

Any proposed changes to scope which impacts on this intent or the realisation of benefits must be authorised by the Regeneration Board and may be subject to further levels of approval.

The vision of the Digital Planning Programme is to deliver a modern, data-driven planning system fit for the 21st century and its objectives are to:

- Faster and more efficient plan making (focusing planners' time on strategic planning matters) by:
  - Enabling a 30-month streamlined local plans process,

o Improving land and site identification/allocation processes so that more land is identified for development,
o Funding 60 Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to start their new local plans by 2024/25.

- Improved decision-making for development (faster planning application processing) by:

  o Building modern development management services (for submitting and approving planning applications),
  o Funding 175 LPAs to adopt/be in the process of adopting these services by 2024/25
  o Improve efficiency of development management processes by a min of 20% in the LPAs we are funding.

- Better access to planning data (for government and the private sector to drive productivity and unblock innovation) by:

  o Building a national planning data platform.
  o A minimum of 50 LPAs will be publishing standardised data to the platform by 2024/25.

- Improved local community engagement involving wider demographic (to better inform local communities about the trade-offs and benefits associated with proposed development) by:

  o Developing guidance and tools for LPAs to use modern engagement platforms and approaches.
  o A minimum of 50 LPAs will be using these platforms and approaches by 2024/25.

Your personal objectives and performance criteria which relate to the Digital Planning Programme are:

- The delivery of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB)
- The stewardship of the planning system through planning policy
- The delivery of the Digital Planning Programme
- The delivery of National Strategic Infrastructure Project reforms

You are expected to run your project in accordance with the Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery, the other Functional Standards as applicable to the Digital Planning Programme and the requirements of the Government Project Delivery Framework.


## Extent and limit of accountability

Finance and Controls

HM Treasury spending controls will apply on the basis set out within the department's delegated authority letter. Where the programme exceeds the delegated authority set by HM Treasury, the Treasury Approval Point process will apply, and the details of each approval process must be agreed with your HM Treasury spending team. You should consult departmental finance colleagues on how to go about this.

You should note that where expenditure is considered novel, contentious, repercussive, or likely to result in costs to other parts of the public sector, HM Treasury approval will be required, regardless of whether the programme expenditure exceeds the delegated authority set by HM Treasury. If in doubt about whether approval is required you should, in the first instance, consult departmental finance colleagues before raising with the relevant HM Treasury spending team.

The overall estimated budget, resourcing requirements and tolerances for your project/programme will be agreed as part of the approval process. You will be expected to deliver within these tolerances and report quarterly on these as part of GMPP reporting.

You should operate at all times within the rules set out in Managing Public Money. In addition, you must be mindful of, and act in accordance with, the specific HM Treasury delegated limits and Cabinet Office controls relevant to Digital Planning Programme. Information on these controls can be found here: Cabinet Office controls.

Delegated authority

**You are authorised to:**

- approve expenditure of £105m for the period 2022-2025.
- agree project rescheduling within a 12-month period of agreed milestones, but rescheduling beyond that must be agreed with the Director General and Programme Sponsor Emran Mian and the Regeneration Board
- recommend to the Director General and the Regeneration Board; the need to either pause or terminate the programme where necessary and in a timely manner.

These authority limits are subject to change and other conditions, or tolerances may be set as part of the business case approval and ongoing monitoring processes which you should then operate within.

Where issues arise which take you outside of these authority limits which you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these issues to the Director General and Programme Sponsor Emran Mian and to the Regeneration Board.

## Appointments

You should appoint a full-time programme director to support you in the management of this programme and make other appointments as required for the control and delivery of your programme within your delegated authority.

## Governance and assurance

You should pay attention to ensuring effective governance for your programme, including the establishment of a programme board with appropriate membership and clear terms of reference.

As primary owner, you must ensure that the Digital Planning Programme secures business case approval from the Digital Board and Regeneration Board (including the ISC, CO and HMT). You should also ensure that the programme remains aligned to the strategic outcomes, costs, timescales, and benefits in line with the approved business case as well as monitoring the context within which the programme is being delivered to ensure it remains valid.

Where a change impacts the scope, costs, benefits, or planned delivery milestones agreed as part of an agreed business case, you are responsible for following the agreed change request approval process and setting a new, approved, business case baseline.

You should ensure that an accounting officer assessment is completed alongside the approval of the Outline Business Case and that this is published on GOV.UK as part of the government's transparency requirements on major projects. You are responsible for bringing to the attention of the accounting officer any material changes in the Digital Planning Programme which could require a new accounting officer assessment to be

completed and published. [Guidance on completing accounting officer assessments](#) for major projects is available from HM Treasury.

Although you are directly accountable for this programme, you are also expected to support delivery of the department's overall strategic objectives. This means that you are expected to work collaboratively with other SROs and project directors in adjacent projects and programmes and with the Regeneration Group portfolio management office and Central Portfolio Office to manage dependencies, resources, schedules, and funding to support delivery of the overall change the department needs to achieve its strategic objectives.

You should ensure that appropriate and proportionate assurance is in place and agree on the level and frequency of assurance reviews through the maintenance of an integrated assurance and approvals plan. You should develop this plan and its maintenance in collaboration with the Departmental Assurance Coordinator and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

## Programme status, reporting and transparency requirements

The Digital Planning Programme status at the date of your appointment is reflected in the most recent quarterly return on the programme to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and is the agreed position as you assume formal ownership of the programme.

You are responsible for ensuring the honest and timely reporting on the position of the programme to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority while it remains on the GMPP and for providing reports and information to the Regeneration Group Portfolio Management Office as required. In future, reporting should include carbon measurement, and other sustainable development goals in accordance with evolving government policy and standards. Information on the Digital Planning Programme will be published annually by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

As part of the government's commitment to transparency on major infrastructure projects, you are responsible for publishing on GOV.UK:

- A summary of the accounting officer assessment completed in line with the approval of the Outline Business Case and summaries of any subsequent assessments should they be required;
- A summary of the HM Treasury approved Full Business Case; and
- A close out report after the Digital Planning Programme has completed.


## Development and support

As SRO of a GMPP programme, you are required to complete the Major Projects Leadership Academy, and you have agreed to enrol on a cohort in the near future. The Head of Profession in DLUHC can provide further information on the application process.

To widen experience and understanding of the role, SROs are also expected to become accredited assurance reviewers and to lead or participate in such reviews for other government departments, the wider public sector, and other areas of the DLUHC as appropriate. Becoming an assurance reviewer and completing a review will form part of your time at the Major Projects Leadership Academy. To maintain your accreditation, you will be required to participate in a review at least once every 12 months.

The department will assist you in securing the necessary resources to support the programme, and will set clear guidance, requirements and standards, which align to the [Government Functional Standard on Project Delivery](#), to enable good governance and effective delivery. You will be part of the department's cohort of major project leaders who will be expected to support each other, share good practice and lessons learned and to collectively develop solutions. You should liaise with the department's Head of Profession for project delivery to discuss the maintenance and development of your delivery and leadership skills.

The Infrastructure and Projects Authority will be available to you for support, advice, and assurance throughout the programme's time on the GMPP.

Following approval of the business case and entry onto the Regeneration Group portfolio, the Regeneration Group Portfolio Board will provide ongoing oversight and support and will take steps to help resolve and escalate risks, issues or constraints that are acting as a blocker to successful delivery.

**Government Grant Functional Standards**

Where you are an SRO of one or more grant-funded initiatives, you should operate at all times within the rules set out in the Government Grant Functional Standard and Managing Public Money. Minimum Requirement One of the Government Grant Functional Standard provides background and specific guidance on your SRO role obligations and responsibilities. In addition, you must be mindful of, and act in accordance with, the specific HM Treasury delegated limits and Cabinet Office controls applicable to the relevant grant-funded initiative(s).

You are also responsible for familiarising yourself with relevant information and good practice documentation from the Cabinet Office Grant Centre of Excellence website, including the Code of Conduct for Recipients of Government Grants

In addition, it is also your responsibility to undertake the SRO training provided by the Cabinet Office Grant Centre of Excellence on an annual basis. This can be accessed at SRO learning – Grant Centre of Excellence (civilservice.gov.uk) (registration on the Centre of Excellence Portal is required). You are also responsible for ensuring that any staff involved in the design, development or delivery of grant-funded initiatives, within your remit, complete the required minimum mandatory grant management e-learning. Details can be found in the Grant Learning section of the DLUHC Grants Community Hub.

You should also ensure that there is a process in place to ensure that all key documents for grant-related initiatives are retained in the appropriate way and for the correct length of time. This should include documentary evidence of all key decisions taken in the development of the grant scheme, as well as invoices, receipts and accounting records provided by the grant recipient as detailed in the grant agreement. This should be on a shared drive and be accessible by key staff, auditors and the DLUHC Grants Centre of Excellence when required.

The DLUHC Grant Centre of Excellence team and Cabinet Office Government Grant Management Function (GGMF) colleagues are available to provide further support and advice on the Government Grant Functional Standards and best practice.

The new DLUHC Grants Community Hub also offers useful information and resources, including essential documents, templates, training and guidance to inform grant-making across the department. The Cabinet Office GGMF website  also has a resources library which you are encouraged to access and review: Standard documents – Grant Centre of Excellence (civilservice.gov.uk)]

On receipt of this letter, please sign it electronically and send a copy of the signed version to the DLUHC Grant Centre of Excellence team at Grants.Champion@levellingup.gov.uk. This is to ensure the department complies with the requirement for departmental SRO letters for grants to be uploaded into the Government Grant Information System.
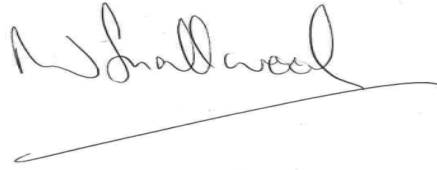
We would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your new role as SRO

Yours sincerely,

**JEREMY POCKLINGTON**

Permanent Secretary, DLUHC

**NICK SMALLWOOD**

Chief Executive Officer, Infrastructure and Projects Authority

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**CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF APPOINTMENT**

I confirm that I accept the appointment of Senior Responsible Owner for the [**project/programme**], including my personal accountability for implementation, as set out in the letter above.

**CONRAD SMEWING**

Senior Responsible Owner, Digital Planning Programme

1 February 2023

**ANNEX A**

**Government Grant Functional Standard** [1]

1. The Government Grant Functional Standard and its accompanying minimum requirements can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/grants-standards

2. The Government Grant Functional Standard and associated minimum requirements operate on a **'comply or explain'** basis. In practice, this means the department should demonstrate compliance with the minimum requirements or where that is not possible for specific elements of the requirements, develop a supporting rationale providing justification for any areas of non-compliance, as part of the business case, signed off by an appropriate person within the organisation.

3. The department has implemented the new standard Model Grant Funding Agreement for government departments, drafted to be fully compliant with Minimum Requirement Six of the Government Grant Functional Standard.

4. Standard Grant Determination templates have also been developed and are available in the DLUHC Grants Community Hub for use with relevant grant schemes.

5. For information purposes, here are some of the significant headlines from the minimum requirements;

   ● All government grant schemes require a named Senior Responsible Officer with clearly defined responsibilities throughout the lifetime of the scheme.

   ● Departments will ensure they have a robust grants approval process to approve spend over £100k and ensure that details of all current grant schemes and awards are available on the Government Grant Information System (GGIS) where all award schemes must be recorded. In DLUHC, your grant scheme Finance Business Partner is responsible for ensuring relevant and timely information is provided to the relevant GGIS liaison team in Finance Directorate. As SRO, it is your responsibility to ensure the relevant Finance Business Partner fulfils their obligations on behalf of your grant scheme.

   ● All new government grant schemes, including those that are high risk, novel, contentious or repercussive, as well as those undergoing a step change in scope or funding, are strongly encouraged for referral to the Complex Grant Advice Panel (CGAP) for scrutiny and advice from subject experts. Schemes that are referenced in the Government's election manifesto and in the Government Grants Pipeline Control Guidance are subject to mandatory referral, follow-up and reporting against the Panel's recommendations as set out in Minimum Requirement Three.

   ● A robust business case, proportionate to the level of expenditure and risk, must be developed for all government grant schemes. This will be scrutinised and approved in stages, as part of the grant scheme approval process, in line with the guidance in Managing Public Money.

   ● Government grant schemes should be competed by default; exceptions may be approved where competition would not be appropriate. Detailed supporting evidence for any direct award decision or other non-competitive approach must be provided in the approved business case.

   ● All government grant schemes must be awarded through robust grant scheme agreement documents. These must be proportionate to the value of the grant scheme and reflect the minimum requirements for government grant schemes, in line with guidance in Managing Public Money. All government grant scheme agreements/grant scheme determination documents should include terms of eligible expenditure.

- All government grant schemes will be subject to timely and proportionate due diligence, assurance, risk management and fraud risk assessment.

- All government grant schemes will have performance measures and longer-term outcomes defined, wherever possible, to enable active performance management, including regular reviews and adjustments where deemed necessary.

- All government grant schemes will be reviewed annually at a minimum with a focus on financial reconciliation, taking into account delivery across the period, resulting in a decision to continue, discontinue, amend or clawback funding.

- All those involved in the development and administration of grant schemes must undertake core training in grant schemes management best practice. Details of the prescribed learning can be found in the Grants Learning section of the DLUHC Grants Community Hub.

**Please note**: Whilst the Government Grant Functional Standards and associated responsibilities set out in the above letter apply to all grant schemes, in some cases specific DLUHC grant scheme responsibilities may be delegated to Local Authorities or other designated bodies as part of the agreed delivery arrangements.

In such cases, as the relevant SRO, you must still ensure that the department fulfils its overall obligations in respect of that grant initiatives and also ensure that the relevant designated bodies are aware of their specific, delegated grant management obligations and responsibilities, as part of the grant agreement or other relevant documentation.