



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Infrastructure
and Projects
Authority

To: Mark Thompson, Senior Responsible Owner for the Northern Ireland Programme

From: Tamara Finkelstein, Permanent Secretary of Defra; and Nick Smallwood, Chief Executive Officer of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority

15 August 2023

Dear Mark

APPOINTMENT AS SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OWNER FOR THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROGRAMME

We are writing to confirm your appointment as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the Northern Ireland Programme with effect from 1 April 2023. 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 Sarah Homer, the Director General for Portfolio Delivery Group, under the oversight of Permanent Secretary Tamara Finkelstein as accounting officer for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Minister Mark Spencer and Secretary of State, Thérèse Coffey.

Your programme forms part of the Defra Portfolio with oversight from Defra's Executive Committee and is included in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

You have personal responsibility for delivery of the Northern Ireland 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 programme. You are also 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 Executive Committee.

You remain accountable to ministers, as set out in the Civil Service Code, and should deliver the project 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 Northern Ireland 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 Defra Portfolio Directorate.

Time commitment and tenure

This will be a full-time role to enable effective delivery of the role and execute your responsibilities in full.

You are required to undertake this role until the Windsor Framework implementation is complete, following proposed discussions with the EU (European Union). This implementation is likely to continue until at least end of the financial year 2025/26. 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 and Projects Authority consent.

Objectives and performance criteria

The policy intent supported by this project, driven by the Windsor Framework and related agreements, is to ensure an enduring, operable Northern Ireland (NI)/Great Britain (GB) boundary for all Defra stakeholders, and the ongoing integrity and efficacy of Defra's regulatory regimes in the context of the Windsor Framework working collaboratively with the devolved administrations. Proposed changes to the programme scope which impact on this intent or benefits realisation must be authorised by the Northern Ireland Programme Board and may be subject to further levels of approval.

The vision of the programme is that Northern Ireland remains an integral part of the UK internal market: citizens continue to access Defra commodities, with no impact on the price or accessibility as a result of the Windsor Framework. The objectives are:

- Uninterrupted trade between GB (Great Britain) and NI
- Unfettered Market Access of NI goods to GB

- Management of any regulatory divergence in an orderly way to avoid negatively impacting NI businesses or customers.

Your personal objectives and performance criteria are:

1. Implement the Defra NI Programme blueprint, including obligations under the Windsor Framework and joint delivery with the DAERA SRO of SPS inspection facilities in NI.
2. Manage Defra NI programme resources, including delivery of the programme business case and management of capability and capacity requirement (within FTE allowances)
3. Realise Defra NI programme benefits.

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 Northern Ireland Programme and the requirements of the Government Project Delivery Framework.

Extent and limit of accountability

(1) Finance and controls

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

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

The overall estimated budget, resourcing requirements, and tolerances for your project or 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 always operate within the rules set out in [Managing Public Money](#). In addition, you must be mindful of, and act in accordance with, the specific Treasury delegated limits and Cabinet Office controls relevant to the Northern Ireland Programme. Information on these controls can be found here: [Cabinet Office controls](#)

(2) Delegated departmental/programme authority

- Tolerance limits for each project has been agreed through the project licence to operate process. These have been reviewed through the programme governance processes and should continue to be reviewed through those structures as the programme is revised and restructured to meet the changing demands. You are authorised to agree project rescheduling for timelines agreed in Project-level business cases within agreed phase envelopes but rescheduling beyond that must be agreed with the Northern Ireland Programme Board. You are authorised to approve transactions up to the value of £10m.
- You are also responsible for recommending to Sarah Homer, the Director General for Portfolio Delivery Group and the Northern Ireland Programme Board the need to either pause or terminate the programme where necessary and in a timely manner.
- Where issues arise which, you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these issues to Sarah Homer, the Director General for Portfolio Delivery Group, the Northern Ireland Programme Board, and if appropriate Executive Committee.

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 Sarah Homer, the Director General for Portfolio Delivery Group, the Northern Ireland Programme Board, and if appropriate Executive Committee.

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 programme secures business case approval from Defra's Investment Committee/Executive Committee and then by HM Treasury (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 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 Defra Portfolio Office and portfolio director 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 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 Defra Portfolio Office as required. Reporting should include carbon measurement, and other sustainable development goals demonstrating evidence that the project contributes to an overarching environmental strategy and is aligned with defined Net Zero pathways. Information on the programme will be published annually by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

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.

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 Defra 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 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 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.

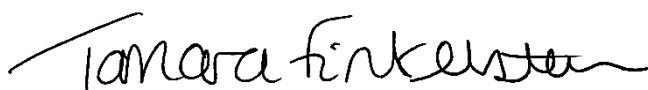
You will be part of the department's cohort of major project leaders who will be expected to support each other, share good practice and lessons learned and to collectively develop solutions. You should liaise with the department's head of profession for project delivery to discuss the maintenance and 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 Defra portfolio, the Executive Committee 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.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you success in your role as SRO.

Yours sincerely,



Permanent Secretary
Department for the Environment,
Food, and Rural Affairs



Chief Executive Officer
Infrastructure and Projects Authority

CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF APPOINTMENT

I confirm that I accept the appointment as Senior Responsible Officer for the Northern Ireland Programme, including my personal accountability for implementation of the project, as set out in the letter above.

Name of SRO: Mark Thompson

Signature of SRO: 

Date: 24/10/23