



Infrastructure  
and Projects  
Authority

To: Catherine Poyner, Senior Responsible Owner for Synergy Programme

From: Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary of Department for Work and Pensions;

Nick Joicey, 2<sup>nd</sup> Permanent Secretary of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs;

Antonia Romeo Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Justice;

Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary of the Home Office; and

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

**1<sup>st</sup> May 2024**

Dear Catherine

### **APPOINTMENT AS SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OWNER FOR THE SYNERGY PROGRAMME**

We are writing to confirm your appointment as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the Synergy Programme with effect from 7 November 2022 (Returning to the Programme after a period of maternity leave in November 2023). This letter sets out your responsibilities and the support you can expect from the Synergy Programme lead, DWP as lead Department, and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

The Synergy Programme is a cross departmental collaboration between the DWP as lead and sponsor department, the Ministry of Justice, DEFRA and the Home Office.

As SRO, you are directly accountable to Debbie Alder, Synergy Cluster Sponsor Director General, under the oversight of Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary and Accounting Officer for the Department for Work and Pensions and lead Accounting Officer for the programme, and Mel Stride, Secretary of State. Uniquely this appointment is made by four Accounting Officers, reflecting the shared nature of accountabilities. Peter Schofield has lead accountability as Accounting Officer for DWP. However, as Accounting Officers for Defra, MoJ and Home Office, we retain responsibility for the expected outcomes and benefits that impact our departments locally and will provide the required support and challenge to enable you, as SRO, to deliver on our behalf.

Your programme is funded as a dedicated cross departmental programme under the sponsorship of DWP but not forming part of the DWP Change Portfolio, it is also part of the Shared Business Services portfolio. The programme is included in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP), and you are required to work with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority for the major assurance of the programme and its cross departmental position within the GMPP.

You have personal responsibility for the delivery of the Synergy programme and will be held accountable for the delivery of its objectives, 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 that you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these to the clusters' sponsor Director General, the Synergy cluster DG sponsor group, the Strategic Programme Board, and where necessary, ad hoc plenary meetings including Departmental Investment Committees or Synergy Plenary Permanent Secretary Group.

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 Synergy 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.

### **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 expected to undertake this role for a minimum duration of three years, nominally to November 2025.

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

The Programme has been set up to deliver the Synergy Cluster response to the 2021 Government's Shared Services Strategy. The strategy aims to bring together departments' core business functions into a single, freeing up time for front line colleagues and offer taxpayers better value for money, and offer taxpayers better value for money.

The Programme will design, develop, and procure the new technologies and capabilities that are required to help modernise our 'back office' systems. It will deliver a high quality, and good value, system and support service to help streamline the transactions and activities that underpin the way departments are run.

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

The vision of the programme is to deliver the Government's three overarching objectives for shared services. These are:

- **Better experience for all users** – intuitive systems that are easy to use and mobile-enabled.
- **Efficiency and value for money** – better systems and services which support productivity and seek to reduce costs.
- **Standardised processes and data** – support interoperability, making it easier to understand and compare data.

## Benefits

Your personal objectives and performance criteria which relate to the Synergy programme are:

As SRO you are accountable for ensuring that the programme delivers the expected benefits. The programme's purpose is to free up staff time so that they can focus on core government business by driving significant business transformation across the four major Departments. This will be achieved through a common operating model to drive high levels of convergence, the introduction of a high-performing, user-centric Intelligent Client Function, more consistent and common data standards and through the exploitation of new functional capability. The introduction of a cloud-based IT system that remains constantly up to date and supports modern HR, Finance and Commercial delivery will underpin the programme.

The programme will deliver a mix of cashable and non-cashable benefits. The cashable benefits picture will be further developed as part of the Full Business Case.

You are expected to run your project in accordance with the [Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery](#), the other [Functional Standards](#) as applicable to this 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 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 the Synergy Programme. Information on these controls can be found here: [Cabinet Office controls](#).

### Delegated authority

HM Treasury spending controls will apply, as set out within the HM Treasury Delegated Spending Authority letter. HM Treasury funding is stage gated with an indicative delegation received by email of £80.3m to cover all activity up to the production of the first iteration of the Full Business Case, defined as control point 5 in the OBC. This is expected to be operated on a ring-fenced central fund basis.

Where Synergy 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 the DWP's HM Treasury spending team.

### **You are authorised to:**

- **approve expenditure as set out in the DWP financial delegation authority;**
- **agree project rescheduling as set out in the Synergy Implementation and Delivery controls; and**
- **recommend to the Synergy Strategic Programme Board the need to either pause or terminate the programme where necessary and in a timely manner.**

The Synergy Implementation and Delivery controls will need to be agreed by you as the SRO with the Strategic programme board **within 3 months** of commencing your role.

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 within which you should then operate.

Where issues arise that take you outside of these authority limits which you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these issues to the cluster sponsor Director General, the Synergy cluster DG sponsor group, the Strategic Programme Board and if necessary, the Synergy Plenary Permanent Secretary Group.

## **Appointments**

You should appoint a permanent 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 Strategic Programme Board with appropriate membership and clear terms of reference, establishing a single apex of control for which you are accountable.

As primary owner, you must ensure that the programme secures business case approval from the 4 departments, the Strategic Programme Board and HM Treasury. 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 cluster departments' overall strategic objectives. This means that you are expected to work collaboratively with other SROs and project directors both within DWP and the other three cluster departments in adjacent projects and programmes and with the requisite departmental portfolio management offices and directors to manage dependencies, resources, schedules, and funding to support delivery of the overall changes the departments need to achieve their 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 Infrastructure and Projects Authority and the cluster department's Delivery Assurance Co-ordinators or their equivalents.

## **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, as a programme hosted by DWP as the lead department the DWP Departmental Change Portfolio Office will help as required, but it should be noted that this cross departmental programme is not formally part of the DWP Change Portfolio. 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.

As the SRO of a project/programme that is within scope of the cross-government Net Zero Portfolio you are additionally required to report into the Net Zero and Climate change governance structure, specifically reporting into the Net Zero National Security Implementation Group Sub-Group and the climate Action Implementation committee.

You are responsible for publishing on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) a summary of the sponsor departments' accounting officer assessment completed in line with the following points

- HM Treasury of the Outline Business Case; and
- A summary of the HM Treasury approved Full Business Case; and
- A close out report after the Synergy Programme has completed.

You should note an updated accounting officer assessment should be prepared at subsequent stages of the Synergy Programme if it departs from the four standards (regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility), or the agreed plan – including any contingency – in terms of costs, benefits, timescales, or level of risk, which informed the accounting officer's previous approval.

It is for you, as the SRO, to decide whether or not an accounting officer assessment should be prepared at any other stage of the programme. You should be prepared to defend your decisions to Parliament if challenged, for example, if called to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee.

## **Development and support**

As a graduate of cohort 22 of the Major Programme Leadership Academy you are also expected to be an accredited assurance reviewer and to lead or participate in such reviews for other government departments and the wider public sector as appropriate. To maintain your accreditation, you will be required to participate in a review at least once every 12 months.

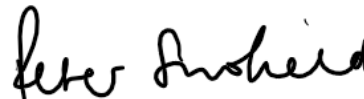
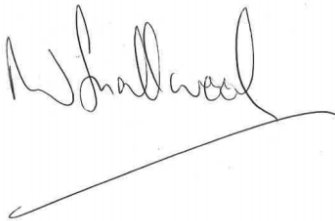
The department will assist you in securing the necessary resources to support the programme and will set clear guidance, requirements and standards, which align to the [Government Functional Standard on Project Delivery](#), to enable good governance and effective delivery. You will be part of the Civil Service 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 Infrastructure and Projects Authority Head of Profession for project delivery to discuss the

maintenance and development of your delivery and leadership skills as well as maintain links with the departmental programme directors.

The Infrastructure and Projects Authority will be available to you for support, advice, and assurance throughout the programme's time on the GMPP. This programme sits outside of the lead department Projects and Programme's portfolio and as such assurance should be sought primarily from the Infrastructure and Projects Authority or through engagement collectively with the programme portfolios within the cluster departments.

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

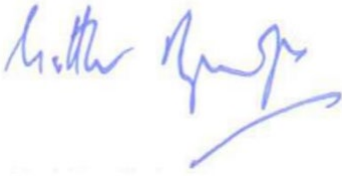
Yours sincerely,



NICK SMALLWOOD Chief Executive Infrastructure and Projects Authority	PETER SCHOFIELD, Permanent Secretary of Department for Work and Pensions
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Nick Joicey 2 <sup>nd</sup> Permanent Secretary of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	ANTONIA ROMEO Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Justice
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**MATTHEW RYCROFT**

Permanent Secretary of the Home Office

**CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF APPOINTMENT**

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



**Catherine Poyner**

Synergy Programme, 29/05/2024