



Department  
for Education



Infrastructure  
and Projects  
Authority

To: **Chris Armstrong-Stacey**, Senior Responsible Owner for the **Early Years and Childcare Reform Programme**

From: **Susan Acland-Hood**, Permanent Secretary of the **Department for Education** and  
**Nick Smallwood**, Chief Executive Officer of the **Infrastructure and Projects Authority**

15/01/2025

Dear **Chris**

## **APPOINTMENT AS SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OWNER FOR THE EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE REFORM PROGRAMME**

We are writing to confirm your appointment as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the **Early Years and Childcare Reform Programme** with effect from **06/01/2025**. 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 **your Director General, under the oversight of the Permanent Secretary as accounting officer for Department for Education, and the Secretary of State for Education**.

Your **programme** forms part of the **DfE Major Projects Portfolio** under the oversight of the Chair of the **Performance and Risk Committee** and is included in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

You have personal responsibility for the delivery of the **Early Years and Childcare Reform Programme** and will be held accountable for the delivery of its objectives, with policy intent and outcomes expected. This encompasses 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 the **Performance and Risk 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 **Early Years and Childcare Reform 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 **Major Projects Portfolio** management office.

### **Time commitment and tenure**

**This role will require around 50% 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 **the programme closure**, planned for **September 2026**. 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 **programme** is integral to helping deliver the previous government's commitment as set out in the Spring Budget of 2023 to increase the amount of early education and care that working families can access. The current government confirmed that it would be committing to this policy and marks the beginning of long-term reform to create an integrated early years and childcare system that works for parents and gives every child the best start in life. This Government expects to spend in excess of £8bn each year from 2027/28. This includes £4.1bn to fund extended free hours for children over the age of 9 months, a funding rate increase increasing the supply of wraparound childcare, and wider market reforms.

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

The purpose of the **programme** was to support more parents to work and become economically active by improving the affordability, availability and flexibility of childcare. This programme now also forms part of opportunity and growth mission.

To enable this transformation, the **programme** has the following objectives:

- To increase the take-up of early years childcare to support parents to work and become economically active.
- To put in place the effective legal, digital and funding infrastructure to enable parents to access expanded early years entitlements.
- To create sufficient childcare places for eligible parents to access the new early years entitlements in their local area, including in areas of disadvantage, for vulnerable children and those with SEND.
- To maintain the uptake of existing entitlements, quality of provision, and financial sustainability of providers as childcare entitlements expand.
- To give every parent/carer of a primary age child who needs it in order to work, access to wraparound childcare from 8am to 6pm during term time.

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

- Setting the long-term vision for the project.
- The delivery of agreed objectives and policy intent over the lifetime of the project.
- Putting in place effective management for the project to ensure work is appropriately defined, planned, monitored, and controlled, and quality managed to maximise success.
- Ensuring that a business case is developed and updated throughout the project lifecycle.
- Presenting all iterations of the project's business case at Investment Committee (if it meets committee thresholds) to seek departmental approval.
- Identifying and securing the necessary investment and approvals for the project internally, for example Investment Committee approval and externally, for example HM Treasury (HMT) clearance and Cabinet Office (CO) controls.
- Managing the resources allocated to the project and ensuring they are equipped with skills and expertise for successful delivery.
- Realising the benefits of the project as outlined in the agreed business case.
- Putting in place effective governance for the project.
- Understanding how risk is managed in the department, setting up and embedding processes to identify and escalate risks and issues in your area, and actively managing risks where you are the owner.
- Influencing the context, culture and operating environment of the project so as to maximise its chances of success.

These objectives need to be proportionate and balanced to the business need given the emerging priorities.

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 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 **The Early Years and Childcare Reform Programme**. Information on these controls can be found here: [Cabinet Office controls](#).

### Delegated authority

**You are authorised to:**

- **approve expenditure of up to £15m;**
- **agree project rescheduling within 12 weeks of agreed milestones, subject to alignment with ministerial decisions, and;**
- **recommend to the Director General and the appropriate governance body 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 the **Performance and Risk 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 **Investment Committee including 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 a summary of key points from the assessment should be published on GOV.UK as part of the government's transparency requirements on major projects, your Finance Business Partner will be able to assist with this. 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 **Major Projects Portfolio** management 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 **Major Projects Portfolio** management 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.

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 programme has completed.

## Development and support

As a graduate of the MPLA, we both expect, and will support, you to continue your ongoing professional development, and will encourage you to take part in active MPLA alumni activities.

To widen experience and understanding of the role, MPLA graduates 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 Education 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 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 **DfE Major Projects Portfolio**, the **Performance and Risk 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.

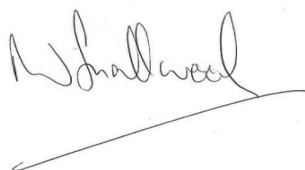
We would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your role as SRO.

Yours sincerely,



**SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD**

Permanent Secretary, Department for Education

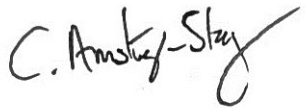


**NICK SMALLWOOD**

Chief Executive Officer, Infrastructure and Projects Authority

## CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF APPOINTMENT

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "C. Armstrong-Stacey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

**Chris Armstrong-Stacey**

21 February 2025