



HM Government

To: Will Davis, Senior Responsible Owner for the Freeports Programme

From: Dame Sarah Healey, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; and Becky Wood, Chief Executive Officer of the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority and the Senior Accountable Officer for Project Delivery across Government

07 October 2025

Dear Will,

APPOINTMENT AS SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OWNER FOR THE Freeports Programme

We are writing to confirm your appointment as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the Freeports Programme with effect from 30/06/2025. This letter sets out your responsibilities and the support you can expect from your department, Government Project Delivery and the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority.

As SRO, you are directly accountable to Will Garton, Director General for Local Government, Growth and Communities, under the oversight of the Permanent Secretary, Dame Sarah Healey, as accounting officer for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Governments.

Your Freeports Programme forms part of the Local Government, Growth and Communities Portfolio, under the oversight of the Chair of the Local Government, Growth and Communities Portfolio and is included in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

You have personal responsibility for the delivery of Freeports Programme and will be held accountable for the delivery of its objectives, policy intent and outcomes. 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 Freeports Programme. You are also responsible for ensuring the ongoing viability of the Freeports 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 Local Government, Growth and Communities Portfolio Board.

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 Freeports 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 Government Project Delivery's guidance on [the role of the senior responsible owner](#),

You are expected to run your programme in accordance with the [Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery](#), and the requirements of [other functional standards](#) as required, which is mandated for government departments and arm's length bodies to follow. You should also make yourself familiar with [The Teal Book](#), Government Project Delivery's code of practice for project delivery, and any further guidance and requirements set by departmental portfolio office, CoE etc.

Time commitment and tenure

This role will require at least 10% of your time to enable effective delivery of the role and execute your responsibilities in full.

You are required to undertake this role until programme closure, planned for April 2030. 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 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority consent.

Objectives and performance criteria

The policy intent supported by this Freeports Programme is to bring together ports, local authorities, businesses and other key local stakeholders to create national hubs for trade, innovation, commerce and global investment in England, Scotland and Wales. They will regenerate communities, attracting new businesses, spreading jobs, investment and opportunity to towns and cities across the country.

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

The vision of the Freeports Programme is to be a flagship government programme and its objectives are to:

- Establish Freeports as national hubs for global trade and investment across the UK
 - Trade: increase in trade throughput through the designated Freeport area
 - Investment: increase in investment within Freeport boundary area, surrounding area and nationally
- Promote regeneration and job creation
 - Employment: increased number of jobs and average wages in deprived areas in and around the Freeport
 - Economic activity: increase in economic specialisation in activities high in GVA relative to the current makeup of the local economy
- Create a hotbed of innovation

- Innovation: Increased local involvement and funding in R&D and innovation
- Productivity: Increased productivity in each target region, through increased capacity to absorb innovation

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

- ensuring the assessment of bids are performed with fairness, propriety and conducted in line with the criteria set out in the Prospectus;
- overseeing the successful administration and delivery of the programme, in accordance with policy objectives set out by Ministers; and
- ensuring the project is governed capably, effectively and transparently.

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 Freeports 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 Freeports Programme. Information on these controls can be found here: [Cabinet Office controls](#).

Delegated authority

You are authorised to:

- approve expenditure up to the budget delegation for the programme, which is £348.73m.
- agree programme rescheduling within the agreed Spending Review period that is agreed until Financial Year 29/30, but rescheduling beyond that must be agreed with HM Treasury.
- recommend to the Director General for Local Government, Growth and Communities and the Local Government, Growth and Communities Portfolio 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 for Local Government, Growth and Communities and the Local Government, Growth and Communities Portfolio Board.

Appointments

You should appoint a full time programme director to support you in the management of this Freeports 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 UK Industrial Strategy Zones Programme Board with appropriate membership and clear terms of reference.

As primary owner, you must 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 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 Local Government, Growth and Communities 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 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation 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 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation 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 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority while it remains on the GMPP and for providing reports and information to the Local Government, Growth and Communities 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 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority.

As part of the government's commitment to transparency on major 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.

Guidance on the [publication of business cases](#) and on the completion of [accounting officer assessments](#) is available from HM Treasury.

Evaluation

Evaluation of major projects is a requirement. Given the scale and complexity of major projects, it is essential that they are evaluated properly to learn lessons and help ensure accountability. As an SRO of a GMPP project, you are responsible for ensuring that your programme has proportionate and suitably resourced evaluation in place. Evaluation planning should begin from the very start of the policy development and the initiation of the programme or project. Progress with the development and implementation of evaluation plans will be monitored through the major project assurance process.

You are also responsible for registering all planned, live and completed evaluations on the Government Evaluation Registry. [Guidance on using the evaluation registry](#) is available on GOV.UK.

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 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 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 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 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 Freeport 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.

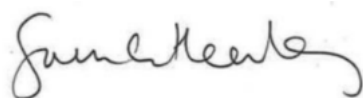
The National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority and Government Project Delivery will be available to you for support, advice, and assurance throughout the programme's time on the GMPP.

Government Project Delivery's suite of standards, guidance, tools, templates and services can be accessed from projectdelivery.gov.uk and we encourage you and your team to register for accounts

The Local Government, Growth and Communities 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.

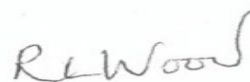
We would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your role as SRO.

Yours sincerely,



Dame Sarah Healey

Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Housing,
Communities and Local Government



BECKY WOOD

Chief Executive Officer, National Infrastructure
and Service Transformation Authority

Senior Accountable Officer for Project Delivery
across Government

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.



Will Davis

07/10/2025
