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Ministry
of Justice



Government
Project Delivery

To: Fiona Parker, Senior Responsible Owner for the Small Secure Houseblocks Programme

From: Dr Jo Farrar CB OBE, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice; and Alison Baptise CBE Director Function, Insight, Portfolio and Assurance for the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority

August 2026

Government Major Project Portfolio (GMPP)

Dear Fiona,

Appointment as senior responsible owner for the Small Secure Houseblocks Programme

We are writing to confirm your appointment as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the Small Secure Houseblocks Programme with effect from October 2024. This letter sets out your responsibilities and the support you can expect from your department the Ministry of Justice, Government Project Delivery and the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA).

As SRO, you are directly accountable to Chief Executive Officer of His Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) under the oversight of the Permanent Secretary as accounting officer for Ministry of Justice and Minister of State for Prisons, Parole and Probation.

Your programme forms part of the Ministry of Justice's Portfolio, under the oversight of the Chair of the Portfolio Committee within the tolerances set by the Investment Committee at each approvals point and is included in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

You have personal responsibility for the delivery of Small Secure Houseblocks 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 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 Ministry of Justice's Investment 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.

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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 Small Secure Houseblocks 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 are mandated for government departments and Arm's Length Bodies. 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 the Ministry of Justice's Portfolio Management Office.

Time commitment and tenure

This role will require 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 close, planned for Q3 2028. 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 NISTA consent.

Objectives and performance criteria

The policy intent supported by this programme is to increase the supply of prison places in response to a growing demand, helping to support the Government in their Manifesto Mission of 'Taking Back our Streets' through providing fit-for-purpose prison accommodation that focusses on reducing reoffending. The places delivered will contribute to the overall aim of providing 20,000 new prison places into the estate.

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

The vision of the Programme is to deliver c1,080 additional prison places through the expansion of existing Small Secure Houseblocks as part of a wider delivery of 20,000 accommodation places identified within the 2021 Spending Review to mitigate the predicted shortfall in prison places against forecasted demand. The programme will provide a viable, quick to install, permanent and more cost-effective method than temporary units, that will be able to hold Category C prisoners and meet Category C security standards.

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

- To ensure the additional prison capacity is built to the relevant standards and requirements, on time and within budget.

You should ensure that the prison places are delivered on time, to enable first prisoner dates to be met and capacity to be ramped up to full capacity swiftly and reliably, within budget, and that they meet the relevant standards and requirements, including those of HMPPS. You should ensure that the impacts of external

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risks are managed and mitigated as far as possible and ensure transparency and escalation of risks where required to keep delivery on track.

- To ensure fair and open competition for the management contract of the construction, using the Crown Commercial Service Construction and Associated Service Framework, awarding the contract to allow construction to be completed within the required timeframe and to the right quality standards.

You should ensure that the tendering process supports open and fair competition, and that the successful parties are contracted on time to allow the Programme to meet delivery dates; and that they are successfully contract managed to deliver the programme objectives, driving value for the taxpayer.

- To assure the mobilisation of the additional prison capacity at each site, to allow first prisoner acceptance within the required timeframe.

Mobilisation is a challenging period. You must ensure that each prison is held to account for mobilising the additional capacity safely, on time and meeting HMPPS's requirements within the set budget and in line with first prisoner acceptance dates or as otherwise agreed by the programme board.

- Environmental Sustainability, Efficiency and Resilience

As SRO for the programme, you will support the Ministry of Justice's vision for Environmental Sustainability Efficiency and Resilience, this means embedding sustainability in everything the Ministry of Justice does and using sustainability to support environmental outcomes and demonstrating best practice.

Projects should deliver BREEAM Excellent as a minimum in line with Government Buying standards and strive to deliver BREEAM Outstanding, where technically feasible and commercially viable. BREEAM should be used to ensure buildings are efficient and resilient to the impacts of climate change in construction and operation and systems should be put in place post construction to ensure benefits in operation are realised.

Projects should deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in line with statutory compliance on projects requiring planning with PDR sites aiming for BNG as close to 10% as is practical taking into consideration site constraints.

Delivery of "near zero energy" buildings is required by the UK Building Regulations for all public sector buildings and so any new build expansion must be Net Zero Carbon ready, being designed and operated without the need for fossil fuels, and houseblocks should aim to reduce embodied carbon emissions associated with houseblock construction, targeting a 10% reduction.

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 (TAP) 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.

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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 Department's specific HM Treasury delegated limits and with the wider approach to functional controls set out in the Department's Memorandum of Understanding with HM Treasury, in relation to a multi-disciplinary, single approval point within the Treasury Approvals Process.

Delegated authority

You are authorised to:

- Approve expenditure to the limit set out in the most recent Business Case.
- Agree programme rescheduling within agreed Prison Capacity Sub-portfolio tolerance parameters of agreed milestones, but rescheduling beyond that must be agreed by the Ministry of Justice's Investment Committee; and, dependent on the scale of the movement, with the Permanent Secretary, the Minister of State for Prisons, Parole and Probation and Lord Chancellor, and
- Recommend to the Chief Executive Officer, HMPPS, and the Ministry of Justice's Investment Committee 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 within which you should then operate.

Where issues arise which take you outside of these authority limits and which you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these issues to the Prison Capacity Sub-Portfolio Board and the Ministry of Justice's Investment Committee.

Appointments

To support you in the management of this programme you have appointed a full-time Programme Manager, which meets the standard time commitment for major projects on the Ministry of Justice's Portfolio. You should make further 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 the Ministry of Justice's Investment Committee and Cabinet Office 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.

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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 for 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 Ministry of Justice's Portfolio Management Office and Head of Portfolio 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 NISTA.

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 NISTA 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 NISTA via the Government Reporting Integration Platform (*GRIP*) while it remains on the GMPP, and for providing reports and information to the Ministry of Justice Portfolio Management Office as required and for submitting business cases and reports to the keyholder process and relevant boards. Where appropriate, governance will include reference to the Ministry of Justice's Investment Committee, Executive Committee and the Portfolio Committee as required 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 NISTA.

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

- Business cases for projects and programmes that form part of the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP). This business case may be a Summary Business Case, a Full Business Case or a Programme Business Case. The business case must be published within four months of the project or programme receiving HM Treasury approval.
- 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 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.

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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 a graduate of the Major Projects Leadership Academy, you are expected to maintain your continuing professional development as a project leader.

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.

NISTA 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.

Following approval of the business case and entry onto the Ministry of Justice Portfolio, Portfolio 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,



Dr Jo Farrar CB OBE
Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice



Alison Baptiste CBE
Director of Function, Insight, Portfolio and Assurance

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National Infrastructure and Service
Transformation 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.



Fiona Parker

April 2026