



Public Accounts Committee

Alex Chisholm
Permanent Secretary & Chief Operating Officer of the Civil Service
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
LONDON SW1A 2AS
By email: PSAlexChisholm@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

24 November 2022

Cabinet Office Accounting Officer Assessments – IT related

Dear Permanent Secretary,

I am writing to you following publication in September of your summary Accounting Officer assessments in respect of the [Verify Programme](#) and the [One Login Programme](#).

I have reviewed these assessments with interest and have some lines of enquiry included in the Appendix.

I would be grateful if you could respond on these points before **Friday 16 December**.

Yours sincerely

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts



Public Accounts Committee

Appendix

1. Verify Programme

The Accounting Officer assessment presents a positive net benefit picture including up to closure of Verify in 2023.

This raises a question about the analysis used and I would be grateful if you could provide a response to the following query:

- a) **Remaining costs to closure.** The assessment states that Verify will show a net cost for its final year because of the loss of discounts related to volume and spreading of fixed costs over a smaller user base as services and users withdraw. It states that the overall economic appraisal remains positive if the following are also considered: time savings for citizens, reduced fraud and avoided costs of departments implementing their own solutions or reverting to "costly in-person methods."

However, no analysis is presented to underpin this statement and a number of counterarguments may be advanced. Time savings for citizens are undermined by the diminishing number of services and the need for re-enrolment in the One Login solution when it is rolled out. The counterfactual of departments developing their own solutions is undermined by the existence of the One Login programme which is actively seeking to use and develop the mechanisms developed by departments where Verify did not meet their needs.

Please provide further analysis of the conclusion that that the "overall economic appraisal remains positive".

2. One Login Programme

One Login aims to overcome the issues associated with Verify's operation and the Accounting Officer assessment presents a positive picture in terms of the likely join up across government and the related benefits associated.

This assessment raises some points for clarification and I would be grateful if you could provide a response to the following queries:

- a) **Barriers to joining up government systems.** The Accounting Officer assessment states that One Login will "replace duplicative and disjointed systems across government". This was the same objective that Verify had. It also states that OneLogin will "remove barriers to service integration". However, it is not clear to us how a system which confirms identity at the point of accessing the service will achieve back-office integration, especially where this involves legacy



Public Accounts Committee

systems that typically contain siloed and poor-quality data. Please explain the extent to which the programme can realistically address this objective in these circumstances.

- b) **Assumptions underpinning the benefits case.** The assessment states that “the programme has been subject to extensive economic appraisal” and has a “strong benefits-costs ratio”. However, no further detail or supporting statements are provided. This was the case with Verify. Please clarify these assertions with the basis on which they are formed and the sensitivity of the underlying assumptions.