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15/12/2022

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Account

From Tamara Finkelstein CB
Permanent Secretary

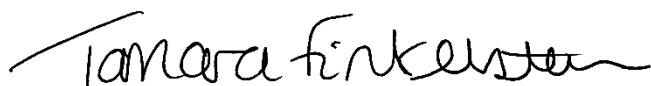
Re: DEFRA AOA – Workplace and Facilities Management

Dear Dame Meg

1. Further to your letter of 29 November 2022, I recognise the gap between my approval of the full Accounting Officer (AO) assessment and publication. This letter details the timeline between approval and publication, but I want to assure you that I am committed to publishing AO assessments in a timely manner.
2. AO Assessments are completed for all projects at every stage of a business case and are considered by the department's Investment Committee. For GMPP projects the AO Assessment Summary is finalised for publication once the business case has been fully approved by HM Treasury i.e. after a Treasury Approval Point (TAP) or Major Projects Review Group (MPRG).
3. I approved the WPFM Full AO assessment on 12 January 2022. The approved AO assessment and Project Outline Business Case (OBC) were submitted to HM Treasury for consideration and approval. HM Treasury approved the WPFM OBC at the end of March 2022.
4. Following approval of the business case the WPFM project prepared the AO assessment summary, which was delayed slightly as the project were at a critical point in the commercial strategy, whilst transitioning and securing roles. The AO Summary was approved by the Project Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) and submitted for final consideration and approvals late June.
5. The AO assessment summary must be laid in the House of Commons Library before being published on gov.uk. The AO assessment was timed to be published early September, at the end of summer recess. Depositing the AO assessment summary in the house was further delayed as country entered a period of National Mourning
6. During this time my department took the opportunity for a further review of WPFM AO by Senior Officials and HM Treasury. The AO assessment summary was updated to reflect

their suggested comments and approved by myself on 27 September, deposited in the House mid-October, and published on Gov.uk on 27 October.

7. Defra is sensitive to the economic situation, the WPFM Project are currently developing their Full Business Case for consideration by the departmental Investment Committee at the end of March 2023. The Accounting Officer Assessment will be refreshed, and an updated AO assessment summary will be produced for publication if the project departs from the four standards or agreed plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Tamara Finkelstein'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

TAMARA FINKELSTEIN
Permanent Secretary