



Public Accounts Committee

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SARs Reform Programme

Dear Permanent Secretary,

I am writing to you following your letter to the Comptroller and Auditor General of 10 May, providing a summary of your Accounting Officer assessment of the Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) Reform Programme. I note that your department failed to provide me with a summary of the assessments as stipulated in HM Treasury's guidance on Accounting Officer Assessments.¹ I hope you will ensure this does not occur again.

Your summary of the assessment covers the four Accounting Officer standards, but it is limited in its description of the programme and of the evidence supporting your conclusions. Given the importance of the SARs Reform Programme in improving the response to economic crime, I would value some more details.

It appears from your description that this programme needs to achieve significant change in activities and sectors which the Home Office does not control, such as compliance reporting practices by banks, law firms and other parts of the regulated sector and the utilisation of SARs by law enforcement agencies. You also refer to 'legacy IT systems' causing inefficiency and ineffectiveness, although it is not clear whether this refers to government, law enforcement or private sector systems. As you know, my Committee's examination of other Home Office major programmes have highlighted the difficulties, delays and cost increases that have occurred when the Department is working in partnership and does not itself control all the resources required to deliver a programme's objectives.

Please would you advise me of: the key objectives for the SARs programme and how these will be monitored; the timetable for delivery; the programme budget; the expected benefit-cost ratio; key risks to delivery and the steps the Home Office is taking to mitigate the risks. If not covered in the discussion of risks, please also explain how the Home Office is addressing the challenges of working in partnership with the regulated sector and law enforcement agencies, and of updating the main 'legacy IT systems' involved in this programme.

¹ [HM Treasury, Accounting Officer Assessments: Guidance, December 2021](#)



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I also note that while the programme's outline business case was approved in August 2020, the accounting officer assessment has not yet been published. I would be grateful if you could explain the reason for the delay in producing the summary assessment and making it available externally. Please also confirm that the Home Office will ensure that it produces and publishes its summary AO assessments in a timely way from now on.

I ask that you provide a response before the House rises for the summer recess. This letter will be shared with the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Yours sincerely

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts