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Alex Chisholm
Civil Service Chief Operating Officer
and Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary
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Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts

Dear Chair

Response to pensions related queries regarding Cabinet Office Accounting Officer Assessments

My thanks for your letter of 15 November, raising questions over the timeliness of AO Assessments and the steps the Cabinet Office is taking to ensure assessments contain sufficiently detailed assessments of the risks and complexities of the different stages of programmes under assessment.

As I explained at the PAC meeting on 18 July we use AO assessments regularly and find them extremely useful, particularly for the more novel, contentious and short term proposals. Nevertheless we have not been systematically conducting them for our GMPP projects in recent times, in part because Cabinet Office major projects tend to be smaller scale and less contentious than for the classic delivery departments, and in part because as chair of the Cabinet Office Approvals Board I play a key role in the critical investment decisions for all our major projects. Nevertheless I appreciate that these Assessments apply a different and helpful lens through which to consider our major projects.

As I committed to at the PAC hearing we have now caught up for all our existing GMPP projects. Going forward I am mandating AO Assessments are undertaken for all our GMPP projects in parallel with business case approvals, as AO Assessments are typically required from OBC stage. We will also integrate the requirement into our GMPP onboarding process to avoid projects falling through the gaps when they are brought onto the GMPP whilst in flight.

Any assessment of a programme considers both the specific moment in time at which the assessment occurs as well as a consideration of the programme across its lifespan, including a narrative description of the programme as a whole. This includes consideration of the various risks which exist at different stages of a programme and the mitigations that should be set against those risks. These are set out in the relevant business cases which require approval at the Cabinet Office Approvals Board at each stage of business case

development and assessed further during targeted periodic assurance reviews during the life cycle of the programme.

In respect of the specific Remedy programme, the assessment considered the recent review of the programme by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, whose independent team not only reflected on the phase 1 achievements but also stress tested the phase 2 preparations, finding the programme to be on track for a successful implementation. This concurs with the ongoing assessment of the SRO and Programme Board.

This is reflected in the progress that has been made thus far on the second phase of the programme, which includes:

- 98% of the required key data on track to be provided to the programme team by January 2023, three months ahead of usage, with plausibility checks underway and a GIAA audit of the data collection process already undertaken;
- Capability for the production of the alternate calculations on track for completion by April 2023, currently operating at an 80% automation threshold with a team of pension administrators recruited to commence investigations into the remaining 20% clerical caseload;
- Eight existing channels available across the membership to ensure communications, (including in person, virtual and automated systems). Work is ongoing to test, refine and iterate solutions throughout the next phase.

The Remedy programme continues to push forward solution design at risk as the policy has developed and matured, with significant associated scrutiny from Cabinet Office and Civil Service bodies. We have also agreed with the IPA that they will undertake a further assessment towards the end of Q1 next year to re-test any associated risk to a successful delivery.

This approach reflects the wider approach that the Cabinet Office takes to assessing risks across the whole life of its programmes. Future assessments will reflect the significant risks as articulated in the latest business case and assurance review.



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