

Summary Accounting Officer Assessment: Sovereign Borders Programme

19 June 2023

Background and Context

It is normal practice for Accounting Officers to scrutinise significant policy proposals or plans to start or vary major projects, and then assess whether they measure up to the standards set out in Managing Public Money. From April 2017, the Government has committed to make a summary of the key points from these assessments available to Parliament when an Accounting Officer has agreed an assessment of projects within the Government Major Projects Portfolio.

The assessment below reflects the position in June 2023.

The Sovereign Borders Programme ('the Programme')

This summary covers parts of the Sovereign Borders Programme which implemented reforms from the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (the 'Act'). Separate to this, in April 2022, letters regarding the ministerial direction to establish a Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda were published. This can be found here: [Migration and economic development partnership: ministerial direction - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/migration-and-economic-development-partnership-ministerial-direction).

The Programme and NABA legislation has the following **three strategic objectives**:

1. To increase the fairness and efficacy of our system so that we can better protect and support those in genuine need of asylum.
2. To deter illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of people smuggling networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger.
3. To remove more easily from the UK those with no right to be here.

The Programme has already implemented large parts of the Act. It has strengthened criminal offences, including for illegal entry and facilitation; reformed the Clandestine Civil Entrant Penalty scheme; made initial changes to the asylum system; and delivered modern slavery and nationality reforms. The delivery of the remaining elements remains under consideration. The delivery of the Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda has been covered by separate Accounting Officer advice on which my considerations have already been published.

1. Regularity

All reforms of the asylum system that are being delivered through the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and pre-existing legislation are in accordance with our international and domestic legal obligations.

Funding for the Programme (2022/23 to 2024/25) was provided as part of the Department's Spending Review 2021 settlement. This will be kept under review as part of future spending cycles.

I consider the Programme is meeting regulatory requirements so am satisfied that the regularity test has been met.

2. Propriety

The case for change is clear and was set out in the New Plan for Immigration Policy Statement published in July 2021. Since then, we have seen the scale of small boat arrivals and challenges, including the demands placed on the asylum system.

The Programme is implementing reforms in accordance with *Managing Public Money* and to a standard that meets public expectations. There are also:

- monitoring and evaluation arrangements to understand the impact of the reforms. This is based on statistics that the Home Office routinely publishes;
- regular engagements with stakeholders; and
- well-established governance arrangements to ensure the safe and successful delivery of the reforms; and to manage any emerging risks and issues in line with the Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery.

In my consideration of whether this Programme meets the Accounting Officer propriety test, I have considered the development of the business case, planned monitoring and evaluation work, and the governance structures in place and I am satisfied the test has been met.

3. Value for Money (VfM)

The Programme's business case considered value-for-money implications and has been approved by the Department's Finance and Investment Committee (FIC) at key intervals.

In recognition that the Programme is one part of a wider reform portfolio, the appraisal adopted a layering approach to benefits.

Taking account of the points above, overall, I consider the parts of the Programme on which this summary relates – namely the Nationality and Borders Act - to conform to the Value for Money Accounting Officer standard.

4. Feasibility

The Programme has delivered the majority of reforms in the Act. These are now operational. The remaining areas will be delivered in due course, keeping under consideration the scale and complexity of these, and wider change requirements.

In my consideration of whether this Programme meets the Accounting Officer feasibility test, I have considered the plans for delivery which were approved by the Home Office Finance and Investment Committee (FIC) in January 2023, and whilst risks remain, I am satisfied with the mitigations in place that the delivery of the current FIC-approved plan remains feasible.

5. Conclusion

The delivery plans for this Programme remain realistic. Each of the areas set out above will need to be kept under close review.

Overall, I am satisfied that the parts of the Sovereign Borders Programme on which this summary relates meets the four Accounting Officer standards of

regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility expected by Parliament and the public.

As the Accounting Officer for the Sovereign Borders Programme, I have considered this assessment and approved it on 19 June 2023.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Rycroft', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matthew Rycroft CBE

Permanent Secretary for the Home Office