

# **HMRC Trader Support Service (TSS) Programme further contract extension: Accounting Officer Assessment Summary**

It is normal practice for Accounting Officers to scrutinise significant policy proposals or plans to start or vary major projects and assess whether they measure up to the standards set out in HM Treasury's (HMT's) Managing Public Money guidelines. 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 a project within the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

The first assessment for the Trader Support Service (TSS) programme was published on 29 January 2021. The most recent, updated summary was published in November 2023 to reflect a one-year contract extension to December 2024. This updated summary has been completed in the light of a further exceptional one-year contract extension for the service to December 2025.

## **Background and context**

The Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP) was agreed in 2019 as part of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. On 27 February 2023, it was announced that the NIP would be replaced by the Windsor Framework. The Windsor Framework restores the free flow of trade from Great Britain (GB) to Northern Ireland (NI) by reducing customs processes and unnecessary checks that were previously required by the NIP. A key aspect of the Windsor Framework is the introduction of the Simplified Process for Internal Market Movements (SPIMM), which will protect internal UK trade and separate goods destined for Northern Ireland from goods that are at risk of moving into the EU.

Underpinning the Windsor Framework and its implementation is the TSS. The TSS is a free-to-use customs intermediary service that was set up by HMRC to reduce the administrative and financial burden the NIP placed on traders. The TSS supports UK businesses by facilitating the submission of traders' declarations and provides a comprehensive educational offering on customs processes. Following the publication of the Windsor Framework, government committed to providing ongoing support to traders moving goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland under the new Windsor Framework arrangements.

The TSS was initially procured for two years until 31 December 2022, with the option of extending for two further periods, each of one year. Given the importance of the TSS, both extension periods have been utilised through to December 2024. We have assessed the medium to long-term options for sustaining the TSS and consider that a further one-year extension from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025 is

needed to provide continuity and stability for traders as the Windsor Framework continues to be introduced via a phased approach. For the period beyond 2025, we have recently announced that a competitive procurement exercise will be launched for the next phase of the TSS that will deliver ongoing support for traders from 2026 onwards.

## **Regularity**

The programme was part of the government's commitment to implement the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 and the NIP (now Windsor Framework). The Programme continues to comply with Parliamentary requirements for the control of expenditure.

The TSS was designed to address the key readiness challenges for the implementation of the NIP. With the replacement of the NIP by the Windsor Framework, the TSS will maintain support for traders moving goods under existing arrangements and support delivery of the changes required under the Windsor Framework, which are ongoing.

## **Propriety**

The TSS Programme complies with Parliamentary requirements for the control of expenditure, with funds being applied only to the extent and for the purposes authorised by Parliament.

Clear governance processes have been established for effective programme management. The programme has established a Project Board and Programme Board as the key decision-making boards, attended by key stakeholders. An updated business case was recently approved by the department in July 2024 and has received HMT approval.

As part of the GMPP, the programme reports quarterly to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) on progress. An assessment of the programme's progress is published on an annual basis as part of the IPA's Annual Report, and the annual GMPP transparency publication.

## **Value for money**

The programme has followed HMT's Green Book methodology and 5-case model. Value for money has been assessed via an options appraisal which has been documented in the Programme Business Case. The preferred option offers the highest potential to achieve the programme's objectives and minimise delivery risks. Without this service there would be a significant additional regulatory burden on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland which could deter such trade.

To support value for money, HMRC has negotiated new contract terms with additional cost savings. The TSS will manage Windsor Framework service delivery through adjusting capacity and cost as required.

## **Feasibility**

The programme leadership, supported by delivery partners, has the skills and experience needed to achieve the programme deliverables within the required timeframe. The programme regularly monitors capacity and resource requirements, progress against delivery plans, risks, and dependencies, with action being taken when it is appropriate to do so.

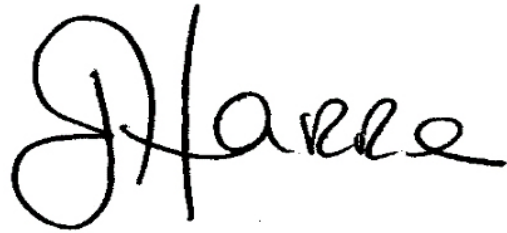
An IPA gateway review was conducted in June 2024 to assess the contract extension to December 2025 and future arrangements for TSS. The review team gave a green delivery confidence assessment of the TSS and found that successful delivery of the programme to time, cost, and quality appeared highly likely and there were no major outstanding issues that at this stage appear to threaten delivery.

## **Conclusion**

As the Accounting Officer for HMRC I have considered my assessment of the TSS Programme and concluded that the proposal represents value for money and is deliverable. I have therefore approved it as of 5 September 2024. I have prepared this summary to set out the key points which informed my decision. If any of these factors change materially during the lifetime of the programme, I undertake to prepare a revised summary, setting out my updated assessment. This summary will be published on the government website (GOV.UK). Copies will be deposited in the Library of the House of Commons and sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Accounting Officer's name: Sir Jim Harra KCB, Chief Executive HM Revenue and Customs.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Halle". The letter 'H' is large and stylized with a loop at the top. The 'a' is small and connected to the 'l', which is also connected to the 'l' and 'e'.

Date of signing: 5 September 2024