

## Accounting Officer Assessment Summary – Asylum Transformation Programme

Programme Background:

The Asylum Transformation Programme is transforming people capabilities, process and technology underpinning asylum casework and asylum support and accommodation, enabling the Home Office to better meet the interests and concerns of the many stakeholders in UK asylum, now and in the future. The four strategic objectives of the programme are to:

1. **Build a flexible, sustainable and efficient system.** An improved asylum system, which is efficient, reliable and sustainable such that it can adapt with future fluctuations of migrants through the system in the face of geopolitical unpredictability.
2. **Develop a transparent and outcome focused customer journey.** Applicants follow dynamic journeys, receive the right support first time, and receive decisions in line with service standards.
3. **Build Strong partner and public trust.** Improvements to accommodation processes, technology and data use, and relationships with Local Authorities, meaning that the Home Office are better at maximising the flow of asylum seekers through the system, utilise more financially viable Dispersed Accommodation (usually houses or flats in residential areas in local authorities) over more costly Contingency Accommodation (such as hotels), and reduce the time it takes to “move” ineligible asylum seekers on once they've received a decision.
4. **Improve the colleague experience.** Greater employee engagement and retention, allied to better tools and processes, resulting in reduced asylum casework processing times, allowing application decisions to be made with fewer resources.

The programme entered the Government Major Projects Portfolio in April 2023, and the Programme Business Case is now with HMT for approval.

This assessment is made by the Second Permanent Secretary and Permanent Secretary (and Accounting Officer), Home Office.

### **1) Regularity**

#### *Policy*

The Asylum Transformation Programme is assessed as regular as it relies on existing primary legislation of the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Acts of 1971 to 2016, and does not require new or amended legislation to progress. The Immigration Rules, which are laid before Parliament under section 3 of that Act, set out the practice that will be followed. Changes to the scope and operation of the immigration system are made through the Immigration Rules and a framework of secondary legislation as required.

The programme has deemed the potential legal challenge as low, as the transformation relies on existing legislation as well as being a mechanism to provide greater efficiencies in the asylum system.

## *Affordability*

The programme forecasts spend of £65.5m. The programme is to be funded from existing Home Office budgets.

The programme therefore **conforms to the Regulatory Accounting Officer standard.**

## **2) Propriety**

The proposed course of action complies with managing public money (3.3.3 Value for Money). Where the Asylum Transformation Programme is being managed and delivered in compliance with the Home Office's best practice and standards.

The programme is delivering in a complex political and policy landscape, where robust dependency management is a priority and forefront of project management. The programme is aligned with the wider Government policies, and programmes. There is no risk of conflict with policies led elsewhere due to the close managing of dependencies.

We continue to review equalities impacts in relation to the new system. The programme is ensuring its outcomes are not prejudicial to any particular group of people by following best practices and standards including completing Equality Impact Assessments (EIA). Robust independent evaluation will continue ensuring our approach to policy and delivery is led by the evidence and continues to provide good value to the taxpayer. To protect the vulnerable, we also continue to engage with local authorities and third sector delivery partners.

The overall Risk Potential Assessment (RPA) for the programme is high. The key drivers of this assessment are the high political and public strategic impact given the high interest in the asylum system. Appropriate governance is in place to ensure that spend is monitored and well managed, risks to delivery are identified and mitigated as appropriate and that spend is in line with ATP's and the wider Department's objectives.

The programme is overseen by robust governance and reporting arrangements, with clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for expenditure that fully meet the Home Office requirements and necessary approvals. The programme is governed by an internal Programme Board as well as other appropriate boards and authority bodies within the Home Office. The key and relevant officials across the Home Office including finance, data, and project professionals have reviewed the proposal and provided the necessary level of assurance and authority to proceed. The programme has regular interactions and reviews by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA), including quarterly reporting as a result of being a part of the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

As a result of this programme, the UK Public, Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and Immigration Advisors (IA), Home Office Staff and Asylum Applicants will all notice improvements in their experiences.

The programme is now in the process of obtaining the external HM Treasury approval for the Programme Business Case.

**The programme therefore conforms to the Propriety Accounting Officer standard.**

## **3) Value for Money**

Delivery of the ATP outcomes will provide the United Kingdom with significant financial and non-financial benefits. The latest Programme Business Case provided a detailed assessment against a number of delivery options, with the preferred option delivering a Net Present Social Value (NPSV) of £879.9m over the 10-year appraisal period. The costs of delivery to meet the preferred option equates to £207m, over the 10-year appraisal period, inclusive of Optimism Bias. Any sunk cost or realised benefits have not been included as per HMT Greenbook requirements.

ATP delivers on Ministerial commitments, external recommendations, and Departmental objectives. It also delivers significant value to society with monetised and non-monetised benefits to the Home Office.

Key financial benefits include:

- Savings through FTE reduction due of increasing decision maker productivity. These FTE savings can then be either redeployed (non-cashable) or if circumstances permit be cashed.
- Financial savings due to increased utilisation of Dispersal Accommodation beds over Contingency Accommodation.
- Financial savings as a product of decreasing the time it takes asylum applicants to “Move On” from asylum accommodation and support once in receipt of a decision.

Non-Financial benefits include:

- Improved relationships with Local Authorities.
- Improved colleague experiences.
- Improved asylum applicant experience and customer journey.
- The establishment of a sustainable and resilient asylum system that can flex to changing demands.

The programme benefits have been identified and validated through the establishment of a robust cost-benefit model, which have gone through appropriate Quality Assurance processes. Sensitivity analysis has been undertaken to demonstrate the impact of changing key components of the cost benefit analysis. Sensitivity analysis scenarios looked at benefit reductions, case working efficiencies, and accommodation and support rates. In each scenario, the NPSV for the preferred option remained positive.

Taking account of the points above, overall, I consider the Asylum Transformation Programme is a sound use of public funds that will deliver a significant level of benefits for the public sector and **conform to the Value for Money Accounting Officer standard.**

#### **4) Feasibility**

The Asylum Transformation Programme conforms to the Feasibility Accounting Officer Standard. The programme approach is well established, with appropriate resources, skills and capabilities in place to enable successful delivery.

The programme has successfully delivered a number of outcomes to date, including clearing the legacy asylum backlog, supporting the closure of asylum hotels and ensuring that the pressures of accommodating asylum seekers are more evenly balanced across a broader cohort of Local Authorities.

The Programme consists of 27 projects (split between two workstreams) and 2 supporting initiatives (within a cross-cutting workstream). These projects vary in maturity and scale and will be delivered through a mixture of 'agile' and 'waterfall' project management approaches. Each project is supported by a detailed delivery plan, proactive risk and issue management and a robust governance structure.

The programme has undergone two IPA-led Gateway reviews to date. The first occurred in February 2023, where the programme received a delivery confidence assessment of amber and 11 recommendations, all of which have been delivered against. The second review occurred in February 2024 and the programme again received a delivery confidence assessment of amber. The programme also received 8 recommendations and delivery against them is underway.

The IPA review reflects that whilst the programme is delivering in a complex and challenging landscape, the Home Office does have the ability to carry out the proposed programme effectively and credibly.

The Asylum Transformation Programme is being managed by a well-resourced, capable, and qualified team of project and business change professionals, supported by engaged operational colleagues and technical experts.

Therefore, I consider the programme to **conform to the Feasibility Accounting Officer standard**.

## Conclusion

As the Accounting Officer for the Home Office, I have considered this assessment of ATP against the four accounting officer standards of regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility.

I am satisfied the programme:

- Relies on clear legal powers;
- Meets the standards of Managing Public Money and accords with the generally understood principles of public life;
- Represents good value for money for the;
- Is feasible to deliver.

I am therefore satisfied that the programme is a good use of public resources and meets the overall requirement to deliver an effective immigration service for the UK.

As the Accounting Officer for the Home Office, I considered this assessment of the Asylum Transformation Programme and approved it on 29 September 2024.

I have prepared this summary to set out the key points which informed my decision.

Matthew Rycroft

Permanent Secretary for the Home Office

29 September