

Accounting Officer Summary: Civil Registration Service Transformation (CReST) Transformation Programme

It is normal practice for Accounting Officers to scrutinise significant policy proposals or plans to start or vary major projects. From April 2017, the government has committed to make a summary of these assessments available to Parliament when an Accounting Officer has agreed an assessment of projects within the GMPP.

When considering and approving an assessment for a Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) project, assessing Accounting Officers are required to provide a summary of the key points from the assessment to Parliament.

Background and Context

Civil registration is a core national function. Since civil registration began in 1837, the General Register Office (GRO) has had a statutory obligation to hold, maintain and provide public access to civil registration records of births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships, and other registration events for England and Wales. In England and Wales, civil registration is supported by a multitude of ageing systems used by the GRO & Local Registration Service (LRS), on behalf of the Registrar General for England and Wales.

Civil registration services and systems are reliant on equipment that is no longer readily available from commercial markets. GRO records are stored on microfilm tapes which are at risk of degradation and becoming unusable. There are also significant service and sustainability risks as they reach obsolescence.

The strategic drivers for the programme can be summarised as:

- Give long term business continuity, enabling the Home Office to meet the statutory requirement of providing a civil registration service for England and Wales.
- Contribute towards the wider Government digital identity agenda (the One Login for Government and Tell Government Once programmes).
- Continue to be a data provider for other critical services across government.
- Replace systems nearing obsolescence and ensure business continuity, reducing risk to civil registration including security threats.
- Provide value for money to the public by digitising data. This will enable easier and quicker access to registration records and reduce travel time. Therefore, contributing to government's agenda to reduce carbon emissions.

The Whole Life Cost (WLC) of the programme is above £150M CDEL. This has resulted in the programme's inclusion in the GMPP, and an Accounting Officer Assessment is required.

Regularity: The provision for registering births and deaths is principally governed by the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953, the Registration Service Act 1953 and Registration of Births and Deaths Regulations 1987. The provisions for marriages and civil partnerships are governed by the Marriage Act 1949, Registration of Marriage

Regulations 2015, the Civil Partnership Act 2004, and Civil Partnership (Registration provisions) Regulations 2005. The CReST programme is assessed as regular, as it relies on the provision of an essential national service bound by primary legislation.

The Programme Business Case has received approval from the Investment Committee. CReST is funded by the Home Office, Department of Health and Social Care and Government Digital Services. Funding is rigorously managed and monitored, and the programme is considered affordable.

Therefore, I consider the programme to conform to the Regularity Accounting Standard.

Propriety: The CReST programme conforms to the propriety standard as the completion of the programme deliverables will result in noticeable improvements for the public. The programme is ensuring it is not prejudicial to any group of people by following best practices and standards, including executing Equality Impact Assessments. CReST complies with the standards set out in Managing Public Money by obtaining the necessary approvals for expenditure.

Therefore, I consider the programme to conform to the Propriety Accounting Standard.

Value for Money: This programme is funded through the Home Office budget with contributions from Government Digital Services and the Department of Health and Social Care. The final total cost of the programme is estimated at £263.35m, including Optimism Bias.

The key benefits of the CReST programme include cost savings, increased productivity, enhanced customer experience, better strategic alignment, positive environmental impact, enhanced staff experience, risk reduction and continued adherence to statutory requirements. This includes assumed benefits for the Local Registration Services. While some of the benefits fall to the Home Office, Local Authorities will be responsible for realising the benefits when the programme has ended. The overall estimated benefits are approximately £291m over the 10-year appraisal period.

Transformation will provide greater infrastructure stability, ensuring GRO are able to fulfil their statutory obligations. The improved systems and infrastructure will support delivery in accordance with upcoming legislative changes.

Therefore, I consider the programme to conform to the Value for Money Standard.

Feasibility: The CReST programme conforms to the feasibility standard as it is managed by a well-resourced and qualified team of project and business change professionals. Two contracts have been awarded and mobilised to support the delivery of the programme. There is an established PMO team, who ensure the programme is supported and delivered in accordance with the Home Office's best practices and standards.

A combined CReST Programme PPD Gateway 0 Strategic Review was conducted in May 2024, with some recommendations which are currently being addressed or

resolved. The delivery confidence assessment for the programme is Amber/Red. To improve the current status, CReST is currently implementing a new programme management structure. This will enhance delivery and management of the programme, with the introduction of dedicated service owners to monitor key aspects of delivery and mitigate any issues. The service owners will have autonomy to make decisions and accelerate the pace of delivery. Therefore, I consider the programme to conform to the Feasibility Standard.

Conclusion

The CReST programme conforms to the four Accounting Officer standards of regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility. Therefore, I consider the programme to be proper.

As the Accounting Officer, I considered this assessment of CReST and approved it on 04 December 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 this programme, I will prepare a revised summary, setting out my assessment of them. This summary will be published on the government's 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

Sir Matthew Rycroft KCMG CBE
Permanent Secretary

04 December 2024