

Accounting Officer Assessment – Support for Victims of Modern Slavery (SVMS) programme

Programme Background:

The UK has international and domestic legal obligations to provide support to potential and confirmed victims of modern slavery primarily set out in the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT), the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (MSA) and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (NABA). One way the UK Government currently meets these obligations to adult victims of Modern slavery is through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC) in England and Wales which is due to end in January 2027.

The Support for Victims of Modern Slavery (SVMS) programme is a procurement programme which addresses the question of what replaces the MSVCC. The programme will ensure there is legally robust policy and operational practice to assist adult victims of modern slavery (potential and confirmed) in their recovery and that facilitates smooth transition out of contracted support, when no longer required, into mainstream support services as appropriate. The new contract will deliver this adult support model through a service that is innovative, flexible, and responsive to changes in demand, and that can adapt to victims' needs effectively.

Assessment against Accounting Officer standards

Regularity

1. The investment does not raise specific regularity concerns. The programme's Outline Business Case (OBC) sets out expenditure on resources and a standard procurement route. This is within Home Office powers and is similar to existing projects/programmes. As Accounting Officer I am content this meets the required regularity standard.

Propriety

2. The proposed investment is not novel or contentious and an agreed procurement strategy will be approved by the relevant internal and external assurance boards prior to the launch of the Invitation to Tender (ITT).
3. Appropriate programme governance and assurance is in place to ensure the programme is managed effectively. The governance structure includes representatives from various key enablers across the Home Office, for example Commercial, Home Office Analysis and Insight (HOAI) Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT), and Finance. The programme, to date, has successfully passed through Commercial Assurance Board on two occasions, DDaT Technical Design Authority, Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) Gate 2 independent assurance, and InvestCo. The programme will revisit the same assurance boards as part of Full Business Case (FBC) assurance processes.

4. The programme has a clear set of milestones from now until it transitions into BAU. As Accounting Officer, I am content that this meets the required propriety standard.

Value for Money

5. The recommended option set out in the OBC has a negative Net Present Social Value (NPSV). Monetising the intended benefits for SVMS is inherently difficult, but there are several non-monetised benefits. As Accounting Officer, I must satisfy myself that these non-monetised benefits mean that this programme can be justified as a sound use of public funds and therefore value for money.
6. The proposed approach meets the strategic objectives and UK Government legal obligations set out in the OBC 'case for change' to procure a replacement to the current Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract (MSVCC). As evidenced through the SVMS Theory of Change, the service will aim to achieve several outcomes for victims both during their time in the service and after exit. In the long-term, once victims have exited the service, this could potentially contribute to reduced re-victimisation among victims supported and increased positive engagement with the criminal justice system.
7. The OBC sets out the non-monetisable benefits and highlights that benefits are largely social and public-facing for adult victims of modern slavery and public authorities, which are difficult to monetise due to various factors that can also contribute to the identified benefits making attribution difficult. The OBC explains how the Home Office will measure intermediate benefits and plans to undertake an impact evaluation throughout the contract duration, which will aid the identification of measures and long-term benefits realisation. At FBC stage, there will be a clearer view of benefit measures.
8. Regarding affordability, I am aware that funding for the 2025/26 Financial Year (FY) will be prioritised within the Public Safety Group allocation following the Spending Review (SR) settlement. Spending in FYs 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29 will form part of the overall bid for phase 2 of the SR for submission in Spring 2025. As Accounting Officer, I am content that this investment meets the required Value for Money standard and am therefore content to proceed at this time.

Feasibility

9. As Accounting Officer, I must be comfortable that the project is deliverable and be cognisant of the overall Amber rating provided by independent reviewers through the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) Gate 2 Review.
10. The SVMS Programme has a clear governance and assurance structure with a dedicated programme/policy (P/P) team and several key enablers from across the Home Office. The programme will implement IPA Gate 2 Review critical recommendations, mostly around resourcing and governance, to improve project delivery processes moving forward ahead of FBC stage.

11. I am content that the commercial route has been approved via the Commercial Assurance Board (CAB) in October 2024 and will not proceed to ITT launch until Cabinet Office commercial colleagues approve the programme to proceed to ITT via standard and formal process. I am aware the programme is one of the first procurements to go to tender using the new procurement regulations introduced in 2024.
12. I am aware that the deliverability of the SVMS Service itself is feasible. It is a re-procurement of the current contract, and robust plans are in train to manage a transition if a new supplier is successful. As Accounting Officer, I am content that this meets the required feasibility standard.

Conclusion

13. I have considered this assessment of the SVMS programme against the four Accounting Officer standards of regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility. I am satisfied that the approval of the OBC meets the standards of regularity and propriety set out in Managing Public Money and that this investment meets feasibility and value for money standards.
14. There remain concerns over the negative NPSV of this investment, but there are clear strategic benefits which are non-monetisable. These provide benefits for adult victims of modern slavery, the Home Office's National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and wider public services.
15. I have prepared this assessment to set out the key points supporting my decision. If any of these factors change materially during the lifetime of this programme, I undertake to prepare a revised document, setting out my assessment of those factors.



Simon Ridley

Acting Permanent Secretary and Interim Accounting Officer

3 April 2025