



Accounting Officer Memorandum

Small Secure Houseblocks Programme - Full Business Case

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's Major Projects Portfolio.

Background and Context

The Small Secure Houseblocks Programme (SSHP) was initiated to ensure HMPPS provides additional, modern prison places. The Outline Business Case (OBC) sought approval to deliver c.1,200 of the places within the 20k programme.

This Full Business Case (FBC) is seeking approval to:

- Deliver 1,080 places across six sites through houseblock expansions along with the associated uplift in ancillaries (HMP Erlestoke, Onley, Lancaster Farms, Northumberland, Ranby and Humber).
- The FBC will deliver c.120 fewer places than set out in the Outline Business Case (OBC), following the scope of the programme being revised.

Assessment against the accounting officer standard

Regularity

The SSHP FBC is assessed as regular. The Prison Act 1952 includes that the Secretary of State may, with the approval of the Treasury alter, enlarge, or rebuild any prison and build new prisons. It is therefore considered that the department has the required spending powers to enter into the contract amendments required to build and then operate the additional houseblocks. The SSHP is fully compliant with other relevant legislation and the programme has obtained legal input throughout its development.



Propriety

The SSHP FBC is assessed as proper. The SSHP has passed the internal project, programme and departmental governance. I am satisfied that all relevant governance and assurance procedures have been completed. The SSHP is fully compliant with the relevant legislation. The programme is affordable within latest Spending Review settlement, and has been selected based on its cost, feasibility, strategic fit and overall value for money.

Value for Money

The investment in additional places delivered through Small Secure Houseblocks has been assessed as delivering value for money. This is based on meeting the demand for prison places, delivering 1,080 Category C places and delivering a design and specification that meets the operational requirements. Value for money has also been assessed through the total cost per place, assured by cost consultants (industry specialists) and assessed against key set of criteria that takes into consideration, strategic viability, deliverability and the time required to deliver the places.

The FBC has also scaled back c.120 places since the OBC to ensure the programme can continue to demonstrate value for money and the wider portfolio still retains the ability to deliver 20,000 additional prison places. The additional places to be delivered will support the department in upholding the sentences of courts and the law across England and Wales. This programme is therefore of significant value in terms of helping to address the need to increase capacity within the prison estate.

Feasibility

The SSHP FBC is assessed as feasible. The project management arrangements, internal governance and assurance processes are already in place and embedded to control, oversee and manage the SSH builds.

Conclusion

I have considered this assessment of the SSHP FBC against the four accounting officer standards of regularity, propriety, value for money, and feasibility. I am satisfied that these responsibilities are met.

As the accounting officer for His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. I considered this assessment of the SSHP FBC and approved it on 1st April 2025.

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 undertake to 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.

A copy has also been provided to the principal accounting officer for the Ministry of Justice, who has seen my assessment and endorsed my decision based on my assurance my accounting officer responsibilities are met.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. Copple". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "P" and "C".

Phil Copple

HMPPS Chief Executive and Accounting Officer

