



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Dame Meg Hillier
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Jeremy Pocklington CB
Permanent Secretary

**Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
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19 April 2022

Dear Dame Meg,

Thank you for your letter of 28 March regarding Freeports and other local growth programmes in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

Decisions on when a project is onboarded onto GMPP are taken by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA), in conjunction with the department. Whether or not a project is part of the GMPP, business cases for all large projects must be approved by HM Treasury, in addition to the department's own scrutiny. That has been the case for all the programmes you mention.

The March 2021 Budget announced eight Freeports in England, following a competition. The decision-making note on the selection process was published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) in April 2021.

The Freeports programme was onboarded to GMPP in June 2021, which means that the programme receives IPA-led assurance and active IPA support. In addition to this assurance, Freeports and all programmes onboarded to GMPP report quarterly to the IPA. As a GMPP project, Freeports will participate in annual IPA reviews, with the next scheduled for October 2022.

Of the other funds you referenced, Towns Fund joined GMPP with the same approach to assurance as just described and we published its Accounting Officer Assessment (AOA) on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) in September 2020. The Levelling Up Fund (LUF) onboarded to GMPP in September 2021 and was subject to an IPA gateway review earlier this year. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is currently in the process of being onboarded.

The Freeports AOA was completed at the time of onboarding in June 2021. At that time, we agreed with the IPA not to publish immediately, but instead to align with that of the other two linked local growth programmes, LUF and UKSPF, given the close links between the programmes. Early in 2022, we revisited this decision and agreed with the IPA that whilst we were managing these programmes as part of the same portfolio, their scale meant that each merited assurance in its own right. For that reason, we reverted to publishing each assessment separately, with the Freeports AOA published in March 2022. The LUF AOA publication will follow in May 2022 and the UKSPF AOA will be published upon completion of the onboarding process, expected to be in June 2022.

Finally, there are specific criteria for which projects are invited to meetings of the Major Projects Review Group (MPRG) and, of those referenced above, only Freeports was selected for the MPRG.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jeremy Pocklington". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Jeremy" and last name "Pocklington" clearly distinguishable.

JEREMY POCKLINGTON