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Meg Hillier MP
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By email

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Dear Chair,

Forty-Second Report of Session 2017-19: Modernising the Disclosure and Barring Service

The Committee asked the Home Office and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to update on the progress made on modernising the services provided by DBS since the Committee's two reports in May 2018 and 2019. We have made significant progress on the four outstanding recommendations, with three closed and one remaining open.

As you are aware, as part of the Government's response to Covid-19, DBS have developed an automated Covid-19 fast check system for healthcare and social care workers in England and Wales being recruited in connection with the provision of care and treatment of coronavirus. This has been a priority for DBS. The process has been in place since March and DBS has processed just under 224,000 urgent checks free of charge within 24-hours.

I am writing to update you on one outstanding recommendation from the Committee's May 2018 report, "Modernising the DBS".

The Home Office should write to us before Parliament's summer recess, setting out the outcome of the negotiations with TCS, a clear and realistic timetable for when modernisation will be completed, and details of the cost implications for DBS and the Home Office.

Further to my letter to you on 10 July this year, I can confirm the contract between DBS and TCS has now come to an end. Collaboration between TCS, DBS and CGI and Hinduja Global Solutions UK Limited (HGS), DBS' two new delivery partners, meant DBS transitioned successfully to its new suppliers on 28th March 2020. All of this was achieved without disruption to DBS live services and the new suppliers are working in line with agreed standards.

Regarding the outcome of the DBS' negotiations with TCS over commercial disputes, there is no change in the disputed cause of delay. In July 2019, TCS initiated legal proceedings related to the ticket price provision within their prior contract and requested the court clarify how the contractual provision should be interpreted. It was anticipated that this court case would have been heard in June 2020 but because of Covid-19, this has now been delayed with no guidance yet on when this might now be heard. DBS will update you once there is movement on this.

I am conscious the original implementation date for this recommendation was originally deferred from July 2019 to Spring 2020 to align with the DBS modernisation programme. At the last review for the Treasury Minutes in February this year, the date was amended to September 2020 to allow DBS's new IT supplier, CGI, time to develop a clear view of the technology roadmap, architecture principles and priorities for modernisation.

Since February, DBS has prioritised the development of the Covid-19 solution. It has continued to provide a full disclosure operational service - despite operating in lockdown conditions and with a reduced Liverpool workforce due to social distancing requirements, It has also successfully transitioned to new suppliers without any impediments on their services. Parallel to this, work on modernisation has continued and has been taking place during 2020 through the R0 Refresh Project, which will replace all legacy hardware. Despite this being legacy hardware, DBS and CGI were able to physically move the system from their former supplier premises, again without disruption to service and the system remains resilient.

DBS sent an outline of the plan to the Committee on 28 September. It is disappointing that the full detailed plan cannot be shared now with the Committee. DBS say that the slippage has resulted from the impact of Covid-19 on both business priorities and ability for CGI to have technical staff working in the Liverpool Office. A full technical plan is now in place and DBS is in the final process of prioritising this plan with detailed costings. The plan will be approved by their Change Committee before Board approval in early November. I have been assured by the DBS that they will be able to provide the Committee with a detailed plan, along with associated costings, in November and the Chief Executive has written to you to explain this.

Whilst there has been much progress against this recommendation, it is not yet in a position when it can close. In order to be confident of delivery, I would prefer if we could revise the implementation date to November to give DBS time to fully consider how they propose implementing the plan and be able to provide you with more detail of their timelines and costings. I hope they will also then be in a position to provide an update on the legal proceedings with TCS.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Rycroft
Permanent Secretary