



CABINET OFFICE

Civil Service Chief Operating Officer & Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary

Catherine Little
Civil Service Chief Operating Officer
and Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary
5 November 2024

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Chair

UPDATE ON VETTING TRANSFORMATION

Further to the letter from my predecessor Sir Alex Chisholm dated 4 December 2023 and the Treasury Minute provided to the Committee in May 2024, I am writing to provide an update on the status of vetting transformation. I am also proposing the closure of the final outstanding Recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee's report on the performance of UK Security Vetting (UKSV):

Recommendation 6: The Cabinet Office should set out a clear implementation plan for vetting transformation, with interim milestones for each of the new vetting levels and a realistic completion date. It should set out the key elements of this plan in its Treasury Minute response to this report.

I am pleased to report that UKSV has delivered the objectives of delivering stability in its performance via the Delivery Stabilisation Programme (DSP) and continues to consistently meet its performance targets, as set out in the PAC report. It is now regarded as a stable service by customers.

As UKSV emerged from the DSP, it became clear that stakeholder concerns for vetting had shifted considerably. Customers of the service were seeking immediate improvements and enhancements in data management and cyber security and were concerned about their ability to fund a large-scale Vetting Transformation Programme (VTP). In July 2024, the Executive Challenge Board (ECB) comprised of UKSV's largest customers and funders recommended the formal closure of the VTP for the following reasons:

1. **Lack of appetite from Customers** for wholesale transformation and a request for more discrete incremental improvements to the UKSV service with a greater focus on the pressing risks facing vetting today regarding data management and cyber security;
2. **Insufficient funding available from Customers** to support the envisaged investment scope of the VTP due to a non-investment Spending Review combined with the recent contract award providing coverage until 2028; and
3. **Significant changes in the strategic vetting landscape** following the Angiolini Inquiry which underscored the need for a more holistic fundamental overhaul of vetting across the whole enterprise. The VTP was entirely focused on the work of UKSV and not the wider vetting enterprise and the opportunities to synergise vetting systems across the HMG landscape.

As a result of the ECB recommendation, the proposal to close the VTP was formally reviewed by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) and they have endorsed the closure of the programme. The IPA recommended that the UKSV Chief Executive Officer should approach sustainable change through a continuous improvement and incremental change rather than an ambitious and expensive transformation programme. This approach was ratified by the Government Security Board (GSB) in September 2024. The closure of the VTP does not, in any way, mean that UKSV are less committed to modernising and improving vetting services. It has, however, enabled the team to review how we take this forward and allowed us to move away from the 'big bang' transformation which was envisaged by the VTP.

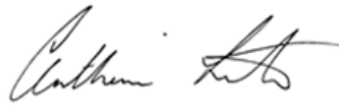
We remain committed to achieving significantly improved outcomes in vetting delivery through the implementation of three core workstreams:

1. **Rationalising Policy and Process** - Government Security Group (GSG) and UKSV are working with customer departments to standardise and centralise decision making across all our products. This will create a uniform risk appetite across government and increase assurance across government, create further process efficiencies within UKSV and further simplify the transfer of cleared personnel across government. We have completed the standardisation of Counter Terrorist Check (CTC) policy and process and are working towards CTC rationalisation by March 2025, followed by CTC decision-making by December 2025. Security Check (SC) and Developed Vetting (DV) will follow drawing on the lessons from CTC.
2. **Enhancing Digital and Cyber Security** - We are currently in the process of migrating the National Security Vetting System (NSVS) platform to the cloud from existing, on premises configuration, with a target date of July 2025. This will enhance the reliability of the current service as well as bringing some of the capabilities in line with industry best practice. Additional work is being undertaken to further enhance the protections around UKSV's data archive, with a target date of September 2025 for a secure archive capability.
3. **Increasing Assurance** - We are moving to an approach of continuous improvement across the assurance offered by our investigations. The priority for the coming twelve months will be pilots on interrogating the Police National Database (PND) (a lesson from the Angiolini Inquiry), with the pilot completing this calendar year; and on digitising the

Annual Security Appraisal Form (ASAF), delivering our first step on improved continuous assurance, with the aim of introducing the new product and mandating the ASAF no later than June 2025.

The Cabinet Office remains committed to prioritising vetting and further improving this important aspect of the government's work. I would be happy to update the Committee on progress annually against these three workstreams and overall service performance improvements. I hope this letter provides you with the assurance and rationale for now requesting closure of recommendation 6 of the 12 May 2023 PAC Report.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Little', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Catherine Little

Civil Service Chief Operating Officer & Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary