

Meg Hillier MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0PW

By Email Only

25 March 2021

Dear Chair,

DIGITAL SERVICES AT THE BORDER

I wanted to write to you following the release on 12 March 2021 of the Forty-Eighth Report of Session 2019-21 on Digital Services, in respect of three areas that didn't translate successfully from the Hearing through to your Report. I have provided clarification on these aspects of the Report below.

£173m additional whole life cost to the programme following reset.

In response to Question 90 during the hearing I stated, *'The total additional cost to this programme as a result of the delays, the reset and so on is £173m'*. Paragraph 1, page 5 of the report states *'The delayed delivery of the successor Digital Services at the Border programme has already cost the taxpayer £173m'*.

To clarify, the additional lifetime cost of the programme following reset is £173m, rather than the additional cost already incurred to date. I would suggest the record is amended to reflect this position, that the £173m is the additional whole life cost for the programme.

Border Crossing staff training.

Question 60 of the hearing stated, *'in terms of your user target, you are aiming to have 7,000 users by June 2021'*.

It is worth reiterating that in our letter to you dated 12 February 2021 we advised that Border Crossing is designed and scaled to support the use of the system by 7,000 potential users at launch. Within that initial capacity, however, the modelled requirement for the number of users who will need to be trained on Border Crossing to meet the anticipated operational demand from 30 June 2021 is 4350 staff. This number assumes that passenger arrival figures would be in the region of 140 million as seen in previous years. The additional 2650 capability provides capacity for future growth and demand.

The Department is confident that we will meet the 4350 staff trained target. Users are trained as close as possible to the time they use the system, to ensure maximum retention of skills and knowledge. Border Crossing has completed phase two of roll out and is now live at 16 ports and remains on track to have all 56 ports technically enabled by the end of June. Border Force has the ability and flexibility within the training programme to be able to increase or decrease training to meet any changes in operational demands.

Programme SRO time commitment to DSAB Programme.

In response to Question 66 of the Hearing transcript I stated 'when someone is appointed SRO for a major programme, that is the one and only thing that they are doing. I am afraid that we have had some examples of an SRO covering multiple programmes, or doing that role alongside other important responsibilities. From my perspective, if you are the SRO of a programme of this size, that is a very full-time job that will keep you fully occupied for many years'.

This is echoed in Paragraph 3, of the report which states 'The Department now expects the Digital Services at the Border programme SRO to focus full-time on seeing the programme through to delivery'.

For clarity, what I meant was that as part of our wider improvement programme we are moving to a model where SROs will only have responsibility for one major programme. Mr Gillan is available full time to lead the DSAB programme as SRO, and he currently commits at least 40% of his time directly to the DSAB Programme, as part of the improved governance and enhanced senior leadership in the programme that was put in place following the programme reset. The SRO role compliments and aligns with the wider role in delivery of other similar changes across Border Force which need to link with DSAB, and the percentage of time committed will vary at different points in the programme lifecycle. For example, during his first year when the programme was re-scoped and reset, Mr Gillan was spending 70% of his time as SRO on DSAB, likewise, as this critical delivery year progresses his time commitment will increase above 40% to ensure key delivery milestones are met.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Rycroft

Permanent Secretary