ACTICA
consulting

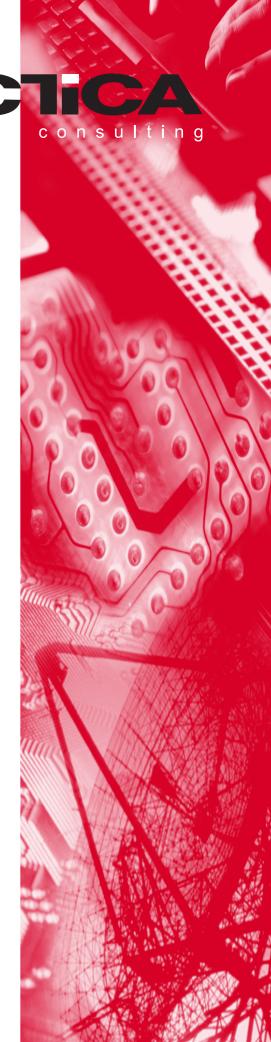# Party and Electoral Funding Database Project - Review of Progress with Recommendations

Actica/PB325D002-1.0

11 February 2011

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This document has been prepared by Actica Consulting Ltd at the request of the Electoral Commission (EC) following Actica's assurance review of the Party and Election Funding Online (PEF) project carried out in November 2010. The assurance review highlighted a number of recommendations requiring action; this document reviews the EC responses to the recommendations and progress on their implementation.

1.2 Approach

1.2.1 Actica carried out a short follow up review in the week commencing 7 February 2011. The updated project documentation was reviewed and a detailed analysis of the responses to all recommendations was carried out with the PEF Project Manager on 9 February 2011.

1.2.2 The documentation on which our findings are based is as follows:

    a. Summary of recommendations from Gateway Review, with EC comments;

    b. PEF On-line Implementation Overview (V2);

    c. Rollout and implementation plan v2 (with progress recorded to date of review);

    d. PEF Online Benefits Realisation Plan – v1.6.

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2 Review of progress with recommendations

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 Overall the PEF project have responded positively to all the recommendations made in the readiness for service assurance review and are now in a good position to progress to successful implementation. The project now has a clear, credible plan for phased go-live in March and May 2011, with accountabilities for key tasks assigned to appropriate owners within the project, its suppliers and the wider EC business areas impacted. Successful completion of these tasks will require continued focus from senior management and all concerned with the project. This focus must be maintained, not only the run up to the imminent internal go-live on 10 March and the e-filing live on 19 May, but through into the initial live period, when political parties begin to use the PEF Online service.

2.1.2 We are satisfied that the Project Manager and Board are closely managing progress, and there are appropriate review processes in place to rapidly identify and respond to likely issues in a timely manner.

2.2 Status of original recommendations

2.2.1 We have reviewed the extent to which the responses and actions taken by the project have addressed the recommendations made in the original report. The responses appear well founded and address the issues underlying the recommendations. There has been good progress in moving forward the identified actions, although in some instances we noted that deliverables still require management sign-off and tasks require to be completed once the interim resource is in place from 1 March. These areas still require continued management focus to drive the project to successful implementation

2.2.2 The Commission response to each of the recommendations in the assurance review, our comments based on our analysis, and a revised status are shown in the table in Appendix A.

2.3 Project status

2.3.1 The definitions of project status used in OGC Gateway Reviews are as follows:

- Red: To achieve success the project should take action immediately.

- Amber: The project should go forward with actions on recommendations to be carried out before further key decisions are taken that affect the potential success of the project.

- Green: The project is on target to succeed but may benefit from the uptake of recommendations.

2.3.2 On the basis of this update, the current status of all recommendations, and the project overall, is considered to be Green: The project is on target to succeed, but may benefit from the uptake of recommendations.

2.3.3 Given continued management focus, and successfully meeting the two remaining milestones noted below, the 10 March initial internal go-live is on track.

2.4 Comments on current project status

Initial internal release

2.4.1 We noted that there are two key milestone deliverables which need to be met successfully before the go-live date for this release. In discussion with the Project Manager we are content that both these deliveries are being actively managed and contingency plans are in place which, should issues occur, will enable EC to take actions to hold to the current planned date.

2.4.2 The two milestones are:

2.4.3 **Successful completion of data load:** The final testing of the loading of three entities remains to be completed. Of these, two are not critical (Loans and Emblems) and could be deferred. Testing of the third entity (Addresses) is a focus for the team and the Project Manager is confident of successful completion.

2.4.4 **Final acceptance testing of software release for go live:** Triad are due to deliver an updated version of the software, resolving issues found in testing, on 11 February. Acceptance should be limited to re-testing of the recorded issues and is due for completion by 17 February.

e-filing release

2.4.5 The proposed plan for go-live for this functionality in May appears achievable, but will be dependent on successfully managing transition when the current Project Manager leaves the EC at the end of March.

2.4.6 It will be important that the project team continues to hold to the agreed content of the software release planned for this implementation. Any demands to add further, non-critical, changes should be resisted.

Ongoing operations

2.4.7 The project has re-analysed the expected number of concurrent users of the query functionality. Their view is that concurrency will not exceed the 100 user level at which performance begins to degrade. Contingency arrangements have been discussed should numbers exceed this level and options have been identified to respond, including:

a. Changes to the "busy screen" implementation;

b. Adding processors to the current servers;

c. Mirroring servers.

2.4.8 The approach to post-implementation change control and releases has been set out, but the final detail will be the responsibility of the new post holders/interim resource.

2.4.9 The detail of the phasing of the sign up of political parties to the new system of online filing will need to be further developed. It is critical to successful take-on to manage the number of new users per period to a level which can be effectively administered and supported by available EC resource.

A Review of progress with recommendations

A.1 The recommendation status is defined as follows:

    a. Red – Take action immediately;

    b. Amber – Take action before further key decisions are taken; and

    c. Green – Take action as required.

Ref. No.	Recommendation	Original Status	EC Comments	Actica Review	Current Status
1	Project Board and SRO review and update benefits realisation plan and allocate specific management responsibility for the delivery of each benefit. (Amber)	Amber	**Agreed.** The project board discussed this on 21st January. A number of new benefits were identified and management responsibility allocated to appropriate individuals. The update of the benefits realisation document will be completed by 11th February.	Revised Benefits Realisation Plan is comprehensive and appropriate. Each benefit has an allocated owner for delivery. Document must now be signed off by Project Board and owners held to account for benefit delivery through ongoing monitoring.	**Green**
2	Use the updated benefits realisation plan to drive prioritisation and implementation planning decisions. (Amber)	Amber	**Agreed.** The phased approach to benefits realisation has been adopted as the fundamental driver and already included in our implementation planning.	Current phased delivery plan is consistent with benefits realisation approach. Focus now should be on benefit ownership and tracking to assess and control change requests and other post-implementation activities.	**Green**

Ref. No.	Recommendation	Original Status	EC Comments	Actica Review	Current Status
3	All EC business areas involved in project implementation and operation should produce detailed timetables and resource plans for implementation activities. The Project Manager should ensure all such internal stakeholders are kept informed of progress on system completion and remain prepared to proceed with their planned activities as soon as final testing is completed. (Red)	Red	**Agreed.** There is a project plan in place which identifies the key work-streams and events for implementation. The plan includes resources, timescales, and a means of monitoring progress against them. Arrangements are in place to update the project board on progress twice weekly. We have identified the various work processes affected by PEF Online and addendums written to the relevant QMS procedures. This will document the new processes and act as an interim measure prior to a comprehensive overhaul of the QMS post launch. Comms have been identified as a key stakeholder and have been assigned actions in the implementation plan regarding the availability of the public search. Progress against the implementation plan will be provided to the Executive Team on a weekly basis. All other internal stakeholders have received daily updates on testing results and as noted there are twice weekly updates to project board members.	Plan covers all work areas and is at suitable level to manage project to completion. Critical that all responsible parties work to the plan and deal with issues as they arise. Communications activities are low key, assuming a "soft launch" rather than major publicity activities.	**Green**

Ref. No.	Recommendation	Original Status	EC Comments	Actica Review	Current Status
4	For future projects consider using professional testing resources to design and implement test processes and scripts. (Green)	Green	**Noted** – to be raised with CPB / ET and incorporated into Lessons section of project closure report	For action post-implementation.	**Green**
5	The SRO and project board should now give strong direction on the handling of testing issues, and in particular monitor whether fixes or changes are critical and must be implemented prior to going live with a particular function or group of users. (Red)	Red	**Agreed** (See also 9a) This has now been completed and a review of issues is included in the project board meetings	Firm definition of changes required for two fixed "go live" releases have been agreed. Criteria for go live are appropriate - defined for each phased implementation as "no critical or major issues". (Issues affecting large volumes of users or preventing a key statutory process from being completed)	**Green**
6	A clear release plan and schedule should be agreed through to implementation and responses to issues from all testing allocated to a release and tested in a controlled manner. (Amber)	Amber	**Agreed** (see 5)	Changes required for each phase have been packaged into a single release for each implementation, with appropriate allowance for responses to test failures to be delivered and retested. Final re-testing of fixes to 1st release to be completed in next week.	**Green**

Ref. No.	Recommendation	Original Status	EC Comments	Actica Review	Current Status
7	Consider implementing the database tier on a separate server to the application server if performance under load continues to be an issue.	Green	**Noted** Second round of Load Testing completed. No additional action identified as being needed as a result of testing. The performance under load is considered to be sufficient to meet reasonable demand with a 'system busy' message incorporated to prevent degradation of service.	Project's re-analysis of potential usage and approach to managing load and user experience appear sound basis for decision not to introduce a separate server at this point. The project will monitor live operations and have contingency plans to implement technical upgrades etc. if required.	**Green**
8	Ensure lessons learned from the issues with the PEF project are captured during the project closure process and that actions are taken to embed these lessons in guidance and direction for future projects throughout the Commission. (Green)	Green	**Noted** Already planned as part of Capital Programme remit. NAO will also be reviewing project.	For action post-implementation.	**Green**

9	The SRO and project board take the lead in moving the project to completion by setting:
	
	   a. clear acceptance criteria for completion of testing and making a go live decision. To be owned and actively monitored by SRO/Board;
		Red	**Agreed.**
			   a. The project board have agreed the criteria for acceptance (that there should be no outstanding Critical or Major issues). Testing of the build delivered 19 January (internal launch build) was completed by the end of January and the outstanding issues were categorised according to the
				Appropriate acceptance criteria have been defined as noted above.	**Green**

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	b. responsibilities for ongoing operational management, including identifying the role of Information Asset Owner; c. a timetable for passing responsibility to senior system user and operational staff; d. clear operational management (e.g. Senior User) responsibility for managing the process of implementation and transition to operations. (Red)		criteria by 7th February. One final round of issue resolution will be carried out and is expected to be finished by 17th February. b. Operational management will be jointly handled by ICT and key PEF staff. Asset Owner will be a new Senior IT Officer post within ICT team. The job description for this post has been produced and a business case has been submitted to ET and was approved on 3rd February. Anticipated date to have new Senior IT Officer in post is mid-May. An interim post-holder has been identified and will be put in post on 1st March for a 3 month period to cover the transitional period. c. See Points 3 Implementation Planning and workstreams identified	New roles are being defined and recruited, which is critical given Project Manager is leaving at the end of March. This process would ideally be further advanced, but appointment of knowledgeable interim resource (Triad PM) from 1 March is an appropriate response to practical position. Information Asset Owner needs to be a senior business manager – Project have agreed to assign this responsibility ot the System Senior User.	

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			d. The response to this is the outline implementation Plan noted in point 3. The senior users have been identified as John Franks and David Aikin, with David taking the lead role.		
10	A realistic plan detailing all implementation tasks should be developed and used as the basis for all parties to sign-up to a revised go-live date. The plan must take into account other business activities and dependencies (for example, the imminent office move) and resource availability. (Red)	Red	**Agreed.** Completed as set out in response to point 3.	Appropriately detailed plan is available and is being updated for actual progress on a regular basis. Project Plan recognises key external activities (referendums etc.) impacting the EC team and schedules releases in windows of low activity to minimise risk.	**Green**

Ref. No.	Recommendation	Original Status	EC Comments	Actica Review	Current Status
11	Phase go-live to internal and external user groups in order to deliver benefits and gain experience and confidence in live operation. (Red)	Red	**Agreed in principle.** In the body of the report the recommendation is to phase rollout to external Public Users separately, but this is not possible because it would require maintenance of the old and new system. When the system is launched internally the public search must also be launched. The only element which can be staggered is the party user / e-filing functionality and this approach has been adopted. Issues have been re-classified as necessary for initial launch / launch of e-filing functionality. Initial rollout will allow internal users to familiarise themselves with the system and enable a well-targeted approach to the launch of the e-filing component which will help ensure a greater success rate with adoption.	Basis of proposed phasing is sound. Risk has been mitigated by phased implementation - limiting number of EC staff requiring training and readiness at 1st go live date to 4 key PEF staff and the contact centre. The project have considered the handling of any potential problems with the search facilities going live as part of the initial release and have realistic contingency plans in place.	Green

Ref. No.	Recommendation	Original Status	EC Comments	Actica Review	Current Status
12	Confirm implementation of appropriate security controls and conduct a Privacy Impact Assessment Screening and Data Protection Compliance Check. (Amber)	Amber	**Noted and agreed.** The appropriate security controls have been implemented (SSL- Secure Socket Layer). An impact assessment screening and data protection compliance check has been arranged for 15th February 2011.	Penetration test has been completed and all recommendations actioned. Project Manager also confirms all recommendations from 2008 security assessment report have also been implemented. Small number of remaining http redirect and DNS tasks to be completed.	**Green**

13	Put in place a succession plan for project manager/business support manager role and manage knowledge transfer. (Amber)	Amber	**Agreed.**
			
			Two new posts are being created
			  a) Senior IT Officer (Systems Management) – submitted to CE on 28/1, referenced above in response to point 9(b).
			
			  b) PEF On-line Support Officer - to submit to CE by 4th February
			
			Handover documentation will be produced after the initial launch, by the interim post-holder for the Senior IT Officer role – this will be completed by the 28th March.
				See 9 above. The effective recruitment of these roles is key to successful initial operations. Appropriate handover and initial support (from the interim post holder) will be required.	**Green**

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14	Implement integrated service management arrangements across internal and external suppliers, including: a. implementing additional service management activities, such as security, performance and capacity monitoring; b. reviewing the existing Commission business continuity arrangements to ensure they are appropriate for PEF Online and updating as necessary; and c. ensuring effective support arrangements; d. publishing a schedule for planned upgrades/non-critical fixes. (Amber)	Amber	**Agreed** a. To be carried out by the interim Senior IT Officer (Systems Management) once appointed b. To be carried out by the Senior IT Officer (Systems Management) once appointed c. Legal colleagues have redrafted the Support Agreement and Triad have provided comments. This should be finalised by the 11th February. d. This is subject to the outcome of the e-filing launch planning process	The basis of the responses is sound, but limited progress to date. Whilst not critical for day 1 go-live these tasks require early action in the coming weeks. Progress is the responsibility of new appointees yet to be recruited, but activities are on project plan and are part of ToR to be progressed by interim resource from 1 March.	**Green**

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15	Plan for enhanced support levels and increased levels of change/fix requests over the initial implementation period. Ensure that all source code and associated design documentation is delivered by the supplier. Allocate and manage a specific budget for these activities. (Amber)	Amber	**Agreed** Enhanced support during launch is included in the support agreement (and has been budgeted for). The requirement to deliver the source code forms part of the contract with Triad	Appropriate response. Hand over of source code on implementation (10 March) is scheduled in project plan. (With later update for e-filing release.)	**Green**
16	Introduce appropriate ongoing review and impact evaluation procedures to engage PEF System Owner in development and planning of initiatives which may affect the PEF Online service or system. (Green)	Green	**Agreed** The development of this will form part of the Senior IT Officer (Systems Management) and PEF On-line Support Officer role prior to approval by the project board	Post go-live activity – will require communication and embedding across the whole of the Commission.	**Green**