GP Niche Project Implementation - Follow Up Report FINAL – May 2026

Follow Up Audit Objective

To provide assurance that the actions agreed to mitigate against the risk exposure identified within the 2025/26 no assurance opinion audit of Niche Project Implementation have been implemented.

Follow Up Progress Summary

Priority	Complete	Actions Superseded	In Progress	New Actions Agreed
Priority 1	0	5	0	0
Priority 2	0	1	1	4
Priority 3	0	0	0	0
Total	**0**	**6**	**1**	**4**

Follow Up Assessment

The original audit of Niche Project Implementation was completed in August 2025 and received a 'none' assurance opinion. The objective of that audit was to provide assurance over whether the Niche Project implementation was on track for the revised go live date in February 2026.

This audit sought to 'follow-up' on the implementation of the action agreed as part of the original audit. Audit testing was performed in relation to the actions and supporting evidence obtained where possible to demonstrate the progress made towards the implementation of these actions.

Key Findings

This follow-up review is limited to the Niche programme and does not constitute a full assessment of the Force's wider Programme and Project Office function. Findings should therefore be interpreted in the context of this specific programme. The Niche project has now gone live, with project, communications, and resourcing plans developed and used effectively to support delivery. While these plans were applied in practice, there is limited evidence of formal review or approval by stakeholders prior to go-live, meaning governance requirements were not fully met. As such, actions relating to these areas are marked as partially complete and will be signed off in our audit management system, as retrospective completion would add limited value.

A formally defined Minimum Viable Product (MVP) was not established, and while communications indicate that business, configuration, interface, and technical requirements were discussed with relevant stakeholders, there is no evidence of formal sign-off. Similarly, the High-Level Design (HLD) documentation remains in draft form. These gaps increased uncertainty regarding requirements traceability, scope management, and project deliverability at the time of implementation.

Evidence from Programme Board meetings, RAID logs, Go/No-Go assessments, and other supporting documents shows that progress was made under significant time and resource pressures. The project team prioritised delivery over formal governance processes, resulting in partial compliance with expected project management standards.

To ensure the risks identified during the Niche programme are appropriately mitigated going forward, new preventative actions have been raised. These actions are intended to support the consistent application of governance controls, ensuring that, where applicable, future projects formally define, review, and approve key documentation – including project plans, communications plans, resource plans, business and technical requirements, and MVPs — prior to project commencement or go-live. These actions are designed to strengthen governance, accountability, and auditability for future projects.

Conclusion

Meaningful progress has been made in delivering the Niche system and implementing project plans, communications, and resourcing arrangements. However, formal governance and approvals for key project documentation were not consistently applied prior to go-live, resulting in partial completion of the original actions.

The actions marked as superseded will be signed off in the audit management system, as retrospective completion is unlikely to add value now that the project has gone live. Nevertheless, these gaps highlight the risks associated with governance processes not being fully evidenced or formally approved within the Niche programme, including potential impacts on scope, resource allocation, and deliverability.

New preventative actions have been raised to ensure lessons learned are captured and applied to future projects. These actions provide a clear, auditable framework for strengthening project governance in response to risks identified within the Niche programme, and are intended to support consistent application of controls across future projects where applicable.

Full details of our audit testing are available upon request. Our audit assurance framework and definitions can be found here (www.swapaudit.co.uk/audit-framework-and-definitions)

Appendix 1 — Agreed Actions & Follow Up Assessment

1.1a	Action		
The Niche Programme Manager has agreed to develop a formalised and fully integrated project plan, communications plan and resource plan. These should be developed and agreed by all relevant project stakeholders to support delivery of the revised go-live date in February 2026. These plans should clearly set out roles, responsibilities, timelines and interdependencies.			
Priority	1	**SWAP Ref.**	AP#7439
Responsible Officer	Niche Programme Manager		
Timescale	15th August 2025		

Follow Up Assessment	Action Superseded
The project, communications, and resource plans have been developed and were used to support delivery of the Niche system. These plans have been communicated effectively through internal documentation and Programme Board meetings. While no further work is expected in relation to this action and it will be signed off in our audit management system, we have not been provided with evidence of formal approval or review by relevant stakeholders prior to go-live, and the action is therefore considered partially complete and has been superseded. This represents a governance weakness. To address this, and to ensure risks identified during the Niche programme are appropriately mitigated going forward, we have created a new preventative action to ensure that for future projects, all key project documentation – including project plans, communications plans, resource plans, business cases, and risk registers – is formally reviewed and approved by the project sponsor and relevant stakeholders prior to the commencement of project delivery or go-live. This provides a clear, auditable governance checkpoint.	

1.1c	New Action – Formal Governance Process		
The Head of Change and Transformation has agreed to develop and implement a formal governance process to ensure that all key project documentation — including project plans, communications plans, resource plans, business cases, and risk registers — is reviewed and formally approved by the project sponsor and relevant stakeholders prior to the commencement of project delivery or go-live. This process will be documented, communicated to all project teams, and monitored to ensure compliance for all future projects.			
Priority	2	**SWAP Ref.**	AP#9324
Responsible Officer	Head of Change and Transformation		
Timescale	30th September 2026		

1.1b	Action			Follow Up Assessment	In Progress
The Head of Change has agreed to introduce a standardised project management framework across the Force. This should outline the minimum required documents, such as a Project Initiation Document (PID), business case, risk register and governance structure, that must be developed, reviewed and approved prior to the start of any project work.				We have been provided with a proposed Project Management Improvement Plan, which outlines enhancements to project governance, reporting, and planning (including prioritisation, categorisation, and resourcing) across the Force. This plan represents a positive step toward introducing a standardised project management framework. While the framework is a significant development, it has not yet been fully implemented or formally approved. As such, the benefits will only be realised once the plan is applied consistently across all projects. This action supports the governance improvements required to address the lessons learned from the Niche implementation project. However, to ensure that all future projects follow appropriate governance steps — including formal review and approval of key project documentation prior to commencement or go-live — we have created a new preventative action above (1.1c). Formal implementation and approval of a standardised project management framework, including clearly defined review and sign-off processes for all key project documentation, is critical to prevent similar governance gaps in future projects.	
Priority	2	SWAP Ref.	AP#7439		
Responsible Officer		Head of Change and Transformation		Responsible Officer	Head of Change and Transformation
Timescale		28th February 2026		Revised Timescale	30th September 2026

1.2a	Action		
The Niche Programme Manager has agreed to develop and implement an agreed project reporting and communication plan. This plan should ensure timely, accurate, and transparent reporting to project leadership, including early escalation of risks, issues and any potential delays. It should also define clear reporting lines, frequency, formats, and responsibilities to improve internal communications across all project workstreams.			
Priority	1	**SWAP Ref.**	AP#7441
Responsible Officer	Niche Programme Manager		
Timescale	15th August 2025		

Follow Up Assessment	Action Superseded
An updated communications plan was developed for the Niche project and is in draft form. While this plan outlines reporting lines, frequency, formats, and responsibilities, we have not been provided with evidence that it has been formally reviewed or approved by relevant stakeholders. Regular internal reporting has taken place and communications have been shared via Programme Board meetings, demonstrating that the plan has been followed in practice. Given that the project has now gone live, it is unlikely that formal review, approval, or finalisation of the Niche-specific plan will occur retrospectively. To address the governance gaps identified, a standardised communications framework should be implemented for all future projects. This framework will define minimum requirements for project-specific communications plans, including required documents, reporting lines, approval processes, and frequency. All project communications plans must be formally reviewed and approved prior to project commencement or go-live.	

1.2b	New Action – Standardised Communications Framework		
The Head of Change and Transformation has agreed to implement a standardised communications framework for all future projects. This framework will define minimum requirements for project-specific communications plans, including required documents, reporting lines, approval processes, and frequency. All project communications plans must be formally reviewed and approved by the project sponsor and relevant stakeholders prior to project commencement or go-live, with compliance monitored.			
Priority	2	**SWAP Ref.**	AP#9325
Responsible Officer	Head of Change and Transformation		
Timescale	30th September 2026		

1.3a	Action		
The Niche Programme Manager has agreed to develop a detailed resourcing plan that is agreed by project leadership, ensuring alignment with the roles and capacity requirements set out in the approved Business Case. This plan must consider all phases of the project, including configuration, testing, training, and post-implementation support Addressing current ICT resourcing gaps must be prioritised to avoid further delays. The resourcing plan should be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains adequate as the project progresses.			
Priority	1	**SWAP Ref.**	AP#7442
Responsible Officer	Niche Programme Manager		
Timescale	15th August 2025		

Follow Up Assessment	Action Superseded
A Niche resources plan has been developed in the form of an Excel spreadsheet, tracking job roles, allocated hours, and associated costs. An organisation chart is also in place outlining the teams required for the Niche project. While these tools provide visibility of resource allocation, there is very limited evidence of formal governance or documented approval processes associated with resourcing and hiring decisions. It appears that, given the high-risk and high-priority nature of the resourcing gaps at the time, management prioritised ensuring the necessary resources were in place over following formal governance procedures. Given that the project is now live, it is unlikely that retrospective formal approval of resourcing decisions will occur. To address this governance gap and embed the lessons learned, a formal resourcing governance process should be implemented for all future projects. To strengthen this area going forward, formal governance and approval of resourcing decisions should be in place prior to project commencement, including clear sign-off by project leadership. This will ensure that roles and capacity are agreed, documented, and auditable, while still allowing urgent resource needs to be addressed where necessary.	

1.3b	New Action – Resource Governance Process		
The Head of Change and Transformation has agreed to implement a formal resourcing governance process for all future projects. This process will ensure that all key project roles and capacity requirements are documented, reviewed, and formally approved by project leadership prior to project commencement, covering all project phases including configuration, testing, training, and post-implementation support.			
Priority	2	**SWAP Ref.**	AP#9326
Responsible Officer	Head of Change and Transformation		
Timescale	30th September 2026		

1.4a	Action		
The Niche Programme Manager has agreed to conduct a detailed business analysis of the current system and service requirements to identify the minimum functionality that Niche must deliver to effectively support operational needs.			
Priority	1	SWAP Ref.	AP#7443
Responsible Officer	Niche Programme Manager		
Timescale	30th September 2025		

Follow Up Assessment	Action Superseded
Evidence reviewed (RAID log, Traceability Matrix, Gateway Criteria, Go/No-Go documentation, Exit Criteria, Programme Board Packs) indicates that business, configuration, interface, and technical requirements were discussed with Subject Matter Experts and tracked throughout the project lifecycle. However, a formally defined and approved Minimum Viable Product (MVP) was not established. While it has been communicated that requirements were analysed and agreed, this was not supported by a single, formally documented and approved statement clearly distinguishing MVP functionality from post-implementation enhancements. Retrospective formalisation is unlikely to add value now that the system has gone live. To address the risks identified during the Niche programme and ensure appropriate controls are applied in future projects, a new action has been raised to ensure that future projects formally define, document, and approve minimum functional requirements at an appropriate stage prior to implementation, with clear traceability to the business case and governance sign-off.	

1.4d	New Action – Agreed Project Requirements		
The Niche Programme Manager has agreed to implement a requirement within the Force's project management framework that, for all projects above an agreed risk or financial threshold, a formally documented and clearly defined Minimum Viable Product (MVP) or minimum functional requirement set is developed, reviewed, and approved by the Project Board prior to implementation or go-live. The approved MVP and requirements must: • Be clearly traceable to the original business case and operational requirements; • Explicitly distinguish between functionality required at go-live and functionality deferred to a later phase; and • Include a documented assessment of risks associated with scope reduction. All business and technical requirements, as well as any associated High-Level Design documentation, must be formally reviewed and approved by the project sponsor and relevant stakeholders, with compliance monitored by the PMO for all future projects.			
Priority	2	SWAP Ref.	AP#9329
Responsible Officer	Head of Change and Transformation		
Timescale	30th September 2026		

1.4b	Action	Follow Up Assessment	Action Superseded
The Niche Programme Manager has agreed to ensure to develop and obtain formal sign-off of a comprehensive set of business and technical requirements for Niche. These should be traceable to the original business case and clearly distinguish between MVP and post-MVP functionality. If any scope reductions are proposed, such as deferred interfaces or functionality to be delivered post go-live, these decisions must be formally documented. The associated risks and operational impacts must be assessed, recorded, and mitigated through appropriate planning and resource allocation.		Communications indicate that business, configuration, interface, and technical requirements have been confirmed for all relevant business areas. This includes RAID logs, Go/No-Go meeting documents, Exit Criteria documentation, and Programme Board Packs. However, these communications are not formally approved, and some remain in draft form. There is no evidence of formal sign-off of the requirements or scope reduction decisions. Given the system has now gone live, retrospective approval is unlikely to provide additional value. To prevent recurrence of these issues and ensure appropriate governance is applied in future projects, the combined action (AP#9329) requires formal development, documentation, and approval of all business and technical requirements, with traceability, scope reduction documentation, and risk assessment prior to project commencement or go-live.	

Priority	1	SWAP Ref.	AP#7444
Responsible Officer	Niche Programme Manager		
Timescale	30th September 2025		

1.4c	Action	Follow Up Assessment	Action Superseded
The Niche Programme Manager has agreed to produce and formally approve complete technical design documentation, including High-Level Design documents where required, ensuring alignment with the signed-off requirements.		A High-Level Design (HLD) document has been produced for the Niche project and contains appropriate technical information. The document appears to remain in draft form due to tracked changes in the contents pages, and there is no evidence of formal review or approval prior to go-live. Given that the system has now gone live, retrospective formal approval is unlikely to add value. This gap is addressed through the combined action (AP#9329), which ensures that future projects formally develop, document, and approve technical design documentation aligned to signed-off business and technical requirements prior to project commencement or go-live	

Priority	2	SWAP Ref.	AP#7445
Responsible Officer	Niche Programme Manager		
Timescale	15th August 2025		