Bringing Technology to Post Offices and Benefit Payments

TERMS OF REFERENCE - TECHNICAL ASSURANCE FORUM

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Contents   Page

1.   PURPOSE OF PAPER

This paper defines the Terms of Reference and proposed Method of Working for the Technical Assurance Forum to be set up between POCL Horizon and ICL Pathway.

Nothing contained within this message shall be deemed or construed as affecting existing contractual obligations between ICL Pathway, the DSS and/or POCL.

c:\~po-pocl-archive\jf\horizon\terms   of   reference\tor   for   *Page ~* 1 of 5
technical assurance forum.doc
9th December 1998 DRAFT B

2. BACKGROUND

One of the responsibilities of the Product Assurance Group within the POCL Horizon programme is to make a recommendation to the Release Authorisation Board (RAB) for each release of the Pathway service as to the fitness for purpose of that release for its intended environment. One of the viewpoints for this recommendation is from the Technical Assurance angle, and in particular covering the (as opposed to functionality) characteristics of the service in four key areas, viz:

- performance and scalability

- integrity

- service availability and resilience

- security

Although the Technical Assurance team's primary visibility of the solution is through its work on Acceptance, it has been acknowledged this the timing of the acceptance activity (concentrated on a decision at the end of "Live Trial" prior to National Rollout) does not provide the information required to make an informed recommendation for other sittings of the RAB, and in particular for the RAB authorising the *entry* to Live Trial.

It has therefore been agreed between ICL Pathway and POCL Horizon to constitute a Technical Assurance Forum, under the auspices of the Joint Working approach with ICL Pathway, to enable the assurance team in POCL Horizon to gain the visibility needed to discharge their obligations to the RAB.

3. OBJECTIVES AND ADVANTAGES

3.1. Primary Objective

The primary objective of the Technical Assurance Forum is to provide adequate visibility of the service characteristics of the Pathway solution to enable the Technical Assurance team on Horizon to make an informed recommendation on fitness for purpose for the Release Authorisation Board.

3.2. Other Advantages of this Approach

Although the primary objectives of this work is above, a number of other advantages are seen as emanating from this approach, including:

(a) de-risking the achievement of both an authorised release of the ICL Pathway service and of contractual acceptance in the relevant areas, through provision of early warning of areas which may prove problematic.

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(b)   provision of an additional "independent review" of certain aspects of the ICL Pathway service, which may benefit ICL Pathway

(c)   provision of a route for ICL Pathway to gain clarification of the technical requirements and/or of other related aspects of sponsor domains

4.   APPROACH AND ETHOS

It is intended that this form of joint working be conducted in a fully co-operative manner, with the objective of both ICL Pathway and Horizon participants being to further a solution capable of authorisation for the stated release, in a "can do" manner.   In particular, it is intended that any concerns in the relevant areas will be openly shared and discussed through the Technical Assurance Forum, with the aim being to achieve their resolution rather than purely to escalate "issues" to senior management.

5.   OUTPUTS

The Technical Assurance Forum itself will primarily provide output on an "exception basis", as in issues that arise from the review activity.   The main purpose of the activity, however, is to enable Horizon Technical Assurance Group to achieve their output, which is their Release Authorisation Board recommendation.

6.   METHOD OF WORKING

6.1.   Meetings

The Forum will be focused through *meetings* held every two weeks between ICL Pathway and POCL Horizon Technical Assurance. The meetings will be chaired by Dick Long (ICL Pathway) and Jeremy Folkes (POCL Horizon). The meetings will normally take place in Feltham on Wednesdays from 2pm to 4pm.

The meetings will follow a *standard agenda* consisting of:

- relevant actions from previous meetings

- main topic of the meeting

- topic actions/activities to be completed by next topic session

- AOB and next meeting

6.2.   Topics

The meetings will cycle through the four main *topics* of:

c:\~po-pocl-archive\jf\horizon\terms   of   reference\tor   for
technical assurance forum.doc
9th December 1998 DRAFT B

Page ~ 3 of 5

- performance and scalability

- integrity

- service availability and resilience

- security

to ensure that adequate focus is brought to bear and to ease time pressures on individual attendees.

The topics to be discussed will be published in advance in a *meeting schedule*.

The working group may be asked to review topics which, although within scope, do not immediately fit the meeting schedule, for example topics arising from testing. The AOB agenda item will be used to ensure what topics are tabled at the earliest opportunity.

6.3.   Style

The meetings will adopt a "workshop" style, with an open and interactive approach. No formal minutes will be produced, but agreed actions will be documented. Notes may be produced by the Horizon attendees, as part of their audit trail towards Release Authorisation, and may be shared with ICL Pathway to ensure factual accuracy.

6.4.   Non-Disclosure

Any ICL Pathway *documents* provided to Horizon under the auspices of this Forum will be subject to the existing NDA arrangements

6.5.   Issues

Any *issues* arising from the meetings will be held on a *shared list* with a common agreed definition of an individual issue. For any issue, it will be key to assess the issue in the context of the next major programme event (eg *Release Authorisation Board*) to understand the risks perceived, to quantify the issues as far as possible (eg frequency of occurrence within the scope of that release) and to agree any mitigation actions.

6.6.   Escalation

Any issues which the Forum is unable to resolve will be escalated to the joint working group sponsors in ICL Pathway (Terry Austin) and POCL Horizon (John Meagher).

7. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The critical success factor of this Forum will be that the Horizon Technical Assurance Group are able to make an informed decision to the Release Authorisation Board for each release.

A secondary factor is that there are a minimum number of unresolved issues remaining within the scope of Horizon Technical Assurance at the time of the Release.