Six early signs a project needs a hand.

An early-warning check to run on a live web project, by whoever is accountable for the date. It takes half an hour a month. Nothing on it is technical.

Run it on a project that feels fine as well as one that does not, so you know what fine looks like. Two or three answers coming back wrong is a conversation, not a crisis.

THE STATUS, READ PROPERLY

- [ ] **Read the note under the colour on the last four reports, not the colour**
  If the wording has barely changed in a month, the report is describing a feeling rather than a position.
- [ ] **Nothing has been amber for more than two reporting cycles**
  Amber has no owner and no deadline, so it can sit there for weeks without anyone being asked to act.
- [ ] **Every amber has a name and a date next to it, or it becomes green or red**
  "What would need to happen for this to be green?" is the whole question. A clear answer is a to-do list.
- [ ] **Somebody's actual job is to ask these questions**
  Developers often see it first and say nothing, because it is not their place to say it.

WHO DECIDES WHAT

- [ ] **The next three decisions each have one name written next to them**
  Not the stakeholder list. Who says yes, this week, to the thing holding up the work.
- [ ] **Nothing has been waiting on a decision for more than a fortnight**
  Anything older than that is usually waiting on a person, not on information.
- [ ] **Where a decision is late, the cost of waiting is written down**
  It is rarely just the fortnight. It is the fortnight plus unpicking what got built around the guess.
- [ ] **If a subcontractor is involved, everyone knows which model they are working under**
  Behind the scenes, fronted under your brand, or named. It decides who they are allowed to ask.

THE PLAN AGAINST THE DATE

- [ ] **The signed scope and the current backlog have been compared this month**
  Count the items in the backlog that are not in the scope. It is the most surprising twenty minutes of the month.
- [ ] **The changes since sign-off have a rough estimate each, and a total**
  More than a week of change against a date that has not moved means the date needs another look.
- [ ] **Every date change has been said out loud, not quietly adjusted**
  A date that moves without an announcement teaches everyone to stop trusting dates.

- [ ] **Contracted work is scoped to a deliverable with an end, not to days a week**
  A deliverable can be re-planned. A standing weekly commitment just carries on.

WHAT IS BEING PUT OFF

- [ ] **There is one list of everything deferred, with a date against each item**
  Search the last month of notes for "later", "park" and "phase two". Twice is the signal.
- [ ] **Nothing appears on that list twice**
  The thing deferred twice is usually the hardest part: the integration, the migration, the approval nobody has.
- [ ] **The riskiest unknown has been looked at, even for a day**
  Doing it in the last fortnight is the expensive version, because there is no room left to be wrong.

WHAT YOU ARE BEING SHOWN

- [ ] **The last four demos did not show the same screen three times**
  Not hiding anything. Nobody has had a reason to open the rest.
- [ ] **Someone has asked to see a different part of the build this month**
  "Could we have a look at the checkout this week?" is the whole intervention.
- [ ] **The build can be opened and clicked by the people paying for it**
  A screen share is a demo. A link is evidence.

WRITTEN DOWN, SO NOBODY HAS TO REMEMBER

- [ ] **A decisions log exists, somewhere everyone can see it**
  It stops the same discussion coming round again in month three, and it is what the other signs get checked against.
- [ ] **A decision from two months ago can be found in under five minutes**
  If it takes longer, it is not recorded, it is remembered, and memories disagree.
- [ ] **Each entry says what was decided, by whom, and when**
  A log with no names is a list of things somebody thinks were agreed.
- [ ] **Recording a decision is nobody's favour: it is in the plan, with time for it**
  It usually stops because people are not sure the decisions will stick, not because they are lazy.

Take it, change it, use it on your own projects. No need to credit me. **adamroe.co.uk/blog/signs-a-project-is-going-wrong**