



House of Commons
Science and Technology
Committee

Digital Government: Government Response to the Committee's Eighteenth Report

**Fourteenth Special Report of Session
2017–19**

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Science and Technology Committee

The Science and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Office for Science and associated public bodies.

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Fourteenth Special Report

On 10 July 2019 the Committee published its Eighteenth Report of Session 2017–19, [Digital Government](#) [HC 1455]. On 30 September 2019 we received the Government's response to the Report, which is appended below

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

The Government welcomes the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee's report on Digital Government (HC 1455) published on 10 July 2019.

We are grateful that the Committee is highlighting the importance of digital transformation. We share its view that digital transformation offers great potential for government by making services better, driving efficiency, and utilising emerging technologies, also a key theme of the UK's Industrial Strategy.

The Committee raised a number of specific issues, to which we respond in turn below.

I look forward to working with you and the other members of the Committee on these and other matters as we move forward with the digital transformation of government.

Government Digitisation

1. Recommendation: Government digitisation should be defined as transforming how services are delivered so that the relationship between the citizen and the State is enhanced. Government should adopt this definition and set out metrics of success.

Departments and associated Agencies should be required to publicly report against these metrics on an annual basis, starting from the financial year 2020/21, highlighting areas of success and areas for improvement. The Cabinet Office should be responsible for overseeing departments' action plans in response to this annual publication. (Paragraph 15)

The government does not agree with the proposed definition of government digitisation. True digitisation is broader than the definition proposed by the Committee.

However, the government does agree with the ambition that there should be clear metrics to measure the progress of government digitisation, and are currently working across government to improve our data infrastructure so that we are able to develop metrics that are as robust as possible. We will take forward work with departments to set out a robust set of metrics that will enable us to measure and evaluate our success.

2. Recommendation: The Government should facilitate a national debate on single unique identifiers for citizens to use for accessing public services along with the right of the citizen to know exactly what the Government is doing with their data. (Paragraph 34)

The government does not agree with this recommendation. Whilst the government understand that users need to trust that their personal data is used responsibly and lawfully, the government believes that the best way forward is through developing secure digital identities as opposed to single unique identifiers.

The government wants to build a digital identity ecosystem which will provide greater resilience and user choice. We have published a Call for Evidence to gather feedback from a range of stakeholders on what this ecosystem may look like. The government is confident that its approach to digital identity will support innovation, reduce fraud and cost, safeguard our privacy and streamline online services. We are working in partnership across government, the private and voluntary sectors, academia, and civil society to achieve this goal.

Part of our work will focus on what measures for transparency and accountability the public and civil society organisations expect when it comes to how their personal data is used by government services.

Throughout 2019 we will gather insights and evidence into how Government can support improvements in identity verification and support the development of secure digital identities, ensuring that the potential benefits of this approach are open to all. The Digital Identity Unit, announced earlier this year, when formally launched will publish our findings and continue to consult as policy in this area develops.

3. Recommendation: The Government must ensure that public spaces with digital access, such as libraries, are maintained. (Paragraph 36)

The government agrees with the recommendation. However decisions about the provision of public libraries in an area are a local government responsibility; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for superintendence to ensure councils are meeting their statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service.

The government fully recognises the importance and value of public libraries in supporting the transformation of individuals, communities and society as a whole. The range of outcomes they help to achieve is substantial and varied, and the government is therefore committed to ensuring that there remains a strong library service.

Government funding of £2.6 million provided in 2015/16 enabled the installation or upgrade of Wi-Fi in over 1,000 libraries in England, resulting in over 99% of public libraries in England now providing free Wi-Fi; and supported a number of projects in 2017/18 supporting digital skills work and the establishment of makerspaces through its 'Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone' innovation fund. Digital access and skills is an important strategic outcome highlighted in the 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries 2016 to 2021', a strategy endorsed by both central and local government. Public libraries are also recognised in the UK Digital Strategy as a vital source of digital skills training across the country.

4. Recommendation: The Government should also ensure that those who are not digitally connected have alternative ways of accessing services, for example, by using the phone or having assistance to use digital services, and those alternatives are properly promoted. (Paragraph 36)

The government agrees with this recommendation. As detailed in our written evidence to the Committee, the government already mandates alternative ways of accessing services across departments.

The Government Digital Service's (GDS) Service Standard is a set of criteria that helps teams to create and run great public services, and point five is "Make sure everyone can use the service". This is to ensure departments provide a service that everyone can use, including people with disabilities or other legally protected characteristics, and people who do not have access to the internet or lack the skills or confidence to use it.

GDS also leads on the implementation of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 which aims to improve the accessibility of public sector websites and mobile applications. We will continue to ensure that government services are inclusive and accessible for everyone.

Levers for transformation

5. Recommendation: DCMS should conduct an audit of data-sharing amongst Government departments to see where best practice is taking place, and identify which departments are particularly siloed. The audit should also determine to what extent the initial recommendations by Martha Lane Fox were adopted. This audit should be completed and published in advance of the National Data Strategy being published in Winter 2020 so that its findings can inform the National Data Strategy. (Paragraph 46)

The government partially agrees with this recommendation. The government is already undertaking a public call for evidence, direct engagement with a broad range of organisations and a mapping exercise for data-related policies across government as part of the first phase in the development of the National Data Strategy (NDS). The strategy will highlight best practice case studies and help to build a better understanding of data sharing arrangements within central government. While this exercise will not form a formal audit it will stand alongside some inventory work that the data policy team is undertaking and together these will move towards increasing understanding of the status of data in each department. Even in the case of a full audit, it would not be appropriate to publish results that would contain sensitive information that could compromise national security.

6. Recommendation: The Government should set out how it will make the work of the Data Advisory Board more transparent. It should make public its membership, agenda and a summary of its decisions. If the Government decide that it is not possible to make the Board more transparent then it should set out its reasons why. (Paragraph 50)

The government agrees with this recommendation. The Data Advisory Board and the Data Leaders Network now have public pages on GOV.UK, and terms of reference are available. The boards are considering appropriate ways of increasing transparency of their activity, such as by publishing membership lists and minutes of previous meetings.

7. Recommendation: *The Government should appoint a Chief Data Officer by the end of 2019.* (Paragraph 51)

The government does not agree with this recommendation. However the Government accepts that a Chief Data Officer should be appointed. The government stated in the 2017 Government Transformation Strategy that it would hire a Chief Data Officer by 2020 and this is still the timeline for the appointment.

8. Recommendation: *The Government should make the Government Office for AI responsible, as a central body, for leading on ensuring that all departments take advantage of the transformative benefits that Artificial Intelligence and other innovative technologies offer.* (Paragraph 62)

The government partially agrees with this recommendation. The Office for Artificial Intelligence (a joint unit between DCMS and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) leads on implementing the commitments of up to £1 billion AI Sector Deal launched in 2018, building on its foundations across skills, data and adoption to further enhance the UK's artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities across both the public and private sector.

The government understands that more work must be done on ensuring that all departments take advantage of the transformative benefits of emerging technologies, including AI. To drive forward this change the Office for AI and GDS conducted a Cross-Government AI Review as part of the 2018 Budget, which led to the creation of a prioritisation framework with HMT for AI projects, as well as a 'Guide to using artificial intelligence in the public sector' to understand, develop, and use these technologies in an ethical, safe and fair way.

Driving AI adoption across the public sector requires central leadership, strategy, and steer for which the Office for AI will set direction. Its execution requires cross-government collaboration, making use of existing levers around digital, data, skills and technology. As government's Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) functional lead, GDS is therefore critical to the delivery of ambitions for AI in the public sector.

9. Recommendation: *DCMS should ensure that the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation annually assesses public opinion on Government data use. This review should start in Summer 2019 and should aim to report by Spring 2020.* (Paragraph 70)

The government partially agrees with this recommendation. The Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI) is currently delivering its 2019/20 Work Programme, which includes some public engagement elements. DCMS will be discussing the future work programme with CDEI in the coming months and this recommendation will be fed into the prioritisation process. The CDEI will publish a Work Programme for 2020/21 in April 2020.

Cultural Challenges

10. Recommendation: *The Government should introduce a ministerial digital champion in every department by the end of 2019 who has responsibility for using innovation and digitisation to transform the way their department operates. These*

champions will need to co-ordinate at a department level and across departments. In response to this Report the Government should set out how this co-ordination will take place. (Paragraph 82)

The government does not agree with this recommendation. The government believes that all Ministers and senior leaders should consider innovation and digital transformation to be central to their roles. GDS has been working to create the best environment for digital transformation and the use of innovation and emerging technologies across government.

The intention to appoint a Government Chief Digital and Information Officer, as a second Permanent Secretary within the Cabinet Office, who will oversee the development and delivery of HMG's innovation and transformation strategies across departments, will further strengthen the Government's digital transformation agenda and provide senior DDaT leadership across government.

11. Recommendation: *GDS's purpose should be twofold: to provide advice to departments when needed, but also to devise and enforce minimum standards to be applied consistently across Government digital services. Departments, with the relevant capacity, should retain the ability to develop platforms and software. The Government needs to clarify GDS's role and its relationships with other departments, as well as determining with GDS whether there are any powers it needs to compel departments to take particular action.* (Paragraph 91)

The government agrees that GDS's purpose is to continue to support government departments with their digital transformation. This includes ensuring that government is joined up, trusted, and responsive to user needs and that the work that we do is appropriate for all of government.

The appointment of a new Government Chief Digital and Information Officer (GCDIO), with responsibility for shaping and delivering HMG's innovation and transformation strategies will further support the digital agenda. The new GCDIO will set the strategic vision for DDaT across government, convening departments to drive digital transformation. Alongside this, GDS will continue to publish advice through world-leading guidance and standards, such as the Technology Code of Practice and the Service Standard. The Spend Controls process will continue to be a way to assure services and ensure that these standards are applied consistently across government.

Government Departments will continue to retain the ability to develop platforms and software, and GDS's purpose is to help government deliver user focused services and embrace, adapt and respond to the dynamic and innovative digital world.

GDS will continue to be the centre of DDaT capability building, with the introduction of capability based pay to encourage the development and retention of deep expertise, and training, building and maturing the DDaT function and profession across government.

Our approach in this space allows departments to retain the flexibility to respond to local pressures within existing structures, budgets and business strategies whilst providing a consistent set of data tools to inform departmental pay strategies.

12. Recommendation: *We urge the Government to keep under review whether DCMS should be the lead department for open data and data ethics, governance and sharing. Further, in response to this Report, the Government should set out whether DCMS requires any additional powers to drive data reform across Government. If it does not deem this necessary it should set out why.* (Paragraph 96)

The government agrees and will keep this situation under review. DCMS and GDS currently work closely together, respectively covering the policy and technical aspects of the government data agenda. GDS is a key member of both the Data Advisory Board, and the Data Leaders Network, and both departments are engaged in numerous cross-government working groups on issues such as data quality. Government will continue to review the ownership arrangements of the various components of data policy to ensure optimal delivery and impact. In delivering against its objectives to drive data reform across government, no additional powers are required at present, as a collaborative cross-government approach has been adopted into which respective departments are actively participating.

Technical challenges

13. Recommendation: *GDS should conduct an audit of all legacy systems across Government, including where they are based, what actions to take, the expected cost of such action and the resulting timescales. This audit should be completed no later than December 2020.* (Paragraph 114)

The government agrees with this recommendation and the Cabinet Office, GDS and National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), with a focus on Cyber Security are already undertaking a review focusing specifically on Legacy IT in government. We will seek to use the next Spending Review as an opportunity to address the issues identified as part of this review.

GDS will also use the outcome of this discovery phase to conduct an enhanced audit of the legacy IT estate leading to support to individual departments in developing business cases to reduce their exposure to risk.

Work is already underway to enhance the existing spend control and governance mechanisms within GDS to include legacy IT, including bringing Cyber Security as a key point of reference in all standards, guidances and process, as well as updating the guidance they provide within the Technology Code of Practice to support departments in moving away from legacy technology.

14. Recommendation: *We support the 2018 recommendation of our colleagues on the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy that there should be a Minister for Cyber Security. The Government should reconsider creating a Minister for Cyber Security who will be able to hold Ministers across Government to account for their internal cyber security.* (Paragraph 123)

The government does not agree with this recommendation. As set out in our clarifying letter to the Committee, the Minister for the Cabinet Office is accountable to Parliament for cyber security matters.

15. Recommendation: *The Cabinet Office should review their universal, departmental cyber security standards and ensure they are sufficient, and clearly set out the requirements that bidders must meet to be eligible for Government procurements by the end of 2019. If any department wishes to diverge from these standards, they should have to make a case to the Minister for Implementation.* (Paragraph 128)

The government agrees that the minimum cyber security standard should be regularly reviewed. The minimum cyber security standard was issued to departments last year and it sets the standard that government expects departments to adhere to, including assuring its supply chain. It defines outcomes to give departments the flexibility they need to meet the standard knowing their local context best. There is no choice for departments to meet these and technology spending is strictly enforced by the GDS spend controls process, which is subject to ministerial oversight.

The cyber standard was deliberately ambitious so that the baseline across government was raised and our IT estate hardened. It is not static and as threats and technology develop, so will the standard. We are not complacent and know that government needs to do more to meet its protective security standards, however the work of GDS and GSG, together with the national technical authorities will ensure our estate is transformed for the better. We will continue to keep the standard under review.

The government is pleased that the committee has raised the importance of cyber security in the government's supply chain. The Supplier Code of Conduct (February 2019) makes clear the government's expectations that our suppliers meet HMG's cyber security standards and that breaches of our data are reported. There are procurement rules in place about the use of Cyber Essentials in government procurement, which are currently under review, to ensure proportionate and adequate levels of assurance are in place. Our commercial frameworks cover a range of cyber security services, including those certified by the National Cyber Security Centre. The new Cyber Services Commercial Agreement is due to go live in early 2020 and it will offer access to a wider range of suppliers.

Institutional challenges

16. Recommendation: *The Government should publish a strategy by mid-2020 covering how it intends to make digital skills sustainable. It should also set out the ways in which it plans to continue to raise the skill levels of the Government workforce, ensuring that it is attracting and retaining the best and most digitally skilled employees as well as spreading best practice to staff working in roles which are predominantly non-digital.* (Paragraph 139)

The government does not agree with this recommendation. Building digital, data and technology skills and capability across government is already a priority of the Government Transformation Strategy (2017) and Government Technology Innovation Strategy (2019) so the Government does not agree that an additional strategy is necessary.

The Government Transformation Strategy set out the government's ambition to create "one of the most digitally skilled populations of civil servants in the world", and this continues to be our aim. GDS's leadership of the Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT)

Profession has been collaborating across government to ensure departments attract, develop and retain the people and skills they need to transform public services. It enables us to act at scale through cross-government strategic programmes and initiatives.

The government will establish a pipeline of digital talent for all levels of the Civil Service by continuing to develop the Capability Framework and improve the way we present digital careers in government to entice top technical talent into the Civil Service at all levels. The Digital, Data and Technology Fast Stream programme and our apprenticeship schemes provide university graduates and school-leavers with the opportunity to join the Civil Service in specialist roles, with associated learning and development programmes. This provides a well established and sustainable route into DDaT careers in government.

17. Recommendation: *The Crown Commercial Service should produce a consultation immediately on the accessibility of the current Government technology procurement framework, asking for input from start-ups and SMEs on how accessible the current framework is. The consultation process (including a public response from the Government) should be concluded by Spring 2020, alongside the publication of a Government technology procurement strategy. The Minister should then provide this Committee with an update on how these are working within 12 months of publication.* (Paragraph 155)

The Government does not agree with this recommendation. The Crown Commercial Service (CCS) conducts extensive stakeholder engagement with suppliers and customers prior to publishing a contract notice on Contracts Finder to ensure that each commercial arrangement best serves the market and provide a pipeline of future commercial deals available online at: <https://www.crowncommercial.gov.uk/agreements/upcoming>

However the government understands the need to bring more SMEs into the supply chain and that is why CCS has recently launched Spark, a Technology Innovation Marketplace which can help Government and the wider public sector to access new and emerging technology products.

18. Recommendation: *The Government should increase the funding pot for the GovTech Catalyst fund.* (Paragraph 156)

The government welcomes the Committee's recognition of the potential impact of the GovTech sector and of the GovTech Catalyst Programme. So far the programme has reviewed over 90 submissions and chosen 15 public sector challenges to work on. We have reviewed over 500 proposals from public sector innovators to solve these problems and funded over 70 companies to work on them, over 90% of which are SMEs. We are now working with public sector challenge owners to unlock innovation, tackling common issues across national security, public safety and social welfare.

Additionally, the Government Technology Innovation Strategy committed to look to increase the use of challenge-based procurement methods where appropriate, and continue to explore how we can expand on the present success of the GovTech Catalyst. Future funding decisions will be taken as part of any future fiscal event.