



**THE CABINET OFFICE**  
LONDON SW1A 2AS

**Meg Hiller MP**  
**Chair**  
**Public Accounts Committee**

By email

10 April 2020

Dear Meg,

**Re Challenges of Using Data Across Government**

Following your inquiry on Challenges of Using Data Across Government, the Government committed to write to you by 31 March 2020 setting out its plans to improve its use of data, including priorities, milestones and accountabilities.

This letter provides the aforementioned update, taking account of the impact of coronavirus and the implications that has for the organisations involved in improving the use of data within the Government, which accounts for the delay to our reply. The priorities and milestones set out below may need to change to take account of the Government's response to managing the impact of coronavirus. Where these are significant, we will keep the Committee updated.

Transforming the use of data for policy making and service delivery is a key priority for the Government. Since your inquiry concluded in September 2019, work has continued across Government to make transformational changes in the way we use data. This work, led by DCMS, Cabinet Office (GDS) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS), has set the foundations for the better use of data in government, delivering better public services and demonstrable savings through improved data use.

As part of Budget 2020, the Chancellor announced an initial investment of £16.4 million over the next three years in the government's own use of data.

The Budget settlement includes funding for a Data Standards Authority (DSA) for government, led by GDS in close collaboration with ONS. As the Committee rightly noted, standards are a critical enabler for better data use in Government. The DSA will bring departments together to create data standards to use across government; drive adoption; and improve collaboration on data. The DSA will also address implementation incentives across government and make departments accountable for applying standards. We will seek

to build the case for additional funding for the DSA, potentially through the Spending Review.

ONS will use Budget funding to establish a cross-government Centre for Data Quality. The Committee identified poor-quality data across government as a significant driver of service failure. The Centre will provide tools, guidance, training and support for government to understand, improve and report on data quality. The Centre will publish a Cross-Government Data Quality Framework in 2020/21; provide practical advice to support the production and maintenance of good quality data; establish a cross-departmental network to share knowledge and expertise; and advise departments on quality improvement initiatives.

In combination, the DSA and the Centre for Data Quality will make significant inroads in addressing fundamental challenges to using data across government.

The Budget also allocated funding for a 'discovery' into the viability of an Integrated Data Platform for the UK which securely links and anonymises administrative data for analysis and research purposes. Integrated data models allow for powerful policy analysis and evaluation. Pilot projects, delivered by analysts from across government using linked data will be delivered in the next few months, supporting the levelling up agenda and join up policy development across government.

A Government Counter Fraud Data Analytics Development project, led by Cabinet Office, will provide a counter fraud data analytics capability and run counter-fraud pilots across government, significantly reducing losses to the taxpayer through fraud. This is an exemplar project which will both deliver measurable financial results, as well as demonstrate the value of data-driven initiatives across government departments.

Further work beyond the projects funded in the Budget is needed to solve the biggest challenges the government faces to manage and use its data as a collective, strategic asset. Work will continue, although the scale and pace of that work in the short term be affected by the response to coronavirus. The response will be improved by better use and sharing of data across government. We will work with HM Treasury as it rapidly re-profiles spending priorities in response to the coronavirus outbreak, both in the short-term and in a future Spending Review.

We envisage further proposals in this area forming a key component of the Government's forthcoming National Data Strategy, which we have committed to publish later this year. That Strategy will aim to unlock the power of data across government and the wider UK economy, while building trust in its use. As the Committee is aware, a call for evidence took place in the Summer of 2019 and attracted over 100 detailed submissions. DCMS have subsequently been analysing the responses received which will be used to target Government intervention where it is needed most.

As the Committee is aware, data held in legacy systems holds back development of world-class digital public services. GDS, the Government Security Group (GSG) and the Government Commercial Function (GCF) are working together to assess the state of legacy technology across government and identify the major challenges and risks as well as assess capability and skills needed to manage and migrate from legacy IT. Further, we have worked with HMT to provide guidance for legacy IT spend for the upcoming financial year and subsequent SR period.

We are confident that the government has set the right initial projects to improve the use of data within existing budget constraints and that these will be built upon in any upcoming

Spending Review. We welcome this engagement with the Committee and we will write again in six months, subject to COVID-19 developments, to provide a further progress update.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John A. Manzoni', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

**Sir John A Manzoni KCB**

Chief Executive of the Civil Service & Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary  
**Email** [chief.executive@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:chief.executive@cabinetoffice.gov.uk) **Telephone** +44 (0) 20 7271 8822