

Emran Mian
Permanent Secretary
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
22 Whitehall
London SW1A 2EG
www.gov.uk/dsit

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Chair of Public Accounts Committee
Houses of Parliament
SW1A 0AA

21 May 2026

Dear Sir Geoffrey,

Thank you for your letter of 27 April regarding the Treasury Minute response to the Committee's report on **Government Services: Identifying costs**, and particularly your request for further clarification on recommendation 3b.

I welcome the opportunity to explain how prioritisation and delivery on legacy systems is currently handled across government, and how this is being strengthened over time.

As you note, DSIT holds information from previous exercises, including the legacy systems data set shared with the Committee earlier this year. However, that data was collected through a point-in-time manual commission in 2024 using the Legacy Risk Assessment Framework. While it provides a useful indication of the severity of legacy characteristics, it has not been refreshed to reflect remediation activity or further degradation since that period. There are three principal reasons why we do not believe that this information should be used to produce a prioritised list of systems for the purpose envisaged by the Committee:

1. The data is incomplete and uneven in coverage. Not all departments, arm's-length bodies or systems were assessed, and some areas of the UK public sector such as the NHS, Policing and Local Authorities were out of scope of the commission.

2. The data set has not been updated since 2024. This means that some of the systems are likely to have been remediated whilst new systems have become legacy. This issue is particularly acute due to the pace of change in technology.
3. Legacy severity, as measured in the framework, does not reliably indicate where inefficiencies such as manual workarounds, duplicated staffing effort, or process failures are greatest.

Together these challenges with the existing data mean that we do not believe it would be appropriate to prioritise interventions on the basis of it.

As set out previously, responsibility for modernising individual systems rightly sits with departments and arm's-length bodies, supported by assurance, guidance and cross-cutting action from DSIT. With this in mind, we will be using the existing Digital Business Review process to capture information from departments on which systems they are prioritising internally to modernise and address legacy challenges. In these discussions, Accounting Officers outline the progress of their plans, and DSIT provides scrutiny on how agreed Spending Review bid settlements are progressing.

Our forthcoming Technology Modernisation Action Plan will set out in more detail the steps we will take to improving the quality of data over time, reducing reliance on manual commissions, and building a stronger evidence base to support future prioritisation decisions, including those related to cost, security and emerging technologies. As this work progresses, DSIT's visibility and understanding of other public sector organisations legacy estate will improve. This will then enable us to make a better-informed assessment on cross government prioritisation. However, we assess that this will take longer than the 6 months set out in your recommendation.

I also want to take the opportunity to set out some of the other work DSIT is doing in parallel with improving the quality of data available. We already know that there is a substantial legacy challenge across the public sector and that the current approach to addressing it has not worked so far. Consequently, DSIT has now started exploring what new commercial, financial and technological approaches may be available to shift the dial on the prevalence of legacy. I wanted to particularly call your attention to the work on using AI code remediation tools to modernise systems. DSIT first piloted these tools in partnership with DEFRA and found they were able to complete 9 months of work in just 4 weeks. Significantly, we identified that once the AI tools had been deployed, understood and established in the working practices of DEFRA's teams, they were able to continue the work without further input from DSIT and have now launched their Legacy Application Programme, using AI-enabled approaches to accelerate live legacy modernisation. In

particular, the cost and speed to which wider legacy systems have been remediated has been very successful. Based on this we have now expanded these pilots to four other public sector organisations. Whilst these pilots are still underway early results look promising.

I hope this clarifies why, despite the work already undertaken, we do not consider that DSIT producing a cross-government prioritised list of legacy systems at this point would be a helpful exercise. I remain committed to keeping the Committee informed as this work progresses and to continuing our constructive engagement on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emran Mian', with a stylized, cursive script.

Emran Mian
Permanent Secretary
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology