

Written evidence submitted by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DCG0020)

GDS response to Science, Innovation and Technology Committee Call for Evidence: Digital centre of government

Digital centre of government

Inquiry

Following the general election, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) announced plans to become the “digital centre of government”. It was also confirmed that the Government Digital Service, Central Digital and Data Office and Incubator for Artificial Intelligence would move from the Cabinet Office into DSIT, to “unite efforts in the digital transformation of public services under one department”.

Since the election DSIT has published three reviews to inform this work: a blueprint for digital government, an assessment of digital capability across government, and an AI Opportunities Action Plan. It has also confirmed that the digital centre will be known as the Government Digital Service.

The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee is launching an inquiry to suggest priorities for the new Government Digital Service, scrutinise DSIT’s planned approach to implementation, and identify opportunities and challenges.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3583/>

1. What benefits will a digital centre offer citizens?

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5. What are the barriers to successfully establishing a digital centre of government?

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- 5.2 What infrastructure and regulation is required to make the government "more digital"?

6. In addition, the committee welcomes submissions on the following points:

- 6.1 What impact will the Data (Use and Access) Bill have on efforts to establish DSIT as the digital centre of government?
- 6.2 How should the National Data Library proposed by the government be taken forward?
- 6.3 How should the digital centre be delivered in a way that ensures equitable access to public services?

1. What benefits will a digital centre offer citizens?

When announcing immediately after the General Election the creation of the new digital centre of government in DSIT, the Secretary of State made clear that Britain will not fully benefit from the social and economic potential of science and technology without government leading by example. That means improving how the government and public services interact with citizens, boosting Britain's economic performance and public services and improving the lives and life chances of people through the application of science and technology.

Across the public sector there are many digital services that we are proud of. This includes the NHS app which was delivered in a time of crisis, and is the most widely used app in the UK, as well as GOV.UK, which combines government digital services in a way which is emulated worldwide. Citizens can apply online for Universal Credit, Register to Vote, check for flood warnings, get an MOT test reminder, and order repeat prescriptions.

But we're still a long way from building a truly digital state - one where services work across institutional boundaries, and where digital credentials enable a more timesaving, personalised user experience. Many public services stretch across the remit of many central departments, local authority teams, and NHS trusts. There's a lot we can do to link those services up, while reducing the bureaucratic burden on the public to remember dozens of different accounts and passwords.

Net satisfaction of digital government services has declined over the past decade from 79% to 68%. Users' expectations continue to rise: people expect government services to provide the same convenience and personalisation that they see in private sector services. They can see what's possible. They want government to be raising the bar on universality, inclusion, reliability, security and transparency. There's a generation gap to address: today's young adults do not remember a time when most services were not digital; but we also need to deliver on their high expectations in a way that doesn't exclude anyone.

It's vital that government understands and responds to this. The digital centre has been set up to lead work that's more than just a change – it will help catalyse a wholesale reshaping of the public sector, reaching out to local government, the NHS, and the private sector too.

When we launched the Blueprint for Modern Digital Government in January, we set out our long-term vision for the future of digital government in the UK, to enable five outcomes:

1. Easier lives

Modern digital government should reduce the 'time tax' on people using public services. Not just the time it takes to use a service, but the time to understand what needs to be done. The future we see is one where services are designed around people: wasting less time, money, and energy, and cutting the time that UK citizens spend trying to access public services.

That means accelerating improvements to user experience, and reimagining public services so they're more proactive and more joined up. It shouldn't be a citizen's job to work out what benefits it's worth them applying for. Nor should it be a business owner's job to remember what steps the government needs them to take when starting a new business.

2. Faster growth

Economic growth is a priority for the UK. We need to help businesses start and grow faster and more easily than before, through services that minimise the bureaucracy. We should make the business of running a business less of a chore.

There's also the business of doing business with government. There's a lot we could improve about how public data is made available - with appropriate safeguards and permissions - for new commercial opportunities. And there's a lot we could improve about how suppliers and start-ups can work with government and across the wider public sector to solve the most pressing public challenges.

3. Firmer foundations

People expect that public services are secure, accurate, trustworthy, and available when they need them. This needs to remain true even in the face of cyber threats and attacks, and as we begin to use AI more in public service delivery.

We need to reset our relationship with technology risk so it's managed effectively, to reduce our dependence on decades-old legacy systems and bolster our inadequate cyber defences - all without slowing down the pace of change.

There's also enormous untapped value in the data and technology capabilities locked in silos across the public sector. We want to release that value, reducing duplication, fragmentation and waste. Data should be treated as a public asset, along with the platforms that facilitate access to it. Central government needs to be better connected and integrated with the wider public sector, including local government.

4. Smarter organisations

Changing what the public sector delivers means changing how delivery is done. Too often, we ship the org chart. Despite a number of improvements to processes and practices, we still need major reform to embed modern ways of working and thinking as the norm.

This goes deeper than agile service design teams – it reaches into every part of our work, including funding and governance. It means we'll need to be more systematic in how we find, train and retain the expert practitioners we need, and be bolder in breaking down the barriers that get in their way.

It also means investing in the component parts that make large scale digital service design possible – the platforms, data, and digital credentials that tie everything together.

5. Higher productivity and efficiency

As economic forces continue to put pressure on public spending and families' budgets, the need to deliver outstanding public services at a price we can afford has never been greater. The State of Digital Government Review found £45-87 billion per year of savings and productivity benefits are not realised, equivalent to 4-7% of public sector spend.

We know there's significant scope to deliver better value for the taxpayer by tackling waste, duplication and fraud. We need to look at all opportunities to reduce waste in the way we buy and build services, and to combat fraud through better data exchange and stronger counter-fraud capabilities. To do this we need to build on great examples like GOV.UK One Login, as well as the debt and fraud data sharing powers in the Digital Economy Act, which have saved £137 million since being introduced.

The latest tools and technology, including but not limited to AI, present major savings opportunities. They can take on more of the tasks that humans can do perfectly well, but that computers can do faster. That creates space for humans to do the tasks that computers can't do at all, allowing public sector workers to focus on delivering the crucial front-line work that will always require human relationships, judgement and empathy.

1.1 What benefits will a digital centre deliver to the UK economy?

As set out in the government's Plan for Change, economic growth is the number one mission of the government. Growth will fund our public services, enable investment in our hospitals and schools, and, most importantly, raise living standards for everyone.

The UK lags behind every other G7 country when it comes to business investment as a share of our economy. That means the UK has fallen behind in the race for new jobs, new industries, and new technology.

This is already changing under this government. Through our growth mission, we will aim for the highest sustained growth in the G7 – with more people in good jobs, higher living standards, and productivity growth in every part of the United Kingdom.

The digital centre has a key role to play in driving growth by delivering better and more efficient services, helping businesses start and grow faster and more easily, and fostering innovation through partnership across industry and academia.

We have placed faster growth at the centre of the vision: helping businesses start and scale by delivering services that work as well as they do for citizens.

And we've made a series of commitments in the Blueprint to begin to deliver against that ambition:

- Government services for businesses will be as good as those for individuals, making it easy for them to do the things they need to. We'll use clarity as an enabler: it will be

clearer what licences and certifications a business must apply for, what permissions it must seek, what tasks it must complete, and which it's already completed.

- Businesses will be able to connect to digital public infrastructure, to build new products and services, with appropriate security and privacy controls. They'll be able to create new services, catalysing growth and innovation.
- Government will build a new relationship with the commercial sector, becoming a helpful collaborator rather than a source of frustration. It'll be easier for innovators and entrepreneurs to work with government, and the public will get better value for money.

Through priorities set out in the Blueprint, the digital centre will also maximise the value and potential of public procurement, through reforming government's approach to funding digital and technology.

Work with local government, MHCLG and other departments will define new models for collaboration. It will include identifying opportunities to extend the digital centre's work on technology procurement and strategic supplier management to help local government achieve better outcomes and value for money.

We've also launched a kickstarter project to collaborate with organisations across the public sector to support the government's goal to Get Britain Working by piloting improvements on how we can better manage a long-term health condition or disability.

1.2 How effectively has the vision for a digital centre been communicated?

Since July, teams across the digital centre and beyond have led a coordinated effort to develop and communicate the vision across a wide range of stakeholders both inside and outside government.

Within GDS, the digital centre design project team ran workshops and interactive sessions with more than 300 staff members to generate expert insight and views on the future. We also ran these sessions with colleagues in teams across wider DSIT. Once developed, the vision was communicated extensively to staff ahead of the public launch in January.

Across departments, the new digital centre has built on and enhanced existing strong communities and networks of digital and business leaders to develop, test and communicate the vision. This included a number of workshops and discussions with Chief Digital Information Officers (CDIOs), Chief Data Officers (CDOs), Chief Technology Officers (CTOs) and others to provide direct input into the digital centre's priorities and purpose.

We also took both the State of Digital Government review and Blueprint for Modern Digital Government in full through a cross-government write round process in order to obtain

collective agreement from central departments, as well as providing a valuable opportunity for feedback and socialisation on the findings and proposals.

The 32,000 members of the Government Digital and Data Profession received regular updates through direct communication channels throughout the design and launch of the Blueprint. This included gathering their input through a survey which generated a large volume of responses on our future direction.

We've looked outwards as well as inwards, to leading experts from industry and academia. This included launching a new [expert advisory panel](#) with leading thinkers and entrepreneurs who have provided input throughout the work to date, as well as capturing input from digital expert Non-Executive Directors across government departments. We also drew on the expertise of a wider set of external stakeholders by running roundtable discussions with think tanks, trade associates and civil society groups, including techUK, Reform, Connected by Data and Flint Global.

The vision and key product announcements were launched publicly by Secretary of State Peter Kyle at a major launch event with an audience including a wide cross-section of journalists covering most national outlets. Key points - including that of a digital driving licence, as well as findings from the State of Digital Government review, - were reported on extensively by national and international media.

2. What should be the priorities for the digital centre of government?

Setting out a vision is one thing. Making it happen is another. In the Blueprint, we set out the main changes we believe are needed to start to address the root causes identified in the State of Digital Government review and to deliver the vision.

1. Join up public sector services

To the user, public services are not joined up. Some people have to interact with more than 40 different services across nine organisations when managing a long-term condition or disability. The digital centre will work with departments to enable next generation public services and make it easier to join up and act as one public sector.

Creating GOV.UK and building better services around user needs was a great start. But if we really want services that do the hard work, we need to create the right conditions for building them and change how we develop policy in the first place.

To radically improve value for money we need new approaches to transforming services, both nationally, and local areas as we invest to support place-based growth. We need to holistically improve policies, business processes, data, and systems rather than on a piecemeal basis. That's a considerable shift in how government delivers.

The digital centre will build on existing work to enable more personalised user interactions across multiple channels. To make it easier to join up services we plan to scale common infrastructure. We will continue to create a shared digital workplace where public servants can access and use the latest AI and productivity tools. And over time we will extend this work to the wider public sector.

Aligning with other ongoing work on digital inclusion, we aim to improve digital access to public services and support the digitally excluded.

2. Harness the power of AI for the public good

The digital centre will strengthen responsible AI use and skills across government. The work of the Incubator for AI (i.AI) will focus on building and testing AI tools to boost public sector productivity, targeting the £45 billion per year potential improvements identified in the State of Digital Government review.

As outlined in the recently published AI Opportunities Action Plan, AI has enormous potential to improve lives, drive growth and increase productivity, for example by helping target preventative interventions better at those who need them. We must harness this by integrating AI and automation safely and securely within the design and delivery of public services. We have made a good start, with the creation of i.AI and work in many parts of the public sector to explore and pilot potential opportunities, but there is a long way to go, for example to address the data fundamentals needed to make AI possible.

What's more, we have a unique opportunity to demonstrate the use of AI in line with public values to promote equity, fairness, and transparency. The public sector will role model the responsible use of AI and seek to partner with the UK's thriving AI sector in the process.

That means we will continue our work to embed AI and automation in common products and platforms to provide public servants with better tools to support their work and improve services for the public. Building on the work of the Responsible Tech Adoption Unit, we will provide clear and actionable guidance to embed best practices in trust and responsibility, as well as taking a proactive approach to managing the environmental impact of our use of AI and other technologies.

3. Strengthen and extend our digital and data public infrastructure

Our infrastructure needs to be stronger than ever before to protect against current and future threats. In the last year alone, we have seen multiple examples of the impact that our digital systems failing can have on the lives of people across the UK. The digital centre will build on GOV.UK One Login, improve data infrastructure, and strengthen cybersecurity and national technical resilience.

Thousands of teams across the public sector are already using our world-leading digital components such as GOV.UK Notify, Pay, Forms and Design System. We need to do more of this and build the underlying infrastructure that makes it easy for teams across the whole public sector to work together, access shared technical components and data, and connect

with external organisations and the public. For example, we will support the introduction of a single unique identifier for children to improve data linkage.

Our infrastructure also needs to be resilient and secure against threats if we're to build and maintain public trust and confidence. Currently, vital systems and services are too exposed to risk: we need to tackle these and embed security by design, at scale.

That means we will continue our work to expand GOV.UK One Login's availability, while exploring the development of an equivalent for businesses. We will continue our work to reduce the barriers to sharing data by implementing standards, frameworks and tools that ensure quality, trust, security, privacy and interoperability.

We should adopt best practices for technical resilience, focusing on safeguarding key services and managing failures with integration into existing cyber response capabilities. We will evolve centrally defined guidance with proven patterns and standards developed with industry partners for responsible technology adoption, and we will continue to explore how to improve the environmental sustainability of government's digital services.

4. Elevate leadership, invest in talent

The public sector's digital and data capability is severely lacking, and as a result depends heavily on third parties. This is costly, with the average contractor costing three times as much as a public servant. The digital centre will work with the Government People Group to elevate digital leadership, invest in the profession and the competition for talent, and raise the digital skills baseline for all public servants.

Change won't happen without the right people with the right expertise, working at the right levels, in multidisciplinary teams. We need greater technological literacy at the top of public sector organisations to ensure that digital is not an add-on but a core skillset across the public sector.

We need to make digital government the compelling choice for specialists seeking new careers by competing successfully with the private sector, providing an attractive public sector offering for specialists, and growing talent from within.

That means we will continue our work to equip all senior leaders to be effective in the digital age through an updated curriculum and learning programme. We will enhance digital, cyber security, and AI understanding among non-specialists by integrating standards and learning into all professional curricula, which is a significant culture shift.

We will also work with the people function to run high-profile recruitment campaigns targeting the most important skills gaps. And we will look to expand the cross-government TechTrack upskilling apprenticeship programme and protect headcount to develop the future pipeline of digital experts. We will explore opportunities to link up this work across the broader public sector, for example into the NHS.

5. Fund for outcomes, procure for growth and innovation

Only one in five State of Digital Government survey respondents felt the current funding model enabled effective investment in and running of digital services. The digital centre will work with HM Treasury to reform the government's funding approach, and work with the Government Commercial Function to maximise the value and potential of public procurement.

We must spend in line with modern digital practice, both internally and with suppliers. Digital services need to be funded in a way that focuses on outcomes, allows for prototyping, iteration and pivots, addresses risks and enables joined-up action across the sector. The way we fund also needs to explicitly address service resilience, cyber security shortfalls and technical debt - so that we prevent the creation of new and costly legacy.

As the country's largest digital buyer, we must also make use of our scale to unlock greater value and procure in a way that drives creation of responsible, inclusive and secure technologies and benefits the public, public services and UK businesses including SMEs.

That means we will continue our work to streamline governance and approvals to enable agility and iterative delivery while protecting value for money. We will also continue our work to negotiate whole-of-public-sector agreements and contracting once for a limited number of high value cases, including platform services such as cloud. And we will align research, innovation and procurement policies to create 'cradle-to-growth' relationships with innovators and entrepreneurs.

6. Commit to transparency, drive accountability

The digital centre will help central government work in the open, publish more performance data and act on it to improve accountability.

Increased use of technology can improve government services, making them faster, more personalised and consistent. But experience shows that things can go wrong, and that automated mistakes can scale quickly.

We need to make sure that agile accountability mechanisms are baked into the system, with front-line public servants able to apply oversight and judgement to individual decisions, and senior leaders able to account for the overall operation of a system.

Transparency is crucial to making accountability possible. It is essential to foster trust, giving people and businesses confidence that government organisations are treating them, and their data, with appropriate care.

That means we will enhance transparency by building on the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard to increase openness about AI usage, working with the new Responsible AI External Panel (see point two). Our services will be designed to give people visibility and control over how their data is used, ensuring it benefits end users. We will include diverse external voices in impact assessments for new technologies to ensure comprehensive and inclusive evaluations.

2.1 Are there any areas of the public sector that are particularly suited to or in need of digital transformation?

Alongside the publication of the Blueprint, the Secretary of State published a comprehensive review of the State of Digital Government.

This found many ways in which public sector digital teams excel: on average they've embraced cloud services faster than the private sector; used data and AI to improve clinical outcomes and the speed of emergency response; and found innovative ways to build and distribute mobile apps in response to national crises.

However, too often, these achievements have been made despite the system rather than because of it. Teams depend on creative ingenuity to overcome constraints imposed by cumbersome processes, legacy systems and a lack of stable funding and resources. These achievements are typically in isolation: sharing success and reusing code is rare.

The review identified significant challenges that are pervasive across the entire public sector.

- **Institutionalised fragmentation:** digital services and the technology which underpins them are fragmented between organisations resulting in broken customer journeys, like parents needing to apply for up to 15 services if their child qualifies for free school meals; and duplication, like having over 44 different accounts to interact with government.
- It confirmed the existence of **persistent legacy**. Despite prior funding for legacy remediation, organisations still report that high percentages of their services depend on unsupported, unpatched legacy technology systems: the count of the highest risk and most critical systems rose by 26% from 2023 to 2024 as organisations struggle to maintain focus on risk remediation alongside other priorities. Under-digitisation also persists, with only half of public services digitised, and digital expenditure 30% below benchmarks in industry and other governments.
- Government is also carrying significant **cyber and technology resilience risk**. We have seen a number of high-profile incidents across the public sector that have had real world impacts on citizens' lives and incurred new costs to repair the damage done.
- We need to tackle the issue of **siloes data**, as this continues to hinder collaboration. Data sharing between and within organisations, even after recent legislative changes and sustained effort, is high friction, with agreements taking months or even years to negotiate.
- There is **inconsistent leadership**. Most senior leaders don't get the training or preparation they need to run digital organisations. Most organisations do not have digital leaders on their executive committee. Linked to this, there is a skills shortfall;

the remuneration offer and overall employee value proposition is not competitive with private industry, resulting in stalled increase in growth in digital and resources, talent churn across the sector, and over-dependence on third parties at higher cost.

- **Diffuse buying power** dilutes value for money. Despite central constructs such as frameworks and Memoranda of Understanding, public sector organisations contract locally and individually, holding back the potential of our buying power of over £26 billion p.a.. Our funding models are outdated: over the last 15 years the technology industry has moved from a capital intensive model to a revenue intensive model, in which teams are funded on an ongoing basis and services are paid for by subscription. By contrast, most public sector digital funding is provided in a programme model more suitable for physical infrastructure projects. There is a clear need for sustainable funding models that support run costs over several years.

2.2 Has DSIT identified the right areas of public services with its initial five 'kickstarter' tests and products?

Over the first six months of 2025, the digital centre will start by launching five bold and transparent kickstarter initiatives. They will be designed to showcase a new era of digital government, delivering progress and cultural change through open collaboration and public engagement. These are:

- **A beta GOV.UK App and GOV.UK Wallet**, enabling more personalised user experiences, verifiable digital credentials, and next-generation public services. The GOV.UK App aims to streamline access to government services, allowing users to complete tasks more easily and securely on their mobile devices. Crucially, the app will harness the features of today's smart devices, and start to provide a personalised and proactive experience tailored to people's individual needs and circumstances.
- **Collaborations with organisations across the public sector**, supporting the government's goal to Get Britain Working, by piloting improvements on how we can better manage a long-term health condition or disability.
- **Piloting GOV.UK Chat**, an LLM-powered chat user interface for GOV.UK that resolves complex queries using natural language in seconds, providing targeted support to and reducing friction for businesses and business users. Marking our shift to better support businesses and growth in the new digital centre, we also see this as a good way of demonstrating responsible use of AI in digital public services.
- **Launching a new AI accelerator upskilling programme**, helping digital professionals to become machine learning engineers. This will deliver important new AI expertise in leading government departments.
- **Launching a new cross-government vulnerability scanning service**, so that we can find and address weaknesses in our systems and services. This work is vital in

ensuring our infrastructure is resilient and is a step towards better securing it against threats.

We identified these areas to target with our kickstarters because they have the potential to be highly impactful across the full breadth of the vision (easier lives; faster growth; firmer foundations; smarter organisations; and higher productivity and efficiency).

They represent a wide portfolio to test our approach in several key areas: products that the public will use, like the GOV.UK App, the GOV.UK Wallet; end-to-end service transformation that expands beyond one department or service; services that look improve the government's cyber security; and growing our digital workforce and giving people the right skills to thrive in a digital-first government.

Of course, the kickstarters do not represent the full scope of our ambitions for the digital centre. We have chosen a small number to begin with, to test and learn in the open, rather than over-promising on a larger number of projects or commitments.

2.3 How should DSIT measure and evaluate the success of the digital centre?

In part six of the six-point plan, '6. Commit to transparency, drive accountability', we've committed to work in the open, publish more performance data and act on it to improve accountability.

This will include requiring government departments to publish metrics at least annually on the outcomes they achieve, including service performance, value for money, resilience, digital inclusion and AI adoption.

GDS is currently designing the performance framework and dashboard to monitor progress, setting clear metrics for tracking and driving progress against the five outcomes and six priorities set out above.

In doing so, we are learning from work delivered as part of the previous 2022-25 roadmap for digital and data, Transforming for a Digital Future, which included a performance framework, data collection method and visualisation tool to track the progress and impact of the strategy.

3. What lessons are there for DSIT as it establishes the digital centre?

3.1 Are there any case studies that the committee should consider as part of its inquiry? What lessons do previous and contemporary digital transformation initiatives offer for the digital centre?

Over the last 15 years, digital teams across the public sector have delivered more cost effective, time-saving public services: the Universal Credit live service was first introduced in 2013; by 2016, millions of people had access to their own digital tax account; by 2017, almost everyone over 16 could renew their passport online; by January of last year, Child Benefit claims could be made online for the first time. We've also created a simpler, more consistent experience of government through the GOV.UK website and publishing platform. However, there is still much to learn and to do.

The Secretary of State [wrote to the Public Accounts Committee](#) in January 2025 on the previous government's 2022-25 roadmap for digital and data. The enclosed report highlighted achievements including service transformation and the development and rollout of GOV.UK One Login, but noted that the challenges of digital transformation remain substantial, requiring wholesale culture change, upskilling and multi-disciplinary working. Implementing the roadmap generated a wealth of learnings to take forward into the next phase of public service transformation, from strengthening digital and data public infrastructure to accelerating responsible adoption of AI and developing an effective sourcing strategy that maximises economies of scale.

Furthermore, the [State of Digital Government Review](#) assessed how effectively the public sector uses digital technology to deliver services to people, communities and businesses by gathering insights from over 500 technical and non-technical leaders from 120 public organisations. As part of this, we gathered case studies and lessons learned from a wide range of organisations such as NHS Trusts, Local Councils, and central government departments.

As the digital centre approaches the challenge of delivering a modern digital government, we are looking outwards for learning and best practice including through the [external advisory panel](#). We will be guided by examples of success and failure from the private sector and internationally, including for example transformed operating models in major retail banks and the implementation of AI customer assistants as standard across industry.

3.2 What can the UK learn from other countries' efforts?

The UK has historically been a global leader in digital government. In the most recent rankings the UK ranked 3rd out of 38 countries in the OECD's Digital Government Index (DGI) and 7th in the United Nation's e-government index out of 193 member states.

Although there are important differences between different countries' institutional and legal contexts, including in important areas like data protection and digital identity, the UK can learn much from other leading nations in how they deliver better services to their citizens, support economic growth through open data and interoperability, and bolster critical systems against security threats. For example, one key area in which the UK is looking to learn from others is in how we can best facilitate safe, secure and ethical data sharing to enable joined-up services and business innovation.

GDS participates in a number of multilateral fora to share best practice and insight, as well as regular bilateral discussions with other leading countries to gather and share learnings.

This includes:

- **Denmark:** For the fourth consecutive time, the UN has ranked Denmark's digital public sector as the best globally in its E-Government Survey 2024, which assesses countries on the scope and quality of their online services, as well as their telecommunication infrastructure and human capacity. Denmark has consistently led the ranking and made strong progress in digital governance, boosted by investments in resilient infrastructure and technologies like AI, cloud computing and broadband. We will be drawing specifically on Denmark's approach to all legislation being 'digital ready', helping to reduce complexities in service delivery and improving efficiencies.
- **Republic of Korea:** Ranked 4th in 2024 in UN e-Government Development Index 2024. We have an MoU with the Republic of Korea and use it to share expertise on data utilisation, AI deployment and improving public services. This will allow us to learn better from their examples, and apply that to our own work. The Republic of Korea's Digital Government Masterplan included the aim to ask a citizen for information once only, something which we are now also striving towards.
- **Estonia and Ukraine:** We have a trilateral partnership with Estonia and Ukraine where we regularly collaborate on innovative uses of AI, delivering public services via apps ahead of the GOV.UK App launch, how to create robust data sharing architecture and other areas.
- **Singapore:** With Singapore we regularly engage both bilaterally under our MoU and also via the Digital Government Exchange (DGX) where leading digital nations from around the world come together to exchange expertise. Currently there are three specialised working groups on cloud, AI and cyber. We have also conducted exchanges in resources to further build capabilities across the two countries.
- **OECD, UN and World Bank:** We work closely with multilateral bodies to understand the latest developments around the world in digital government. This includes close work with the OECD on how to make better use of data in the public sector, work with the UN on how to better support local level capabilities and the specialised World Bank working groups where we can both share our expertise and learn from a broad spectrum of partner nations.

4. What assessment can be made of DSIT's work on establishing the digital centre to date?

4.1 What technical and policy expertise does DSIT need to deliver the digital centre?

The new digital centre, and digital government more broadly, needs a breadth and depth of digital, data and technology expertise - as set out in the [Digital and Data Capability Framework](#). This is one of the primary reasons why the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO), the Incubator for AI (i.AI), the Geospatial Commission, the Responsible Technology Adoption Unit and GDS were brought together to ensure that GDS comprises the right technical and policy expertise. Whereas these teams were previously situated in the Cabinet Office, with the new digital centre they are now more closely aligned to other DSIT digital policy teams, enabling closer join-up and collaboration on important areas including digital inclusion and accessibility.

We think that the digital centre will need expertise in the following areas in particular, building on the existing strong capability that exists across GDS teams:

- **Products and platforms** to build and manage GOV.UK channels, service components and common infrastructure
- **End-to-end service delivery** for citizens and businesses, as well as internal government users
- **Technology**: architecture and engineering, for consistent and effective system design and development, as well as expert technology management
- **AI** to improve public services and public sector productivity
- **Data** capability for accurate, trusted, secure and actionable data, and improving availability and exchange
- **Capability and skills** to grow and support the Government Digital and Data Profession as well as upskilling civil servants in other functions and at senior level
- **Supply chain and sourcing**, including leading on supplier engagement and government's digital sourcing strategy
- **Risk and resilience**: identification, mitigation and ability to respond to risks and threats and build national and public sector-wide resilience
- **Responsible technology** adoption including experts in ethics, transparency and digital inclusion

As well as building expertise in GDS, it is vital that we continue to focus on building and championing the great work of digital, data and technology specialists across government. Part four of the six-point plan, '4. Elevate leadership, invest in talent' sets out in more detail our plans for doing this.

4.2 Are the technological solutions required for the digital centre already used by government and other public bodies? If not, are they available or in development?

As set out in the Blueprint and State of Digital Government review, many of the solutions required are already available and in use across government and other public bodies.

GDS has a successful history of building and deploying leading platforms and products, implementing world-class digital public infrastructure such as GOV.UK Notify, Pay, and One Login.

The government has also proved that it is able to quickly adopt new technological solutions. Government has, on average, embraced cloud services faster than the private sector. We have also used data and AI to improve clinical outcomes and the speed of emergency response. Furthermore, we have found innovative ways to build and distribute mobile apps in response to national crises.

However, we know that across government and other public bodies we have major, systemic issues to address across technology and data. This includes persistent legacy, institutionalised fragmentation and siloed data.

We also have much further to go if we are to deliver on the ambitious vision set out in the Blueprint. Part three of the six-point plan, '3. Strengthen and extend our digital and data public infrastructure' sets these out in further detail. As mentioned, the work with local government and the NHS, with the support from other departments will define new models for collaboration, such as potentially sharing technological solutions,

4.3 How should DSIT and other public bodies leverage reforms to public procurement to deliver and operate the digital centre?

Part five of the six-point plan is '5. Fund for outcomes, procure for growth and innovation'.

GDS will work with the Government Commercial Function to maximise the value and potential of public procurement, and will work with HM Treasury to reform the government's funding approach.

DSIT and other public bodies must spend in line with modern practice, both internally and with suppliers. Digital services need to be funded in a way that focuses on outcomes, allows

for prototyping, iteration and pivots, addresses risks and enables joined-up action across the sector. The way we fund also needs to explicitly address service resilience, cyber security shortfalls and technical debt - so that we prevent the creation of new and costly legacy.

As the country's largest digital buyer, we must also make use of our scale to unlock greater value and procure in a way that drives creation of responsible, inclusive and secure technologies and benefits the public, public services and UK businesses including SMEs.

That means we will continue our work to streamline governance and approvals to enable agility and iterative delivery while protecting value for money. We will also continue our work to negotiate whole-of-public-sector agreements and contracting once for a limited number of high value cases, including platform services such as cloud. And we will align research, innovation and procurement policies to create 'cradle-to-growth' relationships with innovators and entrepreneurs.

We have set out specific plans to:

- Define a comprehensive sourcing strategy for what we build, what we buy and how we partner, helping to drive greater efficiency across the £26 billion the UK government spends annually on digital technology.
- Launch work on a Digital Commercial Centre of Excellence to identify opportunities for further reform and improvements needed to enable tech startups, scaleups and SMEs to access government contracts.

Complimentary to this, the new Procurement Act came into force on 24 February 2025. It creates a simpler and more flexible commercial system that better meets the UK's needs while remaining compliant with our international obligations. This includes:

- Through Preliminary Market Engagement, promoting better engagement with the market in advance of the formal tender process, helping contracting authorities to understand what the market is capable of offering and where opportunities for innovation exist.
- Through Competitive Flexible Procedure, giving authorities flexibility to design and run a process that reaches the best solution through developing their understanding of what is available.
- Opening up public procurement to new entrants such as small businesses and social enterprises so that they can compete for and win more public contracts.
- Allowing contracting authorities to take tougher action on underperforming suppliers and excluding suppliers who pose unacceptable risks.
- Embedding transparency throughout the commercial lifecycle so that the spending of taxpayers' money can be properly scrutinised.

5. What are the barriers to successfully establishing a digital centre of government?

As noted above, the State of Digital Government review identified five root causes that need to be addressed in order to overcome them. These are:

1. **Leadership:** There is little reward for prioritising an agenda of service digitisation, reliability, or risk mitigation. Organisational leaders are not paid, promoted, or valued for doing so. Digital leaders are not consistently placed at senior levels, and do not have the power to shape the strategic agenda.
2. **Structure:** Public sector organisations are independent bodies with limited mechanisms to contract services from each other. Consequently, most choose to build and maintain their own technology estate, inhibiting standardisation, interoperability, reuse, and constraining the ability to benefit from scale.
3. **Measurement:** There is no consistent measurement of digital performance across the public sector, including service quality, cost, risk, or ability to deliver change. This lack of measurement inhibits the ability to recognise high performance, identify organisations which need help, and make cross-sector strategic decisions.
4. **Talent:** Compensation and career progression are uncompetitive with the private sector, especially for senior leaders, making it hard to attract and retain top digital and data talent. The lack of an integrated cross-public sector workforce strategy limits the sector's ability to respond strategically to resource and skills gaps.
5. **Funding:** Spend is biased towards new programmes with insufficient prioritisation of the effective operation and maintenance of existing systems, especially legacy assets. This presents an acute challenge for digital services, which increasingly depend on committed and sustained funding.

5.1 How can DSIT address these barriers?

The Blueprint articulates the breadth and scale of the work GDS and wider digital government needs to do to address the challenges and meet the vision. Post-publication, we are now working hard to go to the next level of detail in defining how we'll do this.

For the five root causes identified in the State of Digital Government review, the Blueprint identifies a number of the first steps that we will take to begin to address them:

1. **Leadership:**

We will:

- Require that all public sector organisations have a digital leader on their executive committee and a digital non-executive director on their board by 2026 at the latest and publish this information publicly
- Establish a dotted reporting line to the Government Chief Digital Officer (GCDO) for all CDIOs in central government, including input into recruitment decisions, coaching support and feedback on performance.
- Raise the status of the GCDO role to Second Permanent Secretary-level

2. **Structure:**

We will:

- Create the National Data Library, making it easier to find and reuse data across public sector organisations; this supports better prevention, intervention and detection, and opens up data to industry, the voluntary sector, start-ups and academics to accelerate AI-driven innovation and boost growth.
- Introduce a Digital Backbone enabling the integration, orchestration and instrumentation technology needed to share capabilities and build true end-to-end journeys, such as exposing, creating, processing and maintaining APIs across the public sector
- Mandate the publication of a standard set of APIs and events by public sector organisations. Starting with an expectation that every new service in central government departments will have an open API

3. **Measurement:**

We will:

- We will expand the use of performance-based, outcomes-focused funding models that tie funding to metrics and accelerate the shift from ‘boom and bust’ transformation programmes to continuous funding of persistent, multidisciplinary product teams.
- Co-develop a methodology for measuring the administrative burden including the ‘time tax’ government places on people, and track progress on reducing it, involving civil society groups in the design.
- Require departments to publish metrics at least annually on the outcomes they achieve, including service performance, value for money, resilience, digital inclusion and AI adoption.
- Hold Secretaries of State accountable for their department’s performance against these measures, including through regular reviews with the Digital Inter-Ministerial Group

4. **Talent:**

We will:

- Develop and assess the optimum employment models to attract, grow and mobilise expert digital talent.
- Assess the overall package for digital and data professionals, including remuneration, with a view to ensuring our offer is competitive within the market, making the UK public sector an attractive and viable place for digital specialists.
- Work with the Government Property Agency to establish a Digital Hub in Manchester, building on its already thriving tech sector and a number of existing public sector digital teams in the city.

5. **Funding:**

We will:

- Launch tailored funding models for digital products and services, legacy remediation and risk reduction, and staged, agile funding that better enables exploratory work with new technologies.
- Expand use of performance-based, outcomes-focused funding models that tie funding to metrics and accelerate the shift from 'boom and bust' transformation programmes to continuous funding of persistent, multidisciplinary product teams.

5.2 What infrastructure and regulation is required to make the government “more digital”?

As set out in part three of the six-point plan ‘3. Strengthen and extend our digital and data public infrastructure’, we need to build the underlying infrastructure that makes it easy for teams across the whole public sector to work together, access shared technical components and data, and connect with external organisations and the public. For example, we will support the introduction of a single unique identifier for children to improve data linkage.

We will create the National Data Library, making it easier to find and reuse data across public sector organisations; this supports better prevention, intervention and detection, and opens up data to industry, the voluntary sector, start-ups and academics

Our infrastructure also needs to be resilient and secure against threats if we’re to build and maintain public trust and confidence. Currently, vital systems and services are too exposed to risk: we need to tackle these and embed security by design, at scale.

We will also introduce to government a Digital Backbone: the integration, orchestration and instrumentation technology needed to share capabilities and build true end-to-end journeys, such as exposing, creating, processing and maintaining APIs across the public sector.

That means we will continue our work to expand GOV.UK One Login's availability, while exploring the development of an equivalent for businesses. We will continue our work to reduce the barriers to sharing data by implementing standards, frameworks and tools that ensure quality, trust, security, privacy and interoperability.

We should adopt best practices for technical resilience, focusing on safeguarding key services and managing failures with integration into existing cyber response capabilities. We will evolve centrally defined guidance with proven patterns and standards developed with industry partners for responsible technology adoption, and we will continue to explore how to improve the environmental sustainability of government's digital services.

The Blueprint also sets out initial areas of focus for new or reformed regulation to make government more digital. We will establish a 'once only' rule, so that if people have provided information to one service, it can be reused by others with appropriate safeguards. It will start with central government services and commonly reused data, but be designed to scale over time to the broader public sector and more information. We will also be working towards all legislation being 'digital ready' to reduce complexities in service delivery and improve efficiencies.

6. In addition, the committee welcomes submissions on the following points:

6.1 What impact will the Data (Use and Access) Bill have on efforts to establish DSIT as the digital centre of government?

More effective sharing and use of data was outlined in the [government's manifesto](#) in terms of 'driving innovation' and improving public services (page 33). Improving access to data is also critical for the 'growth driving sectors' in the Government's new Industrial Strategy and commitment to drive forward AI development and AI use in the UK

The Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA) contains, in Part 5, a single, umbrella piece of legislation, designed to reduce legal barriers to data sharing and enable public authorities to share information, for example, relating to a person, organisation, location or online identifiers for specific purposes. It facilitates digital public service delivery by enabling secure data sharing, improving identity verification, and reducing fraud. The DEA supports efficiency through streamlined processes, enhances accessibility, and promotes innovation. By fostering collaboration between organisations, it ensures seamless, cost-effective, and user-friendly digital services for citizens and businesses.

Clause 123 of the Data Use and Access Bill seeks to amend the Digital Economy Act 2017 to extend its existing data sharing powers under section 35 to benefit businesses.

Introducing this flexibility will allow them to benefit from joined-up public services as individuals and households already do.

6.2 How should the National Data Library proposed by the government be taken forward?

The public sector holds and creates a vast amount of data. Collectively, this data represents one of the UK's most valuable assets. It offers powerful insights that are already transforming people's quality of life through better public services and cutting-edge innovation.

But while there are pockets of excellence across the public sector, we are not yet tapping into the full potential of our data. There is currently no single strategic approach to data access across the public sector. Existing initiatives are uncoordinated, leading to a landscape that is complex, fragmented and difficult to navigate.

The National Data Library will unlock the value of public data assets. It will provide simple, secure and ethical access to our key public data assets for researchers, policy makers and business – including those at the frontier of AI development – and make it easier to find, discover and make connections across different datasets.

By unlocking public sector data, the National Data Library will support world-class science and R&D and will lay the foundations for the UK to compete at the global frontier of the development of AI, delivering on the Government's AI action plan. It will also drive forward a modern government, enhancing the everyday experience of people and businesses when using public services.

Achieving this vision will not be easy. To succeed, the National Data Library – and the programme of reform that underpins it – must carefully address the needs of businesses, researchers, civil society and the public. This means understanding the entrenched barriers that we must overcome to genuinely deliver simple, secure and ethical access to key public data assets.

The public must have confidence and trust in the National Data Library. People's privacy must be protected and any mechanisms for sharing data must be secure and ethical. Without this, we – rightly – lose the confidence of the public and the potential to harness the value of public sector data assets.

This Government has been clear that it wants to maximise the societal benefits from public sector data assets. We need to ensure good data collection, high quality curation, interoperability and ways of valuing data that secure appropriate value returns to the public sector.

Our approach to the National Data Library will be guided by the principles of public law and the requirements of the UK's data protection legislation, including the data protection principles and data subject rights. This will ensure that data sharing is fair, secure, and

preserves privacy. It will also ensure that we have clear mechanisms for both valuation and value capture. We are seeking advice from experts on all of these issues.

This is a very active policy area. The NDL is still in the early stages of development with key decisions to be made. We will engage and consult with a broad range of stakeholders on the National Data Library, and give updates in due course.

6.3 How should the digital centre be delivered in a way that ensures equitable access to public services?

The Government is committed to ensuring that everyone has affordable access to public services, whether online or offline. Digital inclusion must be at the heart of what we do, ensuring as many people as possible can access public services digitally, and that we support the digitally excluded.

In 2014, the previous Government published a Digital Inclusion Strategy. However, government progress to deliver this has been limited. Despite great individual projects, such as the Digital Lifeline Fund 1, the lack of a coordinated effort means that millions of people cannot safely enjoy the benefits of our digital world.

This government has released a new Digital Inclusion Action Plan, which sets out our first steps towards ongoing commitment to digital inclusion. But long-term, systemic change is needed to deliver tailored, local, and evidence-based interventions that will meet the individual needs of digitally excluded people.

The Digital Inclusion Action Plan sets out five initial actions this government will take during the year following release, including: launching a new Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund to support local initiatives that increase digital participation; enhancing support for the framework that helps people and businesses get the essential skills they need to get online safely and with confidence; piloting a proof of concept multi-department device donation scheme with the Digital Poverty Alliance, to provide repurposed government laptops to those who need them; making government digital services easier to use with a renewed focus on digital inclusion; and measuring what works on digital inclusion, identifying where the need is greatest and establishing the economic and social value of upskilling adults with digital skills.

It also invites views on how best to address digital exclusion, focusing on: tackling data and device poverty; opening opportunities through skills; breaking down barriers to digital services; and building confidence. A linked Call for Evidence launching alongside the Action Plan will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to guide the government's longer-term approach.

There are some key areas within the Blueprint where GDS will need to join up with work on the Action Plan. In particular, this includes the work of the new Service Transformation Team which has been created to look at whole public sector service transformation and the improvement of priority services. Learning from work on service transformation delivered as part of the 2022-25 roadmap for digital and data, the team will place specific focus on the

accessibility of government services, including on the provision of high quality offline channels as well as online ones.

In addition to the Digital Inclusion Action Plan, departments are required by the government's Service Standard to provide support via alternative channels (phone, face-to-face, webchat) for all their online services to all users, including disabled people, and people who do not have access to the internet. All government services must meet these requirements to go onto GOV.UK.

GOV.UK publishes and maintains an accessibility statement which sets out how the website meets certain standards for people with disabilities to ensure that GOV.UK remains the best place to find government services and information.

We are currently reviewing GOV.UK's digital inclusivity, assessing our offering and identifying opportunities to better serve users who experience digital exclusion.

GDS aims to build and run inclusive and accessible digital services that are easy to use and save people time and money; with appropriate and well-supported alternative pathways for those who need them. For example, inclusion is at the heart of GOV.UK One Login. We are building the system to make it easy to use and accessible - from using plain English to conducting regular user testing focusing on groups with accessibility issues.

03 March 2025