Digital Government

Good morning everyone, and many thanks to Govnet for inviting me here today and giving me the opportunity to share the plans and priorities for the Digital, Data and Technology Function for the coming year, led by the Central Digital and Data Office. The theme of the next two days is enhancing government to citizen engagement through the digital evolution, and there is so much to talk about as always.

Earlier this year, the Cabinet Office announced the new DDaT leadership team. The appointments of Paul Willmott and Joanna Davinson to the newly established Central Digital and Data Office, strengthen the leadership and vision needed for the next phase of digital delivery and transformation in government.

The CDDO has been established to lead the DDaT function across departments. Our mission is to improve user access and experience of government services and harness the power of data. As such, through this collective leadership we will use and upskill the expertise of our cross-government DDaT community and put the strategy, standards and assurance mechanisms in place to deliver the digital transformation we've been waiting for at scale.

Government, and the stakeholders that it exists to serve, are rapidly becoming 'digital' in every way. The shift to digital is a long term trend that has been accelerated by COVID-19 and will continue with improving technology like the rollout of 5G. Now, more than ever, digital must be front and centre of government's priorities to meet user needs.

There is strong backing and support from my Ministerial colleagues and leaders across government to accelerate the digital transformation of public services – the introduction of the CDDO is evidence of this.

With the creation of CDDO, and a reinvigorated GDS, this is a critical moment we must seize. We must take the opportunity this new focus provides and deliver the transformational agenda to meet our citizens' expectations. Already we are seeing glimpses of the future today. With GOV.UK Accounts we will enable people to better understand government through a more personalised, low-friction experience, one that joins up whole journeys for services in a single space. I'm excited to see how this work will see a positive shift in the relationship citizens have with government.

Underpinning this work will be digital identity assurance. We have recently begun a digital identity pilot project, deliberately small in scale at the start, that will create the proof of concept. This is being led and coordinated by GDS, co-designed with departments and public services, and be largely government-built and government-owned. This will be a successor to Verify and, in time, replace other digital identity systems used across government. Further reducing the complexity of needing multiple accounts to interact with government.

Citizens rightly expect a modern service fit for the 21st century. This vision will provide that and has the potential to radically transform the relationship between government and people, delivery of public services and development of joined-up policy; enabling the UK to remain at the forefront of digital government.

But none of this can be achieved without a strong strategic centre, making better use of data, and building capability across the Digital, Data and Technology Function.

The Prime Minister made a manifesto pledge during the 2019 election campaign to improve the government's use of data. Since then, our experiences of crisis response — such as trying to identify the 2.6 million people most in need of financial support in the early days of tackling the coronavirus — have shown just how significant data sharing is to the economy, society and the public sector; and how it will help to power growth as we set about our recovery.

Take, for example, government data from PAYE and the benefits system which has boosted the Treasury's furlough scheme and DWP's expansion of universal credit. Or the data from NHS Digital which was used to draw up the 'shielding' list of vulnerable people and was the basis for how we supported over half a million vulnerable people with almost 5 million food boxes, priority supermarket delivery slots and other support services by local authorities; and the vaccination programme owes its success in part to being able to organise cohorts by age and risk from patient lists already held by GPs.

As the country emerges from lockdown we will take forward what we have learned, to make sure that we use data more intelligently and sensitively in how we craft and deliver public services, balancing having innovative, joined up services with privacy and ethical considerations. The pandemic has given fresh impetus to digital projects across the public sector, with 90 services stood up across government since March in response to COVID-19. So it is timely that today I can talk to you about the ambitions for the CDDO in 2020/21: the immediate priorities across data, infrastructure and capability, and the longer term ambitions for the CDDO and digital transformation in government.

True digital transformation can only be achieved with robust, reliable and accessible data. It is a crucial enabler which will make the UK the world-leading digital government we aspire to be. At the heart of this aim is better, more personalised and responsive services for citizens, improving the government's approach to policy and decision-making, and bringing efficiencies for government, saving taxpayer money.

By building a truly joined-up and interoperable data ecosystem for government, we will improve the way government collects, uses and shares data. This will benefit citizens and government by providing them with tailored and responsive public services,

We need to tackle the issues that are stopping us from using data on tap.

Data is too often stuck in silos within departments and agencies – there are also other legislative, technical and security blockers which stop us from sharing data. Crucially, there isn't enough of the right talent and tools in place which means that even when data is made available, we aren't able to take full advantage of new technologies that could not only help us fix current issues, but predict and more effectively manage future challenges.

Through the CDDO, we intend to tackle this long-standing issue head on. We will do this by establishing a common data model for government with core data standards, reference data and policies. This will enable easier and ethical sharing of data.

We are also committed to transforming the way data is collected, managed and used across government. We intend to create a joined up and interoperable data infrastructure.

We have already made progress in this area as set out in the National Data Strategy published last year. At last year's Digital Government event, GDS launched plans for a GOV.UK Account, to enable a joined-up, proactive, efficient and personalised public services on GOV.UK. And later this morning, Ash Smith from the GDS Digital Identity team will be speaking about 'one login for government' – another step in harnessing the power of data to bring real-life benefits to users using government services. But we know there is still more to do, and CDDO has been established to tackle this.

CDDO is responsible for delivering the third mission of the National Data Strategy, transforming the government's use of data to drive efficiency and improve public services. In order to achieve this mission, there are some fundamental areas we need to focus on.

Firstly, we need to tackle the cultural and legal barriers to good quality data in government. We need to develop a clear understanding of what data is held and where, promote better data collection and efficient data sharing. So engaging with departments is critical – understanding their challenges and where the CDDO might provide immediate, tactical support to remove blockers.

Secondly, we must look at standards and assurance. We have already made great strides in this area, thanks to the Data Standards Authority, which was set up in April 2020 to improve how the public sector manages data.

For over a year now, the DSA has been working with experts across the public sector and devolved administrations, the private sector and academia, to identify, improve and help implement data standards that meet user needs and improve interoperability. The standards we have established now make it easier and more effective to share and use data across government.

An example of setting data standards is the API Catalogue, which collates a list of government APIs to help unblock issues such as reuse and data exchange. To continue the progress in this area, the DSA will continue to focus on setting and driving the adoption of standards for data, so it can lead to greater consistency, integrity and interoperability.

It will be important to link these data standards to spend controls and form a consensus on government data infrastructure and continuing to prioritise the wide and effective use of data across government through a reliable API ecosystem.

Thirdly, we will increase our accountability and responsibility for this work through new governance structures, and leveraging spend controls.

To achieve our ambitions, we of course need the right people in post and for them to be trained and upskilled to face the challenges ahead. This is our fourth area of focus, which I will talk about later about when I go through our plans for capability, leadership and culture.

And finally, and arguably most critically, we need to take the public on the journey with us, and place ethics and public trust at the core of our delivery.

We recently refreshed the UK's Data Ethics Framework, and are now embedding the Framework in various government processes and scoping opportunities for developing and promoting data ethics skills.

We are also committed to the open data agenda, and through our transparency will retain the trust and confidence of the public.

In order to make the most of data we need to fix the elephant in the room — legacy IT. Because as long as we continue to rely on outdated systems and technology, we will be unable to fully harness the opportunities of emerging technologies and modern digital solutions.

This is a problem felt across the public sector. And a core reason the Central Digital and Data Office has been established is to work across government to define the future for HMG's technology estate and to clarify priorities and roadmaps for dealing with red-rated legacy IT.

Although a decade of transformation has brought major improvements, approaches to technology across government have not yet been sufficiently modernised, or joined up enough, to support our ambition. Despite departments separately taking steps to transform, single departmental accountability, sub-optimal procurement and varied approaches have allowed siloed and restrictive architectures to develop.

Too many systems are disconnected, offer poor user experience and are insufficiently responsive to deliver at pace. Teams struggle to collaborate because systems are not interoperable and built on open standards.

This is not a new issue, and we know much more needs to be done to address it. Over the past year for example cross government working has raised the profile and understanding of legacy leading to the investment of more than £600 million at the last spending review to address critical risks — but this is only one step.

Addressing legacy remains a key focus. Our next phase of work will build on what we have done so far, further identifying legacy assets and agreeing

prioritisation and funding while working with departments to develop roadmaps for addressing risks. Removing legacy IT also achieves value for money by removing excessive costs to support out of date technology.

Progress has also been made moving to cloud, but generally in a siloed way, with the result that many systems stand on different, disconnected cloud architectures with disparate ways of working, while some departments remain locked in to inefficient legacy data centres.

In order to work collaboratively there needs to be clarity on what should be done consistently, and what should be allowed to vary, and then managing compliance with the approach. So we will shortly be starting discovery work to understand the most effective way of aligning and assuring technology strategies and roadmaps with careful consideration given to existing cross-government assurance structures and of course all of our past experience.

We want to ensure that interoperable IT supports improvements to collaborative working across the Civil Service. So we will develop a framework and a blueprint for our office systems that provides a baseline and allows us to monitor progress towards better interoperability. In the future, no new IT systems will be created without consideration of interoperability with other relevant government systems.

Our vision is for highly capable and interoperable systems, with plug and play technology that allows products and components to be swapped in and out as technologies, legislation and ways of working change and advance. This is vital to meet new challenges and serve different users flexibly, at pace, and in line with changing needs and expectations. For government, it will support more agile ways of working, along with more efficient and better organisational outcomes. For citizens, it will lead to improved services and ensure that the experience when interacting with the government is much more akin to what they are used to from the private sector.

To achieve this vision we need to continue with the work to integrate agile ways of working across government. Citizens should be involved in the services we're building for them from the first stages of concept design through to the service going live. Many teams across government are already working along agile lines because it allows them to build and test quickly, iterating their work based on regular feedback from users. It puts users first and means services are much more responsive to the needs of the public, and able to respond quickly to policy changes.

The CDDO will promote agile ways of working across government, specifically in digital projects and programmes. To do this we want to build capability and equip all civil servants with the digital skills required to lead and run modern organisations. We want to continue the work we've been doing with HMT for a number of years to improve the business case process and introduce a common set of KPIs to measure how agile services and teams are performing.

Using agile puts users first and means services are able to respond quickly to policy changes and the needs of the public.

Having the right digital skills underpins everything we want to do. So continuing to invest in building more capability within the Digital, Data and Technology Profession is vital. Over 18,000 civil servants work in this profession and we want people to see working in government as a destination of choice for their career. As part of this we'll be increasing opportunities across the UK through the creation of jobs outside London and investment in apprenticeships and training as we build back better.

Equally important is looking at career development opportunities and making sure the right incentives are in place to encourage people to pursue engineering and other specialities. Alongside regularly reviewing things like the DDaT pay framework to make sure we remain competitive.

Finally there is an ambition to make more of our early talent programmes like the DDaT Fast Stream, with potential for university feeder courses and building tech hubs across the country to help seed local technology ecosystems being explored.

But looking beyond the DDaT Profession, we need digital skills and understanding across all levels of government – we need to bring everyone along on this journey. So improving the digital and data literacy of all civil servants and members of government, particularly senior leaders, is crucial to realising the ambition of having world leading digital services and the next phase of digital transformation. It is central to the effective running of any modern organisation.

We also need to be able to continually monitor and understand how digital services are being used by citizens, and the benefits they are giving. This is not just so we can constantly iterate and evolve them, but key to ensuring the UK has a world leading digital offer.

The UK is rightly recognised as a global digital leader, we consistently rank in the top ten worldwide in international digital government rankings. The UK is currently ranked 2nd in the OECD's Digital Government Index, 7th in the UN's E-Government Development Index and 1st in the Open Data Barometer.

But we don't want to stop there. Our aim now is to build on these achievements and ensure the UK becomes the world's leading digital government, our citizens deserve nothing less.

To help achieve this the CDDO are exploring what a cross-government performance framework should look like and how this can be used to track and report progress.

This framework will include a set of outcome focused metrics to be used consistently across government with a central approach to monitoring and reporting progress.

We need to move away from building and monitoring in isolation, or in silos, now we must build together.

So those are our priorities for the first year, but we must also prepare for the pace of transformation to be sustained and continue into the future. It

will come as no surprise to hear that the CDDO have been giving a lot of thought around what our longer term goals should be.

Many services have been improved over the past decade, but all too often it has not been the end-to-end transformation that is now required. CDDO, working with departments and GDS, will explore how services and departments work together to cover major life events and where the join up should be. This ties into wider government ambitions to reduce multiple logins through GOV.UK Accounts.

Current government funding models are largely designed to support project work within departments. With projects, you generally know exactly what you will build upfront, but Digital, Data and Technology products are often created in an iterative way, so this is a bit of a different approach and requires a different funding approach too. We need to try to bring together ways of funding Digital, Data and Technology that allow for innovation and flexibility across departments, as well as provide enough certainty that government money is being spent in the right ways. The CDDO will be working with HMT to explore options and ways to do this, including agile business case approaches, promotion of cross-department solutions, and outcome based accountability.

With our new found procurement freedoms from exiting the EU the CDDO, working with the Crown Commercial Service, will strengthen commercial technology skills and create a sourcing playbook to support departments who need to bring in services or specific skills. We're also keen to hear from departments to understand the appetite for joint procurement.

We don't want to just simplify procurement though, we need to develop genuine partnerships with strategic suppliers and ensure the focus is on outcomes and value delivered.

Thank you for listening and giving me this opportunity to introduce the mission and priorities of the CDDO.

There is a lot still to do — and with the creation of the CDDO, and all of our commitment and determination, I know we are up for the challenge. There is so much we can achieve by working together, sharing our knowledge, experience and expertise, to shape and deliver digital transformation. And for all of us there could be no greater prize than to improve people's experience of government, and through that change people's lives — for good.