

Digital by Default

What is Digital by Default?

- The [Government Digital Strategy](#) defines Digital by Default in its introduction: “Digital by default means digital services which are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use digital services will choose to do so, while those who can’t are not excluded.”¹

National Context

- In 2010 the Government’s Digital Champion, Martha Lane Fox, produced a strategic review of Directgov ([Directgov 2010 and Beyond: Revolution Not Evolution](#)). Contained within the review was the following view: “for me, the acid test for Directgov is whether it can **empower, and make life simpler for, citizens** and at the same time allow government to **turn other things off.**”²
- Gov.uk was launched on 17 October 2012, replacing Directgov. The site now acts as the web-page for all 24 of the ministerial departments in central government. Other governmental departments and public bodies have also based their services with gov.uk and the intention is that it will centralise digital services for more in the future.
- At this stage there is no plan to extend gov.uk to cover local authorities’ digital services. However, there is an acknowledgement within the Government Digital Strategy that: “in order to provide public services digitally by default, all public bodies will need to work together. Most public services are provided by local organisations such as local councils and the NHS. People often use a range of services, not just one at a time. Most people and businesses don’t differentiate between different levels and types of public services; they just want a good service.”³
- There is also the following commitment to “make the digital assets (standards, designs and code) generated as a result of this strategy widely available.”⁴

¹ Cabinet Office, [Government Digital Strategy](#), November 2012

² Cabinet Office, [Directgov 2010 and Beyond: Revolution Not Evolution](#), Martha Lane Fox, 14 October 2010

³ Cabinet Office, [Government Digital Strategy](#), November 2012

⁴ Ibid.

National Savings

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- Martha Lane Fox's review estimated that: "shifting 30% government service delivery contacts to digital channels would deliver gross annual saving of more than £1.3 billion, rising to £2.2 billion if 50% of contacts shifted to digital."⁵ These figures were provided by the Efficiency and Reform Group (ERG), but the National Audit Office has since challenged the methodology on which many of these savings are being calculated⁶.
- The view that the savings assumptions connected to "channel shift" over to digital services need to be reviewed is also supported by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee⁷, as indicated in their letter to Francis Maude, MP, dated 9 July 2013.
- This letter also highlights several concerns around the security of data, awareness and uptake of digital services, ID assurance, data accuracy and public confidence. The Government is expected to respond in writing to these points by October 2013.
- The Cabinet has set out a number of areas that savings can be made by adopting a digital by default approach. These are:
 - total employment costs of those providing the service, including training
 - estate and accommodation
 - postage, printing and telecommunications
 - office equipment, including technology systems⁸
- The Digital Efficiency Report estimates 78% of the savings will be made through a reduction in total employment costs.
- The Government Digital Strategy does acknowledge there is a potential to reduce costs for local councils: "A 2012 SOCITM study across 120 local councils estimated that the cost of contact for face to face transactions averages £8.62, for phone £2.83, but for web only 15 pence."⁹
- However, the National Audit Office has commented that "the savings estimate does not include the costs that may be required to create or redesign digital services."¹⁰

⁵ Cabinet Office, [Directgov 2010 and Beyond](#)

⁶ National Audit Office, [The 2012-13 savings reported by the Efficiency and Reform Group](#), 8 July 2013, p.45-47,

⁷ "It is not evident to the Committee that the Government has a handle on measuring these savings." House of Commons, [Letter to Francis Maude, MP](#), Science and Technology Committee, 9 July 2013

⁸ Cabinet Office, [Digital Efficiency Report](#), November 2012

⁹ Cabinet Office, [Government Digital Strategy](#), November 2012

¹⁰ National Audit Office, [Digital Britain 2: Putting users at the heart of the government's digital services](#), 28 March 2013, p.6