



# **Digital by Default**

## **Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee Briefing**

3 October 2013

## What do we mean when we talk about digital by default?

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There have been lots of interpretations of ‘Digital by Default’ since Francis Maude coined the phrase in his response to Martha Lane Fox’s report on Digital within Government.

Sadly some interpretations have led many to believe that he meant services should be delivered online only. This was not the case. What was meant is that the way government delivers services, including all back end office process, should be reviewed with digital capability in mind. Reviewing entire agencies’ operations and automating process via digital technology solutions streamlines the time it takes to do the administration around the service and thus reduces significantly the man-hours required to support it. The Cabinet Office 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 systems<sup>1</sup>

There are additional financial benefits to putting some transactional services online for our customers to use: “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.”<sup>2</sup>

## What is happening in central government?

As part of the [Government Digital Strategy](#), the seven government departments that handle the majority of central government transactions agreed to each develop at least three “digital exemplars” services.

As of July 2013, 25 services were identified as exemplars. 13 were in development, 11 in testing and 1 was live.<sup>3</sup> The progress of these can be tracked through the [Digital Transformation Dashboard](#).

Student finance is the first exemplar service to go live. It has estimated 1.16 million transactions per year in the first quarter of 2013, and estimates its digital

<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office, [Digital Efficiency Report](#), November 2012

<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Office, [Government Digital Strategy](#), November 2012

<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Office, [Government Digital Services \(GDS\) July 2013 Quarterly Progress Report](#), July 2013

take-up at 92.4%.<sup>4</sup> Further work is now being done to replace all its back end systems including the technology to manage its £80m loan book.

DVLA is undergoing significant transformation. They have 40 years of legacy IT supporting their business. They were due to spend £250m to maintain and support these systems for the next 5 years. Since Cabinet Office involvement significant savings having been made against that figure and a low-risk digital technology approach to moving away from those legacy systems has been put in place. The first exemplar to be delivered is [View my driving record](#).

DWP's Carer's Allowance Unit is also being transformed. Both the online application and the back-end systems are being overhauled. Efficiency savings within the business are expected to be at over 50%. This is being achieved by streamlining and automating much of the administration process.

## What are other public sector organisations doing?

Many organisations have started digital transformation by redesigning and re-platforming their website. Whilst it's important to have a good and useful website, it doesn't deliver the largest of savings and should be seen as a stepping stone to putting some transactional services online and therefore driving efficiency.

However, a well designed website can reduce contact centre traffic, and increase trust in the organisation's ability to deliver. Smart answers and basic tools will help customers get to the information they need quickly even in complex policy areas. Good examples of website redesign are [Gov.uk](#) and [Lambeth Council](#)

The London Borough of Hounslow, however, did not put their website redesign first. They selected Salesforce.com to help it harness social, mobile and cloud-based solutions in the delivery of services for residents of the borough. The strategy, to begin this year, will reportedly save £600,000 in the current financial year, with further savings to come as legacy applications are retired. The majority of the project is expected to be completed during the first quarter of 2014. To date they are the first council to look at a digital platform approach to transformation. What is meant by this is a whole council holistic approach to building and procuring digital software, not siloed around services as is the norm. This alternative approach means maximum efficiency can be achieved, but requires an appetite for huge cultural change within an organisation.

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<sup>4</sup> Figures taken from the Cabinet Office's [Page 10s Explorer](#) (accessed 14 August 2013)

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