



National Audit Office

Cross government

Digital Britain One: Shared
infrastructure and services for
government online

Detailed Methodology

DECEMBER 2011

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Introduction

1 This document accompanies Digital Britain One: Shared infrastructure and services for government online, a report published by the Comptroller and Auditor General on 9 December 2011. It adds further details to the description of the methodology included in the main report at Appendix One.

2 The purpose of the report is to evaluate the value for money of the Government's investment in shared online infrastructure and services, and of the website rationalisation programme which has accompanied this.

3 The subjects of our evaluation were:

- the Government Gateway (managed by the Department for Work and Pensions);
- the web services Directgov (Cabinet Office) and Business.gov (HM Revenue & Customs); and
- the rationalisation of the Government's websites (managed on behalf of the Cabinet Office by the Central Office of Information).

4 We also examined the Government's new digital strategy, the development of the Government Digital Service (GDS) within the Cabinet Office and plans for the 'single domain'.

5 The study team was composed of NAO staff supported by a specialist ICT consultant, seconded to the team throughout the fieldwork and preparation of our draft report.

Our analytical framework and its application to Gateway, Directgov and Business.gov

6 We asked the consultancy, Amtec, to develop an analytical framework that we could use to assess the operational effectiveness that Gateway, Directgov and Business.gov have achieved for the resources invested. The framework gauges performance in six areas through declarative statements that highlight the features and characteristics expected of well formed and optimised processes. An outline of the framework is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1

National Audit Office framework for assessing operational effectiveness

1 Business model

- 1.1 A clear and agreed strategy exists with optimal benefits.
- 1.2 An agreed business case exists, is funded and is sustainable.

2 Implementation and performance management

- 2.1 The service has been built on sound foundations.
- 2.2 The service operates according to its target model.

3 Service management

- 3.1 An effective service management regime includes acting as an intelligent customer.
- 3.2 Multiple customers are engaged in service management and evolution.

4 People framework

- 4.1 Resources are able to manage operations as well as change.
- 4.2 Capability is nurtured and developed.

5 Process framework

- 5.1 There is an agreed service offering.
- 5.2 There is clear end to end process definition, control and ownership.

6 Technology

- 6.1 The service is supported by the right enabling technology.
- 6.2 Arrangements are in place to handle legacy systems and data.

Source: National Audit Office

7 We collected evidence from Government Gateway, the Central Office of Information, Cabinet Office, Directgov and Business.gov, between June and September 2011. The key methodologies we used were:

- semi-structured interviews;
- document review; and
- financial and quantitative analyses.

Semi-structured interviews

8 We conducted semi-structured interviews with a range of staff. We selected staff for interview by reviewing the organisations' structure charts to ensure appropriate coverage of all key functions. Each interview was carried out by two members of the NAO team. These interviews explored:

- governance arrangements through which strategic planning is conducted and operational delivery overseen;
- management information made available to each organisations' leadership team;
- metrics used to evaluate organisational performance;
- risk management processes;
- the design of operational processes in areas such as publishing, interface design, quality assurance, helpdesk and feedback monitoring;
- structures and processes used to deliver programmes and projects;
- the key contract management processes in place to manage spend with outsourcing partners and suppliers;
- activities undertaken to obtain and monitor stakeholder and customer feedback;
- quality assurance and continuous improvement processes; and
- performance of the technology used, and the current stage in its lifecycle.

9 We recorded the interviews using a standard template which identified points for clarification and documentary sources requested.

Document review

10 We requested and reviewed a wide range of documentation on Government Gateway, Directgov and Business.gov, including:

- Minutes of meetings attended by senior officials and the submissions made at those meetings. These enabled us to understand how financial and operational performance of each service was tracked by the leadership team and how remedial actions were formulated and delivered.
- Management reports, performance dashboards and presentations of key performance information to provide us with an overview of the key measures used by each organisation in performance monitoring.

- Strategy and planning documentation, which we used as evidence to assess the degree to which each organisation had a clear direction and roadmap going forward.
- Internal audit reports and third party benchmarking exercises – to identify weaknesses in structures and processes which had been highlighted by others. We followed up issues identified in these reports to establish how they had been addressed by the time of our review.
- Architectural documentation – to gain an understanding of the underlying technology platforms and to enable us to understand how the technology was supporting key business processes and the approaches taken to achieve high availability and resilience.
- Market research, customer insight and survey data – to understand how well the organisations understood their stakeholders and customers. We also used this material to gauge the impact that change had on these organisations, and how it affected the standing of these organisations among their stakeholders and customers.
- Business cases for Directgov and Business.gov and for selected developmental projects for the services – to establish the original goals which had been set for the organisations and their performance against them.

Financial and quantitative analyses

11 We analysed budget allocations, actual expenditure and key performance indicators, to understand:

- the annual operational costs of the services;
- the levels of investment committed to major projects and initiatives;
- the benefits model and the level of benefits realised from both major projects and business-as-usual operation;
- the profile of expenditure on internal and external resources;
- the allocation of expenditure made with each organisations' main suppliers and managed partners;
- the performance of the services in terms of availability and security;
- unit cost metrics such as cost per visit; and
- the details and impact of website convergence.

The website rationalisation programme

12 We interviewed Central Office of Information staff and reviewed relevant documentation, to understand the process of website rationalisation and the data reported by COI annually on the costs and performance of government websites.

13 We analysed past government announcements on the ongoing status of its website estate and the progress made in closing and rationalising websites.

14 We also accessed the Government web archive, held at the National Archives, to analyse the current status of the Government's website estate, in particular the numbers of websites that have closed.

The new digital strategy, the Government Digital Service and the 'single domain'

15 We interviewed Government Digital Service and Cabinet Office staff and reviewed relevant documentation, to understand the Government's new digital strategy, the development of the GDS and future plans for the 'single domain'.

Literature review

16 We reviewed private sector literature and research from the ICT industry analysts Gartner and Ovum and the local government ICT body, the Society of Information and Technology Management (SOCITM), to identify modern approaches using digital technology and to establish best practice in areas such as web analytics and portal development.

17 We monitored government news, announcements and releases of related strategies to understand the likely impact on the Government's strategy.

18 We also drew on our previous value for money reports that have looked at the Government's presence on the internet and its use of the web. These are available on the National Audit Office website (www.nao.org.uk/publications).