



Audit Scotland report: Enabling digital government

Committee Audit and Standards

Date of meeting 30 August 2019

Date of report 17 July 2019

Report by Assistant Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To advise the committee on the issue of an Audit Scotland report titled '*Enabling digital government*'.

2. Background

Audit Scotland report

In June 2019, Audit Scotland published a report titled "*Enabling digital government*".

The report says that there has been some good early progress towards putting digital at the heart of everything government does. Guidance has been introduced to ensure new services are designed around the needs of citizens.

The report adds that the Scottish Government does not know how much investment is needed to achieve the ambitious aims set out in its 2017 digital strategy and lacks a complete picture of which actions have had the most impact to date and where the gaps are. This makes it difficult to prioritise what to work on.

The report adds that a new government assurance framework is helping individual projects reduce the risks historically associated with public sector IT projects. But a digital skills shortage in Scotland and across government has meant there has not been enough staff to share common lessons learned. This remains a barrier to progress.

The full report can be found at:

<https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/enabling-digital-government>

3. Outline of findings

The world is changing at a fast pace, and digital technology is a key driver. New technology makes it possible to do things that were not imagined ten years ago. For the public sector it offers governments the opportunity to change how they deliver public services and interact with citizens. But it also requires governments to behave differently to make the most of

these opportunities. Improving public services in today's world is more about changing cultures to embrace uncertainty, to put citizens' needs at the heart of service delivery, and to truly collaborate across organisations and sectors. Building a digital government is the responsibility of all public bodies, but vision and leadership need to come from the centre.

Digital technologies are required daily to keep organisations functioning and delivering public services, often to the most vulnerable in society. Governments need to be able to predict and react quickly to emerging technology, and help public bodies understand how this could be used to improve outcomes for citizens. Governments also need to assess what risks new technology brings and put appropriate safeguards in place.

Key messages

The key messages outlined in the Audit Scotland report are:

- digital technology has the potential to help make public services better for Scotland's citizens. The Scottish Government set out an ambitious new digital strategy for Scotland in 2017. Building a digital government is an important part of that vision and is challenging, requiring all public bodies to work together. Some good initiatives have been introduced to enable change and there are examples of progress, but these are at early stages;
- the Scottish Government needs to demonstrate more effective strategic leadership to encourage and promote digital government. It could do more to support organisations across the public sector to work more collaboratively with each other and with the third sector and industry. This might include establishing effective cross-sectoral forums to plan, share knowledge and information, and identify how different programmes interact with each other. The Scottish Government plays a leading role in identifying common platforms for use across the public sector, and in considering how best to deliver these;
- the Scottish Government does not have a complete picture of what has been achieved across the public sector so far, including which actions have had the most impact and where there are gaps in progress. And it does not know how much public money is being invested across the public sector to achieve the strategy's actions, or what is needed to fully deliver on its ambition. This means it cannot properly prioritise the work that will make the biggest impact on public services and learn from experience;
- the shortage of specialist digital skills makes prioritising limited resources more important. The Scottish Government provides digital guidance to public bodies, such as involving users in service design, but needs to more effectively anticipate and plan for the increased demand for new digital skills that new approaches create. The Scottish Government has developed training for existing staff and created new career paths, but a significant skills gap remains;
- a new digital assurance framework is helping individual projects to address the risks historically faced by public sector ICT projects, but the Scottish Government has not had enough staff to share common lessons learned. Its Digital Directorate has not effectively prioritised which projects it can make the biggest difference to, or clearly communicated what support it can offer. It introduced new procedures to improve how it prioritises projects during 2018.

Recommendations

To deliver its vision for digital government the Scottish Government should:

- articulate its strategic leadership role more clearly by facilitating a more collaborative approach and assuring itself that it has an appropriate level of investment and skills to fulfil this role;
- ensure leadership has the technical foresight to understand technology developments and what this means for the public sector and the role of the Scottish Government;
- ensure there is enough flexibility built into recruitment and procurement processes to cope with the fast-paced nature of digital transformation;
- keep the new governance and monitoring arrangements under review to ensure they provide the required oversight and challenge of progress. This includes ensuring that there is an appropriate strategic forum to facilitate shared planning, prioritisation and action across the public sector;
- jointly map out all significant digital programmes over time across the public sector to better prioritise and coordinate activities and people. This should include any interdependencies with the national platforms under development to ensure workforce, procurement and delivery plans are realistic and understood;
- draw upon the knowledge and experience of other organisations and governments. This should include learning how similar forums across government, for example Council of Economic Advisors and International Council of Education Advisors, have been created to provide access to knowledge and expertise.

To better support central government digital programmes and ensure value for money is delivered, the Scottish Government should:

- communicate the Digital Directorate support service to central government bodies so they know what services are available;
- ensure that the new integrated assurance team has the required people and skills to perform reviews and share lessons learned more widely;
- ensure that all major project reviews and Digital First assessments are reviewed by an equivalent to the Chief Information Officer to ensure quality and consistency; and keep the framework and Digital First Service Standard under review to ensure they remain relevant;
- focus on developing commercial and programme and project management skills as well as digital skills.

SPT's response to the Audit Scotland report

SPT is on a journey to digitally transform service provision.

The key messages outlined in the Audit Scotland report will affect SPT and service delivery.

The Assistant Chief Executive has recently completed the Scottish Government's digital champions programme and leads on SPT's digital change agenda.

Progress reports have and will continue to be presented to members.

4. Conclusions

Audit Scotland published a report titled '*Enabling digital government*' in June 2019.

5. Committee action

The committee is asked to note the contents of this report and the Audit Scotland report titled '*Enabling digital government*'.

6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>None.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>None.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>As detailed in the report.</i>

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