

Preparations for the new Parliamentary Digital Service

Paper from the Preparation Team

Purpose

1. This paper sets out our views and recommendations on the governance of the Digital Service and the recruitment of the Head of Digital. It is intended to assist the Management Boards to take the decisions necessary to launch the recruitment of the Head of Digital and to propose further areas of work which we think are necessary to prepare for his or her arrival in post.

The preparation team

2. The preparation team (members listed at the end of this paper) was set up in April. In preparing this paper we have engaged extensively with staff at all levels in PICT, WIS and other parts of the two Houses. We have also discussed the issues raised in creating the Digital Service with Gartner (a specialist technology research firm); Denise McDonagh, Chief Technology Officer at the Home Office and external member of PICTAB; staff and members of the Digital Democracy Commission; and senior staff from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the John Lewis Partnership. More internal and external engagement work is planned, including with the Government Digital Service, mySociety and the BBC. In addition, members of the team have assisted with the identification of recruitment consultants who can assist with the recruitment of the Head of Digital.
3. The team has also collated and responded to the feedback (both internal and external) received in response to the mySociety report on Parliament's online services and the announcement by the Clerks about the creation of the Digital Service. The feedback summary is annexed to this note (annex 2).

Action for the Boards

4. The Management Boards are invited to:
 - Agree the aspirations for the Digital Service (paragraph 6)
 - Agree that a steering group should be established to begin development of a digital strategy for Parliament (paragraph 8)
 - Consider whether the Boards should hold a joint away day to consider the draft digital strategy, once the new Head of Digital is in post (paragraph 8)
 - Consider whether the new Service should be a joint department or a shared service (paragraph 13-16) and that a governance review of the new Service be held in 2017 (paragraph 22)
 - Consider whether the head of the new Service should serve on both Management Boards (paragraphs 17-21) and what line management arrangements should apply (paragraphs 23-25)
 - Agree the title for the new postholder, the grading and salary band of the role and the proposed recruitment process, including the use of recruitment consultants and when recruitment should begin (paragraphs 25-27 and 30-33)
 - Note the likely gap between the departure of D-PICT and the start date of the head of the new Service and agree that a process for identifying an acting D-PICT be started (paragraph 28)
 - Agree that the Digital Service should be launched when the Head of Digital begins work, with TUPE moves timed accordingly (paragraph 29)
 - Agree that this paper and the Boards' decisions should be communicated to staff as soon as possible (paragraph 37)
 - Agree the Preparation Team's further workstreams (paragraphs 9, 34, and 38)
 - Consider the draft application pack and sign-off process (paragraph 30 and Annex 1).

Rationale for creating the Digital Service

5. In their statement to the staff of PICT and the Web and Intranet Service (WIS), the two Clerks said that their vision for the Digital Service was:
 - To give priority to the needs of users of parliamentary data – Members, staff, and both specialist and generalist groups in the public – rather than the interests of producers;
 - To share and reuse the data our users need, in the form in which they need it; and
 - To make things happen more quickly, more simply and more electronically.

The Clerks also said that the two Houses should continue to take a shared approach to online services, to meet the needs of users, achieve value for money, and fully exploit the talents of staff in both Houses.

6. Candidates for the role of Head of Digital will ask for more information about what the Management Boards wish to achieve by creating the new service. We propose the following aspirations for the Digital Service, which will form part of the context for the recruitment of the Head of Digital.

Aspirations for the Digital Service

- Parliament's presence on the web will meet the needs of all user groups, both internal and external, specialist and non-specialist, with increasing levels of satisfaction across the board, whilst achieving value for money.
- Parliamentary data will be easily accessible and will be made available to users in an open format for reuse allowing the value of Parliamentary data to be fully realised
- The Digital Service will meet the needs of all user groups in relation to the provision of IT equipment, infrastructure and support services to parliamentarians, their staff and parliamentary staff, wherever they are based, whilst achieving value for money.
- The Digital Service will facilitate and enable the development of digital capability across the whole of Parliament, working collaboratively with external agencies (such as Government departments) where necessary
- The working relationship between the Digital Service and other departments of the two Houses will be based on collaboration and mutual respect for the professionalism and expertise of staff in all parts of Parliament
- The work of the Digital Service will be driven by shared priorities agreed by the two Houses, with advice and support from the Service.
- The Digital Service will keep abreast of future technological developments, so that Members, their staff and parliamentary staff can make best use of the software, equipment and infrastructure available to them in their work.

We invite the Boards to discuss and agree their aspirations for the Digital Service.

7. Development of a digital strategy for Parliament should proceed as part of wider consideration of the strategies of the two House Services and should be owned by the Management Boards. This work should include further consideration of what "digital" means in the context of what the Boards wish to achieve during the course of the next Parliament. The strategy should draw on the considerable volume of feedback which has been received about what the Digital Service should seek to achieve. In addition, the incoming Head of Digital will want to have his or her say.

8. **We seek authority from the Boards to set up a steering group to begin development of a digital strategy for Parliament, co-ordinated with broader strategic thinking in both Houses. The Head of Digital should be involved with this work, once selected, and should bring the draft strategy to the Management Boards for consideration once in post. The Boards should consider holding a joint awayday in late 2014 / early 2015 to discuss the strategy, which would be a useful opportunity to explore the potential for exploiting the digital agenda in Parliament and the risks and constraints of doing so in our context.**
9. There are examples from other Parliaments of successful digital innovation which we could usefully draw on, particularly in relation to how digital engagement with the general public is combined with services for more specialist audiences. One example is the new website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which we describe in the box below. Dr Cristina Leston-Bandeira, a Digital Democracy Commissioner and the leading expert in this area, has offered to assist us in identifying other best practice. **We propose to undertake further work on international best practice to assist the development of Parliament's digital strategy.**

Case study: the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) launched a new website last year <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/Home-EN.asp>.

Although the scale and profile of PACE are clearly very different from those of the United Kingdom Parliament, there are similarities in terms of political environment, the potential tension between procedural accuracy and public engagement, and the types of information which the website hosts.

Features of the PACE website which might be of particular interest at Westminster include the presentation of member details (sorted by a number of different criteria); the very effective search tool; and the balance struck between providing access to material for expert users and accessibility to the wider public.

The site was developed through collaboration between communications and IT staff, with some consultancy support. Clarity about the objectives of the new site was crucial to achieving a sense of shared ownership. Priority had been given to the quality of user experience including effective presentation on mobile devices.

Achieving consistently effective presentation of information drawn from a range of different sources had necessitated change in working practices, and this had been resisted. The key to progress had been a combination of strong top-down direction, together with a demonstrably high quality of product and delivery.

10. We consider that three related themes from the feedback to the mySociety report deserve to be emphasised at this stage. Firstly, senior leaders must be able to articulate clearly why the Digital Service is being created – and what would happen if it were not. In our view, particularly following our discussion with Gartner, this change is essential in order to ensure that Parliament remains relevant in a digital world (and, indeed, to regain some lost relevance). If we do not make this change, the disconnection between Parliament and the people we are here to serve will grow, undermining our democracy.
11. Secondly, there must be widespread recognition that the digital agenda is not simply a matter for technical staff, in PICT and WIS. It will affect staff across both Houses, particularly, but not exclusively, in those departments and offices which generate parliamentary data and content.
12. Thirdly, a number of respondents said that it was important for decisions by the Management Boards, arrived at following extensive discussion and feedback, to be fully implemented throughout both organisations and not blocked lower down. This is essential for the success of the Digital Service.

Joint department or shared service?

13. Feedback about the new Digital Service generally assumed that it would be constituted in the same form as PICT, as a Joint Department. Some people argued that the Joint Department model had worked well, particularly in terms of balancing the needs of the two Houses. Others questioned whether the Joint Department model had added bureaucracy and complexity, with PICT sometimes perceived as seeking to operate as an equal partner to the two Houses.
14. Two main practical considerations are relevant in deciding whether to retain the joint department structure for the Digital Service or to revert to a shared service model. Firstly, both options involve transferring staff from one employer to another (ie WIS staff (20 in total) to the joint department, or PICT staff (approx. 265 (220 core and 45 project funded) in total) to one or other House). In both scenarios, the current employer would be required under TUPE regulations to consult and inform staff about the change. There is no prescribed timetable for this but it would be good practice to allow a period of time which is in line with the consultation period for statutory redundancy situations – ie thirty days where fewer than one hundred staff are affected, ninety days for more than one hundred employees. **Transferring PICT staff to another employer would involve a significantly longer period for consultation, under TUPE regulations, than would transferring WIS staff.**

15. Secondly, **the Parliament (Joint Departments) Act 2007 would require abolition of PICT to be approved by the House of Commons Commission and by the House of Lords as a whole, on the basis of a recommendation from the House Committee.** Modifying and renaming the joint department would not require such approval if there was no “change to the overall character of the services provided by the joint department”. This would seem to apply in the case of the Digital Service because PICT’s remit was broadly defined (“To provide information and communications technology services to both Houses of Parliament and to carry out such functions related to those services as may be allocated to it by the Corporate Officers from time to time”).
- 16. In our view, any potential benefits from moving away from the current joint department model for the provision of IT and digital services are likely to be outweighed by the costs of a protracted timetable for doing so, involving more extensive input by Members than is necessary for an administrative decision of this sort. In addition, any perceived difficulties in the working relationship between PICT and the two Houses can be addressed by other means, without moving away from the current structure.**

Board membership?

17. Many respondents to the feedback exercise assumed that the Head of Digital will sit on both Management Boards, or argued that he or she should do so. Reasons for this included:
- The digital ambition expressed by the two Clerks might not be fully achievable if the Head of Digital does not have the clout and influence which board membership provides.
 - Moving away from Board membership could look like the role was being downgraded, compared to the current situation, calling into question senior commitment to digital change and thereby undermining staff morale.
 - The role will be less attractive to applicants if it does not involve Board membership.
18. All three recruitment consultants which have been approached about the Head of Digital vacancy have said that board membership would make the role more attractive to potential applicants. For example, one said:
- One signal that many will use to assess this organisational commitment is whether this is a Board appointment. If it is, then this symbolises the importance and commitment of the organisation to the change agenda. If it is not, this will

raise concerns about the ability to impact change. In some recent work membership of the Board has been a strong draw especially in the case of those who are considering taking a significant salary drop.

19. In contrast, the benefits of excluding the Head of Digital post from the Management Boards have not so far been articulated. It has been suggested to us that the Management Boards might usefully be slimmed down and that this change provides an opportunity to begin this process. However, we consider that this would be the wrong time to make such a change, given the transformative role the Head of Digital will play in enabling Parliament to address new challenges.
20. It has been suggested that the Head of Digital should not be a Board member but might be invited to attend meetings of the Management Boards when business relevant to their role is under discussion. The concerns noted above about influence, perception and recruitment would still apply in this case, although arguably to a lesser extent. With IT and digital issues increasingly central to the work of Parliament, the Head of Digital would be likely to attend every meeting of the two Boards.
21. **There are powerful arguments in favour of the Head of Digital being a member of both Boards, as D-PICT is now. Any move away from the current position would call into question senior commitment to the Digital Service's role; would be likely to damage morale in PICT and WIS; and would be likely to deter potential high-calibre applicants to the post.**

Governance review?

22. The Management Boards may wish to review the high-level governance of the Digital Service after two years' experience of the new arrangements. This would be an opportunity to assess whether the Boards' aspirations for the Digital Service were being realised and, if not, what further action ought to be taken. **We recommend that an intention to review the joint department structure and its relationship to the two Management Boards in 2017 be built into plans for the new service.**

Line management

23. As with Board membership, line management arrangements for the Head of Digital also send a signal to potential applicants and staff in the new Digital Service about the importance of the new organisation and its role to the two Houses. However, recruitment consultants have advised us that line management arrangements are likely to be of less importance to potential candidates than Board membership.

24. **Our preference would be for the Head of Digital to be line managed by the two Clerks, acting together.** This would signal the commitment of both Houses to the digital agenda, maximise the Head of Digital's influence across Parliament, and ensure that he or she could be held directly to account by the two Clerks for meeting the needs of both Houses. This arrangement would also reflect the status of the Head of Digital as an employee of both Corporate Officers, leading a service for which the two Clerks act as Accounting Officers.
25. Alternatively, the Head of Digital could be line managed by a member of one Board and counter-signed by someone from the other Board. If this arrangement were preferred, the Head of Digital's right of access to the two Clerks should be explicitly acknowledged.

Recruitment methodology and timetable

26. **The Boards must consider when to start the recruitment exercise.** We have explored various permutations of the recruitment timetable and concluded that there is no prospect of being able to conclude the process before the summer recess. **There are risks associated with starting a recruitment process in June and then pausing over August before resuming in September: DG HR and Change in the Commons has advised against doing this and recommends delaying the start of recruitment until September. The Boards will want to consider this option against the risks to morale and staffing in PICT and WIS of delaying recruitment until the autumn.**
27. Whenever recruitment is launched, it is likely that there will be a significant gap between D-PICT's retirement and the arrival of the new Head of Digital. Acting D-PICT will have a crucial role to play in delivering "business as usual" for PICT, particularly in relation to general election planning and other programmes and projects, and in working with us on preparations for the new Service. **Identification of an acting D-PICT should start shortly to cover the gap.**
28. **We recommend that the Digital Service should be launched when the Head of Digital starts work (subject to discussion of detailed arrangements with him or her). TUPE transfers should be timed to coincide with this start date.**

Job title, description and person specification

29. We have annexed to this note a working draft application pack (annex 1). We would welcome comments. Assuming that a recruitment consultant is engaged, the preparation team will work with them to finalise the job application pack. **The two Boards should agree on how the final pack should be signed off (eg by the two Clerks).**
30. The key difference between this job description and person specification and the equivalent material published for the recruitment of D-PICT is the emphasis on the Head of Digital's role in catalysing change across both Houses, to enable Parliament to take advantage of new digital tools and opportunities. Whereas D-PICT applicants had to have a "track record of achievement in ICT management" we suggest that applicants for this role must have "a strong track record of delivering transformational change to business technologies and processes to improve user satisfaction, whilst achieving value for money, as well as experience of current agile project management practices, open standards, cloud platforms and digital services". The Head of Digital need not be (and probably will not be) a technical expert, which is why the Chief Technology Officer role will be so significant. However, he or she must have a good understanding of digital technologies.
31. We have assumed that the new post will be graded SCS 2, the same level as the Director of PICT and commensurate with similar posts in the civil service. Once the Boards have agreed the draft job description we will arrange for it to be subject to the JESP process. The maximum pay for a SCS 2 post is around £125,000. As a comparator, it has been reported that, on recruitment in 2011, the annual salary of the head of the Government Digital Service was £142,000. Recruitment consultants advised that heads of digital in the private sector could expect to be paid upwards of £150,000 per annum, plus bonus, although it should be noted that our pension arrangements are more attractive than those likely to be available from private sector employers. **Are the Boards content to endorse these arrangements?**
32. Until now, the new post has been referred to as "Head of Digital" but there are other possible titles, including Director of Digital Services, Director General of Digital Services, or Chief Digital Officer – recognised elsewhere. It has been suggested to us that "Head of Digital" in other organisations is sometimes a relatively junior post. "Director of Digital Services" might be more appropriate in Parliament. **The Boards should decide whether to stick to Head of Digital Services or call it something else.**

Performance measures

33. A key element of the new arrangements will be the mechanisms by which the Head of Digital is accountable to users for the progress made in increasing their satisfaction with Parliament's digital offering. This is linked to the question of the new role's autonomy, which is itself related to the development of a digital strategy for Parliament and budgetary arrangements. **We would like to undertake further work on this issue, in conjunction with the development of a digital strategy and consideration of what other organisations do.**

Budget and headcount

34. Our working assumption, for budget and headcount, is that the new Service will begin with the same number of posts as are currently found in PICT and WIS (see paragraph 14) and the same budgetary arrangements as currently exist – in other words, a mix of resources under the direct control of the Head of Digital and some programme funding he or she must bid for from PICTAB (see paragraph 38).

35. The joint Management Boards meeting in May discussed the importance of ensuring that the Head of Digital is not locked into a medium term investment plan which they cannot influence until 2017-18. The Head of Digital must be able to gain access to additional funding for 2015-16 and beyond in order to make the changes necessary to do their job properly. Clarity about the extra funding which might be available would be helpful as applicants will want to know.

Communications

36. The success of the preparations for the new Digital Service, are as much about having an open and transparent discussion with affected staff and offices, as getting the recruitment and governance structure right. On this basis, **we would like to make the Board paper available internally during the week of 9 June. We would also like to work with internal communications teams in both Houses (who are represented on our team) to communicate the Boards' decisions as soon as is practicable.**

Further work

37. In addition to the issues which we have already said require further work, **we would like the Boards to authorise the following work streams for our project:**

- Sub-Board level governance of the Digital Service (reviewing the roles of PICTAB and the Information Management Board) and budget implications
- Transition planning for the launch of the new Service and induction arrangements for the Head of Digital
- Preparation of a job description for the role of Chief Technology Officer (to be signed off by the Head of Digital, once identified)
- Identification of staff across both Houses already engaged in digital service provision or planning, and how they will relate to the new Service.
- Engagement with senior leaders across the two Houses.

38. In our view, none of these issues need to be resolved before recruitment begins. The review of governance should be completed before the Head of Digital is appointed and we propose that we bring recommendations to the Boards in the autumn, alongside the outcome of our work on performance measures and an update on progress with the digital strategy. The other matters relate to the induction of the Head of Digital and, where necessary, could be signed off by the two Clerks.

Financial and procurement implications

39. There are no financial or procurement implications at this stage (other than the recommendation to use recruitment consultants and the points about budgetary arrangements discussed in paragraph 36).

Consultation and equality analysis

40. For further details about feedback see annex 2. The preparation team will commission an equality analysis.

Risk management

41. The preparation team has prepared a draft risk register. Formal project documentation will be finalised in June.

29 May 2014

Annex 1: draft application pack

Note: this is based on the published GDS Head of Digital application pack. Highlighted areas reflect gaps or issues for further thought.

Dear Applicant,

Thank you for expressing interest in the **Director of Digital Services** position.

[contextual information about Parliament and the decision to establish the DS]

This is a rare opportunity to lead a large-scale programme of change that will reposition the two Houses of Parliament strategically to put digital delivery at the forefront of what we do, putting the needs of users first.

Our vision is that staff should work together across departmental and organisational boundaries to make things happen more quickly, more simply and more electronically, building on the work already being done to share and reuse the data our users need, in the form in which they need it. In doing this, we will provide the services and support which Members need to fulfil their Parliamentary duties effectively, which staff need to carry out their day-to-day work supporting the two Houses, and which the public want, whether they are first-time or occasional visitors to our services or have a more specialised and informed interest, as in Government, the legal profession, lobby groups or academia.

We are looking for candidates who can apply their on the ground experience of enabling the transformation of organisations, not those who will maintain the status quo. The **Director of Digital Services** will be an executive with the operating experience, management skills, strategic mindset and vision to help lead Parliament into an increasingly digital future. Their task will be guided by some fundamental principles; putting the needs of users first, focusing on delivery and outcomes over process, and making the most of openness - open standards, open data and **open markets**.

The **Director of Digital Services** will deliver world-class digital services on a modern technological footing based on user needs, alongside the continued provision of high-quality, reliable and user friendly ICT services to Members of Parliament, their staff and Staff in both Houses.

The success of the chosen candidate will ultimately be measured against their delivery of the next generation of digital services, and a culture shift that drives change to digital services across both Houses.

The role of the Director of Digital Services is to:

- Provide strong, visionary leadership, contributing to the development of Parliament's digital strategy, in line with the Strategies of both Houses, and delivering that strategy. [Leader, across Parliament] [need to clarify if on Boards]
- Lead a Digital Service which delivers a wide range of programmes, projects and services that support the work of Members of Parliament, their staff and parliamentary staff, enabling all of these groups to make best use of IT infrastructure, applications and new ways of working to perform their various roles efficiently and effectively. [Leader of dept]
- Define the long-term strategic goals of the Digital Service, to ensure that digital services designed to meet user needs and be iteratively improved over time are at the heart of the department's interactions with Parliamentary users, other specialist users and the public. [strategy for dept, digital at heart]
- Provide strategic oversight for the parliamentary website, the primary portal for interaction between Parliament and the public it serves.
- Embed a sustainable digital capability across the Digital Service, and support a complementary culture change strategy across both Houses, to widen all staff's awareness and exploitation of digital approaches and tools.
- Make full use of agile and collaborative development techniques to ensure that Parliament's digital services are exemplars in their field, whilst achieving value for money. [less bureaucracy, more collaboration]
- Support the flexible, cost effective delivery of Parliament's technology estate by working with the CTO, delivering high quality, reliable and user friendly ICT services to Members of Parliament and Staff in both Houses. [ICT, relationship with CTO]
- Work with digital leaders across international parliamentary bodies, the UK public sector and wider industry to share best practice. Seek to exploit open standards to deliver solutions that support digital services. [best practice]

Sentence on accountability – to the two Clerks as accounting officer; [separately to line manager/CSO?]; to users in Parliament and beyond via performance measures

Person Specification

The successful candidate will be an exceptional leader with the proven ability to set a strong direction and convey a persuasive future vision at all levels of an organization.

He or she will have a strong track record of delivering transformational change to business technologies and processes to improve user satisfaction, whilst achieving value for money, as well as experience of current agile project management practices, open standards, cloud platforms and digital services.

Previous experience of leadership in the public sector is not required, but you will be expected to quickly get up to speed with Parliament's existing culture and processes - not least so you are in a stronger position to shape and develop that culture around the delivery of digital services.

We are looking for a candidate with the ability to:

- Create and lead a Digital Service that is viewed as an exemplar of high quality digital transformation across the public sector and beyond, making it an enviable environment to work in
- Manage senior stakeholders, both internally and externally, and have confidence in dealing with, and influencing, senior officials and Members of Parliament, and producing clear and non-technical advice on complex issues
- Be highly articulate and credible at the most senior level across and outside Parliament, consistently delivering inspiring, engaging and meaningful messages about the future direction;
- Ensure that the Digital Service's staffing and organisational structures meet Parliament's changing digital requirements, and identify and argue persuasively for any additional resources which might be required to ensure user needs are met.
- Develop and embed a culture of collaborative working across Parliament to ensure that digital services are planned, developed and delivered in a timely and cost-effective manner;

- Build a performance culture that is orientated to tangible delivery outcomes and which is based on flexibility, innovation and responsiveness to user needs.
- Champion the strategic importance of people, talent management and development issues, building a strong culture of continuous learning and knowledge sharing between specialists and generalists;

The successful candidate must be digitally literate and capable of effectively engaging with technical staff, suppliers and stakeholders to define the best approach to service design to meet user needs. Detailed technical expertise is not essential, but the ability to manage technical staff and ask the right questions is a minimum requirement. He or she must have a high degree of market awareness, with demonstrable experience of innovative approaches to procuring services and of managing relationships with suppliers. Awareness and understanding of industry standard security issues and processes is also essential.

Annex 2: emerging themes from feedback

Parliament's new Digital Service: emerging themes from feedback

Background

Following a review by [mySociety of Parliament's online services](#) the Commons and Lords Management Boards decided to:

- establish a new Digital Service bringing together the management of all online and ICT services into a single organisation; and
- appoint a Head of Digital to run that organisation, publicly accountable for delivering measurably rising levels of satisfaction with Parliament's digital services from Members, staff and the public.

The Boards asked for feedback on the mySociety report, and these decisions, to help guide and inform the establishment of the Digital Service.

As 8 May 2014, 59 individual and team submissions were received by the team set up to prepare for the [Digital Service](#) from the following sources:

PICT	WIS	Other departments	Members	External
23	8	15	4	9

This note sets out the main themes which have emerged from the feedback. It will be considered by the Management Boards when they discuss the governance of the Digital Service and the recruitment of the Head of Digital, in June. Once the outline job description for the new role has been agreed, recruitment can begin. It is unlikely that a new Head of Digital could be recruited in time to join us before Joan Miller retires as Director of PICT in September. We will also be inviting the Management Boards to consider what interim arrangements to put in place.

The feedback also includes a number of detailed points about the work of PICT and WIS. These will be analysed further to see what improvements and changes can be identified and implemented now, that can help the transition to the new Digital Service.

The bullet points below show the main themes which we have identified. Sometimes these take the form of questions, which we will hope to answer as time goes on in our advice to the Management Boards. We have also picked out some quotations from the

feedback (without attribution) because they illustrate or amplify a wider theme. Inclusion of a quotation does not necessarily imply that we agree with what it says

We would welcome further thoughts on the themes we have identified and anything which we may have overlooked. Please contact us using the newdigitalservice@parliament.uk mailbox.

Emerging themes

- Very few respondents disagreed with the decision to set up a parliamentary Digital Service.

“Everyone wants this change to be a success and thinks that the digital ambition is the right way to go”.

“I strongly agree with the central recommendation of a new Head of Digital and a digital office with sufficient autonomy and resource to get on with the job of designing online services fit for the future, around the needs of users.”

- Collaboration, trust and closer working with staff in other parts of the two Houses were highlighted as key issues.

“The new service should be willing to educate and challenge senior leaders about how the business could adopt new technical opportunities but should not have a strategy of its own separate from that of both Houses”.

“There needs to be greater business involvement. Often there is no response from the business on new ideas.”

“I hope that as part of the transition process we will soon be involved in, that issues of behaviour and culture will be addressed. It is a privilege to work for Parliament, but we will only retain the best people if we are able to build an environment of trust and professional respect.”

“The distinction between Parliamentary ICT and ‘the business’ is unhelpful. We all work for Parliament, and many people in Development have long service and are committed to the organisation.”

“As a relatively senior member of staff it is difficult to be constantly challenged on my own areas of expertise by colleagues who know comparatively little, often to the detriment of project delivery. This is also hard for members of my team, who have their own experience and ideas to contribute, underpinned by specialist technical skills but also as Parliamentary staff.”

“If you could find a way to structure us in a way that brings our common goals together, something that includes rather than divides effort, then all of our situations could be greatly improved.”

- Many respondents were concerned that the change might amount to little more than a reorganisation of PICT. In order to achieve increasing satisfaction with Parliament’s digital services, other parts of Parliament needed to change.

“The ability to communicate effectively and meaningfully is as important as the technical capability. If the communications element is not given due consideration, there could be a danger that the new Digital Service is simply an enlarged PICT.”

“The digital agenda requires a change throughout the administrations of both Houses, not just in PICT and WIS. We’re not sure how widely understood this is”.

“There needs to be cultural change within the business to understand that the digital office is an enabler for change and IT-enabled change should be aligned to and embedded in their business objectives. This shouldn’t be seen as just a rebranding exercise for PICT/WIS alone and the change should be delivered across Parliament”

“In line with public expectations, there needs to be a complete transformation in the way parliamentary information is written, organised and structured for our social media channels. Realising the interactive/participatory potential of social media in engaging the public with the work of Parliament is also crucial to a successful digital strategy. Will the Digital Office have oversight of this?”

“The new Digital Office cannot be tasked with changing Parliament without authority to do so. It must either have the authority to change parliamentary services or Parliament must take responsibility for this change with the Digital Office promoting, consolidating and supporting this change”

- Digital ways of working in supporting the internal functions of the two Houses need to be acknowledged. These do not necessarily involve the internet. “Legacy software” is often fundamental to the work of Parliament and should not be dismissed as out-of-date.
- There should be recognition of the variety of users of Parliament’s digital services, including internal users, with different needs and priorities.
- The Digital Service must work in line with information management best practice.

- Parliament needs better information about who uses its website and what they want from it.
- What is digital? Can we move away from digital being seen as an add-on to print?

“To truly deliver services and information fit for digital, and for the future, Parliament needs to think radically about the entire end-to-end process, not simply designing processes to take the information Parliament produces and put it online”

- How will the changes assist both Houses in agreeing on how to exploit the website and other digital platforms?
- Several respondents took issue with the limited attention to the non-web aspects of PICT’s work in the mySociety report, echoing points made in the response of the two Clerks to that report.
- There are lessons to learn from the creation of the Government Digital Service, but our Digital Service will not be a replica. We have different users and different aims.
- How will the momentum of the project and staff morale be maintained: importance of continuing communications about what is happening.
- Impact of uncertainty on financial planning, HR, accommodation moves and training
- Change fatigue: people need assurance about roles, jobs, terms and conditions.
- What does it all mean? How can we respond when we don’t know what is going to happen?
- Decisions have to be implemented: too often, decisions are not fully implemented or there is an unclear differentiation between policy decision and discussion.
- Don’t forget that some people aren’t or won’t be digital – Parliament needs to cater for their needs as well.
- Significant impediments to moving away from the Joint Department model were noted, as were concerns about how this model has worked in practice. For example, it was suggested that setting up PICT as a separate entity to the two Houses it supports had added bureaucracy and complexity.
- Many respondents assumed that the Head of Digital would sit on the Management Boards; some argued that the HoD should not do so. There were also different views about line management arrangements.

“How much clout will the new Head of Digital have, both within PICT and WIS, and more widely in both Houses? If they don’t sit on the Management Boards, and/or they don’t have their own Department, what does this say about the importance of Digital?”

“The digital director would need to be a member of the management boards of both houses and have the status equivalent to

other departmental directors and be supported by a Chief Technology Officer.”

- The new arrangements must strike a balance between how the two Houses specify and prioritise the projects they want to see implemented and the Head of Digital’s strategic oversight of what will work best for end users (whatever their level of involvement or prior knowledge).
- Can governance structures be simplified?

“There are too many Boards, without the right skills to make the right decisions. There is too much adherence to structures and governance that stop getting things done.”

- Decision making must be less opaque, with clearer prioritisation of projects, particularly projects which are not bicameral in nature.
- There need to be clearer governance arrangements for the website. Who is its editor?

“The new Digital Office must set an effective, authoritative editorial direction for the Parliament website – this will almost certainly require posts dedicated to the provision of editorial control and an overall governance structure that prioritises editorial decision-making as much as project management”

- What do other Parliaments do?
- What will be the timetable for recruitment of the new HoD and the launch of the new Service? Will there need to be an interim appointment to cover any gap after D-PICT retires?
- Should the new Service be set up alongside PICT and WIS and built up gradually, following the GDS model?
- What technical skills will the post require?

“The [HoD] needs to be technologically savvy, however they need to have more than just an IT background, they should be commercially aware in the customer vision and how to solve customer problems using innovation and design. This means both sales, marketing and comms are also a high priority on the wish list. It’s not all about the technology for the [HoD], it’s also about how all the products work together to make learning and transactions easier for the customer.”

- Induction arrangements: how will we ensure that the Head of Digital understands how we work and what we want from them?

- What does accountability to the public look like?

“How you implement the concept of user accountability is, of course, open to debate. I would suggest a committee with no fewer than 60% lay membership.”

- Should we plan now for a further review, in case it doesn't work out?

“Investing so much in one individual is very risky. Perhaps it would be a good idea to have mySociety lined up to conduct a follow up review of the Digital Office after 2 years. If this follow up report identifies poor performance (based upon some agreed criteria) in either the Head of Digital or the senior management team there should be some mechanism to remove them (e.g. fixed term contracts for all senior staff)”

Many points were raised in relation to the future resourcing or organisation of the Digital Service and how it might operate. These issues will not be decided by the Management Boards in June but are noted here as they will need to be addressed in future:

- How will the new Service be structured? How will it relate to other parts of the two Houses with a stake in digital services, or to other interested parties (eg PED)? Can silos (within the department and across Parliament) be knocked down?

“There has to be a reorganisation. The change cannot just be WIS coming in as a new team in the Digital Service”.

- Resourcing: One respondent argued that the UK Parliament's web services are significantly under-resourced compared to other parties. Does “broadly cost neutral” mean there will be cuts in some areas later to pay for more web staff?
- Should the Digital Service operate with pay and conditions aligned to Parliament or to the market?
- Skills required in the Digital Service. Importance of user experience skills.
- More flexible working methods, including internal project application rounds for staff. Can we make projects and assurance requirements less bureaucratic? What can we learn from the Government Digital Service?

“Decision-making is something that is problematic in our experience on projects, with a sometimes extreme risk averse-ness that can cause months of slippage to a project. There is sometimes an absence of policy, but a desire to introduce a change – and the belief that the introduction of an IT solution will bring with it the answers to how we need to do things, which is the wrong way round.”

- Could the Digital Service make more use of cheap technology solutions e.g. open source?
- Should the Digital Service have a monopoly of supply of IT services?

Digital Service Preparation Team

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