



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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Dear Andrew

‘STRATEGY FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL GOVERNMENT’ – SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

Summary

1. Thank you for sending to the Scottish Executive the latest version of the UK Government’s ‘Strategy for Transformational Government’, due to be launched at the start of November. We have followed the development of this strategy with interest, as it has clear links to and implications for the way in which we take forward the reform agenda in Scotland.
2. Many of our comments draw out the distinction between what is reserved to Westminster and what is for the Scottish administration to decide upon. We would again make an important point which comes up frequently in these contexts: that it can be difficult for a reader to see from the Strategy which proposals might apply across the UK and which are distinct to England and Wales, or indeed to England only. While this may not be a key concern for some readers, it is absolutely critical to understanding how these high-level proposals could or could not be implemented, given the devolved structures within the UK.
3. In any event, to deliver the vision there will be a need to dovetail parallel programmes of work currently taking place under the jurisdictions of the distinct UK administrations.
4. You may be aware that we are currently undertaking our own work to map out how public services can best be reformed in Scotland. This is work in progress, but on a general level, we agree with the Government’s assessment of the extent of change which administrations and services at all levels will need to achieve in the coming years in order to transform service delivery and make government ‘transformational’.
5. The thinking of Scottish Ministers and officials on many of the themes of the Strategy is similar to that being developed within the Government. However, while we would support many of the strategic proposals which the Strategy contains, there are some areas in which our thinking

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differs. There are further areas where we agree in principle but may see differently the actions needed to realise the vision. We would therefore not expect to adopt all the same solutions as those which the Strategy proposes for other parts of the UK.

Vision

6. The vision which the Strategy sets out is largely consistent with developing views in Scotland, in particular the vision of making government transformational through the use of technology, creating capacity and capability to innovate and use technology effectively as technology itself develops.

7. We share the vision of service users' needs being at the heart of service development. However, our thinking on the question of choice is developing a little differently. It may be that choice proves to be a secondary issue in Scotland, where users tend to perceive it as being less important than effective delivery in itself.

Current Position

8. The Strategy's assessment of the current position is mainly in line with the picture in Scotland. In Scotland, as elsewhere in the UK, we face the challenge of inherited systems which tend to be ill-placed to adapt to changing needs. We agree that technological development hitherto has focused on back office functions rather than front line services.

9. We are already making substantial innovative changes to the way services are delivered in Scotland. Our Customer First programme of improvement in the delivery of local authority services is underpinned by the principle that services must be tailored to the needs of users in the first instance, rather than to those of providers. It is on track to deliver a national data-sharing infrastructure which will allow local authorities to offer a much more customer focused and efficient service to their citizens. This infrastructure will support joined up Customer Relationship Management systems, but has the potential to do much more.

10. We have established our own Scottish one-stop portal for services related to businesses, the 'Business Gateway'. However we view BusinessLink as a very well-thought-out and successful initiative, and we benefit in Scotland from the expertise which BusinessLink has developed and shared with us. We hope to continue with this useful collaborative approach.

11. Some of the current initiatives described in the Strategy are not as relevant in Scotland however. The fact that Scotland has not signed up to join Directgov is a key example of this, although we are in discussions with the Directgov team to discuss whether there is a business case for Scotland to join.

12. In terms of current electronic service delivery, the figures in Scotland are similar. However, I understand that the statistics given in respect of household access to the internet and the number of Online centres do not pertain to Scotland.

13. Measures to improve project management are also a key feature of the current landscape in Scotland. The Scottish Executive has adopted the Gateway Review process on its highest-risk major projects, conducting reviews within the Executive, its Agencies and NDPBs. We are also now engaging with the NHS Scotland to support them in carrying out Gateway Reviews in advance of them developing a complementary process. Thereafter we expect to be looking at wider public sector engagement with the process.

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Strategy

14. We agree broadly with the three major transformations identified. We fully support the emphasis being placed on services designed around the needs of the relevant customer group, as well as the development of shared services and the IT profession. We agree that these three strategic objectives are appropriate to underpin progress towards true transformation of service delivery. And it is evident that technology will have a major part to play in delivering these objectives.

15. We agree that there is a strong need to focus resources on the substantial development of shared services. However, although we agree with the principles set out in the Strategy around this area, we are currently developing our own Shared Support Services Strategy. Our approach is distinct because of our unique delivery landscape and because we are at a different starting point – the Scottish Executive already has consolidated its support services.

16. The focus of our work on shared services is on enabling the whole public sector to free up resources for improved customer service and frontline delivery through sharing support services. Our aim is to help all Scottish public sector organisations to attack waste, bureaucracy and duplication so that we can get more out of the money we spend. We are working closely with representatives from all parts of the public sector in Scotland to encourage the development of appropriate shared services arrangements, informed by best practice in both public and private sector organisations in the UK and overseas.

17. Similarly, we would agree with the principle of developing greater breadth and depth within the IT profession, so as to be better placed to plan, deliver and manage IT-enabled change. But we expect to develop specific actions within Scotland which meet the needs of the wider Scottish public sector.

18. We agree on the need to ‘systematically engage with citizens, businesses and front-line public servants’. In Scotland, however, we are looking closely at how best to achieve this as part of our wider work on public service reform. It is possible that, with the same strategic aim in mind, we reach different conclusions about how to achieve it.

19. In principle, we agree with the need to rationalise government websites and with developing the use of mobile phone and other devices in public service delivery. We will be interested to learn of proposals for how these aims are to be taken forward in practice, and we will be looking at what might be appropriate in Scotland. Likewise, we would agree that there is increasing potential to innovate and deliver services directly to people’s homes. This plays into our own digital inclusion work in Scotland, which we are currently reviewing.

20. Likewise, the aim of developing a consistent approach to technical standards and architecture is entirely to be welcomed. Scotland already has an established framework for handling interoperability standards within the Scottish context. This framework fully adopts the e-GIF, which aids the adoption of cross-border common standards. However we would be keen to develop a more joined-up approach to ratifying standards at a UK level where appropriate, especially when they are standards which will impact Scottish devolved public services. At present, we are concerned that in the UK context there is an ever growing number of government sponsored standards bodies and organisations. There will need to be much better coordination and/or linkage between these standards bodies if this document’s vision on common standards is to be fully achieved.

B225951

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21. Other strategic proposals are also of interest within the Scottish context: Customer Group Directors; Service Transformation Board; rationalising call centres; single national public service number; supplier management. We are already in the process of publishing a Scottish geographical information strategy.

22. In general, we shall want to follow the development of plans for practical implementation and where appropriate participate in shaping those plans. We want to be able to explore synergies across administrations so that we can optimise our approach to common issues that aren't entirely dependent on our respective strategies and agendas. It will be particularly important to us to work with the CIO Council in areas which are relevant to Scotland and in which we can add real value to discussion. We would therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss cross-border implications and collaborative working with Cabinet Office as soon as possible.

23. My final comment is that the timetable set out at paragraph 53 is primarily England-based, and subsections 1, 2 and 5 are exclusively so. However, subsection 6 sets out the aim of collaborative working to identify areas of common purpose and opportunities for specific shared actions, and we would welcome the chance to discuss how to take this forward, as part of an early dialogue around how we can best work together across administrative boundaries.

Yours sincerely

Peter Russell
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Head of Group

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