# Review highlights challenges and opportunities in digital government



The recent State of Digital Government Review, released by the government, offers a detailed assessment of the challenges and opportunities surrounding technology in public services. This report provides an extensive critique of the current fragmented technology landscape, highlighting significant issues such as underutilised data, low reliability of services, and a concerning dependency on external resources for essential digital skills. The analysis points out that the funding allocated does not align with the demands of modern digital practices.

Key findings from the review reveal that users of public services have greater expectations, yet "45 percent of NHS services still lack a digital pathway." Additionally, it underscores the potential for generating £45 billion each year in "unrealised savings and productivity benefits" through comprehensive digitisation. The report addresses the fragmented and duplicative nature of public sector technology and discusses how the underuse of data is stifling advancements in AI, machine learning, and advanced analytics.

The review also highlights the issue of low service reliability, blaming inadequate incident management plans and a "critically high" risk of cyber threats as additional challenges. It identifies a concentration of cloud adoption within central government, further exacerbating these risks. Furthermore, the dependency on external resources to enhance digital and data teams presents significant concerns regarding institutional knowledge retention.

Five foundational issues are outlined: leadership, structure, measurement, talent, and funding. In terms of leadership, the report claims there’s "little reward for prioritising an agenda of service digitisation, reliability, or risk mitigation," indicating that organisational leaders are neither incentivised nor recognised for focusing on these critical areas. The structural aspect of the system is characterised by fragmentation, where most public sector organisations prefer to maintain their own technological systems which inhibits standardisation and interoperability.

Regarding measurement, the report highlights the absence of consistent metrics for digital performance, making information on quality, user experience, costs, and risks hard to gather without intensive efforts. The talent issue illustrates the public sector’s struggle to compete with private sector compensation and career progression opportunities. Restrictions placed on hiring to manage costs have contributed to a shift towards third-party contractors, which diminishes internal expertise.

Funding is another critical area of concern, with prioritised spending on new programmes challenging digital and data initiatives. The review warns that the trend towards subscription-based services exacerbates the reliance on ongoing funding commitments.

Within the NHS, specific challenges include a lack of standardised integration frameworks, resulting in systems that fail to easily communicate with one another, thereby increasing cybersecurity vulnerabilities. The review points out that a staggering 70-85 percent of technology budgets are consumed by maintenance rather than by upgrading or innovating, and notes the inconsistent adoption of cloud technologies across the public sector.

Despite the outlined challenges, the review acknowledges successful initiatives within the NHS that could serve as a model for other sectors. Key examples include pioneering use of AI, development of common platforms like the Federated Data Platform, and the high uptake of the NHS app, which soared during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, programmes such as cybersecurity services provided by NHS England exemplify shared capabilities aimed at enhancing security compliance.

The report concludes with an appreciation for the collective dedication displayed by the public sector's digital workforce and an urgent call to reform the approaches to leadership, structure, measurement, talent, and funding to unlock the sector's full potential. The insights derive from a broader understanding that reforming digital government practices could significantly benefit public service delivery and enhance overall effectiveness.

In parallel, recent polls and discussions among NHS leaders indicate pressing concerns regarding the future direction of digital investments. One survey revealed that primary care reform attracted 60 percent of votes as a priority area for the new government. A follow-up poll showed that about 35 percent of participants believe digitising or eliminating paper should be a key focus for immediate digital investment. Discussions around interoperability also identified complexity in technical challenges and supplier involvement as critical to advancing digital and innovative practices in healthcare.

The updates reflect a dynamic landscape in which public health and care digitalisation is evolving, with ongoing opportunities for learning, adaptation, and sharing best practices across the sector.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link corroborates the key findings from the State of Digital Government Review, including the challenges and opportunities in public services, user expectations, and the issues of underutilised data, low service reliability, and dependency on external resources.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link supports the information about 45% of NHS services lacking a digital pathway and the potential for generating £45 billion in unrealised savings and productivity benefits through comprehensive digitisation.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link addresses the fragmented and duplicative nature of public sector technology, the underuse of data, and the challenges in AI, machine learning, and advanced analytics.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link highlights the issue of low service reliability, inadequate incident management plans, and the high risk of cyber threats, as well as the concentration of cloud adoption within central government.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link discusses the dependency on external resources for enhancing digital and data teams and the concerns regarding institutional knowledge retention.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link outlines the five foundational issues: leadership, structure, measurement, talent, and funding, including the lack of reward for prioritising service digitisation and the structural fragmentation.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link highlights the absence of consistent metrics for digital performance and the public sector’s struggle to compete with private sector compensation and career progression opportunities.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link discusses the funding concerns, including prioritised spending on new programmes and the reliance on ongoing funding commitments for subscription-based services.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link points out the specific challenges within the NHS, such as the lack of standardised integration frameworks and the high maintenance costs of technology budgets.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-digital-government-review/state-of-digital-government-review> - This link acknowledges successful initiatives within the NHS, including the use of AI, the Federated Data Platform, and the high uptake of the NHS app during the COVID-19 pandemic.
* <https://htn.co.uk/2025/01/22/state-of-digital-government-review-fragmented-tech-underused-data-funding-not-reflecting-modern-digital-practice/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data