

Ministerial foreword

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To govern is to serve. Our purpose is to maintain the security, safety and prosperity of the nation and to deliver what we have promised the people who elect us.

Yet it is too often the case that citizens feel that they live at the convenience of the state: that the government acts not as servant but as master. The result is a perception that the country works for the people who govern, not those whom the government is tasked to serve. Whether it is a lack of belief in the capacity of government to deliver the pledges it makes at election time, or the frustrations thrown in the way of people every day - from filling in a form to trying to talk to someone on the phone - government seems less and less capable of doing what people want.

The result of that disenchantment is plain to see. Here in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the democratic world, people are expressing their wish for a more responsive state at the ballot box. It is a call that demands a reply; indeed, if we wish modern democracy to flourish, it is imperative we respond.

This is no easy task. Government is more complex and wide-reaching than ever before. There is no company on earth - even the largest of multinationals - which comes close to having to co-ordinate the array of essential services and functions for millions of people that a modern government provides. Equally our duty is to serve everyone regardless of ability, age, gender, opinion or the places in which they choose to live. For these reasons and because bureaucracies are by their natures monopoly providers, government has been slow to use the transformative potential of digital technology to change the way it does business. It is at a double disadvantage, therefore: big and slow. In a world where people rightly expect the government to deliver public services effectively and at speed, that makes the challenge more daunting still.

The imperative is to change, therefore - and to do so at pace and at scale. This is the meaning of transformation. It is in essence a change of working, of culture and of disposition - changes that are made possible by digital technology. That technology is not change itself; it enables the change that is so transformative.

How we can make that change happen is the subject of this strategy document. It describes the progress we have already made, from simplifying the smallest

transactions between the citizen and the state to some of the largest reform programmes across the globe. This is only the beginning however: this strategy charts the direction of the total transformation of government - in how we work, how we organize ourselves and how we serve our citizens. It is the most ambitious programme of change of any government anywhere in the world, by a government that has already done more to transform itself than any other.

I commend the brilliant, driven civil servants of this country and the way in which they rise consistently to the challenge of delivering ever better government service. They prove every day that an inspiring, value-based public service ethos is alive and well in modern Britain. Yet achieving our ambitions for transformative public service will take a conscious and daily act of will on the part of public servants in every part of this nation's government. Unlike a business, we will not be forced to change by competition but must do so only because it is the right thing to do. This is change purely in the interests of public service; change that will make us fit servants of the people who ask us to govern. If we succeed, which we must, we will have done much to restore our democracy to the position the people deserve.

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