



# **CONTINUITY AND CONFIDENCE: HOW TO ACCELERATE THE DELIVERY OF DIGITAL CITIZEN SERVICES**

A BJSS White Paper



Government is putting increased focus on the impact public sector organisations have on people's lives – from helping them access vital services with speed and simplicity to supporting economic growth and community renewal. As highlighted in the 2020 Spending Review, demonstrable value for citizens is at the heart of the Government's plans for the public sector, with an emphasis on gaining even greater benefits from the established Public Value Framework.

We believe the Public Value Framework is an excellent tool for Government departments to ensure they are using public money to deliver positive citizen outcomes. Together with the processes and standards created by the Government Digital Service (GDS), the Framework focuses effort and provides roadmaps for successful delivery.

**This white paper explores the Public Value Framework, its relationship with GDS processes and recent Treasury guidance, which explicitly unites both in a more effective and faster method for agile delivery. We offer a four-step model for how you can use the new guidance to create more robust and resilient public-facing digital projects that deliver services that satisfy citizen needs.**

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# DELIVERING VALUE TO CITIZENS WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Ever since the Barber report introduced the Public Value Framework in 2017, it's been clear that the UK Government wants to place two fundamental principles at the heart of all public sector activity: continuous improvement and disruptive innovation. It's rare to see both of these ideas joined in this way, let alone identified as practices to be embedded in the minds of decision makers at all levels of such a large and complex sector

**The Government is taking a real lead in transforming the delivery of public services.**

Use of the Public Value Framework is now a mandatory part of departmental planning, and the 2020 Spending Review signalled a renewed focus on maximising public value from investment in public services. Briefly, the Public Value Framework recognises that public sector projects can't be defined and measured using purely commercial methods because the outputs do not always readily translate into monetary terms – that is, the benefit of a project is not the same as a commercial profit. The Framework, therefore, sets out a range of assessment criteria and a method for applying them. Using the Framework encourages decision-makers to focus on defining the public value they seek to deliver with a project and how they will realise that goal. It is, therefore, transformational by intent and design at both the strategic and tactical levels.

The Framework has evolved rapidly since its inception in 2017, with refinements to make the process clearer and simpler. Meanwhile, the GDS has continued to make it easier and faster to build and launch citizen-facing systems that transform traditional transactions. In particular, [GDS guidelines](#) on agile delivery have familiarised solution creators with the agile project phases of discovery, alpha, beta, and live. With a focus on public value and the strong planning and governance mechanisms provided by GDS, the goal of embedding continuous improvement and disruptive innovation in the service of citizen needs – and effecting a true, lasting cultural change – is within our grasp.



This goal is more important than ever in a post-Covid world, where more services will be delivered digitally, and priorities will shift towards ensuring a strong, sustainable and balanced recovery. New requirements in areas related to Brexit, such as customs, will also drive many new, high-volume services which can only really be delivered by digital technology.

Yet, there are bumps in the road. Mechanisms intended to help progress can sometimes become obstacles, if only because of misunderstandings about their purpose. There is also a tendency in any organisational setting for guidelines to harden into constraints and frameworks to be read as excluding new ways of working.

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# THE SOURCES OF DELAY

**Why are many public-facing digital projects going wrong? In BJSS' experience, some projects are being stood down after discovery, delaying the eventual delivery of value and challenging budgets.**

**This sometimes happens because citizen outcomes were not completely defined or validated at the outset. These are issues of stakeholder engagement and agile practice which are likely to ease as agile experience continues to grow throughout the sector.**

However, we often find that downtime between successful completion of discovery to the start of alpha can extend into two or three weeks. There is also often a quiet period between alpha and beta phases which can be anything from four weeks to a year. While the project clock is stopped between discovery and alpha, teams disperse, taking their experience and commitment with them so that the knowledge base erodes and momentum is lost.

The financial impacts of such delays quickly add up. Using an average annual cost for a permanent member of staff of £38,600 salary plus 30% establishment costs, a typical eight-person scrum team would cost around £15,000 for each two-week sprint. The standard agile convention is that team velocity stabilises after three sprints, reflecting the effects of familiarisation, learning and onboarding. This accrued knowledge value dissipates if the team stands down. Assuming half this value is lost during the delay before restarting the project, the shadow cost to the organisation is £22,500. This amount does not include the delivery value not realised due to the pause itself or the costs of research and revalidation of needs and technology, which may have changed during the delay period.



Restarting the project then requires the assembly and onboarding of teams, which impacts the speed of delivery, necessitates the building of new relationships with stakeholders and risks triggering unnecessary revisits to earlier work. A long lull between alpha and beta increases the lifespan of the less effective services which the project was intended to improve or replace. This consequence may in itself undermine the benefits case for the project.

In lean terms, interruption is another form of waste. Loss of continuity generates inefficiencies that impact the delivery of value and undermine the intentions of the guidelines, leading to frustration for citizens and reduced confidence in developers.

Much of the downtime is caused by departments failing to get adequate funding approval upfront. Additionally, some projects come to a halt because they try to identify key decision-makers and resources mid-project rather than at the beginning.

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# A FASTER START, A CLEARER ROAD

The Government has acted to address these challenges by clarifying how departments should plan for the discovery and alpha phases of projects. Under **new business case guidance from HM Treasury and GDS** issued in December 2020, departments can now apply for spend approval for both the discovery and alpha phases together. Although the guidance is only mandatory for projects which require Treasury approval, it is – like all Treasury guidance – intended for adoption throughout Government and including the departmental planning process. In the new guidance, the natural continuity between discovery and alpha is emphasised by referring to them jointly as “initial research”. Departments can now spend up to £750,000 from their own budgets on discovery and alpha “as a research and scoping activity” subject to normal Cabinet Office IT/digital governance rather than having to seek Treasury approval. The new process emphasises that departments should seek Cabinet Office approval before the start of discovery and that the discovery and alpha phases should each take around eight weeks. The guidance recognises that the outcome of discovery may be a decision not to go ahead with further work, so there’s no suggestion that discovery and alpha have been formally merged.

This agile spend approval process sets projects on a firm footing and streamlines the transition from discovery to alpha with minimum downtime. Welcome as it is, the process alone does not ensure the successful and rapid delivery of digital projects. From our experience in delivering over 40 successful GDS assessments, we have identified four steps to help you move at speed while keeping citizen outcomes front of mind.

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# FOUR STEPS TO FASTER DELIVERY

Here's our guide to the key steps you need to take to ensure the successful delivery of your digital service projects.

# 1



## Define the citizen value you will create

Design citizen-centric services by identifying your users from the outset. This helps to ensure a foundational focus on outcomes and a commitment to ensuring taxpayer money is well spent. The importance of this step is reinforced by Gartner's prioritisation of People Centricity in its 2021 technology trends analysis: "by 2024, organisations providing a total experience will outperform competitors by 25% in satisfaction metrics for both customer and employee experience."

# 2



## Set your programme up for success

Refer to the [Treasury Green Book and associated guidance](#) to shape your thinking and how you will generate public value. Explore the GDS guidelines to understand each stage's objectives and how your planned programme of work will pass each step.

# 3



## Get the funding agreed upfront

The new business case guidance allows you to obtain upfront funding for both your discovery and alpha phases. This will save a considerable amount of time trying to secure funding mid-project.

# 4



## Ringfence the right people

Once you have applied for your funding, identify the people and support you need for the project to move quickly. Ringfence empowered people to make decisions, such as product and service owners.

## **CASE STUDY:**

# **Accelerating to a better way to take roadside payments**

**The Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is an executive agency of the UK Department of Transport tasked with carrying out, among other things, roadside checks on drivers and vehicles to ensure that unsafe vehicles are kept off the road.**

During an inspection, police or DVSA officers will check authorised load weights, roadworthiness, telematics device data and the driver's licence. Failure of any of these checks could result in a vehicle being impounded and fines being issued. Last year, 278,000 vehicles were stopped for inspection, resulting in fixed penalties totalling £3.9m.

More and more vehicles are being registered to use the UK's road network. Around 38.4 million vehicles are licensed on the roads in Great Britain, and since 2012, the average growth has been 640,000 per year. As the number of potentially unsafe vehicles increases, so do the pressures on roadside inspectors.

Given these increasing pressures, DVSA recognised that its legacy roadside payments solution was no longer fit for purpose. Before engaging BJSS, DVSA's roadside payments solution involved taking payments using a retail card reader device, which required mobile data connectivity. In locations where there was no connectivity, payments had to be carried out by calling up DVSA's call centre, which was often overloaded and only operated during weekday working hours. Enforcement officers could also take cash payments, which carried risks from, for example, theft.

BJSS worked with DVSA to design, test and roll-out a digital roadside payments solution. The project team assembled included experienced agile technologists with a deep understanding of DVSA's challenges and human-centred designers who all worked together to co-create with the client a quick and efficient way to deal with roadside payments.

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The discovery phase was based on a BJSS Innovation Sprint – a three-week programme to define the project and produce a working prototype. The team conducted interviews with the key DVSA actors, facilitated consensus on the problem statement in an all-hands exploration workshop, and went on the road to identify the key pain points. Then, in just three weeks, BJSS developed a prototype mobile application and web payment portal. This co-created solution was then tested with the examiners to obtain their feedback and tested for desirability, feasibility and viability. The business case was evaluated and elaborated to define the expected value of the solution.

Thanks to this low-risk, fast-paced approach, DVSA and BJSS were able to identify blockers and flesh out the solution before progressing into the alpha phase. The prototype created a focal point for dialogue while enabling everyone involved to imagine an eventual solution deployed in the real working environment. It also helped to indicate the broad outlines of the work to be tackled in alpha.

The combination of a fit-for-purpose solution, a clear path to launch, and a strong business case delivered in an accelerated three-week window convinced DVSA to proceed with the full-scale implementation, and they selected BJSS to complete the alpha, beta and live phases.

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## CASE STUDY:

# GDS discovery and alpha in just three weeks – and full delivery in another six

**BJSS successfully delivered a brand-new service in collaboration with the Department for Transport (DfT) and Highways England (HE) to help bridge owners find and procure temporary bridge solutions. We went through all three GDS phases (discovery, alpha and beta) and successfully passed the beta evaluation within nine weeks.**

We delivered discovery and alpha phases in a single three-week sprint, validating assumptions and designing the right solution ahead of six one-week sprints covering beta to live. We ran a show-and-tell session at the end of every week to showcase our progress, review our objectives and revalidate the agreed vision.

The discovery-alpha sprint was organised as a one-week discovery and two-week alpha phase. We started discovery with a kick-off workshop with all key stakeholders from DfT and HE to set out ways of working, identify risks and challenges, and define a shared vision. We fleshed out the product owner's initial ideas, transforming them into user journeys and personas. In that first week alone, we spoke to three end-users and obtained 49 responses to the online survey we sent out on Tuesday. All interactions with users were conducted online, which allowed us to interview a large number of people. The feedback gathered – while challenging some of our initial assumptions – clearly validated the need for the service, which gave us enough confidence to move into alpha.

For the alpha phase, we synthesised our findings from the first week to form a service blueprint, which then allowed us to start designing the system. Our developers had spent the first week setting up a fit-for-purpose development environment and designing the target architecture based on the information we had at the time. This enabled them to start implementing pages as they were designed, and we had a first coded prototype to demo at the end of Week two. We also presented our target architecture to the architecture governance team, which enabled us to change elements of our solution (the database technology) without compromising the delivery timelines.

In week three, we tested a partial solution with end-users. This involved gathering feedback and valuable insights into their needs and frustrations that simple interviews would not yield. On that Friday, the mid-way GDS review replaced our weekly show-and-tell. Using our experience, we worked to help the assessor evaluate our delivery against the 14 criteria set in the GDS Service Standard.

With the approval of the GDS assessor, the project moved rapidly into beta. Our architecture-first approach to building code enabled us to build on the alpha and saved precious time going into beta. Although the delivery was challenging – with issues around deployment, integrations, performance and the underlying technology – we delivered a full end-to-end GDS service in under nine weeks.



# TIME TO ACCELERATE

The conceptual gap between discovery and alpha was always more imaginary than real. With projects idling between these phases, HM Treasury intervened to urge a unified view of the two phases, with added stress on achieving funding approval before embarking on this combined research stage. The guidance is all the more concrete, thanks to the setting of a £750,000 ceiling for streamlined approvals. For departments, this means empowerment to progress swiftly and surely to the public phases of agile delivery. Using our four-step method, you can avoid projects drifting into the doldrums, key staff disappearing and confidence draining away. You will be able to launch your projects with significantly reduced risk, a shared vision and safeguarded continuity. You will show increased leadership and accountability. You will enhance your department's capabilities and reputation, making it a more attractive place for people to build their digital careers.

Most of all, you will achieve the citizen benefits you set out to create. At BJSS, we know our colleagues in the public service want to make a positive difference to the lives of everyone in the UK. We're here to help you accelerate safely through the business of value delivery, working collaboratively with you to navigate agile processes, help with the heavy lifting, bring our insights and expertise to bear, and transfer our knowledge into your team.

BJSS has the skills, resources and experience to guide you through the combined discovery and alpha phases at speed. We hope this paper acts as a helpful guide in shaping your next digital project. But most importantly, we hope it helps save your department money and time, all while delivering positive citizen outcomes.

The machinery of Government is being upgraded to serve citizen value like never before. It's time to accept the invitation to deliver more, better and quicker digital citizen services. It's time to embark on a new journey to success.

**Find out more about BJSS discovery and alpha phase services on the Digital Marketplace >**