

DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

Blueprint for Public Sector Transformation
and Digital Economy Leadership



Digital Government Services: The Cornerstone of a Thriving Digital Economy

As Becca Fairless writes here the Scottish Government unveiled a refreshed National Digital Strategy in November 2025.

It is a central, foundational strategy for Scotland to achieve the goal of building a world leading digital nation.

A modern digital government provides seamless access to online services for citizens. Key technologies include Digital Identity and GovCloud Computing, and Scotland is pioneering initiatives such as 'Digital Mailboxes'.

A Whole of Sector Approach

In November 2025, the Scottish Government and local government partners, through COSLA and the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government, took a significant step forward.

They published a refreshed **Digital Strategy for Scotland** alongside the **Sustainable Digital Public Services Delivery Plan 2025–2028**. This collaborative document reaffirms a bold, collective vision for how digital technology can enrich lives, drive economic growth, and transform public services across the nation.

The plan outlines concrete actions over the next three years, organised around six key themes: system leadership, common approaches, data, public sector capability and workforce, advanced technology and AI, and cyber resilient services.

Digital Government Services: The Cornerstone of a Thriving Digital Economy

Integrated Health, Care and Government Services

With clear responsibilities assigned between national and local government, success criteria focused on real outcomes for citizens, and a strong emphasis on joint delivery, this refresh moves beyond aspiration into actionable commitment. It responds to rapid technological change—particularly the rise of AI—while building on lessons from the original 2021 strategy and the demands of a post-pandemic world.

This moment marks more than an update to policy documents. It signals a renewed determination to place **Scottish digital government services** at the heart of a thriving, inclusive digital economy.

From the single secure access points like mygov.scot and ScotAccount that simplify interactions with public services, to the integration of data, common standards, and innovative technologies, Scotland is building infrastructure that is smarter, faster, and fairer—designed around people and communities rather than organisational silos.

Imagine a carer in Aberdeen seamlessly coordinating health and social care support through interconnected digital platforms that offer accessible interfaces and assisted options. Envision a small business owner in the Borders accessing grants, skills programmes, and market data without navigating fragmented systems or facing digital barriers.

Picture a young person in the Western Isles overcoming digital exclusion to gain new skills, while public resources are freed through efficient, cyber-secure, and inclusive services to invest in prevention and innovation. These are the kinds of tangible improvements the refreshed strategy and delivery plan aim to scale nationwide.

Digital Government Services: The Cornerstone of a Thriving Digital Economy

Inclusive Service Design: Leaving No One Behind

A cornerstone of the refreshed strategy is its explicit focus on **inclusive access to digital** and **inclusive service design**. Recognising that digital technology must serve as a gateway to opportunities rather than a barrier, the approach commits to designing public services that everyone can use, involving those who use them from the outset.

This means embedding digital inclusion principles throughout service development—addressing not only connectivity and devices, but also skills, confidence, motivation, and accessibility for people of all ages, abilities, incomes, and geographies.

Scotland's framework draws on established pillars of digital inclusion: ensuring equitable access, building user confidence, providing non-digital alternatives where needed, and applying person-centred, co-design methods such as the Scottish Approach to Service Design.

Particular attention is given to groups at higher risk of exclusion—older adults, people with disabilities, low-income households, and those in rural or island communities—where infrastructure challenges can compound inequalities. By prioritising inclusive design practices, including in the adoption of advanced technologies like AI, the strategy aims to build trust, reduce exclusion, and ensure that digital transformation delivers equitable outcomes.

This commitment goes beyond accessibility standards. It involves holistic efforts: training public sector workforces in inclusive practices, engaging lived experience in service redesign, and creating seamless experiences that blend digital and offline channels. The result is services that adapt to users' needs—whether a carer coordinating support, a small business navigating grants, or a young person in a remote area gaining essential skills—rather than forcing users to adapt to rigid systems.

Digital Government Services: The Cornerstone of a Thriving Digital Economy

Foundations for a Thriving Digital Economy

At its core, Scotland's approach recognises that effective digital government is foundational to economic prosperity.

By fostering collaboration across government levels, investing in workforce capabilities, embracing advanced technologies responsibly, and ensuring services remain accessible and resilient through inclusive design, the strategy creates the conditions for broader success: a vibrant digital economy that attracts investment, boosts productivity, generates high-quality jobs, and supports sustainable growth in every region—from urban innovation hubs to remote rural communities.

This book examines how these digital government services and the initiatives outlined in the 2025 refresh serve as the cornerstone of that thriving digital economy. It explores the policies, platforms, and partnerships driving change; analyses successes and challenges in areas such as data sharing, AI adoption, digital inclusion, inclusive service design, and cyber resilience; and draws lessons for building public services that truly deliver for citizens while unlocking wider economic potential.

Conclusion: Action Plan Community

Whether you are a policymaker shaping the next phase of delivery, a technologist implementing solutions, a business leader navigating the opportunities, or a citizen interested in how government can harness digital for the common good, the following chapters provide an in-depth look at Scotland's journey. The vision is clear and ambitious; the real work of making it happen—together—is now underway.

Digital Government Services: The Cornerstone of a Thriving Digital Economy

Scotland's digital future is being shaped not just by strategy on paper, but by collaborative action on the ground. This book tells the story of how digital government services, grounded in inclusive design, are laying the foundations for a more connected, innovative, and prosperous nation.

With a focus on innovation, inclusivity, and global competitiveness, Scotland is poised to harness the power of digital transformation, setting a shining example for nations worldwide and igniting a new era of economic and societal advancement. Our community provides a forum for public and private sector innovators to meet, collaborate and realize this vision for Scotland.

Social Security Scotland - Flagship Exemplar of Inclusive Service Design

Social Security Scotland is a flagship exemplar of how technology can prove central to realizing the vision of a new 21st century Scottish digital nation.

As one of the first major central government functions devolved for local implementation in Scotland, it was a test of the nation's operational capability, and also of the aspiration to build a more socially inclusive country.

The Scottish Government aimed to create a digital-first system aligned with its principles of dignity, fairness, and respect, and the department was tasked with administering 11 devolved benefits, including the Scottish Child Payment, Adult Disability Payment, and Carer's Allowance Supplement, transitioning from the UK Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Showcasing Scotland's Digital Leaders: Andy McClintock

In [this GovCIO interview](#) Andy McClintock explains how he was asked to set up the Chief Digital Officer function in 2017 and deliver the estate just 22 months later.

He shared insights on the transformative project, how he emphasized a user-centered approach, prioritizing dignity, fairness, and respect in delivering benefits. Andy highlighted the focus on accessibility, inclusivity, and data security while integrating with UK systems.

His team aimed to create a seamless, trustworthy digital platform to simplify access to benefits for Scotland's diverse population, ensuring an efficient and supportive user experience.

Social Security Scotland - Flagship Exemplar of Inclusive Service Design

Devolving Benefits

The devolution of social security powers to Scotland through the Scotland Act 2016 marked a significant shift in the United Kingdom's governance structure, enabling the Scottish Government to establish its own social security system. Social Security Scotland, launched in September 2018, is a pioneering agency tasked with administering devolved benefits, embodying a person-centered approach rooted in dignity, fairness, and respect.

The agency required a robust, user-friendly technological framework to handle applications, assessments, payments, and case transfers for over 500,000 existing claimants while introducing new benefits.

Social

By 2023, Social Security Scotland was delivering a range of benefits, including the Scottish Child Payment, Carer's Allowance Supplement, and Adult Disability Payment, with plans to complete the rollout of all devolved benefits by 2025. The agency's innovative benefits have had tangible impacts, such as reducing child poverty through the Scottish Child Payment and supporting carers with additional payments.

Digital Transformation and Inclusive Service Design

Social Security Scotland offers a powerful success story not only of implementing a large, complex enterprise IT project but even more so best practices for ensuring digital inclusion is a key factor of the service delivery it enables.

Social Security Scotland - Flagship Exemplar of Inclusive Service Design

Social Security Scotland implemented a bespoke Case Management System (CMS) to process applications, manage assessments, and issue payments. Built on a modular, cloud-based architecture, the CMS integrated with payment platforms and allowed real-time updates, ensuring scalability as caseloads grew.

They adopted an agile development methodology, allowing rapid prototyping and testing of digital tools.

Early launches of benefits like the Carer's Allowance Supplement provided valuable data to refine the CMS and portal. Regular "lessons learned" reviews, as noted in Audit Scotland's 2019 and 2022 reports, ensured continuous improvement.

Effective data sharing with the DWP was critical, given shared clients and the need for seamless transitions. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2019 outlined data-sharing protocols, supported by a secure Application Programming Interface (API) framework.

This allowed Social Security Scotland to access DWP data for existing claimants while maintaining separate governance structures. For example, the transfer of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) cases to Adult Disability Payment relied on API-driven data flows, minimizing disruption.

The agency also invested in data analytics to monitor performance and user satisfaction. Dashboards provided real-time insights into application volumes, processing times, and payment accuracy, enabling proactive issue resolution. By 2022, Audit Scotland reported that 98% of payments were issued on time, reflecting robust data management.

Digital Inclusion

The technology implementation was heavily informed by the Social Security Experience Panels, comprising 2,400 individuals with lived experience, who provided critical insights into benefit design and delivery.

Social Security Scotland - Flagship Exemplar of Inclusive Service Design

Their input shaped the online portal's design, ensuring intuitive navigation and accessibility. For example, feedback highlighted the need for simplified forms, leading to iterative updates that reduced application abandonment rates.

The Scottish Government also collaborated with advocacy organizations and the Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group to refine digital tools for disability benefits. User testing sessions, conducted in 2019 and 2020, identified pain points, such as complex language in forms, which were addressed through plain-language rewrites and visual aids.

The Scottish Government also established the Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group to guide eligibility criteria and processes, particularly for complex benefits like Disability Assistance. Consultations, such as the 2019 Disability Assistance consultation, further refined policies, ensuring they were responsive to public input.

By 2023, Social Security Scotland's technology infrastructure supported the delivery of £3.5 billion in benefits to 1.4 million people, with 98% of payments issued on time. Critically it also began the process of delivering on Scotland's ambition of a modern, inclusive and socially-oriented nation – The Scottish Child Payment, enabled by automated payment systems, reached 140,000 children by 2022, contributing to a measurable reduction in child poverty.

The Digital Front Door - Revolutionizing Access to Health and Social Care Services in Scotland

Scotland's National Health Service (NHS) is advancing an ambitious initiative to implement a **Digital Front Door** (DFD) platform, a key component of its Digital Health and Care Strategy, designed to revolutionize access to health and social care services.

Unlike England's NHS App, which is tailored to its specific healthcare infrastructure, Scotland's DFD is a custom-built solution that integrates both health and social care services into a single, user-friendly digital interface.

This platform aims to empower citizens to take control of their care, streamline administrative processes, and enhance service efficiency. The initial launch is scheduled for December 2025 in Lanarkshire, with a progressive national rollout planned throughout 2026, marking a significant step toward a digital-first healthcare system.

The Digital Front Door - Revolutionizing Access to Health and Social Care Services in Scotland

Unified Service Access

The DFD will serve as a comprehensive access point, available through a website and mobile app, enabling users to manage their health and care needs seamlessly. Patients will be able to access and update personal health records, including hospital appointments, test results, and screening invitations, while receiving digital notifications, such as appointment reminders, to reduce reliance on costly traditional methods like postal services. For instance, NHS Tayside alone spent £7.64 million on postage between 2019 and 2022.

The platform will also facilitate direct interactions, such as booking appointments, ordering prescriptions, and accessing virtual consultations. By leveraging Scotland's Community Health Index (CHI), the DFD will ensure seamless data integration across health and social care services, supporting innovative programs like digital dermatology, mental health referrals (which reached 74,000 in 2023–24), and long-term condition management. Additionally, the platform will extend to social care, potentially enabling referrals for community care assessments or automating benefits processes.

Development of the DFD, which began in 2022, is led by NHS Education for Scotland (NES), with a £27.8 million contract [awarded to BJSS](#) in May 2025 to support delivery. The project involves close collaboration with health boards, local authorities, and stakeholders like COSLA to ensure alignment with Scotland's unique care landscape.

The Digital Front Door - Revolutionizing Access to Health and Social Care Services in Scotland

The platform is being co-designed with input from citizens, including those with lived experience, and organizations such as Disability Equality Scotland and Age Scotland. An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is guiding efforts to address digital access barriers, particularly for rural and marginalized communities, ensuring inclusivity. The project's budget reflects significant investment, with £0.75 million allocated in 2021/22, £2 million in 2022/23, £1.5 million in 2023/24, and £12 million for the 2025/26 initial launch, underscoring its priority within Scotland's healthcare agenda.

Public Service Reform

The DFD aligns with broader strategic goals outlined in Scotland's NHS Operational Improvement Plan and Public Service Reform Strategy, which aim to reduce waiting times, shift care to community settings, and achieve £2.5 billion in savings by 2030. It complements initiatives like the Accelerated National Innovation Adoption (ANIA) pathway, which fast-tracks technologies such as digital dermatology, and the Hospital at Home program, set to expand to 2,000 beds by 2026.

The Digital Front Door - Revolutionizing Access to Health and Social Care Services in Scotland

However, the project has faced criticism, particularly from the Scottish Conservatives, who argue that the DFD lags behind England's NHS App, launched in 2019, and highlight cost escalations from an initial £12 million estimate. Concerns also arise about the complexity of integrating social care data, which some fear could delay progress, though officials emphasize its necessity for a holistic approach. To address digital inclusion, the government is committed to providing non-digital alternatives and supporting digital literacy initiatives.

Looking ahead, the DFD holds transformative potential, with aspirations to integrate with wider public services, such as prison systems or benefits administration, and to leverage emerging technologies like AI and robotics for prevention and efficiency. By prioritizing co-design, interoperability, and inclusivity, Scotland's DFD aims to deliver a modern, accessible platform that meets the needs of its diverse population, reduces pressure on the NHS, and sets a foundation for a resilient, digital-first health and social care system.

Scottish Government Launches 'Digital Mailboxes'

Scotland is poised to lead the UK in public service innovation with the launch of a nationwide Digital Mailbox solution in 2026.

Developed by Netcompany in partnership with the Scottish Government, this secure, unified platform will serve as a one-stop digital hub for all official government communications, marking a shift from traditional print and post methods to efficient, citizen-centric digital interactions.

A digital mailbox (often called “Digital Post” in Denmark) is a secure online platform that replaces traditional physical mail for communications between governments/public authorities, citizens, and businesses.

Instead of paper letters, notifications, bills, or documents, senders deliver them digitally in a legally binding, encrypted format.

Key Features and Functionality

Unified Communication: Every Scottish citizen will receive a personal digital mailbox for essential updates, such as benefits notifications, tax information, and service alerts. Users can view, respond to, and act on messages—sharing documents, making payments, and accessing related services—all from one secure interface accessible across devices (mobile, desktop, etc.).

Integration and Security: The system integrates with Scotland’s national digital identity framework, ensuring GDPR-compliant, two-way communication. It prioritizes data sovereignty by hosting data on Scottish infrastructure where possible, enhancing privacy and trust.

Scottish Government Launches 'Digital Mailboxes'

Accessibility Focus: Designed to bridge the digital divide, it includes provisions for offline users (e.g., parallel paper options) and targets remote or underserved communities to promote inclusivity.

Broader Implications

This model is inspired by Netcompany's successful implementations in Denmark, where similar digital mailboxes have delivered substantial efficiencies and cost reductions—outcomes Scotland aims to match or surpass.

The Digital Mailbox positions Scotland as a digital pioneer in the UK and Europe, aligning with the refreshed National Digital Strategy's vision for “smarter, faster, and fairer” services. It sets a potential blueprint for other regions, emphasizing ethical tech adoption, sustainability, and societal value over mere digitization. As one expert noted, this could “transform how governments connect with citizens,” driving long-term economic and social benefits.

Aberdeen City Council Streamlines 'Digital Front Door' with Microsoft AI Chatbots



One of Scotland's largest local authorities is [using the Microsoft Cloud](#) to transform its social care services by designing a new ecosystem in partnership with its own social workers.

Aberdeen City Council, a local government in Scotland with 8,000 employees, faced increased demand for services like healthcare, mental health, and housing amid budget cuts and workforce shortages.

Aberdeen City Council has been working with Microsoft to drive a cutting-edge programme to upscale and redesign services for 230,000 people in the area.

Microsoft's Dynamics 365 [is being used](#) to bring adult and children's social care data and workflows together in one place, where staff will be able to record, share and analyse information with greater ease, supported by automation.

365 Copilot Productivity

As [this case study](#) describes to address administrative overload and enhance service delivery for its 230,000 residents, the Council deployed Microsoft 365 Copilot to 700 staff across various services.

Led by Andy MacDonald, Executive Director of Corporate Services, the initiative aimed to automate repetitive tasks such as producing meeting minutes, reports, policy documents, and translations, freeing staff for more resident-focused work.

Aberdeen City Council Streamlines 'Digital Front Door' with Microsoft AI Chatbots

As existing Microsoft 365 users, the Council leveraged technology champions to ensure smooth adoption. Copilot's integration improved productivity and job satisfaction, with user surveys showing weekly time savings and a projected 241% ROI, equating to \$3 million in annual savings.

Notably, neurodivergent employees benefited significantly from Copilot's capabilities. The Council also piloted a telephony solution using Microsoft Dynamics 365, enabling personalized resident communication via Facebook Messenger. These efforts enhanced operational efficiency, redirected staff toward community initiatives, and improved service delivery, particularly for vulnerable residents, positioning Aberdeen as a technology trailblazer in local governance.

Revamping the digital front door to council services

Furthermore Aberdeen has pioneered the use of Azure AI to streamline the online citizen contact experience. They were the first local authority in Scotland with a virtual assistant when it launched its AB-1 chatbot with Microsoft in 2020.



Aberdeen City Council Streamlines 'Digital Front Door' with Microsoft AI Chatbots

It has now launched an improved version of AB-1 in Azure, which has helped it to optimise and scale the chatbot. New generative AI capabilities also mean it can understand more complex questions and respond with more detailed answers.

Enabling citizens to help themselves to round-the-clock support, AB-1 handles queries on topics such as refuse collection, school term dates and council tax. The Council also has an internal version of AB-1, answering questions about topics such as wages and annual leave for the Council's 8000 staff.

And while the original chatbot reduced the number of calls and emails to the Council, freeing up staff for more meaningful and in-person work, the latest version of AB-1 is producing even greater efficiencies.

"Early testing shows AB-1 is now answering twice as many questions, and we expect volumes to increase," says Andy MacDonald, Executive Director of Corporate Services at the Council. "Customers can now get most of their answers online."

Microsoft supported Aberdeen's developers during the creation of the original AB-1. It's now helping the Council to optimise and develop the upgraded chatbot's training, using Copilot Studio. The team is also making sure that the chatbot's feedback mode is enabled, so it can keep analysing and learning from past interactions.

Aberdeen City Council Streamlines 'Digital Front Door' with Microsoft AI Chatbots

When AB-1 launched it featured a unique ability to take some basic questions in Doric, the regional dialect. The Council is now finalising a forthcoming edition with an enhanced understanding of Doric, which will also be able to [support several other languages](#). These will include some of the most widely-spoken languages in the area, such as Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Russian.

Scotland Pioneers Role of Open Data in a Digital Government Strategy

Open Data is a cornerstone of a robust Digital Government strategy, enabling transparency, accountability, and public engagement while driving innovation and efficiency.

It makes government information accessible to citizens, fostering trust by allowing scrutiny of public spending, policies, and decision-making processes.

By publishing data in reusable formats, governments empower stakeholders to monitor performance and hold officials accountable.

Empowering Open Innovation

Open Data facilitates citizen participation by providing accessible information that enables informed contributions to policy-making. Tools like data portals and AI registers allow communities to engage with government processes, aligning with participatory democracy goals.

By making data freely available, governments enable businesses, developers, and researchers to create new products, services, and insights. This fuels innovation, supports evidence-based decision-making, and stimulates economic activity through data-driven solutions.

Open Data supports internal and external efficiency by enabling data sharing across government agencies and with the public. Transparent data practices, such as public AI registers, build trust by demonstrating ethical use of technology. Open Data ensures that public sector applications of data and AI are inclusive, fair, and aligned with societal needs.

Open Data fosters collaboration between government, civil society, academia, and the private sector. Communities of practice and stakeholder networks amplify the impact of data-driven policies, ensuring they address real-world challenges like climate change or public health.

Scotland Pioneers Role of Open Data in a Digital Government Strategy

In essence, Open Data transforms government into a platform for collaboration, innovation, and trust, aligning with the broader goals of a Digital Government strategy to create responsive, inclusive, and efficient public services.

Scotland's Open Government Action Plan

As they share [here](#), the Scottish Government's Open Government Action Plan provide updates on five key commitments aimed at enhancing openness, transparency, and participation.

Commitment 1: Fiscal Openness and Transparency

Efforts continue to improve the accessibility and usability of public finance data. Progress includes refining benchmarking against the International Monetary Fund's Fiscal Transparency Code, with input from the Scottish Human Rights Commission's Open Budget Index.

A beta solution for standardizing and visualizing budget data is being developed, with plans for a public-facing fiscal portal by early 2025. Engagement with stakeholders, including the Fiscal Openness and Transparency Commitment Group, supports a transparent budget process, with improvements planned for the 2025-26 budget.

Commitment 2: Health and Social Care

The commitment focuses on co-designing health and social care services with service users and staff. The Getting it Right for Everyone (GIRFE) Pathfinder Project is advancing, with 59 co-design sessions planned through February 2025 to develop an adult practice model. These sessions involve underrepresented groups through third-sector partnerships, such as the Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project. Outputs, including a national toolkit, are being refined and shared to enhance person-centered service design.

Scotland Pioneers Role of Open Data in a Digital Government Strategy

Commitment 3: Data and Digital Commitment

Progress includes expanding open data initiatives, such as the Scottish AI Register, mandated for public sector use since April 2024, with over 60 AI use cases being added. The Find.Data.Gov.Scot platform is improving data discoverability, with plans to add 10 more data sources by November 2025.

Collaboration with climate change and transport teams supports open data for public transport and emissions modeling. The Better Data Community of Practice continues to promote data standards through events and workshops, with a focus on policy development and AI ethics.

Commitment 4: Climate Change

The commitment aims to engage stakeholders in Scotland's net-zero ambitions by 2045. A stakeholder network supports participation in climate policy, with updated terms of reference and engagement plans. Progress includes co-creating opportunities for public involvement, aligning with the Just Transition approach, and addressing missed emissions targets through enhanced collaboration with diverse organizations.

Commitment 5: Participation

This commitment advances public participation through the Participation Framework Agreement, with training for Scottish Government staff planned for early 2025 to align with policy standards. A social research project on impactful participation concluded in September 2024, with findings to be published in early 2025.

Scotland Pioneers Role of Open Data in a Digital Government Strategy

Efforts to improve children's participation align with the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, and the National Performance Framework refresh incorporates public engagement outcomes, with parliamentary scrutiny ongoing.

Overall, the report highlights steady progress across all commitments, emphasizing co-creation with civil society, data-driven transparency, and inclusive participation, though some areas, like participation training and citizens' assemblies, face delays due to resource constraints.