

Transforming public services for a modern Wales

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Wales stands at a pivotal moment.

With the 2026 Senedd elections on the horizon, now is the time to reimagine how our public services can better serve people, strengthen our economy, protect our environment and secure our future.

Wales has the potential to become a beacon for modern, human-centred public services. Our size is our strength - we can be nimble, responsive, and innovative in ways that larger nations cannot.

This report sets out the challenges facing the next Welsh Government, a better way of delivering change and recommendations for how to proceed.

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Contents

	Introduction	4
	Current challenges	8
	A better way	12
	Why this matters	22
	How to get there	26
	Making this real	42
	A call to action	48
	Further reading	50
	About the authors	54

Introduction

In 2026, Wales will elect a new Senedd – bigger, and for the first time, chosen entirely through proportional representation.

It's unlikely one party will win enough seats to form a majority government. For whichever parties form a coalition, this is a chance to reimagine how our public services can better serve people, strengthen our economy, protect the environment, and secure our future.

The next government will inherit tough challenges: long NHS waiting lists, pressure to grow the economy, challenging net zero targets, rising child poverty, house-building. It will need to deliver visible improvements to people quickly, but this is challenged by existing siloed ways of working, poorly designed services, and a slow pace of delivery. The recent Spending Review makes clear: funding is going down, not up. Hard choices lie ahead.

For too long, we've relied on short-term fixes and sticking plasters to keep vital services running.

A bit more money here. A reshuffle there. But this is not enough to deal with the scale of the challenges Wales faces.

We keep the same people in positions of power, closing the door to new talent in leadership. We use the same approaches to designing and delivering services, repeating the same mistakes over and over again.

It's time to break the cycle of crisis management. We need to plan for the long term. That means rethinking how government works – not just what it delivers, but how.

As devolution has given Wales more power, we have not grown our capacity to deliver that change. We must now build the state's capacity to manage it for a more vibrant, successful Wales.

We need a digital approach

Digital isn't just about technology. It's about how we design, deliver, and run services. Done well, it transforms how change happens.

Instead of starting with what a health board or government agency thinks people need, digital starts with researching and understanding real needs – grounded in the lives of people and communities across Wales.

It means working in small, cross-functional teams. Testing small ideas early. Learning what works. Scaling what helps. It means focusing on outcomes, not outputs – and being open about what's working and what's not.

This approach helps government spot problems earlier and fix them faster. It reduces waste. It builds services that are simpler, quicker, and more inclusive.

Done right, digital helps public services do more with less – and builds trust along the way.

Definition of digital:

Applying the culture, processes, business models and technologies of the internet-era to respond to people's raised expectations.

- Tom Loosemore, 2017
definitionofdigital.com

Our vision for the present and the future

This report outlines a strategy for transforming Welsh public services, not only to meet the urgent demands of the present but to deliver on the vision of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. We can ensure a prosperous, resilient, healthier, and more equal Wales for current and future generations.

The choice for the next Welsh Government is profound: to continue with short-term fixes and inherited frustrations, or to commit to genuine transformation. A transformation that brings together arms-length bodies, local government and the NHS to deliver for Wales.

Digital is not technology.

**It's rethinking
how we design,
deliver, and run
services.**

Current challenges

The way we design and deliver public services is broken.

For over a decade, we've failed to increase our state capacity as Welsh public services have faced growing pressures: rising demand alongside reduced funding. People need and expect more, but public services have failed to keep up.

Councils are finding it hard to keep essential services running. Wales' 22 local authorities often work in silos, face chronic underfunding, and rely on outdated delivery models. Expensive 'big bang' technology programmes take years and rarely deliver the improvements people need.

The NHS is struggling to balance budgets, reduce waiting times, and handle large queues at A&E.

Welsh public services are falling behind – not just compared to England, but to other countries like Estonia, Canada, and Caribbean nations leading the way in public service reform.

For years we've relied on sticking plasters and short-term fixes to keep vital services running. A bit more money here, a re-organisation there. But it's not enough. Without a strong impetus for systemic reform, this fragmented approach only perpetuates problems.

We're stuck in a cycle where it takes more and more just to stand still.

And now, the latest Spending Review makes the outlook even tougher. Hard choices are coming.

It's time to move beyond crisis management and start planning for the future.

We can't afford to wait another 5 years.

The old ways are not working.

For years, government has turned to technology to make services more efficient.

While technology has changed immeasurably in the 25 years of devolution in Wales, the way we deliver it hasn't.

Wales relies too heavily on big IT suppliers – often based outside Wales – who still use old-fashioned delivery methods. These methods rely on months of upfront planning, heavy governance that slows things down without adding value, and long procurement cycles that often fail. Even when projects launch years later, they're usually outdated, over budget, and a huge drain on public funds.

This holds us back from using more modern effective ways of working that deliver value at pace.

Policy is still made without understanding delivery. Technology is still bought without thinking about users. Big programmes promise everything – then deliver too late, or not at all.

We rely on the empty promise of 'quick fixes' like Artificial Intelligence, and assume they will dig us out of a hole.

We've designed around technology, not people, and it shows. We keep putting tech and policy first, and experience last. We mistake digital products for digital transformation. We rely on the empty promise of 'quick fixes' like Artificial Intelligence, and assume they will dig us out of a hole.

And with organisations each trying to solve the same problems in isolation – from social care to housing – we waste money, time and effort that could be better spent working together.

What's needed isn't just better tools, it's better ways of working.

That means starting with people's needs. Testing and learning, not guessing and launching. And building in the open, with teams who can adapt as they go.

The real opportunity lies in how we work, not just what we build.

Good practice exists, but it's not the standard.

Wales isn't short on talent or good ideas.

The Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) has successfully tested different ways of delivering services. This includes a positive shift to designing better bilingual services through closer working between the Welsh Government and the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Alongside this, other organisations have shown what's possible. Sport Wales has redesigned its community grants service to be more inclusive. The Welsh Revenue Authority prototyped policy in the open. Natural Resources Wales is sharing and learning openly. Councils in Gwent are forming a shared digital unit to share resources and learning, and reduce duplication.

The Welsh Government should be championing and mandating these modern approaches across all public services, especially for local government and the NHS.

But they are small-scale, fragmented, and far from standard. Progress is too slow.

The Digital Strategy for Wales has stalled.

The next government is a chance to do things differently, and do them better.

A better way

Transforming public services for a modern Wales

Pouring more money in isn't the only answer.

If Wales wants to rise to the challenge of improving public services, we have to change how we design and deliver them.

That means putting people first, adopting modern and open ways of working, drawing on the best digital practices to build services that are simple, efficient, and designed around real life-needs.

In practice, this means we:

- 1** Start with people, not solutions
- 2** Organise around multidisciplinary teams
- 3** Test, learn and adapt
- 4** Work in the open
- 5** Own and build the digital plumbing

1. Start with people, not solutions

Before designing policy or implementing technology, we need to understand the problem – and the people affected by it.

That means doing first-hand research. Instead of making assumptions or relying on surveys, we need to:

- observe real behaviours
- map full end-to-end service journeys
- understand people's needs, goals, and the context around them

This helps us focus on outcomes, not pre-decided solutions. It's how we design services that work across organisational boundaries, reduce avoidable complexity, and minimise costly errors.

By truly understanding the complex lives of the people of Wales, we can design services that bridge the fragmented offerings across local authorities, central government and the NHS.

This avoids wasting time and money designing or building solutions that do not get used – or worse, create bigger problems down the line.

By designing services around user needs, staff can concentrate their efforts where human judgement and care make the biggest difference.

2. Organise around multidisciplinary teams

Transformation doesn't happen in documents or plans – it happens in teams.

Successful digital delivery depends on small, multidisciplinary teams that bring together:

- user-centred design
- policy and operations understanding

A better way

- information governance, procurement and legal insight
- modern software and infrastructure expertise

These teams are the unit of delivery. They work iteratively, learn fast, and adapt to change. They're empowered to make decisions throughout the life of the service – and accountable for outcomes, not just outputs.

This approach challenges the usual top-down silos in the public sector. It helps teams work faster and more efficiently by removing barriers and creating a shared understanding.

As the needs of the service evolve, so does the team. But the investment in people, knowledge and trust remains – supporting long-term progress.

3. Test, learn and adapt

Government services are complex. People don't always behave as expected, life is messy, and priorities shift.

That's why a test and learn approach matters. Instead of years gathering requirements, procuring, and building an oversized solution that arrives late, over budget, or not at all, teams start small.

They focus on the biggest needs, test risky assumptions, and deliver improvements in small steps. This reduces costs and uncertainty as they go, while quickly releasing value to the public.

This approach:

- surfaces pain points early
- de-risks delivery and costs
- avoids expensive 'big-bang' failures
- delivers better value for money over time

All of this builds trust and confidence over time, for both users and government.

4. Working in the open

Working in the open means showing your work as it happens.

This includes:

- sharing regular updates
- publishing research and early prototypes
- being honest about what's working and what isn't

Openness builds trust with users, stakeholders and delivery partners. It improves governance, makes dependencies visible, and helps retain knowledge across teams.

It also creates momentum for change. The more people can see the story, the more they can support it and continue the work.

5. Own and build the digital plumbing

Today, teams can spin up infrastructure in seconds, build prototypes in minutes, and combine proven tools to create complex services in weeks.

Yet in Wales, we still depend too much on outsourcing and big overseas tech companies, often putting all our key services with just one supplier. That's risky: prices can go up, services can be switched off without warning, and our most important systems become more vulnerable to serious cyber attacks.

The alternative is to build with modern Digital Public Infrastructure and open source tools. These are reusable building blocks designed for usability, accessibility, and scale. For example:

- GOV.UK Notify and Pay
- the NHS Prototyping Kit
- the Modular Open Source Identity Platform (MOSIP)

A better way

- OpenEyes (an electronic patient record for Ophthalmology)
- OpenFn (a workflow automation platform)

Shifting from buying to building requires modern skills like cloud engineering, infrastructure orchestration, and software development. But it pays off. It gives public services more control, reduces wasteful vendor lock-in, and creates opportunities for smaller, more agile suppliers – including Welsh companies – to contribute.

Opening up public service technology delivery can play a strong role in growing the Welsh economy, keeping talent in Wales and tapping into our universities, our strong cyber cluster, and vibrant fintech sector.

Building with Digital Public Infrastructure helps governments move faster, keep spending local, and stay resilient and sovereign while meeting people's expectations.

This is not new.

None of this is radical. These approaches are now the standard in the most effective organisations, public and private.

In the UK, the Government Digital Service (GDS) codified these ways of working more than a decade ago. Since then, major services like Renew your passport, Register to vote, and Lasting Powers of Attorney have been transformed using these principles.

They've since become common practice around the world: in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the US and beyond.

In Wales, the System Reboot report made the case for digital public service reform in 2018. It called for:

- services designed around user needs
- small, empowered teams that can ship and iterate quickly
- open ways of working to build trust and accountability

Systems Reboot led to the creation of the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) and the Digital Service Standard for Wales.

Progress has been made. But the scale and pace of change still isn't close to what's needed.

Even though System Reboot and CDPS set strong foundations, big cultural and systemic barriers have slowed real change. Many organisations use the right language, but the deeper shifts in mindset and practice haven't happened. This means we're still stuck with short-term fixes instead of long-term transformation.

We believe the next Welsh Government should make a clear shift from programmes and projects to teams and services. It's a chance to:

- deliver better outcomes for people
- reduce cost and risk
- rebuild public trust in government

A note on Artificial Intelligence (AI).

We've deliberately not focused on artificial intelligence (AI) in this report.

AI is not one technology, or a silver bullet. It brings both promise and risk. It's already helping doctors diagnose cancer more effectively. But it can also amplify bias, concentrate power, and cause real harm if used carelessly.

That's why the methods in this report matter.

To use AI in ways that benefit Wales, government will need to:

- put humans at the centre
- empower multidisciplinary teams
- test, learn and adapt
- work in the open
- design and build the digital plumbing

These aren't just good delivery habits. They're critical foundations for exploring new technologies responsibly, and shaping a better future for everyone.

What's needed isn't just better tools

It's better ways of working

Why this matters

Welsh public services haven't kept up.

Technology has transformed how we live, work, and connect with the world.

People expect public services to be simple, fast, and user-friendly – just like everything else in their lives. But too often, government services are slow, clunky, and frustrating.

When services look bad and feel bad, trust in government is eroded.

Public services in Wales need to be designed around the people and communities that use them.

Modernising public services isn't just about technology.

It's about securing Wales' future.

If we act now, we can build a nation where the government works smarter, where people trust public services, and where businesses and talent thrive.

A stronger, more influential Wales.

Leading by example in digital transformation makes Wales a progressive, ambitious nation that others look to for inspiration.

By improving how the government works, we can negotiate with Westminster from a position of strength and be taken seriously alongside other digital nations.

A thriving economy and future-proofed jobs.

Investing in digital skills and homegrown expertise creates high-quality jobs and makes Wales a more attractive place to live and work.

Growing and supporting local businesses, universities, colleges and tech talent makes sure money stays in Wales, reducing reliance on expensive external consultants.

We can show the world that we're a nimble, forward-thinking nation, and give the Welsh diaspora something to be excited about.

Public services that actually work.

Modern, human-centred ways of working lead to faster, fairer and more accessible services – designed around people's real needs, not outdated systems.

By fixing how services are designed and delivered, we can reduce short-term, reactive spending and focus on long-term improvements that benefit communities across Wales.

This matters most in places like local government and the NHS, where day-to-day services shape people's lives and wellbeing.

Designing with users from the start helps create inclusive systems that support – rather than exclude – the people who need them most. It's not just about efficiency. It's essential for building a healthier, more equal and prosperous Wales, in line with the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

A government that earns trust.

When public services work well, confidence in government grows because people feel heard, valued, and supported. This means delivering noticeable, positive changes to their everyday lives – services that are demonstrably faster, simpler, and more effective.

Transparent spending makes better use of public money, reducing waste and making decision-making clearer.

Through working openly and iteratively, government will foster the deep involvement, collaboration, and long-term thinking that underpins the sustainable development principle of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, rebuilding trust and ensuring accountability.

How to get there

Wales has the potential to become a beacon for modern, human-centred public services.

But to get there we must act decisively in three main areas: **leadership**, **skills** and **funding**.

1

Leadership: Clear, bold and accountable

Appoint a Minister for Digital to lead a visionary national strategy, be accountable and advocate for digital at the highest levels of government.

Establish a national Chief Digital Officer (CDO) and a Digital Delivery Unit for Wales with the authority and support to lead digital reform, shifting the focus from technology to ways of working that make services better.

Lead by example, demonstrating a radical new approach to public service delivery by doing, testing and learning, and bringing teams together across the public sector.

2

People:

Invest in modern skills and expertise

Bring modern skills into the public sector, including user research, service design, interaction design, content design and engineering, using multidisciplinary teams to transform public services.

Invest in career pathways and pay structures to make Wales an attractive place for digital professionals and user-centred design practitioners.

Accelerate digital talent and embed leadership understanding, creating a new generation of bold, forward-looking, and digitally literate leaders with modern skills to drive Wales into the future.

3

Funding:

Reinvent delivery mechanisms

Fund teams not projects - teams that focus on cross-sector collaboration, solving shared problems, and fixing the infrastructure to make services quick, easy and flexible to change.

Simplify and modernise procurement processes to make it easier for small businesses to bid, use flexible contracts, and break large projects into smaller, outcome-focused pieces.

Introduce radical transparency for digital delivery to increase trust and accountability in public services, demonstrate ongoing delivery, and build the digital economy of Wales.

Clear, bold and accountable leadership



Transforming public service requires clear, bold leadership.

Leadership that understands the scale of the change we need that's prepared to challenge and be challenged. Leadership with the vision, authority and staying power to drive lasting change.

Right now, leadership in Wales is fragmented. Direction is split between multiple government ministers, three Chief Digital Officers (CDO), and two 'delivery' bodies – the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) and Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW).

Each has separate priorities, approaches and strategies.

There's no single, accountable figure setting direction, championing good practice or uniting the system behind a shared vision. For example, in NHS Wales, the CDO for Health and Social Care cannot control or set the direction of digital delivery in DHCW or individual health boards. Each has its own digital strategy and accountability frameworks.

Compounding this, Wales has a significant number of boards, committees and governance forums. While intended to oversee, they often become talking shops. They absorb valuable time and resources without genuinely accelerating delivery or fostering new thinking, reflecting a broader lack of imagination in addressing systemic issues.

The next Welsh Government should:

A. Appoint a Minister for Digital

Transformation needs a champion at the highest level. Someone who can advocate for a modern, user-centred approach to public services across government.

This Minister should:

- be responsible for a bold national digital strategy
- lead a cultural shift in how services are designed and delivered
- stay in post for the full Senedd term to provide consistency

B. Establish a national Chief Digital Officer (CDO) and a Digital Delivery Unit for Wales

Wales needs more than a single champion – it needs a dedicated team of experts, led by a national Chief Digital Officer, who can represent and transform the whole public service: Welsh Government, local authorities, arms-length bodies, and the NHS.

The CDO for Wales should:

- sit at Director General level, reporting to the Permanent Secretary and Minister for Digital
- be a visible and recognised leader in digital public service innovation, nationally and globally
- bring a track record in large-scale digital services (not IT) and a deep understanding of modern, user-centred ways of working
- be empowered to lead transformation across the system – not just influencing, but actively driving and delivering change
- be the Head of Profession for digital and technology across the whole of the public sector

The Digital Delivery Unit should act as a visible centre of leadership that builds confidence, shifts mindsets and inspires teams across Wales.

Together, they should deliver a portfolio of high-impact services to show how transformation moves from discussion to tangible outcomes. They should have a mandate to bring leadership across organisations together to redesign cross-cutting services and deliver improvements.

They should be responsible for building and delivering the digital public infrastructure and plumbing that supports a modern government. In the first 2 years they should transform 3-5 services across government, including:

- appointment management and reminders for health and social care
- registration, payment and management of council tax
- bringing together benefits, entitlements and support payments across Wales

This is not about creating another arm's-length body. It's about establishing a unit within the heart of government with the authority, skills and mandate to lead change across the whole system.

C. Lead by example

The Welsh Government must model the approach it wants others to adopt. This means:

- empowering teams to work in the open and share learning
- celebrating delivery while being honest about challenges
- embracing a test and learn culture and showing work in progress

This kind of leadership helps rebuild public trust, and shows what good looks like in practice.

Invest in modern skills and expertise

2

Better public services start with the right people.

Modern, user-centred services require skills that still aren't widespread across the Welsh public sector – especially in user research, service design, content design, delivery management and engineering.

While there are small pockets of these skills, they're often too small, unevenly distributed, and underpowered – sitting in junior roles without the mandate to lead change.

Some organisations that should be driven by these skills – like Digital Health and Care Wales – lack them at scale and seniority.

Pay and career progression for digital roles are uncompetitive and inconsistent between different levels of government in Wales. Digital and data specialists are regularly lost to better-paid roles in the private sector or UK Government departments based in Wales and across the border.

Wales has the talent. Our successful growing fintech and cyber security sectors show that. But we need to make government work feel like an exciting, meaningful and credible career path for those already here, and those in the Welsh diaspora who may want to return.

Change cannot happen without the right people with the right skills and capability, the powers to make change, working in multidisciplinary teams.

The next Welsh Government should:

A. Bring modern skills into the public sector

Transforming services means transforming how delivery works.

Welsh Government should:

- launch high-profile recruitment campaigns to attract user-centred design, engineering, and supplier management expertise
- form these practitioners into empowered, multidisciplinary teams who work alongside policy and operations experts to redesign services
- expand and scale the training currently offered through CDPS, enabling civil servants to gain hands-on experience with user-centred methods

Every civil servant should understand how modern services are designed. And every major delivery team should have people with the skills to do it.

B. Invest in career pathways and pay structures

Working in government should be an attractive choice for digital professionals. For this, they need clear career pathways and fair pay. The government should:

- create visible career progression routes for digital and design roles, from graduate schemes to senior leadership
- expand and support communities of practice across all digital professions
- review public sector pay structures to compete with the wider market, including the UK Government

These improvements don't have to mean simply spending more. Our recommendations in this chapter propose new ways to fund digital

delivery – by reducing duplication, pooling investment, and shifting from short-term procurement to long-term capability.

Where public bodies struggle to recruit or retain talent, the Welsh Government should step in – using its central role to host shared digital teams that can support multiple services across Wales.

C. Accelerate digital talent and embed modern leadership

Transformation cannot succeed without leaders who understand it. To run modern organisations, we need modern leadership – grounded in the skills and mindsets that make digital change possible. It's no longer acceptable for senior leaders to be unfamiliar with digital and technology.

Digital leadership skills should be seen as core to public sector management. That means:

- accelerating experienced digital talent into leadership roles across government
- requiring every public sector organisation to have a digital leader on its executive team and a digital non-executive on its board by 2027
- making user-centred design and modern software delivery training mandatory for all board members, executives, and the top tiers of organisational management

The Chief Digital Officer for Wales should be the Head of Profession for digital and technology across the whole of the public sector. They should have a mandate to bring leadership across organisations together to redesign cross-cutting services and deliver improvements.

Reinvent funding and delivery mechanisms



Transforming how government works also means transforming how it funds and delivers work.

Across the Welsh public sector, the default model is still large, time-limited programmes that rely on cumbersome, multi-stage business cases. This process is slow, expensive and based on guesswork. It forces teams to commit upfront to fixed plans rather than testing risky assumptions or responding to real-world feedback.

Small projects face the same scrutiny as major programmes, making it harder to start small and scale what works. To bypass the rigidities of these larger programmes, Wales has increasingly relied on short-term grant funding pots. While intended to encourage innovation, these funds are often too brief to sustain successful initiatives or diverted to prop up failing projects, undermining their original purpose.

Combine this with the year-by-year operational settlements, organisations have no clear idea what their overall funding looks like. Continuous improvement is squeezed out by crisis-mode spending and an over-focus on “new” instead of maintaining what already exists.

The results? Ballooning costs, fragile systems, and failed delivery.

Instead of pouring money into one-off initiatives, the next Welsh Government should invest in continuous, outcome-driven delivery – supported by funding models that reward stability, learning and long-term value.

The next Welsh Government should:

A. Fund teams not projects

Modern services require continuous care, not stop-start projects.

Time-limited funding encourages short-term thinking and rewards outputs, not outcomes.

Services decay once projects end, and the systems left behind often become brittle, outdated and expensive to maintain.

Welsh Government should adopt a Product Operating Model, replacing project-based funding with long-lived, cross-functional product teams that own public outcomes.

These teams should:

- be multidisciplinary, combining policy, operations, design, technology, delivery and user research
- be empowered to make operational decisions within their budgets
- work iteratively, with tight feedback loops and space to continuously improve

The next Welsh Government and the new Chief Digital Officer should start by establishing 4 or 5 high-impact product teams in year one – focused on cross-sector collaboration, and solving shared problems faced by local authorities, the NHS and central government.

B. Simplify and modernise procurement practice

To support better delivery, Wales needs more agile, modular and SME-friendly procurement systems.

Current procurement often assumes we can predict the future, locking government into rigid, long-term contracts with limited flexibility. This slows innovation and increases reliance on large vendors based outside of Wales.

Welsh Government should:

- redesign procurement policy and culture to support smaller, outcome-driven contracts
- lower barriers for small companies and create space for incremental delivery
- break up large monolithic procurements and reduce dependency on “strategic suppliers”

This should be underpinned by a Technology Code of Practice, setting out red lines that:

- limit maximum contract values and lengths
- end automatic extensions and bundling of unrelated services
- require the use of open standards and modern cloud infrastructure

In parallel, government should build strong market intelligence to inform buying decisions and stimulate local supply chains.

Smarter procurement isn’t just about efficiency. It’s about building a Welsh tech economy that serves the public good, maintains digital sovereignty, and reduces the reliance on large, extractive technology vendors.

C. Introduce radical transparency

Public trust in government depends on understanding not just what gets delivered, but how.

Traditional accountability tools like Senedd committees, audits, ministerial Q&A are important, but often retrospective and slow. Meanwhile, top-down communications like press releases and milestones rarely show the messy, iterative reality of delivery.

The Welsh Government should lead a culture shift toward radical transparency, where teams work openly and share real-time information about their progress, thinking and decision-making.

That means:

- publishing service performance and delivery data in the open
- sharing how user feedback shaped decisions
- explaining challenges, trade-offs and learning as they happen
- regularly publishing digital and technology procurement pipelines

This shift should start with the new product teams and be championed from the top by the First Minister, Minister for Digital, and Chief Digital Officer for Wales.

Understanding how government's internal "plumbing" works and making that visible is critical for rebuilding public confidence and democratic accountability.

**It is not enough
to simply
rebadge teams.**

**We must
fundamentally
reinvent
leadership,
skills, and
funding.**

Making this real

Grounding our 'better way' in practice.

Fully adopting the approach set out in this report means changing how the Welsh Government designs policy and delivers services.

To illustrate, we've sketched what the first 100 and 1,000 days might look like in two areas:

- Delivering a new National Care and Support Service
- Reforming the planning system through the new Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024

These examples ground our 'better way' in practice, but the same model could be applied to other priorities – from justice reform to decarbonisation.

The model: a better way of delivery.

Our approach rests on five principles:

1. **Set direction early** – publish a clear political statement of intent and outcomes to create a unifying 'North Star'.
2. **Build empowered teams** – multidisciplinary groups with policy, operational, digital and frontline expertise, led by a senior service owner with direct access to ministers.
3. **Start with users** – map the needs and pain points of people and staff, rather than locking in solutions.
4. **Test, learn, adapt** – run small experiments with rapid feedback loops, scaling what works and discarding what doesn't.
5. **Work in the open** – share progress regularly through updates, open data and public briefings to build trust and accountability.

Delivering a new National Care and Support Service.

Radically changing how we provide care and support to people in Wales will be one of the defining challenges of the next Welsh Government. With an ageing population and a 10% forecast rise in local authority social care spending in 2025 alone, the pressures on the current mix of local authority and NHS services are already acute.

The government has committed to creating a National Care and Support Service over the next decade, with full implementation from 2029. But a rigid, long-term plan risks being overtaken by events. A better way is to accelerate delivery by combining clear political intent with practical, test and learn reform.

The first 100 days.

In the first months, government should:

- **Publish a clear 'North Star'** – a political statement setting out outcomes and principles for reform, signalling urgency and accountability.
- **Assemble a multidisciplinary team** of 12–15 people from across government, local authorities, NHS and social care providers, supplemented by service design, user research and technology experts. Crucially, the team must include people with deep frontline knowledge of care delivery.
- **Start with users, not solutions**, mapping end-to-end journeys through the system using existing evidence from Audit Wales, the National Office for Care and Support, and the original expert group.
- **Launch small, bounded experiments** in one or two local authority or health board areas. Example hypotheses might include:
 - How can patients be discharged from hospital more quickly?
 - How can staff make home visits more efficient?

Making this real

° How can handovers between social care teams be simplified?

° How can people better track and manage their care?

- **Work in the open**, publishing weekly or fortnightly updates, holding monthly briefings with ministers, experts and the public, and being candid about uncertainties and lessons learned.

By the end of 100 days, the team should have disproved risky assumptions, exposed hidden friction points, identified regulatory blockers, delivered visible improvements for individuals, and laid out opportunities for further progress.

The next 2 years.

Over the following two years, the focus should be on scaling what works and embedding reform:

- **Growing multiple empowered teams**, each tackling a specific issue such as workforce shortages, new service models for home support, training provision or technology adoption.
- **Testing and refining models locally**, then scaling successful ones across Wales while stopping those that fail to deliver.
- **Building transparency** by publishing real-time data such as numbers of people receiving care, patients awaiting NHS discharge, and pressure points in care packages. These metrics should underpin monthly 'show and tell' sessions with ministers, frontline staff and the public.
- **Developing the digital plumbing** to support reform, not through buying a single system but by adopting "small pieces, loosely joined" — for example, using GOV.UK Notify for communications or GOV.UK Pay for transactions.

By the end of year two, the service should show measurable improvements in efficiency, user experience and public trust, with a foundation of empowered teams, open working and digital infrastructure ready for wider transformation.

High-level planning reform.

Wales faces significant challenges in housing, infrastructure, climate change and public health. Yet the planning system – anchored in local development plans – is struggling to respond. Many local plans are outdated, the process for updating them is long and complex, and both communities and businesses find it hard to engage. Wrexham's recent high-profile planning dispute illustrates the risks.

The Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 provides a new consenting framework for major projects. But without reform at local plan level, Wales will remain hampered in meeting its future needs.

The first 100 days.

In its opening months, government should:

- **Publish a political statement of intent**, linking planning reform directly to housing delivery, energy infrastructure, climate goals and healthier places.
- **Create a dedicated multidisciplinary planning reform team**, led by a senior service owner, bringing together expertise in planning, policy, user research, service design and digital delivery.
- **Engage communities and developers** to understand needs and pain points. For example: How can residents meaningfully shape their neighbourhoods? What makes the process predictable for developers?
- **Run practical experiments** with one or two local authorities to test:
 - faster identification of development sites
 - new digital tools for public engagement
 - ways to simplify and improve plan quality
- **Work in the open**, publishing regular updates and holding monthly ministerial briefings to share learning and progress.

Making this real

By the end of 100 days, the team should have disproved risky assumptions, uncovered legal or regulatory barriers, surfaced hidden friction points, and developed prototypes to improve the planning process.

The next 2 years.

Over the following two years, reform should deepen and spread:

- **Growing multiple teams**, each specialising in aspects of reform such as community engagement tools, plan digitisation, or developer submissions.
- **Developing shared digital services** – the “digital plumbing” – for all local authorities, such as reusable templates, common data standards and integrated platforms.
- **Publishing open performance data** showing how quickly and effectively local plans are being produced.
- **Scaling successful models** across Wales, so that every local authority can produce timely, adaptable local plans.

By year two, Wales should see more responsive local planning, easier community participation, and greater clarity for developers – all underpinned by modern digital infrastructure and transparent reporting.

Wider application.

This delivery model is not limited to care or planning. It could support transformation in any area the next Welsh Government prioritises – from youth justice to universal benefits. What matters is consistency: set direction, empower teams, start with users, test and adapt, and work in the open.

A call to action

Wales can't afford to fall further behind.

Our public services are being held back by outdated systems, fragmented leadership and short-term fixes. People are frustrated. Trust is eroding. And the potential of our nation is being wasted.

It doesn't have to be this way.

This report sets out a better path: modern, people-centred public services designed for the real world. Services shaped by evidence, delivered by empowered teams, and improved continuously, not once a decade.

To make it real, the next Welsh Government must act with courage. Not in four years – now.

We need:

- bold leadership with a clear mandate for change
- long-term investment in people and skills
- funding models that support learning, not legacy

This is more than digital reform. It's how we build a more resilient, responsive Wales – one that works for everyone, for generations to come.

The choice is clear. Stay stuck. Or lead the way.

Further reading

This report sets out a path to better public services, grounded in decades of experience and proven practice. For those ready to take the next step, we've curated essential resources to support practical implementation.

These books, reports and websites offer clear guidance on user-centred design, agile delivery, open working, and building modern digital infrastructure.

Further reading

System Reboot (2018)

Lee Waters

This influential report outlines the urgent need for systemic transformation within the Welsh public sector. Setting the scene for our work, it highlights long-standing challenges and makes the case for a bold, new approach to public service delivery in Wales.

<https://transform.wales/link/system-reboot>

The Digital Service Standard for Wales

Centre for Digital Public Services and Welsh Government

The Welsh Digital Service Standard provides practical, outcome-focused guidance for designing and delivering public services that truly meet user needs. It embodies the 'better way' principles we've outlined, offering a tangible framework for teams across Wales to build services that are simpler, clearer, and faster.

<https://transform.wales/link/wales-digital-standard>

The Radical How

Andrew Greenway and Tom Loosemore

This foundational book provides a compelling blueprint for delivering transformative change within government. It offers practical guidance to the mindsets, approaches, and challenges of digital transformation, directly informing our emphasis on moving beyond short-term fixes and new ways of thinking and doing.

<https://transform.wales/link/radical-how>

Digital Transformation at Scale

Andrew Greenway, Tom Loosemore, Mike Bracken and Ben Terrett

Building on extensive experience from the UK Government Digital Service, this book offers critical insights into how major digital transformation can be managed across large, complex organisations. It supports our calls for bold leadership, multidisciplinary teams, and a focus on continuous delivery, and demonstrates how these principles translate into large-scale systemic change.

ISBN: 978-1-9130193-9-6

<https://transform.wales/link/digital-transformation>

Further reading

The agile comms handbook

Giles Turnbull

Clear, open communication is essential for successful digital transformation — especially when working in the open. This handbook offers practical advice on how to communicate transparently and iteratively, supporting our call for radical transparency and helping to build a more open public service culture.

ISBN: 978-1-7399422-3-6

<https://transform.wales/link/agile-comms>

Trio Writing: Designing bilingual content for user-centred services

Joanna Goodwin, Adrián Ortega, Ceri Brunelli-Williams, Heledd Quaeck, and Nia Campbell

This practical guide to collaborative writing supports our principles of working in the open and multidisciplinary teamwork. It shows how structured collaboration can produce clear, user-centred bilingual content, leading to better communication and outcomes in public services across Wales.

ISBN: 978-1-446782 2-4-8

<https://transform.wales/link/trio-writing>

Platformland

Richard Pope

This influential thinking explores the concept of 'platforms' as foundational digital infrastructure, moving beyond individual services to create reusable components and shared capabilities across government. It underpins our recommendations for fixing the 'plumbing' of government and simplifying procurement, enabling a more integrated and efficient digital state.

ISBN: 978-1-9167491-1-5

<https://transform.wales/link/platformland>

Further reading

The Service Organization

Kate Tarling

This book offers crucial guidance on how public sector organisations can be structured and led to effectively deliver modern, user-centred services. It provides practical frameworks for building an organisational culture that supports continuous service design and delivery, and directly informs our recommendations on leadership, multidisciplinary teams, and improved ways of working.

ISBN 978-1-913019-76-1

<https://transform.wales/link/the-service-organization>

A blueprint for a modern digital government

UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

This blueprint sets out a vision for the future of an agile, user-centred government that resonates deeply with our recommendations. It reinforces the importance of integrated digital public infrastructure, open standards, and a focus on outcomes, and provides a broader strategic context for the actions proposed in our report.

<https://transform.wales/link/modern-digital-gov-blueprint>

Foundations Of The Digital State independent report for Scottish Government

Gordon Guthrie

This report offers a comprehensive vision for building a modern digital state, particularly relevant in a devolved context. Its focus on foundational components, capabilities, and strategic investments provides valuable parallels and reinforces the systemic changes we advocate for: leadership, skills, and funding to enable sustainable digital transformation in Wales.

ISBN: 978-1-0685451-0-8

<https://transform.wales/link/digital-state-foundations>

About the authors

This report was written by Ann Kempster, Dafydd Vaughan, Jo Carter and Nia Campbell.

We're a collective of digital transformation and design experts with decades of experience leading change across Welsh public services and UK Government.

We've helped teams deliver change at every level, and we believe Wales has the potential to lead, not just catch up.

Earlier this year we launched Cymru Ddigidol, a growing community of public sector practitioners and leaders working to rethink how services are designed and delivered.

We want to move beyond short-term fixes to design more resilient, responsive and trusted public services that truly meet the needs of Welsh communities.

Ann Kempster

Ann runs a small consultancy that works with Welsh public sector organisations who are committed to radically changing how they work.

She is an experienced digital leader who has spent the last 20 years building and leading digital teams that successfully deliver human-centred services. She was a founder of the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) - an organisation designed to help build better public services in Wales through digital ways of working.

Dafydd Vaughan

Dafydd is a technology specialist, with experience leading complex digital transformations in the public and private sector organisations. His expertise lies in transforming complex legacy IT, supporting technology teams as they build new digital services and coaching executives on setting the conditions for success.

He was a founder of the UK Government Digital Service - which revolutionised how government delivers public services, through modern digital ways of working.

He is currently Chief Technology Officer for a global digital consultancy and a non-executive director in NHS Wales.

Jo Carter

Jo is a passionate service designer with a strong focus on government, social housing, and the charity sector. She's the lead organiser of the GovCamp Cymru unconference.

After a decade in local government, Jo founded Service Works to improve public services through design. She is a trained coach, accredited Master Service Designer, and also works as a consultant, trainer and facilitator.

Over the years, Jo has worked with organisations including DWP, Audit Wales, The Pensions Regulator, and Welsh Government.

Nia Campbell

Nia is a designer and strategist with over a decade of experience shaping inclusive public services across government, health and social care, and the third sector. She has led content and service transformations, advised on bilingual design at central government, and developed organisational strategies that strengthen teams as well as services.

Alongside her professional work, Nia is an active community organiser. She creates spaces for digital practitioners to connect, share ideas, and build confidence. She is committed to open, collaborative ways of working that leave lasting value beyond individual projects.

Thanks and acknowledgements

We're deeply grateful to the many people whose insights and feedback helped shape this report. This includes current and former public servants, ministers, academics, industry experts and Senedd watchers.

This work builds on a rich legacy of digital public service reform across the UK and beyond. Important milestones include:

- The creation of **UKGovCamp** by Jeremy Gould in 2007, which brought together digital practitioners from across the public sector for the first time
- The launch of the **UK Government Digital Service (GDS)** in 2011, which helped redefine how public services are designed and delivered
- The founding of **GovCamp Cymru** in 2014 by Jo Carter and Esko Reinikainen, a vital platform for ideas and collaboration in Wales
- The work of Lee Waters, Sally Meecham, Simon Renault and Ann Kempster to establish the **Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS)** in Wales in 2020

These efforts – and the people who led them – gave us the confidence, insight and inspiration to believe that better public services are possible.

It's important to also recognise the dedicated public servants who live, breathe and work in these modern ways every day - often without recognition or support.

We'd also like to acknowledge the writing and thinking that has directly influenced this report:

- **The Radical How** by Andrew Greenway and Tom Loosemore – on how these approaches can radically transform government
- **A Blueprint for Modern Digital Government** by the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology – outlining the future of agile, user-centred government
- **System Reboot** by Lee Waters (2018) – setting out the urgent need for transformation in the Welsh public sector
- The ongoing work of **Jennifer Pahlka** and the **Niskanen Center** – showing how these ideas support digital capacity and reform in US state governments

To everyone who's contributed to this movement: thank you.

This report is part of your story too.

Transform Wales

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