

## Case study: implementing GDS governance guidance at the Home Office

This paper is about the first iteration of a joint initiative between the Immigration Platform Technologies (IPT) Programme at the Home Office and the Government Digital Service (GDS) at Cabinet Office to test the [governance guidance and principles](#) developed by GDS.

It covers the:

- objectives
- approach to the work
- outcomes.

It also identifies things that will benefit other service delivery teams, programmes and departments, and some observations about managing a transformation to a more iterative and adaptive way of working.

### Context

The IPT Programme is providing the technology and information to support the immigration service now and in the future. It is working closely with UK Visas & Immigration, Immigration Enforcement and Border Force. Along the way, it is replacing 5 existing technology systems.

GDS is responsible for leading the digital transformation of government, making public services [digital by default](#) and simpler, clearer and faster to use.

This iteration of governance work has led to:

- a new organisation structure for the IPT Programme, with more emphasis on service delivery
- clear role definitions and associated induction materials
- simplification of internal reporting using the data that comes from the delivery teams at the end of every sprint
- a new approach to the [discovery phase](#) of service delivery, piloted in the Immigration Identity Assurance System (IIAS) project and now being used in the Asylum Services project
- fewer, more focused pan-project delivery governance forums and stand-ups to match the pace of delivery teams
- revised commercial arrangements to create and manage multi-disciplined, multi-supplier teams
- a continuous improvement initiative, with a dedicated team focused on embedding the right approaches to service delivery.

As a result of these outcomes, GDS now has a reference point for how to organise a large-scale business change programme to focus on service delivery, and will encourage others to use this as an example of what good looks like.

For example, other teams can learn from the:

- service delivery oriented organisation structure
- supplier relationship management model
- consolidated internal reporting
- examples of how to run an effective discovery stage.

The GDS governance guidance has also been improved through user research with members of the programme team.

The initiative will now move into iteration two, which will focus on the impact the guidance will have in the Home Office beyond the IPT Programme.

## **1. What was the question we were trying to answer?**

At the outset of the initiative, GDS was developing some governance guidance and the Home Office was thinking about how to provide governance and assurance for services being delivered through agile programmes and projects.

We agreed that it would benefit the Home Office and GDS to pilot the governance guidance in the IPT Programme. We wanted to test what impact the guidance would have on the governance and assurance procedures in the IPT Programme and Home Office.

## **2. How did we elaborate that question?**

Alongside the governance pilot, the IPT Programme was seeking to enhance its delivery capability, particularly with reference to the use of agile methods. We agreed that the governance pilot should be combined with this improvement initiative.

The combined project was called 'Agile IPT' and had the following objectives:

- build sustainable agile capability in IPT
- make IPT more efficient and effective by introducing more agile governance arrangements
- road-test the new governance principles and guidance
- create a case study for agile governance that others could refer to.

## **3. What did we do?**

### **3.1 Discovery**

We believe that transforming to an iterative and adaptive way of working should be formally managed as a change activity in its own right.

We started by running a discovery for Agile IPT, with defined objectives (see Appendix C.1) and deliverables [see Appendix C.2]. These included:

- define a vision for how IPT will look when this is done
- identify our community of users and their needs
- understand how these needs are being serviced today, and what we need to change to make IPT more agile, and to take account of the governance principles

Discovery delivered the following:

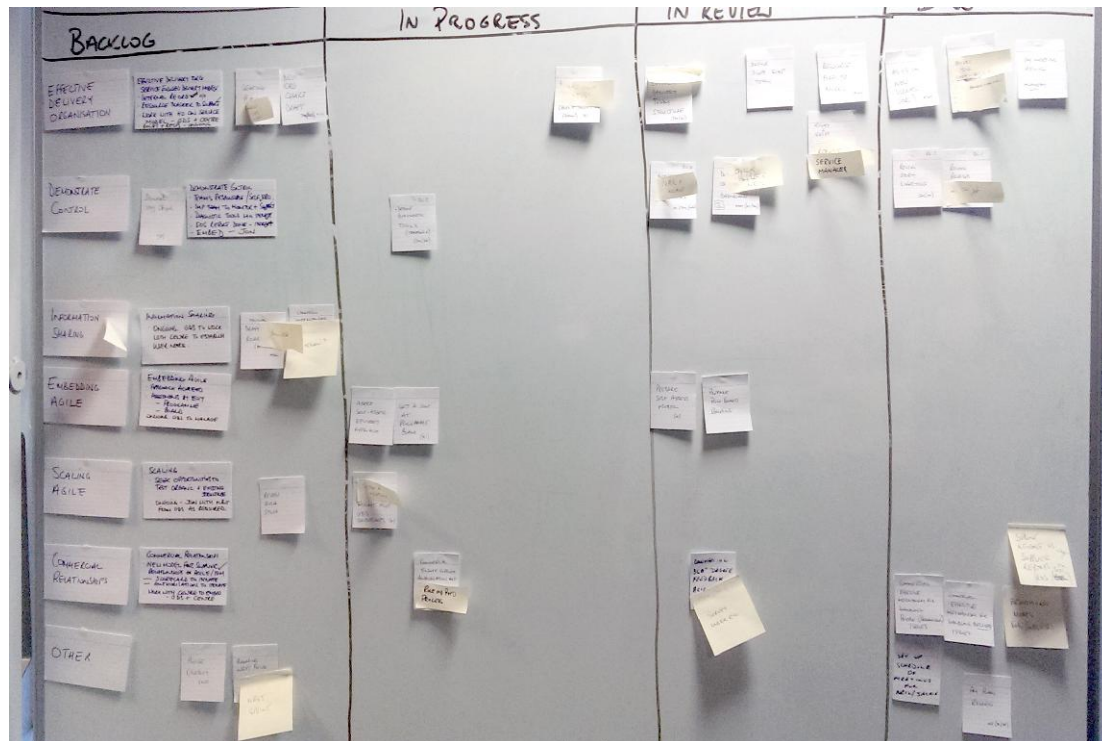
- **Agile IPT vision**  
This defined what a truly agile IPT Programme would look like (see Appendix A).
- **Delivery backlog**  
We created a product backlog of things we were going to improve with specific user stories in the following key areas of responsibility:
  - people
  - behaviours and practices
  - environment
  - business engagement
  - commercial
  - governance.

### **3.2 Delivering the change**

The delivery stage was formally planned and managed, with product manager and delivery manager roles allocated, and ownership for each improvement area assigned to a member of the programme's senior management team.

Weekly stand-ups were scheduled, with a monthly show and tell to the programme's delivery board.

A physical team wall was created as well as a Trello Board (an electronic visual tool) to allow the team to track progress on stories.



### 3.3 Mid-stage stocktake and retrospective

In preparation for a digital stocktake with the Permanent Secretary Mark Sedwill, a mid-stage status update was prepared, with the following key messages:

- **What's working well**
  - o business engagement: product owner appointments, induction process and role understanding visibly improving
  - o good agile working practices for discovery evident in the new workstreams
- **What's challenging**
  - o agile behaviours: ongoing need to challenge behaviours in relation to the governance guidance and principles
  - o information sharing: need to align the information needs of external stakeholders without disrupting the ability of the teams to deliver
  - o commercial relationships: initial concepts around supplier relationship model requires engagement with suppliers to form a balanced point of view
  - o scaling agile: identifying the right time to scale, and the appropriate levels of empowerment at delivery team vs programme level.

The team had a retrospective against the original backlog, which highlighted that

improvements focused at the delivery team level were progressing better than those focused on governance at the programme and Home Office level. This meant that the initiative was not addressing some of the key challenges of the programme, in particular the challenges of working as an agile programme within the Home Office which is still in its early days of supporting an agile approach to service delivery.

### **3.4 Re-set with focus**

To address these concerns, the initiative was re-set. We agreed that a number of experienced, capable people would be dedicated for a calendar month to focus on priority areas.

We also agreed to work in three one-week sprints, with daily stand-ups and weekly show and tells.

The following areas were prioritised:

- (i) Effective delivery organisation**
  - implement a programme organisation structure focused on service delivery
- (ii) Demonstrate control**
  - of delivering a prioritised scope and quality for an agreed cost at an agreed time
- (iii) Information sharing**
  - provide the minimum amount of information to sponsors so they can understand the status of their investment
- (iv) Embedding agile**
  - implement and support culture and behaviours in line with the governance principles at all levels within the programme
- (v) Scaling agile**
  - understand how we scale organically and what a good scalable delivery team looks like (related to item(i))
- (vi) Commercial partnerships**
  - understand how to manage relationships with multiple supplier teams working to time and materials contracts.

A new backlog with detailed acceptance criteria was created.

### **3.5 Final Delivery Outcomes**

After three sprints, with the appropriate dedicated resources and weekly show and tells to take stakeholder feedback, the following were the outcomes:

- (i) Effective service delivery organisation**
  - a 'service delivery'-focused programme organisation structure has been

defined in consultation with the delivery teams (refer to Appendix D), and this has served as the basis for an internal restructure

- an automated resource tracker has been built to support a single consolidated resource view of the programme

Outcome: Done.

- discussions have started with Home Office Digital (HOD) and Home Office Technology (HOT) to agree an approach to transitioning services from programme to live operation.

Outcome: Ongoing. GDS to continue to progress this working with Home Office Digital and Home Office Technology

## **(ii) Demonstrate control**

- it is agreed that delivery teams have a responsibility to demonstrate that they are in control of the scope, timeliness, cost and quality of their deliverables
- IPT's Continuous Improvement team will monitor data and generate some metrics to help teams to identify circumstances where they might not be in control of any of those variables
- an end of sprint dashboard which reports progress across those variables has been developed and will iterate (this already replaces the monthly supplier report)

Outcome: Done.

IPT's Continuous Improvement team to work to embed this in the delivery teams

## **(iii) Information sharing**

- whilst the internal programme reporting requirements have been simplified, further work is required with stakeholders at the centre of the Home Office to establish their user needs for information

Outcome: Ongoing.

GDS to manage this to conclusion within the Home Office with assistance from the programme

## **(iv) Embedding agile**

- an approach to ensuring that the governance principles are being truly adopted within delivery teams, the programme governance team, and the IPT Programme Board has been agreed
- a self assessment tool has been developed for delivery teams and programme governance teams to assess levels of adoption on an ongoing basis

Outcome: Ongoing.

GDS to manage this to conclusion by running assessments with delivery teams and the governance team, and to provide an ongoing view of adoption to the IPT Programme Board

**(v)        Scaling agile**

- no opportunities arose to test the organic scaling guidance during the pilot
- GDS and IPT will continue to seek opportunities to test (a) organic scaling and (b) appropriate structures for organising existing teams

Outcome: Ongoing.

IPT's Continuous Improvement team to progress as appropriate with assistance from GDS as required

**(vi)       Commercial relationships**

- a new model for managing multi-supplier time and materials relationships has been developed in consultation with suppliers, and this will iterate
- a balanced scorecard to measure performance has been developed in consultation with suppliers, and this will iterate

Outcome: Done.

IPT's Continuous Improvement team to work with Commercial to iterate the supplier relationship model and the balanced scorecard

- this supplier model will need to be understood in the central Home Office, and its potential for re-use evaluated

Outcome: Ongoing.

The commercial model will be continually assessed and evolve as required through the life of the programme. IGDS to work with the Commercial team at IPT to help evaluate and embed this where appropriate, in Home Office and with other assurance groups

**4.        How has the programme benefited from improved governance?**

**4.1      Roles and responsibilities**

IPT has implemented the role of product owner - to be filled by respected business subject matter experts who will lead the change in their operation. These product owners are fully engaged in the programme, and understand their empowerment to effect change.

The programme has built on the standard GDS role definitions to define responsibilities for service managers and product owners, and has created focused induction materials aligned with these.

Further work will be required to align with the roles being defined by HOD, and to agree the relative empowerment between the business roles (service managers and product owners) and policy makers.

The programme team is actively working with the Home Office to define

the requirement for future service managers; product owners and policy makers, to ensure resources are available at the right time. The role definitions and induction materials which the IPT Programme has prepared can be made available to share with others - contact the IPT Continuous Improvement team.

#### 4.2 Discovery

An approach to the Discovery phase (with defined objectives, activities and deliverables) has been piloted in one of the IPT Projects, has iterated, and is now being used in a second Project.

The IPT Programme can share Discovery plans, preparation materials, activities and deliverables.

#### 4.3 Commercial

The IPT Commercial team has made significant progress in learning how to procure and manage multi-disciplined, multi-supplier teams. More work will continue in this space

##### - Procurement

The commercial team has used the Digital Services Framework (DSF) to procure teams for future work-streams across all of the disciplines required for delivery. Specific feedback has been provided to GDS and Crown Commercial Services (CCS) about the experience using this framework, for application to the next iteration of the DSF.

##### - Relationships

The commercial team has spent considerable time working with new supplier teams to agree how best to establish commercial relationships in a new multi-supplier, multi-disciplined, time and materials based model. The team has prepared a Supplier Scorecard, and established a Memorandum of Understanding which is focused on fostering cross-supplier collaborative relationships.

The commercial team will be prepared to share experiences and the Supplier Scorecard with other teams, and is currently preparing a blog to do this.

#### 4.4 Effective delivery organisation

The programme has re-aligned its organisation structure to focus on service delivery. In doing so, it has defined a scalable service delivery model, with defined core team and support roles, and a light governance layer across the business, technical and delivery domains.

This organisation model is published (refer Appendix D). The IPT programme team or GDS team members can provide context.



## **5. What have we learned about agile transformation?**

It is important to treat the transition to an agile approach as a change in its own right:

- there must be clear ownership for the initiative
- product owner and delivery manager responsibilities for the transformation should be clearly defined
- people must be allowed time to focus on the improvement initiatives
- transformation should be iterative and incremental – work on the priority items and understand that you can't change things overnight
- use the governance principles as a driver for cultural and behavior change.

Agile projects and programmes survive and thrive when they are delivering within agile organisations. It is important that senior stakeholders understand the cultural change that may be required, are fully engaged and committed to working in an agile way, and understand the implications for how they govern. Effective Business and Policy engagement is essential for the programme to be successful.

## **6. Next Steps – Iteration 2**

- **Information Sharing**  
GDS will work with the Home Office to identify the key requesters of information in order to encourage consolidation and reduce the burden on delivery teams.
- **Service Model**  
Home Office Digital and Home Office Technology are working together to define a future service operating model. GDS and the IPT Programme will inform this and, where appropriate, pilot the transition to this model.
- **Embedding Agile**  
GDS will work with IPT and the Home Office to assess and improve the adoption of an agile approach. This will involve running assessments with delivery teams and the governance team and addressing any issues raised, and providing an ongoing view of adoption to the IPT Programme Board.
- **Commercial**  
The model of engaging with suppliers for delivery of digital services is different to traditional procurement models. GDS and the IPT Commercial team will work with appropriate stakeholders at the Home Office and with other assurance groups to raise awareness and adoption where appropriate.
- **Assurance**  
GDS will assist the IPT Programme with upcoming Business Case and Programme Assurance reviews, applying the assurance guidance which has been created in conjunction with Major Projects Authority (MPA) and the Treasury.



## Appendix A: The GDS Governance Principles

1. Don't slow down delivery
2. Decisions when they're needed, at the right level
3. Do it with the right people
4. Go see for yourself
5. Only do it if it adds value
6. Trust and Verify

## Appendix B: The vision for Agile IPT

### **Agile IPT will transform the IPT Programme so that:**

- we are held up as an example of successful large scale agile delivery by government and industry
- anyone who comes in contact with the programme can clearly see that:
  - this is a good place to work
  - we are doing the right things, in the right way
- our customers and business partners are our strongest advocates

### **Our success in this transformation is founded on the following values:**

- we reward courage
- we encourage innovation
- we encourage 80/20 thinking
- we are focused on the delivery of business value as early as possible
- our delivery is predictable in terms of time and quality
- we are transparent

### **We live these values through our working practices:**

- we have clear, transparent relationships internally and externally
- we have appropriate process and controls that reflect recognised agile principles and practices
- we champion this way of working
- feedback is regularly, constructively exchanged
- people are supported in being transparent

### **About this vision:**

- the Agile IPT initiative is owned and driven by the teams
- we are 'keeping it real' (this is not just an aspiration we can't achieve)
- we are all aligned in this vision
- Agile IPT is co-ordinated in line with other programme activities

## **Appendix C            Agile IPT discovery**

(i)     We established discovery objectives as follows:

- define a vision for how IPT will look when this is done
- identify our community of users and their needs
- understand how these needs are being serviced today
- understand what we need to change to:
  - make IPT more agile
  - align IPT with the agile governance principles
  - apply the GDS governance guidelines

(ii)    We defined discovery deliverables as follows:

- Refined vision and objectives:
  - a vision for what IPT will look like when the project objectives have been achieved
- Stakeholder plan for alpha
  - the community of people who will be impacted by the change
- An initial list of stakeholders' needs, and a deck of high-level stories to meet those needs in the following areas:
  - agile delivery and governance practices
  - behaviours, roles, culture
  - supporting environment and tools
- An outline plan for delivery:
  - who's in the delivery team?
  - what do we plan to deliver, and when?

## Appendix D

## Effective Delivery Organisation

