

Public sector impact studies

Infrastructure: Replacing fragmented reporting with real time oversight on major UK projects





The problem

At the centre of UK government, good decisions depend on timely, accurate information from departments across Whitehall. But in practice, the act of getting that information can often be slow, fragmented, and frustrating.

To understand what was happening across major government projects, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (now the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority) had to request data from 21 government departments, each using different IT systems. The process relied heavily on spreadsheets sent by email, manually checked and reassembled by civil servants. This created a system that was burdensome for staff, prone to errors, and slow to deliver insight.

For an organisation overseeing a portfolio worth £834 billion, these weaknesses had serious consequences. Data often arrived weeks late, limiting the ability of senior officials to spot risks early or intervene effectively. The quality and structure of the information also made it difficult to use modern analytical tools. Despite its high cost, the existing reporting system delivered limited value and absorbed significant staff time to operate.



The innovation

The Government Reporting Integration Platform (GRIP) was developed to replace this outdated approach with a shared, real-time system for collecting and using data across central government. Developed in-house, it provides the core infrastructure for how departments report on major projects to the centre of government. Its key components include:

A single, web-based reporting platform: Departments enter information directly into GRIP, replacing emailed spreadsheets with a shared system that acts as a single source of truth for major project data.

Built-in guidance and quality assurance: The platform includes embedded guidance, validation rules, and business logic, improving data quality at the point of entry and removing the need for separate, downstream assurance processes.

Real-time access and integration: Data is immediately visible to authorised users and integrated with the Cabinet Office data infrastructure, enabling live dashboards and near real-time insight for senior decision-makers.

This public sector impact study is based on a talk at Productivity Pitches, a series of events hosted by the Institute for Government and The Productivity Institute, which aims to share and support ways to improve public sector performance levels. The talk is available to watch on the [Institute for Government's website](#).





The impact

The shift to GRIP has transformed how information flows between departments and the centre of government:

- *Greater use:* User numbers grew from around 650 on the old system to approximately 6,500, creating a single shared source of information and eliminating countless parallel spreadsheets. Reporting cycles that once took around three weeks to close are now effectively immediate.
- *Better quality of data:* Checks and assurance are built directly into the reporting process, rather than added later as a separate step. This has enabled the Infrastructure and Projects Authority to move from static, retrospective reporting to near real-time dashboards that show how projects are performing across government.
- *New analytical capabilities:* The structured data collected through GRIP has also enabled the use of AI-supported tools, such as the Scout service. This tool helps assurance reviewers assess large volumes of documentation more efficiently, allowing staff to focus their expertise where it adds the most value.

“The study illustrates how external shocks can create windows of opportunity for reforms that would otherwise struggle to gain traction in more stable periods.”



Takeaways

The case study illustrates several broader lessons about how productivity improvement occurs in central government, and why it is both difficult and essential.

1. First, productivity in a Whitehall context is about successfully marshalling the resources that are needed to translate political intent into delivered outcomes. Unlike frontline organisations, such as the police or the NHS, the centre of Government does not directly produce public-facing services. Instead, its value lies in its ability to take a system-wide view of threats and opportunities, unblock problems that are impeding public services, and ensure resources are directed to where they are needed most to turn policy ambition into delivery. In this context, GRIP creates value by improving the evidence base of decision-makers, so that they are more able to ensure that the right problems are being solved in their project portfolio in the right way.
2. Second, the case illustrates how successful delivery requires closing the gap between those who design the system and those responsible for making it work. The platform succeeded not just because it was a technically sophisticated IT system, but because the people who understood the reporting problem were the ones building the solution. This end-to-end ownership contrasts with the traditional, fragmented model where policy design, digital development, and operational use are separated across organisational boundaries. Because these elements were kept tightly connected, the team could iterate rapidly in response to user needs. Moreover, this approach ensured that the designers had a stake in the final outcome, incentivising them to build a solution that effectively solved the actual problem rather than just meeting a specification.
3. Third, the case shows how moments of crisis can crystallise long-standing problems and create the conditions for change. The limitations of spreadsheet-based reporting had existed for years, but it took the pressures of Brexit and the COVID-19 response to expose them fully. These created both the operational necessity and the organisational permission to depart from established processes, experiment with new approaches, and accept short-term risk in pursuit of a better overall system. GRIP emerged from this context, illustrating how external shocks can create windows of opportunity for reforms that would otherwise struggle to gain traction in more stable periods.



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