Developing Public-Facing Online Services Policy

Ministry of Central Services
Information Technology Division

Digital Strategies and Operations Branch

Version 1.2

Last revised: August 2018

Last reviewed: April 2019

Next review: April 2020

Government of Saskatchewan

Developing Public-Facing Online Services Policy

Version 1.2
Last revised: August 2018
Last reviewed: April 2019
Next review: April 2020

Digital Strategy and Operations Branch, Ministry of Central Services

This policy should be followed when developing online services for the public.

Policy

EFECTIVE DATE

January 8, 2018
Any projects started after the effective date are subject to this policy.

PREAMBLE

External clients need services that are simple and fast, and can be accessed anytime and anywhere. They want simplified processes that demonstrate government is an enabler, not a barrier, to what they are trying to achieve, and that government values their time and money.

Government needs services that are high quality, cost effective and delivered in a timely way. The services also need to be delivered with consideration given to timing, budget, available resources, operational limitations, privacy, security, etc.

Public facing-online services, when designed and delivered effectively, offer an opportunity to take all of these needs into consideration. The standards outlined in this policy ensure that project teams are delivering incremental value quickly while improving satisfaction with service delivery and saving both the people of Saskatchewan and the Government of Saskatchewan (GoS) time and money.

APPLICATION

This policy applies to all Executive government services that are offered to the public on Saskatchewan.ca. This also applies to non-Executive government services that are offered on Saskatchewan.ca.

POLICY

This policy establishes required standards for Developing Public-Facing Online Services (Appendix 1) to ensure that the Government of Saskatchewan's online services provide value for both the people of Saskatchewan and GoS. All public online services must adhere to these standards. At its core this policy has three objectives:

1. Design and develop online services for and with the public;

2. Deliver value quickly and continuously to Saskatchewan people and the Government of Saskatchewan; and

3. Reuse and build upon existing tools and design knowledge to remain cost effective and support government as one team.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Collaboration – Delivering in the digital space requires horizontal collaboration across technology, business process, and user needs. Tight coordination and collaboration between the program area ministry(s) and ITD as well as other key stakeholders identified for the online service is critical to the success of the project.

Shared assessment responsibilities – Reflective of the collaboration required, delivering successful online services also requires a one team approach to assessing that the standards have been applied appropriately on a given project. As such, responsibility for assessment of the individual standards is dispersed across GoS to relevant stakeholders.

Pragmatic, value-driven, opportunity-focused decisions – Application of this policy should always endeavour to be pragmatic, problem solving and advance our Commitment to Excellence. A well-defined, citizen-centred problem or opportunity should always be at the heart of every project and online service projects must carefully balance the interests of the public with the budget, time and resource constraints of the program area ministry.

Alignment with IT Governance and Portfolio Management – Aligning with the current IT Governance and Portfolio Management requirements supports doing the right things by: ensuring investments align with government strategies, using a common intake process and an enterprise approach for evaluation, and balancing business as usual with business changes.

DEFINITIONS

Public-facing online services:

- A group of transactions or activities that results in people of Saskatchewan interacting with government on screen;
- it can be a push or pull of real-time information that helps the end user complete a goal; and
- it can be completed:
  - independently (self-serve) or
  - through digital assist (e.g. assisted by a government employee or third-party organization)

IT Governance and Portfolio Management:

- IT Governance and Portfolio Management is led by the Portfolio Management Office. It supports doing the right things by:
  - ensuring investments align with government strategies;
  - using a common intake process and an enterprise approach for evaluation; and
  - balancing business as usual with business changes.
- Ministry proposals with an IT component that meet current defined thresholds must be submitted through the Portfolio Management Office for review and endorsement by Information Management Advisory Council (IMAC) and Deputy Ministers IT Governance Committee (DMITC).

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Ministry Program Area
The Ministry Program Area is responsible for delivering and administering the online service.

Digital Strategy and Operations, ITD, Central Services
The Digital Strategy and Operations branch of ITD is responsible for administering the public-facing online services policy and providing online service design subject matter expertise to the project.

IT Division, Central Services
ITD is responsible for ensuring the online service is effectively integrated, secured and supported by the Government of Saskatchewan IT environment.

Project Manager
The project manager on any public online services project is ultimately responsible for ensuring the project adheres to this policy and its standards, including but not limited to ensure that assessments of the individual standards are completed by the designated parties.

Deputy Ministers
The Deputy Ministers are the ultimate escalation point for contentions regarding the application of this policy and its standards.

AUTHORITY AND REFERENCE

Endorsed by the Deputy Minister's IT Governance Committee at January 8, 2018.

APPENDICIES

Standards for Developing Public-Facing Online Services
Standards for Developing Public-Facing Online Services Summary

VERSION HISTORY

January 2018 | 1.0
June 2018 | 1.1
August 2018 | 1.2

APPENDIX 1: Standards for Developing Public Online Services

Establishing Policy

This policy establishes required standards for Developing Public-Facing Online Services (Appendix 1) to ensure that the Government of Saskatchewan's online services provide value for both the people of Saskatchewan and GoS. All public-facing online services must adhere to these standards. At its core this policy has three objectives:

1. Design and develop online services for and with the public;
2. Deliver value quickly and continuously to Saskatchewan people and the Government of Saskatchewan; and
3. Reuse and build upon existing tools and design knowledge to remain cost effective and support government as one team.

Key Principles

Collaboration – Delivering in the digital space requires horizontal collaboration across technology, business process, and user needs. Tight coordination and collaboration between the program area ministry(s) and ITD as well as other key stakeholders identified for the online service is critical to the success of the project.

Shared assessment responsibilities – Reflective of the collaboration required, delivering successful online services also requires a one team approach to assessing that the standards have been applied appropriately on a given project. As such, responsibility for assessment of the individual standards is dispersed across GoS to relevant stakeholders.

Pragmatic, value-driven, opportunity-focused decisions – Application of this policy should always endeavour to be pragmatic, problem solving and advance our Commitment to Excellence. A well-defined, citizen-centred problem or opportunity should always be at the heart of every project and online service projects must carefully balance the interests of the public with the budget, time and resource constraints of the ministry.

Alignment with IT Governance and Portfolio Management – Aligning with the current IT Governance and Portfolio Management requirements supports doing the right things by: ensuring investments align with government strategies; using a common intake process and an enterprise approach for evaluation; and balancing business as usual with business changes.

Standards

Terms and Definitions
Responsible – denotes the person(s) responsible for ensuring the noted activities and deliverable are accomplished
Assessor – denotes the person(s) responsible for ensuring work aligns with existing policies, practices and priorities
Deliverable – denotes the overall objective for each standard

Discovery Phase

The client ministry can do this work on its own utilizing its service design and internal resources. Digital Strategy and Operations (DSO) is also available to assist, as and when resources are available.

1) Talk to Users

Why we do it: The purpose of user engagement is to inform your design of government services in order to improve user satisfaction (external and internal), save time and cut costs. It can greatly determine the success or failure of a project. It is the difference between a user completing a task or not. It is the difference between a new online service cutting calls or creating them.

Responsible - DSO with the client ministry as a key stakeholder
Assessor - DSO
Deliverable – Citizen/business user requirements

- The citizen/business user requirements should achieve the following:
  - be based on engagement with the relevant citizens and/or businesses;
  - review any existing internal and external user feedback;
  - identify who the citizen/business user is - the different types of people that use your service and their characteristics (e.g. internal business users, external businesses and organizations, citizens – stay focused on the 80%)
  - document what the user is trying to do (their desired outcome); and
  - document the major user pain points interactions with people that represent this range of different users.

2) Define the services you are offering

Why we do it: Where possible, GoS wants to ease the burden on individuals and businesses so they can focus on the task they are trying to achieve and not get bogged down in figuring out how to navigate government process. Yet when we are working on IT projects government is often focused on business process and system design. To ensure we achieve an appropriate blend of client and ministry benefits, DSO will help ministries to understand the service end-to-end, identify pain points that users face, and find opportunities for service improvement that will make the biggest difference for the client experience. This work can inform business process review to help understand what works well, and it will inform the design phase for the technical solution.

Responsible – Client Ministry with DSO as a key stakeholder
Assessor – Client Ministry DMO

Deliverable – A clearly defined end-to-end service experience, that informs the technical solution design and minimizes the burden on both clients and staff.

- Consider the following questions:
  - What problem are you trying to solve?
  - How does the client learn about, find and ultimately engage with your service?
  - What client pain points are you addressing?
  - What staff pain points are you addressing?
  - Why is this approach better and more client-centred than what you do today?
  - What is the return on investment?

- DSO will work with you to review your existing services, answer the above questions and define what the service offerings should be in the online space. The nature of this work can differ from project to project but the DSO assigned resource can support by:
    - reviewing existing documentation
    - acting as a SME or co-authoring recommendations
    - facilitating service design workshops

3) Understand the existing technology terrain

Why we do it: Finding the right path forward to solve a problem or address an opportunity is a fine balance between user needs, business goals and the technical reality/opportunity. Understanding the technology and whatever roadmap may exist is critical to choosing the right path.

Responsible - Client Ministry with ITD's Architecture, DSO and AMS groups as key stakeholders
Assessor – ITD's Strategic Architecture
Deliverable – Existing technical landscape documented

- Answer the following questions; and
  - What systems are involved in current state?
  - Are there any known roadmaps for these systems?
  - Are there any known major/high-level pain points of the systems (e.g. manual work around, end-of-life)?

- Identifies key technical questions that need to be answered in planning.

4) Formalize your project through IT governance

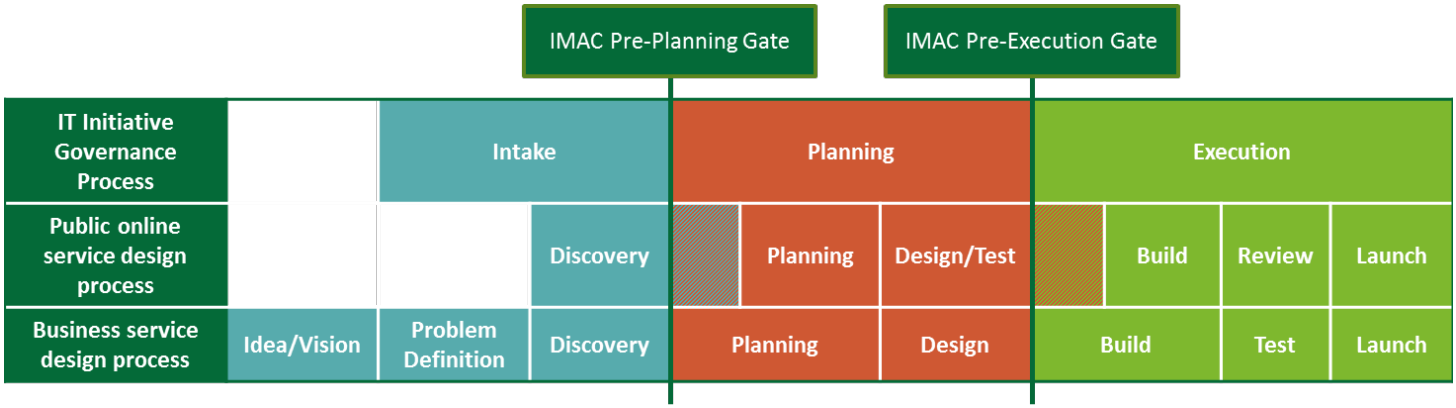
Why we do this: Alignment is absolutely critical when delivering a project across several teams (e.g. one or more divisions in the ministry, digital strategy and operations, ITD and any applicable vendor). The first step to alignment is to ensure we are all on the same page about the starting request from the ministry. The project brief provides for this and also allows us to identify gaps and/or ask questions that can help guide project initiation and development.

Responsible – Client Ministry with ITD Account Executive
Assessor – IMAC/DMITC

Deliverable – Intake initiated and compliance with IMAC/DMITC

- Complete the Project Request Form available from your account executive upon request and submit the form along with a copy of your business case to your Information Technology Division (ITD) account executive. They will begin the IT Initiative Intake process.
    - Ensure you are in compliance with the Information Management Advisory Council (IMAC) and the subsequent Deputy Minister IT Governance Council (DMITC). Your ITD account executive is your primary point of contact to support you through the process.

Planning Phase



This work ensures you have high level requirements, alignment and support to move forward with DSO, ITD and your vendor (if applicable).

5) Develop your solution design document with a citizen focus and starting with common tools and existing architectural approaches

Why we do it: Getting alignment on how the service is going to work is critical for a successful implementation. By documenting what will be collected from and presented to the user, and how, we ensure that the citizen at the heart of the design. By leveraging common enterprise tools, and existing architectural work and micro-services (where possible), we deliver faster and cheaper services with foundational components that have already gone through the rigour of security, technical review and user-centred design.

Responsible – TBD in project
Assessor – Technical Review Board (TRB)
Deliverable – A solution design document that reflects the following requirements:

- Front end requirements based on citizen/business user requirements (Standard 1):
    - Documents the data that is being collected from the end user. If personal information is being collected, used, or disclosed, the appropriate privacy impact work must be completed (see standard #7).
    - Documents the desired collection approach for this data (e.g. is it a stepped form? A single page form? An interactive method?).
    - Documents the system triggers that will push status messages and text/emails to citizens/businesses to keep them informed of how their service is proceeding.
    - Solves any major pain points uncovered in citizen/business research requirements gathering.

- Maps the public facing screen flows and supporting back end process for the primary tasks determined in Standard 1.

- Enterprise tools and approaches requirements:
  - All content is housed on Saskatchewan.ca. Reach out to your account executive for more information.
  - Services requiring authentication must leverage Saskatchewan.ca Account for citizen and business sign-on, profile management and single window view of the service. For details on how to integrate with Saskatchewan.ca Account see our Integration Checklist.
  - Services requiring search must leverage the enterprise search tool, Coveo. Reach out to your account executive for more information.
  - Your application must have a sub-domain of Saskatchewan.ca using the Operating a Saskatchewan.ca Sub-domain guidelines.
  - Your application must have Google Analytics installed. DSO will create and supply the developer with the script.
  - Your application must use the enterprise Saskatchewan.ca header/footer. DSO can provide the script on request.

- Provide evidence of Technical Review Board (TRB) approval of the Solution Design Document prior to integration or installation of any of the enterprise tools.

6) Get clear on your project team and governance

Why we do it: Crystal clear expectations up front improves accountability, speed of delivery, and clarity of decision making in-project.

Responsible – Assigned Project Manager
Assessor – Project Management Office
Deliverable – Roles and responsibilities documented and scopes of work in place

- Document the team (e.g. ministry, DSO, ITD, vendor), responsibilities, project plan, full estimate and scope signed off by all project leads including the DSO project lead. A sample template is available upon request.

- Work with DSO to ensure their contributions and assessment deliverables are clear to support solution design, integrations and standards assessments.

- Ensure vendor specific scopes, estimates and contracts are in place, including those needed for integrations to enterprise platforms.

- Review this project team, governance and plan at every new stage of the project (e.g. design, build, test)

Throughout the Project Phase

This work needs to be started in the planning phase and completed before you launch. The work in this section takes time and requires significant collaboration so it is important that you involve your privacy,

security, communications, and potentially finance partners in planning conversations. This way you can work together to determine appropriate scheduling and check points.

7) Ensure your solution is secured and that privacy is protected

Why we do it: To ensure compliance with privacy legislation (The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Health Information Protection Act) while fostering public trust. We will not be able to proceed with integrations to the Saskatchewan.ca Account without this work completed.

Responsible - Respective Ministry with its privacy officer and ITD Security
Assessor – Access and Privacy Branch and ITD Security
Deliverable – Terms and conditions for use of service, privacy consent statement, evidence of approved PIA, evidence of approved security assessment

- Work with your privacy officer to complete your PIA. A Worksheet can be found on page 21 of the Privacy Impact Assessment Guidelines.

- The PIA must be signed off by your ministry's privacy officer before the project can leverage any public-facing enterprise tools.

- Review any existing terms and conditions for your service with your privacy officer and ensure they are still relevant in your digital context. If you do not have terms and conditions for using your service, work with your legal team and privacy officer to write these.

- Write the consent language for your service following the process and template in the Privacy Requirements Instructions for the Saskatchewan.ca Account. Ensure it is signed off by your privacy officer (or applicable equivalent) and reviewed by the Central Services privacy officer

- Provide evidence that your solution has been approved by the Technical Review Board (TRB). Your ITD account executive will assist with this assessment.

8) Write simple, user friendly content at every stage

Why we do it: Web reading is very different than paper reading. People don't read whole sentences; instead they scan the page looking for actions and key pieces of information. To support this reading habit, our content needs to be actionable, easy to read and in plain language.

Content development time is often underestimated. All ministries have a communications staff member who has been trained in writing for the web. These resources are well positioned to assist the ministry in meeting your content requirements.

It is strongly recommended that ministries involve their communications team early in the project so they have enough knowledge and time to effectively support on content delivery.

Responsible – Client Ministry Communications Department

Assessor – DSO
Deliverable – Service Page(s) and In-Service (i.e. in-app) content and any other content pieces emerging from the content audit

- Have your communications consultant conduct an audit of your Saskatchewan.ca content.
  - This can take quite a bit of time and requires scheduling resources with competing priorities. The earlier this is started the better.
  - DSO will work with the client ministry communications consultant on recommendations for your sitemap and templates will stem from this audit.

- Develop your in-service (i.e. in-app) content.

- Content must adhere to the Writing Well for Saskatchewan.ca Guidelines.

- Adhere to the Service Name policy (available on request)

- Content must follow Saskatchewan.ca templates (e.g. service page templates). Speak with your communications department for more information.

9) Define how you will achieve and measure your return on investment

Why we do it: The dual promise of digital service delivery is that it is easier and more convenient for citizens to complete the service and cheaper for government to deliver the service. The value for government is not delivered unless people know the service exists and use it. The marketing plan should aim to drive citizen traffic to the digital service. The measurement plan is your ammunition to demonstrate the success of the project and encourage ongoing investment.

Responsible – Client Ministry
Assessor – Client Ministry Executive Sponsor
Deliverable – Approach for how it will be achieved and measured

- The ministry has a marketing plan to drive channel shifting in support of the ROI

- The ministry has a measurement plan to track and report on the realized ROI

10) Make a plan and a budget for continuous improvement of your service

Why we do it: The public is used to websites and digital services that are constantly evolving. This presents an opportunity for the Government of Saskatchewan. We don't have to aim for perfection; rather it gives us space to deliver services to the market faster and cheaper, so long as we have the plan and budget in place to continue to evolve the service.

Responsible – Client Ministry
Assessor – Client Ministry Executive Sponsor
Deliverable – Approach for continuous improvement and funding source

- An operations plan that includes budget, resources and release cycles for continuous improvement of the public-facing online service.

- A process for tagging, tracking and reporting on customer queries and staff feedback to support continuous improvement priority decisions.
    - DSO will provide Google Analytics and a feedback survey in the service app to collect ongoing feedback. This will be reported out to the ministry to support continuous improvement priority decisions.

11) Have a plan and process in place for support

Why we do it: As part of being citizen-centric we have an obligation to support the speedy completion of citizen tasks. When they run into trouble, there needs to be a process in place to ensure they get the help they need, in a timely manner.

Responsible – Ministry
Assessor – Ministry Executive Sponsor
Deliverable – Documented customer support plan

- Support system must clearly communicate to citizens and businesses what they should expect from the support system and have a response time in place that is no longer than one business day.

Design Phase

It is always cheaper to throw out a piece of paper than a piece of code. Investing in design offers a safe space to explore ideas and discover what approach will work before things get really expensive. The importance of this stage in the journey to success cannot be underestimated. Expect lots of collaboration here.

12) Design your user interface in line with the 10 Usability Heuristics

Why we do it:
It's important that your users are able to complete their desired task without any problems. Whether it's completing an application form or making a payment, making things usable is crucial to the success and uptake of your online investment. Designing with these 10 general principles for interaction design allows you to put your best foot forward and eliminates a major chunk of usability issues before involving real users. This allows testing feedback with real users (see standards 13 and 14) to be focused on the nuances of your service, rather than general design principles.

Responsible – DSO with ministry and development team as key stakeholders
Assessor – DSO
Deliverable – Screen flow for at least one end-to-end service flow for the project. These are typically called "wireframes."

- If your project is a single service, mock ups/prototypes will be required for every screen the user sees (desktop and mobile).
- If your project is a collection of services, a strategically selected single service, or services (i.e. public facing screen flow), will be targeted for this design work. The expectation is that lessons learned through this design work will be applied to the other services in the solution.

- Start with mobile and ensure your solution uses responsive design methods that work across the range of devices (i.e. mobile, tablet, laptop, desktop)

- Design your system and screens to align with Jakob Nielsen's 10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design.
    1. Visibility of system status
       The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.

    2. Match between system and the real world
       The system should speak the users' language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.

    3. User control and freedom
       Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked "emergency exit" to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Support undo and redo.

    4. Consistency and standards
       Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.

    5. Error prevention
       Even better than good error messages is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place. Either eliminate error-prone conditions or check for them and present users with a confirmation option before they commit to the action. (Read full article on preventing user errors.)

    6. Recognition rather than recall
       Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate. (Read full article on recognition vs. recall in UX.)

    7. Flexibility and efficiency of use
       Accelerators — unseen by the novice user — may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.

    8. Aesthetic and minimalist design
       Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.

       To this end ensure designs supports DSO's form elements (available on request) and Digital Style Guide.

    9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors
       Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.

10. Help and documentation
    Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.

13) Test your screen flows with citizens and/or businesses

Why we do it: At their core, business cases for public facing online services require users to switch from what they are doing today. If the service doesn't work for them in the new channel (online), they will not switch and the business case will not be realized. Testing at this stage provides vital user feedback to ensure we are building for success. It determines whether we are on the right track in concept or still have some work to do to make this a worthwhile public-facing online service investment.

Responsible – DSO or DSO approved usability tester
Assessor – DSO
Deliverable – a test plan and testing report with recommendations

- Test with at least five users per user group from the user pool identified in Standard 1.
- Testing must be done by the DSO or DSO approved vendor.
- Usability test findings, top three to five (at a minimum) major pain points and recommendations must be documented.
- Action plan for addressing the pain points must be developed by the project and approved by DSO.
- Depending on the severity of the pain points, additional testing may be required to ensure that citizens and/or business will be able to complete the service as designed.
- The project cannot move to coding the flows until the major pain points have been addressed.

Build Phase

This is where all that prototyping is put to good use. Coding, integration and configuration all happen in this stage. The design phase will have helped to make sure developers have a clear plan of action but still expect to continue to tweak the design as developers work through making it real.

14) Re-test the strategically selected flows from 'Design' with users once they've been coded and integrations function as expected

Why we do it: Testing at this stage validates that service experience works end-to-end, and that the testers conclude that the usability of the service is done well enough that it will not be a barrier to realizing the business case.

Responsible – DSO or DSO approved usability tester
Assessor – DSO
Deliverable – a test plan and testing report with recommendations

- Test with at least five users per user group from the user pool identified in Standard 1.
- Testing must be done by the DSO or DSO approved vendor.
- Usability test findings, top three to five (at a minimum) major pain points, and recommendations must be documented.
- Action plan for addressing the pain points must be developed by the project and approved by DSO.
  - Depending on the severity of the pain points, additional testing may be required to ensure that citizens and/or business will be able to complete the service as designed.
- The project cannot launch if major pain points remain. DSO sign off is required on the solution post-testing before launch can occur.

15) Final review of services

Why we do it: Through feedback and support we can better understand the needs of the people of Saskatchewan. We use this information to resolve individual challenges in using the service and to drive continuous improvement priorities

Responsible – DSO
Assessor – DSO
Deliverable – DSO sign-off on the service prior to launch

- Ensure development supports World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG) to the A level and strive to meet AA level.
- Test your solution in these browsers:

Operating system	Browser	Support
Windows	Internet Explorer 11	compliant
	Internet Explorer Mobile 11	compliant
	Edge (latest versions)	compliant
	Google Chrome (30 or higher)	compliant
	Mozilla Firefox (27 or higher)	compliant
macOS	Safari 8 or higher	compliant

Operating system	Browser	Support
	Safari Mobile 6 or higher	compliant
	Safari for Windows 5.1.7 or higher	compliant
iOS	iOS 9.3 or higher	compliant
Android	Android 5.0 or higher	compliant

  - ‘Compliant’ means your service must look as good as it does in other modern browsers.
  - Users must be able to access the information they need or be able to complete their task without layout issues causing any problems (for example vital information or form fields becoming less visible, or inconsistencies causing them to lose confidence).
  - ‘Latest versions’ refers to the latest stable version and the version immediately before that.

- Contact DSO for a final review.
  - These reviews take time and will require DSO resources with competing priorities. Please ensure these are scheduled well in advance to avoid delay.