

The UK Government digital service

Mike Bracken sat in his office in Holborn, London, in August 2014, just over three years since accepting the job as Executive Director of the UK Government Digital Service (GDS), thinking about where the team had come from, what it had achieved and where it was going.

A team within Cabinet Office, GDS had been formed as a catalyst for change in 2011, tasked with transforming the UK Government's digital offering from the inside. To the tech community, GDS was an unmitigated success story, having made millions of people's lives more convenient and with an estimated £1.7 billion in potential savings every year. GDS had received acclaim across the world: *The Washington Post* claimed: "Since its launch in 2010, GDS has emerged as the gold-standard in the global world of digital government."

There was also a broader, more ambitious, agenda: to be a catalyst for transforming the UK Government. Bracken and many of his colleagues saw GDS as enabling the shift from a traditional process-driven approach to one focused on delivery.

But while the results of the 25 exemplar projects (the largest government transactions that were being transformed to meet user needs) had been impressive, media reports citing (often anonymous) government officials suggested that beneath the surface there was a backlash against GDS's centrally driven transformation. He observed:

We have achieved a great deal over the last few years, and our approach is demonstrably better than the old way of working. And yet there are still people who think that working in an agile way should be optional. Inertia is a powerful force.

With the next general election in May 2015, there would be no significant policy changes in the coming year. Bracken's challenge was how to maximise the chances of success in the next government.