AUDIT SCOTLAND

News release

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More leadership needed to achieve Scotland's digital ambitions

The Scottish Government needs to show greater strategic leadership across the public sector to achieve its digital ambitions, says the spending watchdog.

There has been some good early progress towards putting digital at the heart of everything government does. Guidance has been introduced to ensure new services are designed around the needs of citizens. And initiatives like Civtech have made it easier for public bodies to develop innovative products in partnership with UK tech companies.

But the Scottish Government does not yet know how much investment is needed to achieve the ambitious aims it set out in its digital strategy in 2017. It also lacks a complete picture of which actions have had the most impact to date - and where the gaps are. This makes it difficult to prioritise what to work on.

A new government assurance framework is helping individual projects reduce the risks historically associated with public sector IT projects. But a digital skills shortage in Scotland and across the government has meant there has not been enough staff to share common lessons learned. This remains a barrier to progress.

Caroline Gardner, the Auditor General for Scotland, said: "The Scottish Government is in a unique position to show digital leadership by bringing people together and sharing lessons learned across Scotland's public sector.

"Governments across the world are facing the same challenge, and bringing about collaboration will not be easy. But Scotland's relatively small size presents a clear opportunity for the government to move from an operational role to one of strategic leadership and reap all the benefits that shift could bring to citizens and the wider economy."

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Notes to editors

1. The CivTech programme (CivTech) began in 2016 to bring together the public and private sectors to find innovative solutions to public sector problems. It provides individuals, SMEs and other businesses access to public sector contracts they would not normally have access to through traditional procurement; helping them to grow and contributing to the wider economy. It has grown each year but is still on a small scale.

2. The Scottish Government refreshed its digital strategy in March 2017. The strategy is ambitious and aims for digital to be at the heart of everything government does: designing services around citizens, developing digital skills, and encouraging innovation and collaboration across sectors to increase productivity and economic growth.

3. Audit Scotland has produced a wide variety of digital work, including an overarching guide of lessons learned from public sector ICT projects, and reports on digital related programmes for central government, infrastructure and health. Find it on our digital e-hub. A supplement [hyperlink to follow] highlighting international best practice has also been produced as part of the Digital Government report.

4. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

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