

23.02.07

6 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier Central of the Chief Minister regarding an individual's personal data (OQ.18/2023)

Will the Chief Minister advise what work, if any, is being undertaken to reduce the duplication of an individual's personal data across multiple computer systems in different areas of the Government digital infrastructure?

Deputy A. Curtis of St. Clement (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

The Chief Minister and the questioner have agreed that I can answer this one. So historically most government systems have been considering what are line-of-business applications. These typically store data and personal information in their own form and have limited access to be linked. There are some limited measures in place across systems such as "People Directory" and "Update your Contact Details" to provide some linkage but this is mostly limited to Customer and Local Services and Revenue Jersey. There is some work ongoing to improve these measures further, such as the development of a health demographic service to connect H.I.F. (Health Insurance Fund) systems across a healthcare estate. Having a joined-up approach to our data and a person's identity across government I.T. (information technology) systems is critical to be able to use digital technology to improve an individual's experience of the government, to improve the efficiency of government and to improve the outcomes of government. To support this I am going to be working with my digital group which I Chair; this has members of H.C.S. (Health and Community Services), C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills), M. and D. (Modernisation and Digital), the Cabinet Office, as well as T. and E. (Treasury and Exchequer), and this is going to be defining a digital strategy and overseeing its delivery. Identity management will be addressed by this Digital Strategy Working Group and it is an area that I am prioritising.

4.6.1 Deputy C.S. Alves:

The digital strategy that the Assistant Chief Minister mentioned there and his priorities, is one of them to ensure that we will have a much more centralised system and one that can be accessed across all departments? If so, by when and, if not, why not?

Deputy A. Curtis:

The reality is it is not going to be a single system but what we do need is a considered strategy that allows us to join up data where appropriate. There will always be instances where we cannot join data for data protection and data reasons but we need to be allowed to enable departments that can access and share data to do so and for systems to do that. One obstacle that we are facing to do this is the current structure of the organisation means we hold very little ability to deliver change within the organisation without going to consultancies. I believe one of the key priorities at our Digital Strategy Working Group is going to identify not just what we should prioritise but the methods of delivery of I.T. So I think by bringing in a capability and a skillset in government we should be able to faster prioritise the areas that the Assembly and Government and citizens want through in-house delivery where it may not typically have aligned to project and department.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Scott, could you turn off your light, please? Once you switch your light on, could you look out for me acknowledging you; when I do, could you then switch it off because it stays on for a long time. Thank you very much indeed.

4.6.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Assistant Chief Minister what budget is being allocated to this project and what is the limit to this budget long term?

Deputy A. Curtis:

The Digital Strategy Working Group is not a project that requires a budget but it is a group of members from across the organisation who are looking at how do we define a strategy that can shape future budgets, so the prioritisation and joining-up of budgets I believe is one key area to deliver savings in I.T. We currently see projects that are stalling or not working efficiently because projects typically align to heads of expenditure or even within that to individual lines of projects. So this project, the Digital Strategy Working Group, does not have a budget and I am not seeking a large increase, or any increase, at the moment in I.T. budget, rather a reprioritisation.

4.6.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

So the group itself does not have a budget but there must be some idea of budget on the digital development. Does the Assistant Chief Minister have an idea of the current spend on I.T. development and what the limit to that will be?

Deputy A. Curtis:

Yes, I do. The budget that we have is split between that that is spent through the Cabinet Office and Modernisation and Digital and by departments. I believe that we have got a breakdown of the Modernisation and Digital spend in the Government Plan. The large amount of revenue expenditure that Modernisation and Digital perform is to run the business which provides us very little leeway to use that as a change enabler within Government as we have typically used capital programmes to fund the change of I.T. So what we will probably need to look towards doing is changing how we approach budgets to increase the revenue element of the Government Plan to invest in elements that incrementally improve the Government's digital I.T. system for both the civil servants and for the public.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

There was no mention of a figure there which was asked for. Is there any possibility of getting an answer like that?

The Bailiff:

Well that was part of the question, are you able to answer that?

Deputy A. Curtis:

The budgeting of this system is very complex. I can give you a rough order of magnitude but I think it is best if I take those numbers offline. We do know that some work within Treasury has been looking at the split between budgets within Modernisation and Digital and outside within the departments.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

With respect, I think offline is not the place to do it as a direct question has been asked in the Assembly. So can we have a figure, please?

The Bailiff:

Well, having highlighted the fact it was not answered on the last occasion, it is up to the Deputy how he answers it at this point.

4.6.4 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Given that centralisation requires a certain amount of co-operation by the population in terms of overcoming general data protection requirements and one of the main reasons why they may be hesitant to co-operate, could the Assistant Chief Minister please provide some sort of explanation about how he will be able to assure the population on the robustness of cybersecurity in this respect?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I am sure when it comes to cybersecurity the Deputy is aware that there has been significant expenditure on cybersecurity programmes within the Government, both pre the Ukraine crisis and following that to further invest and be robust. I am happy to also answer the question on the data protection side but that is quite different to the element of cybersecurity and trust in Government.

4.6.5 Deputy M.R. Scott:

Then by all means answer the question on the G.D.P.R. (General Data Protection Regulation) please.

Deputy A. Curtis:

Happily. On the case of a citizen having more trust in a government that joins up its systems, in holding our Digital Strategy Working Group one of the priorities I outlined in a digital government is one that uses data to be more empathetic and in tune with the population and not one that is cold and less empathetic, so using data to make citizens feel more welcome in government and not less.

4.6.6 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

With the Government being an organisation of over 3,000 employees, how will the Minister ensure that the integration of personal data is going to be fully implemented?

Deputy A. Curtis:

“Fully” is a tough word there and I think it is about prioritisation of systems that need to be integrated based on the user needs. The user in this case might be a citizen, an organisation or the Government. What I would like us to do is to prioritise the systems that get both the most use by citizens and can deliver the best outcomes for citizens if they are not being directly used. I think the way we will achieve a faster delivery and rollout of integration is by having greater capability within Government to solve these problems and building up a skillset that can work project after project within government, understanding our I.T. estate rather than bringing in people who have to learn, onboard and then leave at a far higher cost.

4.6.7 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

My question also relates to data protection. The Assistant Chief Minister referenced that there were some data protection issues that prevented some work being done. Could he outline exactly what those issues are, please?

Deputy A. Curtis:

My understanding is that a current department are their own data controllers, so the work I am referring to is that when a department wishes to share data with another department they must be creating a data-sharing agreement with that department. The example of the department I think

with the most data-sharing agreements, or a fair number, would be Customer and Local Services who have a right under certain circumstances to access that data. That is not an issue, that is a design insecurity, but we may be able to come up with a solution that allows sharing of data while protecting the individual.

4.6.8 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

What instructions have Ministers given to departments to put data-sharing agreements in place and have Ministers considered reducing the number of data controllers to make data sharing perhaps more suitable for the purposes?

Deputy A. Curtis:

To my awareness, I have not instructed any departments to place any data-sharing agreements in place but I am open to talking with Ministers about how that will work. There will be both the process side of enabling data-sharing agreements and the technical side to having systems that could integrate once an agreement is in place. If I could ask the Deputy to remind me of the second part of her question.

Deputy L.V. Feltham:

It was whether Ministers have considered perhaps reducing the number of data controllers within the Government.

Deputy A. Curtis:

Yes, this is something that I have discussed with officers and I think we will be pursuing with the Digital Strategy Working Group.

4.6.9 Deputy R.S. Kovacs of St. Saviour:

Nowadays it seems that all the systems for the Government and everybody else are very reliant on the internet. We have seen in the news lately that Italy had a total breakdown of the internet for a few days. In the event that that can occur anywhere, including Jersey, do we have an appropriate resilience and contingency plan in case that happens to make sure that the data can be still accessed but also protected?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I thank the Deputy for her question. This is an area that I have identified with the department about the growing trend of cloud computing where a lot of services are hosted in external providers' data centres. I have highlighted that I believe we may need to have an approach to our own data ownership and systems ownership that goes beyond that of what a company may need because as a Government we offer a lot of critical national infrastructure through our I.T. estate. We will look at that as, again, a "how do we deliver I.T. and technology" through our Digital Strategy Working Group; that is a point that we will be looking at, and I take any observations that the Deputy has on that.

4.6.10 Deputy C.S. Alves:

Has any consideration been given to enable citizens to access their data digitally or online as and when they require it, as is the case in some other countries?

Deputy A. Curtis:

I thank the Deputy for her supplementary. This is very high on my agenda and I have spoken with officers about multiple parts of the Government I.T. infrastructure in which data should be accessible and is not. It is a priority to me that a system's trust in Government is understanding what data they have and their ability to propose changes and to have a global, joined-up approach will be less bureaucratic. I welcome any feedback from Members as to where they believe the prioritisation lies based on how their constituents report to them.