Digital First Service Standard

Alpha Stage Assessment Prompts and Evidence

Service to be assessed:

Date/Time/Location:

Assessor name:

Assessor role:

Introduction

This prompts and evidence document has been designed to aid assessors and service teams through a Digital First Service Standard assessment. It will provide you with a detailed understanding of what is required to meet each of the Digital First Service Standard criteria.

For the purposes of the assessment the service standard has been re-ordered. This running order clusters the criteria around the themes of user, technology and business capability so as to provide an easier flow throughout the assessment.

Should you have any further questions, please contact the Digital First Team at [OCIOAssurance@gov.scot](mailto:OCIOAssurance@gov.scot).

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|  | Alpha | |
| Point 1 | User Centred - Understand user needs. Research to develop a deep knowledge of who the service users are and what that means for the design of the service. | |
| Additional Guidance | In the alpha phase, the main objective is to establish whether the team has a good understanding of user needs that has come from observing and engaging with end users, that they understand what users are trying to do when they engage with the current service (the user context, whether currently digital or not) and they understand the user needs - not just functional requirements - that the service will have to achieve in order to be successful. Responses should cover both the digital and assisted digital support.  Further, the team need to demonstrate how they have explored design options that will best meet these needs, what concepts they have discarded and why they believe their final prototype has the potential to meet user needs effectively. The assessors are less interested in the quantity of user research that has been undertaken, but rather in the quality and coverage - was it with the right people, was it the right kind of user research done in the right way/place, has it effectively created a user-centred, empathetic view of the project for the team.  The assessors will be interested in how the team has used mixed methods / sources of data to corroborate key findings (e.g. mixing analytics data with qualitative research findings). When doing user research for assisted digital, ensure that research is done specifically with (potential) users of this particular service who have the lowest level of digital skills. Recruitment and research with this audience will need to be done using offline methods. | |
| Prompts | * Who are the users? Including how many you have tested with and how they were recruited. * How have you received active consent and maintained data protection for users? * How have you sought the received permission for ethical research if you have included vulnerable participants within your user groups? * What have you done to understand your users’ needs? * Tell us about what users are trying to do when they encounter your service? * What are the needs that they have when they use this service? * How do they meet those needs now? What are the pain points? * How have you been writing user stories for the service (including for assisted digital users)? Give us some examples of user stories, personas or profiles for the service. * Which users have the most challenging needs? * What are the particular design challenges for this service with this audience? * What parts of the service do users find particularly difficult? How have you changed the service to make these parts of the task easier for users? * Have you identified any changes to user needs as a result of researching with users? * Tell us about what you’ve learned about the particular needs of people who are less confident online or not online? * What problems have you found that you'll have to overcome when designing the service? * How has the design of the service changed over time because of what was found in user research? | |
| Evidence | The Service Manager should be able to show:-  - the user needs found for the service in discovery and how those needs were found, including any needs for assisted digital users  - how they've been writing user stories for the service - including for users who need assisted digital support  - research that identifies parts of the task which users find difficult - explaining how the service has been changed to make these parts of the task easier for users and how this was tested and researched to confirm this  - any problems that were found in research which will have to be overcome to design the service  - discuss how they received active consent and maintained data protection for users  - show how the have sought and received permission for ethical research if they have included vulnerable participants within their user groups | |
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|  | Alpha | |
| Point 12 | Usable and accessible - Create a service that is simple and intuitive enough that users succeed first time. | |
| Prompts | * What is the service? What does it do? * Are the majority of users of the service succeeding the first time they try to use it? * What evidence can you provide that users are, in the majority of cases, succeeding first time? * How have you used research, testing and analytics to make substantial iterations to the service, including the assisted digital support model? * Explain all end-to-end user journeys, including assisted digital journeys, demonstrate that they work and how they were tested. * What design options are you considering for assisted digital support? * How has the assisted digital support model been designed to meet user needs and how it is being provided? If it's not by telephone, face-to-face, talk through and on-behalf-of - why not? * How will assisted digital support will be sustainably funded and free to users? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain the service and what it will provide in a simple and accessible manner  - show the majority of users of the service are succeeding the first time they try to use it  - explain how the team have used research, testing and analytics to make substantial iterations to the service, including the assisted digital support model  - explain all end-to-end user journeys, including assisted digital journeys, demonstrate that they work and how they were tested  - explain the design options that are being considered for assisted digital support  - explain how the assisted digital support model has been designed to meet user needs and how it is being provided - if it's not by telephone, face-to-face, talk through and on-behalf-of, explain why  - explain how assisted digital support will be sustainably funded and free to users | |
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|  | Alpha | |
| Point 14 | Channel shift - Identify and, wherever possible, remove impediments that prevent citizens from using the digital service, clearly establishing it as the primary channel. Plan to provide appropriate assisted digital support if necessary. | |
| Prompts | * What is your plan for increasing digital take up? * What other channels is the service currently delivered through? * Do you collect data for these channels? * How have you complied with data protection for identifiable personal information? * What proportion of your users currently use and complete the transaction per channel? * Which organisations/groups help your users with the existing digital or non-digital services? * How has the digital service been designed to give it clear advantages over the other channels? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain their plan for increasing digital take up.  - explain what other channels the service is delivered through.  - explain what data they collect on their other channels.  - how they have complied with data protection on identifiable personal information  - explain how they collect analytical data on service usage for each channel.  - explain which organisations/groups help your user with the existing digital or non-digital services.  - show user insight from: research with real users, user demographics, attitudes, behaviours and channel preferences, and user journey maps.  - explain how each channel meets different users’ needs. | |
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| Point 13 | Consistent user experience - Build a service consistent with the user experience of the rest of mygov.scot or GDS Service Design Manual, including using the design patterns and style guide. | |
| Prompts | * Has a product designer and content designer been involved during alpha? * Have you used the mygov.scot design patterns and front end tool kit during alpha? * Do you have a front end developer in place? * Have you used the mygov.scot style guide during alpha? * If you are not hosting your service on mygov.scot or using the mygov.scot style guide, are you using the GDS Service Design Manual? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain how the service has used the mygov.scot design patterns, front-end tool kit and mygov.scot style guide during alpha.  - explain what design, content design and front-end developer support was available to the team during alpha.  - show have start and end pages on mygov.scot that are optimised for users | |
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| Point 2 | Continuous feedback - Put a plan in place for on-going user research and usability testing to continuously seek feedback and input from users to improve the service. | |
| Additional Guidance | The main objective is to ensure that you have someone on the team who is dedicated to doing the user research, that there are plans to continue doing user research, and that there is evidence that outcomes from the user research will be fed into the on-going development/design of the service. Responses should cover both digital and assisted digital support. When doing user research for assisted digital, ensure that research is done specifically with (potential) users of this particular service who have the lowest level of digital skills. Recruitment and research with this audience will need to be done using offline methods. Accessibility testing with people who have particular access needs should be done throughout the service design process and not outsourced as a separate activity at the end of the design process. | |
| Prompts | * Are the resources in place to do regular user research and usability testing? * Who in the team is doing user research and usability testing? * How often are you doing user research and usability testing? * How do the results feed into the design of the service? * What is the user research plan for the next stage (and for live) and are there resources in place for user research and usability testing? | |
| Evidence | User Researcher and/or Service manager able to show:  - what the private beta will look like and how the findings will be used to improve the service  - the team can pay for user research and usability tests throughout the design of the service and after it’s built  - how often research and usability tests will be carried out and how the results will be used to improve the design of the service  - a user research plan for beta and a plan for carrying out user research on the live service. | |
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| Point 15 | Data driven - Use tools for analysis that collect performance data. Use this data to analyse the success of the service and to translate this into features and tasks for the next phase of development. | |
| Prompts | * How have you decided what data you need to capture? Where will capture it from? How will you capture it? * What is the on-going roadmap for performance analysis, including assisted digital support? * Do you have resource in the team to identify actionable data insights from alpha, including assisted digital support? * How have you chosen data analysis tools? * How have you addressed information security and privacy issues? * Have you mapped user journeys, and are you able to track progression through your service so you can identify completions and areas of poor performance? * How are you measuring assisted digital support? * What is the next performance analysis user story? * Please summarise your Privacy Impact Assessment and the controls that you have put in place to ensure you are compliant with the Data Protection Act | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain how they decided the data they needed to capture, where it needs to be captured from and how they will capture it based on the projected size and shape of the service.  - show they have an on-going roadmap for performance analysis and someone in the team responsible for identifying actionable data insights during alpha, including assisted digital support.  - show they've used qualitative and quantitative data to help improve their understanding of user needs and identify areas for improvement.  - explain how suitable data analysis tools were chosen.  - show how information security and privacy issues have been addressed appropriately.  - explain how they have mapped user journeys through the service and tracked them to identify completions and areas of poor performance.  - show how assisted digital support is being measured.  - explain the next performance analysis user story.  - show their Privacy Impact Assessment and the controls that have been put in place to comply with the Data Protection Act. | |
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| Point 3 | Cross-functional team. Put in place a sustainable multidisciplinary team that can design, build and operate the service, led by a suitably skilled and senior service manager with decision-making responsibility. | |
| Prompts | * Can you talk us through your team for alpha? * How has the service manager been empowered to make decisions during alpha? * Is the service manager the single responsible person with the power and knowledge to make decisions to improve the service day-to-day during alpha? * Are there any gaps in the team and how are you addressing these? * Is there a separation of key roles? * Who in the team is responsible for user research and how often are they working each week? * Are you using contractors and if so, what is your plan to ensure there is transfer of knowledge and skills to permanent staff? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - clearly explain the structure of the team for alpha (the following should be either in the team or available to the team depending on the scale of the service - service manager, product manager, delivery manager, tech architect and lead, assisted digital lead, designer, user researcher, developers, content designer, web ops, performance analyst).  - show how they (as Service Manager) have the knowledge and power to make day-to-day decisions to improve the service  - explain where they have gaps in the team and explain how they will address them.  - show that there's a person on your team who's responsible for user research and usability tests.  - there is at least one user researcher working an appropriate number of days per week.  - show that there is a separation of key roles (i.e. the same person is not performing multiple roles within the service).  - explain plan to transfer knowledge and skills from contractors to permanent staff. | |
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| Point 5 | Sustainability - Build a service that can be iterated and improved on a frequent basis and make sure that you have the capacity, resources and technical flexibility to do so. | |
| Prompts | * What have you built and why? * Describe the lifecycle of a user story from research to production. * How are you building your service to meet user needs? * What is your process for identifying and prioritising insights from user research? * What technology have you chosen and how are you minimising the risk of it? * Do you have the ability in the team to deploy software frequently with minimal disruption? * How are you analysing user research and using it to improve your service? * How are you solving technical problems? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain what they have built in alpha and why.  - describe the lifecycle of a user story from research to production.  - show they understand how the service is being built to meet user needs.  - explain process for identifying and prioritising insights from user research.  - show they can move user stories quickly and smoothly between user research and production.  - show how you are assessing the technology you have chosen, minimising risk  - prove the team has the ability to deploy software frequently with minimal disruption to users.  - show analysis of user research and that this is being used to improve the service.  - show how the team are solving any technical problems. | |
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| Point 4 | Continuous improvement - Build the service incrementally, releasing early and often, using the iterative and user-centred methods set out in the GDS service manual. | |
| Prompts | * Talk us through how you are working. * What tools and techniques are you using to enable this way of working? * How are you reviewing and iterating your processes? * How are you communicating within the team? * Can you give an example of how you have responded to user research and usability testing? * How are you governing the service? * What design options for the prototype did you explore and why did you discard some options? * How has the design of the service changed due to what was found in user research? * What design options are you considering for assisted digital support? * What problems have you found in research and how are you planning to solve them? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - clearly explain how the service is working - either in agile, waterfall or a hybrid of both and what tools and techniques are being used.  - explain how the team has reviewed and iterated the ways it works to fix problems.  - explain what tools and techniques the team are using to communicate.  - give an example of how the service has responded to user research and usability testing.  - show that governance is: proportional, not imposed, is based on clear and measurable goals, “go and see” rather than “wait and hear”, a clear focus on managing change and risk in real time rather than at arbitrary points, human centred not process centred.  - discuss the design options which were explored for the prototype and the reasons some were discarded.  - show how the design of the service has changed over time because of what was found in user research.  - explain the design options being considered for assisted digital support.  - describe any problems that were found in research which will have to be solved in the design of the service and how the team plans to solve them. | |
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| Point 11 | Business continuity - Define, document and regularly test a plan to handle disasters and other incidents that may cause the digital service to be taken temporarily offline. | |
| Prompts | * Explain the impact upon the user of the proposed service being unavailable? * Have you considered how you will assess and prioritise different disaster/incident scenarios and disaster recovery? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - show consideration has been given to existing business continuity planning, including disaster recovery.  - explain the impact upon the user of the proposed service being unavailable for any length of time. | |
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| Point 6 | Technology appraisal - Evaluate what technology, tools and systems will be used to build, host, operate and measure the service, and how to procure them. | |
| Prompts | * Describe the languages, frameworks, and other technical choices you've made in alpha, and how those will affect the decisions you make in beta. * Describe the set of programming tools that you would like to select for beta and why. * How will you ensure value for money when buying tools? * How do you plan to monitor service status? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain the appraisal method that has been used, including options identification, appraisal criteria, etc.  - describe the languages, frameworks, and other technical choices they’ve made in alpha, and how this will affect the decisions they make in beta.  - describe the set of programming tools they would like to select for beta and why.  - explain how they will get value for money when buying in tools.  - explain how they plan to monitor the status of the service.  - explain any high risk or high cost technology decisions that haven’t yet been made and explain the activities that will be undertaken during alpha to support these decisions. | |
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| Point 7 | Information governance - Evaluate what user data and information the digital service will be providing or storing, and address the security level, legal responsibilities, privacy issues and risks associated with the service (consulting with experts where appropriate). | |
| Prompts | * How have you identified threats to your service, including potential pathways for hackers? What ways of reducing these have you tested? * How do you plan to keep up to date about threats to your service and how to deal with them? * What threats of fraud (fraud vectors) exist and what controls are you prototyping? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain how they have identified threats to the service, including potential vulnerabilities, and tested ways of reducing them.  - explain how they plan to keep up to date about threats to the service and how to deal with them.  - explain what fraud vectors exist and what controls they are prototyping. | |
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| Point 18 | Open data - Make all non-personal, non-commercially sensitive data from the service available for re-use by others under an appropriate licence. | |
| Prompts | * How will you make public data open and available to others for re-use? * How have you built in the opening up of data for re-use into your business process? * How will you make data users aware of any limitations within it? * How and when will you release data? * What contribution can your data make to improved governance? * How do you plan to encourage and empower others to make use of your data? * What data will the service store and process? * Does the service hold “master data” that is consumed by other services? * Does the service consume data from other systems, registers or through third party sources, if so what are the licensing terms for data sourced this way? * What license are you planning to use to publish data? * Where will the data be stored so that it is readily available? * Are open standards being used for the data that is published and are these formats at least “3 star” open data formats? * Will the data depend on third party vocabularies / taxonomies? If so what are the implications of this? * If any data is not to be published, why not? * Will second order data such as MI or reporting data also be published? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain how data is made open and available for re-use.  - demonstrate how the opening up of data for re-use has been built into business processes.  - explain how data users will be made aware of data limitations and what metadata will be provided.  - explain timetable and plan for release of data.  - explain the format for release of data and licence data will be released under.  - confirm data will be made available for free unless within defined exceptions.  - explain how data can support delivery of better public services and improved governance.  - explain plans to encourage and empower others to make use of data for various purpose (including commercial, non-commercial and education). | |
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| Point 21 | Identify how your service aligns with Scotland’s digital ecosystem. | |
| Prompts | * What is your understanding of Scotland's digital ecosystem and how this links with your service? * What is your service pattern? * Have you considered how you can consume from or contribute to the ecosystem approach? * What common capabilities could link in with your service provision? * Have you done value chain mapping? * Have you spoken with the Digital Ecosystem Unit? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - show awareness of the principles of Scotland’s digital ecosystem approach.  - demonstrate and explain the service pattern.  - demonstrate understanding of where common capabilities could fit with service provision.  - demonstrate understanding of how the service could contribute to/consume from development of the ecosystem and shared learning across organisations.  - explain value chain mapping undertaken for the service.  - describe discussions with Digital Ecosystem Unit on how the service can contribute to or consume from the ecosystem. | |
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| Point 8 | Open source - Make all new source code open and reusable, and publish it under appropriate licences (or provide a convincing explanation as to why this cannot be done for specific subsets of the source code). | |
| Prompts | * Talk us through your plan for making all new source code open and reusable? * What license will be used? * Where will the code be published? * Is there anything that can’t be published? Why? * Have team members been given suitable training? * Has SMT been made aware? * Is appropriate governance / procedure in place? * Have third party contributions been considered? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain their plan for making all new source code open and reusable.  - confirm that they own the intellectual property.  - explain how others can reuse their code. | |
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| Point 9 | Open standards - Use open standards and common government platforms where available. | |
| Prompts | * Are you locking yourself into any proprietary solutions where an open standard is available? * Describe the research you have undertaken to identify relevant open standards? * Where relevant open standards don’t exist how do you plain to address this? * Describe which common platforms you have identified that your intended system could use. * Describe any common user needs you have identified and how are you going to address them in a consistent manner with the rest of government. | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - explain how they are avoiding locking themselves into any proprietary solutions by using open standards and common platforms.  - explain how alpha activity enhances your understanding of the open standards identified during discovery.  - describe what common platforms they have identified that their intended system could use.  - describe any needs they have identified which are common to other services and how they are going to address them in a consistent manner with the rest of government. | |
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| Point 19 | Green ICT - Deliver a digital service whose impact on the environment, over its whole lifecycle, is understood. Plan to reduce the environmental impact of the service over time. | |
| Prompts | * How will your infrastructure be deployed in an energy efficient manner? * Have you considered opportunities to work with other organisations to aggregate demand or re-use existing services? * Have you completed a baseline maturity assessment against the Scottish Government’s Green ICT maturity model? * What is your plan to increase your service’s Green ICT maturity level? * (Where procurement undertaken to deliver service) What improvements have you considered making in conducting the procurement process in terms of Green ICT and environmental well-being? * Have you considered procuring services not assets? * What weight have you given green credentials in awarding contracts? * Have you compared repairing, refurbishing and recycling any existing systems against replacement? * How can you increase efficiency and reduce consumption in the operation of your online service? * How have you planned for the disposal of any equipment which you’ve acquired? * What training have you put in place for staff to ensure they consider environmental implications in day-to-day work? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:-  - demonstrate that plans to deliver service and infrastructure in energy efficient manner are being executed  - demonstrate relationships with other organisations to aggregate demand for services/re-use existing services  - show that improvement targets are set to make improvements from the completed baseline Green ICT maturity assessment  - demonstrate improvements they have made in conducting the procurement process in terms of Green ICT and environmental well-being e.g.  - procurement of services not assets;  - high weight green credentials in awarding of contracts; and  - compare repair, refurbishment and recycling of existing systems against replacement of a system.  - show they have reviewed the operation of online services to increase efficiency/reduce consumption  - explain plans to dispose of equipment before it is acquired including:  - reviewing the WEEE regulations and Scotland’s Zero Waste Plan;  - considering opportunities to sell or donate equipment; and  - having a re-use and recycling policy in place.  - demonstrate appropriate training has been provided to ensure that staff consider environmental implications in their day-to-day work. | |
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| Point 20 | Data hosting and data centres - Adopt cloud computing or virtualisation as the preferred approaches to the delivery of data hosting for the service. | |
| Prompts | * Is the service hosted in a public, private or hybrid cloud? * (If the service is hosted in a private cloud) What are the reasons for this? * (If not hosted in cloud) Is the service hosted via co-location in an existing data centre? What are the reasons for not shifting to cloud? * (If neither hosted in cloud or co-located in existing data centre) What are the reasons for building a new data centre to host the service? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to  - explain current ICT data centre and hosting arrangements  - confirm that total cost of running data centres and hosting is known  - demonstrate consideration of cloud computing when assessing current arrangements and future investment plans  - explain reasoning for shift to/not shifting to cloud  - demonstration consideration of co-location in existing data centres where cloud options not considered appropriate  - where cloud or co-location options not taken, explain reasoning for any building of new data centres  - explain plans to measure and improve on data centre’s power usage effectiveness.  - describe pilot activity that has been completed during alpha to confirm hosting decision has been made.  - describe how the team’s understanding has been improved/specific risks or challenges related to the new hosting solution have been addressed during alpha | |
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|  | Alpha | |
| Point 16 | Performance management - Identify performance indicators for the service, including the 4 mandatory key performance indicators (KPIs) defined in the GDS service manual. Establish a benchmark for each metric and make a plan to enable improvements. | |
| Prompts | * How have you set a performance baseline for the old service (if there was one)? * What is your plan to lower cost per transaction (or equivalent\*)? * What is your plan to improve user satisfaction? * What is your plan to increase completion rate (or equivalent\*)? * What is your plan to increase digital take-up and reduce reliance on existing channels whilst supporting assisted digital? * What other metrics will you measure and when? How will these be used to improve the service? * Where are you getting your data for metrics from? * How have you set up your analytics package to collect user journey data? * How have you made sure all stakeholder are involved in promoting or supporting digital delivery of the new service?   \* for non-transactional user journeys | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - demonstrate how they have set a performance baseline for the old service, if there was one.  - demonstrate that the plan for performance management formulated during discovery has begun to be executed.  - explain any challenges in regards to performance that have been identified during alpha ad explain how they will be resolved during beta.  - show how they have assessed the potential for channel shift and the level of assisted digital the service needs.  - explain other metrics that will be measured, when this will start and how they'll be used to improve the service.  - explain where data for metrics is coming from.  - explain how the analytics package to collect user journey data has been set up.  - explain how they have made sure all stakeholders are actively involved in promoting or supporting digital delivery of the new service.  \* for non-transactional user journeys | |
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| Point 17 | Transparent - Report performance data on the Performance Platform. | |
| Prompts | * Have you registered your service with the Performance Platform? * Can it support the metrics you want to present on your dashboard? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - demonstrate they have registered the service with the Performance Platform  - demonstrate that they have published at least one of the four KPIs from the service into the performance platform test environment  - demonstrate have checked the Performance Platform can support the metrics they want to present on their service dashboard. | |
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| Point 10 | Operational acceptance - Regularly test the end-to-end service in an environment identical to that of the live version, including on all common browsers and devices, and using dummy accounts and a representative sample of users. | |
| Prompts | * What is your deployment environment? * Can you create new environments quickly and easily? How? * What data exists in your pre-production environments? * Explain how you are designing and testing the service to work with the devices and browsers their your users use * Explain how you are testing the service in an environment that’s as similar to live as possible * How will the service keep working when the number of expected users try to use it, including for users who need assisted digital support? * What systems and testing environments do you need for non-digital parts of the service? * How often are you testing the service? Why that often? Is the testing automated? * How long does it take to create a test environment from scratch? * How are you managing test data for test environments? * What system quality attributes were be tested during alpha, were requirements met? * What system quality attributes will be tested during beta and do you have quantifiable requirements for each attribute? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - demonstrate that the test plan, described at the discovery assessment, is being executed;  - demonstrate that test regimen considers both the functional and non-functional elements of the service and that it is effective in highlighting bugs, etc.  - show they have an effective deployment environment with separate test environments  - show they can create new environments quickly and easily  - explain the data that exists in their pre-production environments  - show they are designing and testing the service to work with the devices and browsers their users use  - show they are testing the service in an environment that’s as similar to live as possible  - explain how the service can keep working when the number of expected users try to use it, including for users who need assisted digital support  - explain the systems needed and the testing environments for non-digital parts of the service  - explain how they are testing the service frequently and how they decided how often to test | |
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| Point 22 | Sponsor acceptance - Test the service from beginning to end with the minister responsible for it. | |
| Prompts | * Will the Minister and/or Senior Sponsor responsible for the service test it before it goes live? | |
| Evidence | Service Manager able to:  - confirm the Minister and/or Senior Sponsor responsible for the service will test it before the service moves into live. | |
| Met /  Not Met |  |  |