Public Sector Digital Trends

Data: From paper to big data

40+ years • **across five decades**

1980s-1990s

Data as records (paper-led administration)

- Paper forms and filing cabinets
- Local records, held by teams
- Manual updates and case notes

↪ **Shift**: from paper-based administration to early computerised records

2000s

Data as information (digital transactions)

- Websites become the front door
- Online forms, payments and applications
- Contact centres become data-aware

↪ **Shift**: from “come to us” services to online and self-service access

2010s

Data as a public asset (open data and service redesign)

- More datasets published and reused
- User journeys shape service design
- Dashboards support performance insight

↪ **Shift**: from publishing data to using evidence to redesign services

2020s

Data as intelligence (big data, AI and predictive insight)

- Demand, risk and inequality spotted earlier
- AI and automation reshape back-office work
- Ethics, trust and security become core

↪ **Shift**: from reporting what happened to anticipating what may happen next

Then: Data was stored

Paper files, local systems, manual updates

Now: Data is shared

Platforms, dashboards, standards, cross-service insight

Next: Data must be trusted

Ethical, inclusive, secure and explainable use

Big message

Data has moved from the back office to the heart of public service reform. The challenge now is to use the right data, responsibly and transparently, to improve decisions, design better services and deliver fairer outcomes for people and places.

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