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Meeting the GDS Service Standard without slowing delivery

Service assessments feel like hurdles when evidence is gathered at the end. Build it into delivery from discovery, and the Standard speeds teams up.

THE EIGHT-PHASE METHOD



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Changing how transformation is done

The EKSELENS360 family

PUBLIC SECTOR · 12 NOVEMBER 2026 · 4 MIN READ

Many public-sector teams experience the GDS Service Standard as a gate: a set of checks to pass at the end of each phase, often with a scramble to assemble evidence the week before an assessment. Treated that way, it slows delivery and adds little value.

Used as it was intended — as a description of how good services are built — the Standard does the opposite. It reduces rework, prevents expensive late surprises and gives senior responsible owners confidence that a service will work for the people who use it.

Why assessments feel like hurdles

The Service Standard's 14 points cover user needs, team, technology, security, performance and more. Most teams are already doing much of this work. The friction usually comes from three habits:

- **Evidence is gathered at the end.** User research findings, design decisions and technology choices are reconstructed from memory rather than recorded as they happen.
- **The Standard is owned by one person.** A delivery manager prepares for the assessment while the rest of the team carries on.
- **Governance runs in parallel.** Spend controls, security reviews and programme boards ask for the same information in different formats.

Each of these turns a useful discipline into administrative overhead.

Build evidence into the way the team works

The simplest change is to capture evidence as a by-product of delivery:

- keep a running decision log covering what was decided, why, and what evidence supported it;
- record user research sessions and findings in a shared, searchable place;
- maintain a live service performance view from beta onwards;
- document technology and security choices when they are made, not at assessment time.

When the assessment comes, the team is presenting its normal working material, not a special pack.

Make the whole team own the Standard

Each point of the Standard has a natural owner in a multidisciplinary team. User researchers own understanding users, designers own making the service simple to use, technical leads own technology choices and security, and the product manager owns the outcomes. Ask each owner to keep their evidence current and to present it at the assessment. This spreads the load and improves quality, because evidence comes from the people closest to the work.

Align governance with the Standard

Programme boards, spend control submissions and internal assurance often ask questions the Service Standard already answers. Where possible, use the same evidence for all of them:

- map internal governance questions to the relevant Standard points and the Technology Code of Practice;
- reuse the decision log, research summaries and performance data across forums;
- agree with assurance teams what "good enough" evidence looks like at each phase.

One set of evidence, used several times, is faster and more consistent than several sets produced separately.

Treat assessments as a learning loop

Assessment panels are a free source of expert challenge. Teams that treat recommendations as a backlog — prioritised, owned and closed — move through later phases faster. Teams that treat them as criticism to be defended tend to see the same issues raised again.

Book assessments early, share material in advance and be open about gaps. Panels respond well to teams that know where they are weak and have a plan.

What leaders can do

Senior responsible owners and service owners set the tone. Three actions make the biggest difference:

- ask to see the team's decision log and research findings at routine reviews, not only before assessments;

- protect time for user research and performance analysis in every sprint;
- remove duplicate governance that asks for the same evidence twice.

The Service Standard describes what good public services look like. Built into delivery from discovery onwards, it stops being a hurdle and becomes the fastest route to a service that works.

Want to talk this through?

Book a 45-minute discovery conversation. Bring one challenge, leave with three prioritised next steps — written up within 24 hours.

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