DIGITAL PUBLIC SERVICES STANDARD

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1   INTRODUCTION

The adoption of emerging digital technologies in the implementation of public services allows government to engage citizens more effectively and efficiently. By aligning the design, implementation, and governance transformation of service using digital technologies with the Batho Pele principles, these services can better meet citizens' needs, improve accessibility, and prioritize user experiences. However, a key challenge faced by government is that the design and implementation services are often not done in collaboration with citizens' preferences. This is the most sought pursued by the government and the DPSA. The lack of guidance to departments around this matter exacerbates the situation.

2   PURPOSE

The purpose of this Digital Public Services Standard is to guide government departments when designing, implementing, governing, and continuously improving digital services. The standard further ensures the creation of public services that are accessible, ethical, secure, user-centric, and innovative, in line with the government's broader digital transformation goals.

3   LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Below is the summary of the legislative framework that gives rise to this standard

3.1. Chapter 10 S195 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides that public administration must be governed by the democratic values and principles enshrined in the Constitution, including the following principles:

   (b) Efficient, economical, and effective use of resources must be promoted.
   (e) People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policymaking.

3.2. The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery of 1997 provides a policy framework and practical implementation strategy for transforming public service delivery. The white paper defines executive authorities' approach when delivering services. The process is described in the eight (8) Batho Pele principles

   The eight principles serve as acceptable policy and foundation for the governments customer customer-orientated strategy legislative framework regarding service delivery in the public service. These principles align with the Constitutional ideals of promoting and maintaining high standards of professional ethics, providing service impartially, fairly,

equably and without bias; utilising resources efficiently and effectively; responding to people's needs; encouraging citizens to participate in policymaking and rendering an accountable, transparent, and development-oriented public administration.

3.3. In terms of section 3(1) (f), (g) and (i) of the Public Service Act, 1994, the Minister for the Public Service and Administration is responsible for establishing norms and standards relating to Information Management, Electronic Government (e-Government) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) related matters. This also includes matters related to transformation, reform, innovation and any other matter to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the public service and its service delivery to the public.

3.4. Public Service Regulations, 2016, Chapter 3, Part 3 (36) provides as follows "An executive authority shall establish and maintain an operations management framework which shall include- (b) a list of all core mandated services provided by the department; (c) mapped business processes for all services; (d) standard operating procedures for all services.

3.5. The purpose of the Protection of Personal Information (POPIA) Act, 2013, is to "promote the protection of personal information processed by both public and private bodies." Government service delivery transactions with citizens involve personal information, which the government is responsible for safeguarding appropriately.

4   CONCEPT OF A DIGITAL SERVICES

4.1 A digital service is a "service that is delivered or enabled through digital technologies, typically through the internet, mobile apps, or other online platforms. This service leverages technology to improve how users interact with and consume it, offer convenience, accessibility, and efficiency". Digital services span a wide range of functions, from basic online services like information access to complex, integrated systems in areas such as finance, healthcare, education, and government [1]

4.2 Functional attributes

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) report provides six fundamental digital services attributes to realise digital transformation within the public service which are displayed in figure 1 below.

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[1] OpenAI. (2025). Response from ChatGPT. Definition of digital service. OpenAI. (Accessed: March 9, 2025 Available from https://chat.openai.com/

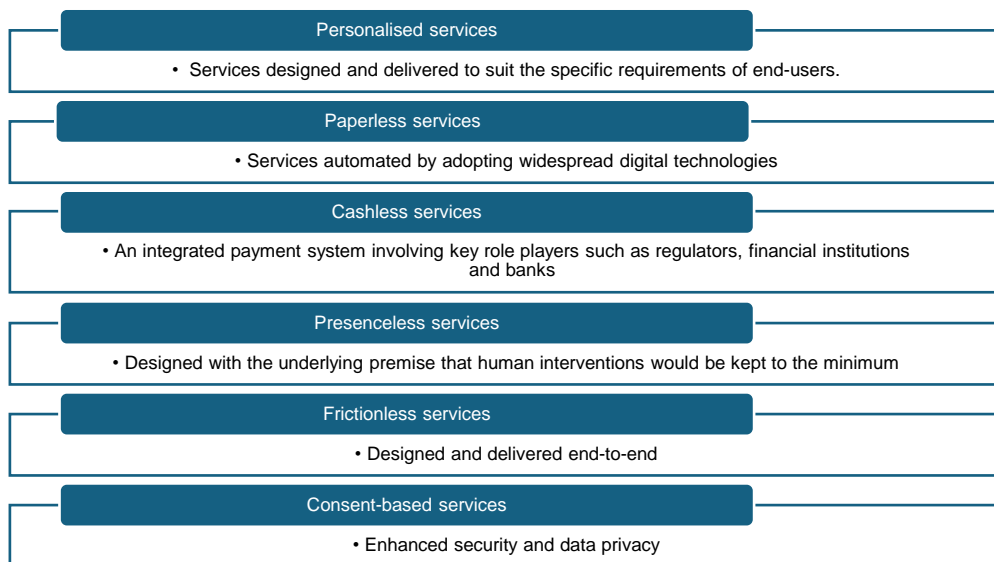|	
Personalised services	• Services designed and delivered to suit the specific requirements of end-users.
Paperless services	• Services automated by adopting widespread digital technologies
Cashless services	• An integrated payment system involving key role players such as regulators, financial institutions and banks
Presenceless services	• Designed with the underlying premise that human interventions would be kept to the minimum
Frictionless services	• Designed and delivered end-to-end
Consent-based services	• Enhanced security and data privacy

Figure 1: Fundamental digital services attributes (Source: adapted from ITU, 2019)

By aligning the design of digital services with the above attributes, departments will go a long way in ensuring digitally transformed practices to deliver public services.

4.3 Technical Attributes

The table below outlines the technical attributes that differentiate traditional e-Services from Digital Services, focusing on aspects such as maturity, delivery channels, user experience, system integration, architecture, platforms, scalability, and methods of development and delivery.

Attribute	Electronic Service	Digital Service
Maturity	Service Request and Service Delivery are electronic.	The interaction is digital end-to-end
Channel	Predominantly web	All devices/ channels
UX	Generic / Common to all	• Personalized, Localized • AI-driven
Integration	Limited to an Application	Enterprise-wide integration
Architecture	Service Oriented Architecture	• Enterprise Architecture • Open API-based • Micro-Services Architecture
Technologies	Internet	SMACI (Social, Mobile, Analytics, Cloud & IoT)
Scalability	Finite	Infinite
Interoperability	Needs conscious effort	By default
Dev Method	Waterfall	Agile, DevOps

Table 1: Digital Service Standards (Source: India)[2]

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[2] National Centre for e-Governance Standards and Technology – STQC. Digital Service Standards. https://egovstandards.gov.in/

4.4 Key digital technologies that enable delivery of digital services

The following digital platforms are technologies, connecting multiple parties and enabling them to exchange information, goods, or services efficiently.

4.4.1 Single Digital Gateway: Acts as the main access point for all digital government services, minimizing the need for multiple platforms or fragmented services. Services should be easily searchable, allowing users to quickly find the information or transaction they require.

4.4.2 Digital identity: A digital identity is a set of data points that represent the characteristics, attributes, and activities identifying an entity on digital platforms. It enables secure and efficient access to services in both the public and private sectors and is progressively extending across borders.

4.4.3 Digital post tools: Digital post allows public authorities and private service providers to securely deliver important and often sensitive information to citizens and businesses via digital channels.

4.4.4 Digital notifications: It is designed to simplify the communication process for public sector institutions, enabling them to reach service users, including citizens and businesses, through traditional methods such as emails, text messages, and physical letters.

4.4.5 Digital payment: A method of conducting transactions or paying bills online or through electronic means, eliminating the need for physical checks or cash. When digital identity is integrated with digital payments and interoperable base registries, it creates a unified and secure government-to-person (G2P) payment system, enhancing security and accuracy in high-volume transactions, such as social cash benefits.

4.4.6 Digital wallet: This technology is essential to allow citizens to securely share information stored in digital versions of their driving license, professional or educational credentials, fishing permits, firearm licenses, and medical prescriptions with just a click of a button on their phone.

4.4.7 Multifactor Authentication: Given the high levels of cybercrime worldwide, it is crucial for departments to secure their publicly accessible services using proper authentication methods, such as usernames and passwords. This need for security has resulted in multiple and varied verification and authentication requirements for citizens. When signing into online accounts, a process known as "authentication,"

users are verifying their identity to the service. Traditionally, this has been done using a username and password. However, usernames are often easy to guess, sometimes just being an email address. Since passwords can be difficult to remember, people tend to choose simple ones or reuse the same password across multiple sites.

4.4.8 Mobile Platform: A key component of the draft Digital Transformation of the Public Service ecosystem is the mobile application, which will allow citizens to access government services from their mobile devices. When selecting the right mobile platform, important architectural factors include portability, maintenance, app store availability, common native capabilities, ease of native integrations, performance, and security. While these considerations are technical, they significantly affect the onboarding of new services and, most importantly, influence the citizen's experience with the application, ultimately impacting their adoption and usage of mobile government services.

4.4.9 Integration Platform: Data integration tools are necessary to access, integrate, transform, process, and transfer data from multiple endpoints across various infrastructures, facilitating the delivery of integrated services.

4.4.10 Digital Experience Platform: These platforms have capabilities such as payments, journey mapping, personalization, and other options provided with single sign-on based on identity and access. These platforms consist of unified citizen profiles with identification elements connected to external systems. These provide citizens with services and related information, in addition to capabilities that offer a more unified and intelligent citizen service experience.

 Departments need to try as much as possible to ensure that the public services they offer meet the above motive when delivering digital channels.

5   GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following design principles guide the development and delivery of digital services, ensuring they meet user needs in a way that aligns with the Batho Pele principles

5.1   Consultation: Involve citizens in the design and delivery (co-creation) of digital services. The departments, along with other external institutions, should actively gather feedback and respond to citizen needs to improve service quality.

5.2   Access: Ensure services are accessible to all citizens, especially underserved communities and vulnerable groups. Digital services should be designed for accessibility across various channels.

5.3   Transparency: Clearly communicate how services work, with terms & conditions and privacy policies readily available and easily understandable to all users.

5.4   Responsiveness: Make sure services are adaptable and responsive to changing citizen needs and requests, incorporating feedback mechanisms for ongoing improvements.

5.5   Courtesy: The design of digital services should prioritize respectful, user-friendly interfaces.

5.6   Redress: Provide accessible and transparent processes for users to submit complaints or resolve issues related to digital services, ensuring timely resolutions.

5.7   Value for Money: Digital services should offer more cost-effective solutions compared to traditional service delivery methods.

5.8   Information and Data Privacy: Services must comply with POPIA, ensuring secure processing, storage, and sharing of users' personal data.

6   DIGITAL SERVICES LIFE-CYCLE

The Digital Services Life Cycle outlines the phases a digital service undergoes, starting from its initial concept and extending to its eventual retirement. It covers the entire process of designing, delivering, and maintaining digital services to ensure they meet user needs, remain effective over time, and adapt to changing circumstances. The six stages are based on various frameworks for digital service implementation, including the United Kingdom's Government Digital Service Standards[3] for service design, ISO 25010 standards[4] for software development, and Agile Methodology[5] for implementation.

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[3] Government Digital Service. Service Manual. https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/service-standard.
[4] ISO 20005: 2024. Systems and software engineering — Systems and software Quality Requirements and Evaluation (SQuaRE) — Quality model overview and usage.
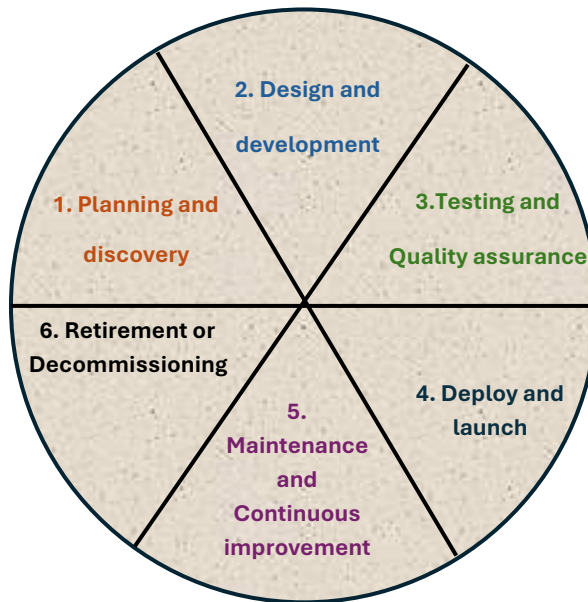[5] Schwaber K, et al. (2001). Agile Methodology.

Figure 2: Digital service lifecycle (Source: adapted from ChatGPT, 2025[6])

6.1   Planning and Discovery

a.   Needs Assessment: Understand the needs that the service is intended to meet, gather user requirements, and define the scope and objectives. Frequently accessed services can be prioritized.

b.   Stakeholder Engagement: Involve stakeholders early in the process to align the goals and ensure that the service meets their needs.

c.   Research and Strategy: Conduct research on existing services, technologies, and trends. Develop a strategy that outlines the service's vision, goals, and success metrics.

6.2   Design and Development

a.   User Experience (UX) and User Interface (UI) Design: Focus on creating user-friendly interfaces, and user flows based on the identified needs. Design should prioritize accessibility and usability.

b.   Architecture and Technology Selection: Define the system architecture and choose the appropriate technology stack, platforms, and tools.

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[6] When prompted by the author, ChatGPT responded with a summary of the 'Digital Service Life Cyle' (OpenAI ChatGPT, 2025).

c. Service Development: Develop the back end and front-end components of the digital service, ensuring they integrate seamlessly with existing systems.

d. Security and Compliance: Ensure the service adheres to relevant legal, regulatory, and security requirements (e.g., data privacy, accessibility standards).

6.3   Testing and Quality Assurance

a. Functional Testing: Ensure the service meets all the specified requirements and works as expected.

b. User Testing: Involve real users to test the interface, usability, and functionality, gathering feedback for improvements.

c. Performance and Security Testing: Evaluate the service's performance under load and test for security vulnerabilities.

d. Refinement: Address bugs, fix issues, and enhance the service based on testing feedback.

6.4   Deployment and Launch

a. Deployment Strategy: Plan and execute the rollout of the service, whether it's a phased launch or a full-scale release.

b. Post-Launch Monitoring: Track service performance, user engagement, and address any issues that arise immediately after launch.

c. User Onboarding and Training: Provide users with resources to help them understand how to use the service effectively.

6.5   Maintenance and Continuous Improvement

a. Ongoing Support: Provide user support, fix issues, and ensure the service runs smoothly.

b. Updates and Enhancements: Regularly update the service based on user feedback, changing requirements, or technological advancements.

c. Performance Monitoring: Continuously monitor the service's performance, ensuring it meets the defined KPIs and adapting as necessary.

d. Iterative Improvements: Use feedback and data to refine the service, adding new features, improving functionality, and optimizing the user experience.

6.6   Retirement or Decommissioning

a. End-of-Life Planning: When the digital service is no longer needed or replaced by a new version, a strategy is developed to phase it out.

b. Data Migration: If applicable, migrate user data to a new system and ensure that it is securely handled.

c. Decommissioning: Shut down the service, ensuring that it's properly archived or disposed of while adhering to any legal or regulatory requirements.

d. Final Evaluation: Conduct a post-mortem or evaluation to understand what worked well and what could have been done better for future projects.

7   GOVERNANCE OF DIGITAL PUBLIC SERVICES

The following measures should be put in place to sustain the quality of the digital services and ensure that they remain aligned to the service delivery strategic objectives of the department.

7.1 Prioritise the development of the following policies for digital services

a. Digital inclusion policy: Ensures that digital services are inclusive and accessible to all segments of society, regardless of economic background, age, or location.

b. Accessibility Policy: Ensures digital services are accessible to all users, including those with physical, visual, auditory, or cognitive impairments.

7.2 Establish roles and responsibilities

The following minimum roles and functions are required to implement the standard:

a. Business Analysis: bridge the gap between business stakeholders and technical teams, ensuring that the digital service aligns with business objectives and requirements.

b. User Experience and User Interface Design: Ensures that the service provides a seamless and intuitive user experience, as well as ensuring the visual design is attractive and functional.

c. Software developer(s): building the digital service, writing code, and ensuring the service functions as intended

d. Quality assurance: ensure that the digital service is thoroughly tested for bugs, performance issues, and usability problems before it is released

A department may assign the officials who are currently responsible for services delivery improvement and ICT to play these roles.

7.3 Monitor and Evaluate implementation of the digital services.

The following implementation of activities as outlined in the digital service lifecycle will form the basis of measuring compliance with the standard. The department should compile the following:

a. A document that outlines processes followed to engage citizens to conduct needs assessments and the results thereof.

b. An implementation plan to develop digital services.

c. A communication plan that outlines stakeholders, mediums for engagement and messages.

d. A document that outlines the User Experience (UX) and User Interface (UI) design processes.

e. Measures followed to monitor the performance of the digital services adherence to the above-mentioned guiding principles and the report thereof.

7.4 Management of the digital services

The digital services should be planned, budgeted, and reported for following the department standards and templates.

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