

Replacing GCF core services: feedback from the PSN community on our proposed approach

Introduction

This GSi Convergence Framework (GCF) was set up as an interim solution to help enable public sector organisations to migrate to the Public Services Network (PSN), the government's high-performance network.

The framework provides access to a number of essential and add-on services used by most PSN-connected organisations. These bundled services are referred to as GCF core services. As this framework expires in August 2015, PSN-connected organisations using the GCF core services will need to replace these services.

We investigated options and developed some initial proposals on how we think these core services could be replaced so that it is simpler and clearer for PSN customers to find and purchase the services they need. We wanted to make sure that what replaces the GCF core services fits user needs and provides the best value.

We then sought the views of the PSN community who use these services so we could understand if the proposals made sense or if they could see any difficulties with the approach.

What the online survey said

In early December 2014, an email was sent to primary contacts within all PSN-connected organisations inviting them to feedback on the proposals. Attached to the email was a document that listed the core services currently available through the framework and presented our proposed approach for how they could be replaced: some by commercially-available alternatives from digital marketplace; others through a centrally-provided solution.

At this early stage it wasn't possible to provide cost estimates but we believed there was a strong indication that significant savings were possible by rationalising what we needed and refining the technical requirements for those remaining services.

The document listed the services currently available through the framework, which were split into the following:

- services we believed were most effectively provided centrally
- services that can be purchased through alternative mechanisms
- services that are no longer required and would not be replaced

Services were subdivided into tables under the headings: core services, network services, data services and miscellaneous services.

PSN customers were invited to feedback via an online survey, which remained active until 12:00am on Friday, 16 January 2015.

Summary of feedback

A total of 55 formal feedback responses were received, the majority from local authorities but also from central government departments, agencies and public bodies. More than 85% of respondents agreed that the proposed approach was an effective solution. Comments were positive, stating the approach was “pragmatic”, “logical” and “realistic” and “should make things a lot simpler”.

Other feedback included a strong confirmation that the services we proposed managing centrally were the right ones and that, in general, nothing further needed to be added.

None of the respondents suggested that the approach was wrong, although some were keen to better understand the procurement routes and options, as well as the associated costs of the replacement services, before they could agree the approach was “an effective solution”.

Further questions related to the use of the GCF internet gateway service. A total of 50 responses were received here, with 26% of respondents stating they used the service. Of these, 21% stated the “majority” of their staff used the service, 36% said a “significant minority” and 46% said it use was limited to “specific roles”.

Survey questions

We asked the following questions in the survey:

- Question 1: do you believe the proposed approach set out in the document is an effective solution? (Respondents were asked to include comments about why they'd answered their specific way)
- Question 2: are there any services that you believe Cabinet Office should consider managing centrally? (Respondents were asked to include details)
- Question 3: do you have any feedback or questions on the approach or the alternatives proposed?
- Question 4: does your organisation currently use the GCF internet connectivity service (either Secure Internet Gateway (SIG) or internet proxy)?
- Question 5: If yes, how many staff in your organisation use it? (Respondents were asked to select from: the majority of staff, a significant minority of staff, its use is limited to specific roles in our organisation)
- Question 6: If yes, are there any specific features of the current service that you would expect from a new service over and above access to the internet?

Next steps

The responses from the feedback survey were in the majority supportive of the proposed approach.

Suggestions were made about needing to better understand the procurement routes, options and costs before they could comment positively. This will become clearer as we finalise the details of the proposal, when we'll be in touch with the PSN community.

All the comments received will be considered and, where appropriate, will be reflected in the completed proposal that will describe the future design of the core services model. We're aiming to publish this to the PSN community in March 2015.

We are grateful to all those who responded to the request for feedback.