

Digital Economy Bill: Digital Government (Part 5)

Data Sharing Codes of Practice

The most successful technology businesses are adept at using data to drive improvements for their customers. Used responsibly, and with the right safeguards, government could use data to deliver radically better public services and save money. The Digital Economy Bill contains a suite of measures that will support the digital transformation of government, enabling the delivery of better public services, world-leading research and better statistics.

Part 5 of the Bill, which deals with Digital Government, sets out provisions to enable the disclosure and sharing of data for specified purposes. These provisions include a set of permissive gateways designed to enable more effective and efficient sharing of data between specified bodies for particular purposes, with a view to fulfilling specific objectives. For example, the powers will help public authorities identify individuals or households who are eligible for specific types of support and services and ensure they are offered at the point of need.

The measures provide new permissive powers for public authorities to share information to combat fraud against the public sector. Public authorities will be empowered to pilot new ways of using data to improve the management of debt owed to the public sector by reducing the time and complexity involved in establishing data sharing agreements. Where a vulnerable customer is identified, the intention is that the sharing of data for this purpose might enable that person to be given appropriate support and advice, which may include signposting to non-fee paying debt advice agencies.

The UK Statistics Authority will be given easier secure access to data to produce more timely and accurate national and official statistics. Researchers will be provided with a more complete and accurate evidence base to inform analysis and enable better policy design and delivery.

These provisions are intended to simplify a complex legal landscape and unlock the potential of publicly held databases to improve the lives of citizens. Increasing citizens' confidence in the government's use of their data while making better use of that data to deliver services they need will help us to build a more prosperous society.

We are publishing the four codes of practice that will give practitioners and citizens clarity and transparency over how the powers in the Bill will operate. They cover:

- A code of practice on Public Service Delivery, Fraud and Debt (Chapters 1, 3 and 4)
- A code of practice for civil registration officials (Chapter 2)
- A code of practice and accreditation criteria for access to data for research purposes (Chapter 5)
- A statement of principles and procedures and code of Practice for Changes to Data Systems (Chapter 7)

Our codes are drawn from, and should be read in accordance with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) code of practice on data sharing, which provides the framework for how the Data Protection Act applies to the sharing of personal data. Our codes also include guidance on the development of privacy impact assessments and privacy notices, again drawn from ICO codes.