



# Transform

## Trusted and accessible justice

What a decade of digital transformation has taught us

**Author:** Rob Pearson  
Director of Justice & Security

# The promise of digital justice

The justice system is under pressure to modernise, with 80,000 cases in the Crown Court backlog alone, a figure that has more than doubled since 2019.

This statistic doesn't represent the real, very personal costs to victims and defendants who're often waiting years for resolution of life-changing events. These rising backlogs, increased caseloads, constrained public finances, and growing citizen expectations have forced us to rethink how justice services are delivered. Historically, courts have often been slow, complex, and difficult for citizens to navigate without legal expertise.

Over the past decade, the UK has invested heavily in digital reform. For example, the HM Courts & Tribunal Service Reform Programme has introduced a wide range of digital services across jurisdictions and processed more than 4 million cases digitally since 2019.

At its core, the vision behind digital justice reform is about stripping back complexity, delivering justice that is faster, simpler, and more accessible. Yet technology alone cannot guarantee accessibility. The critical question for justice leaders today is whether digital reform has genuinely improved access to justice.

80,000  
*cases in the  
Crown Court  
backlog alone*



# What accessible justice means today

Access to justice is increasingly understood as more than the ability to file a claim or schedule a date. Modern justice systems must ensure users can reach services, understand processes, afford participation and trust the outcomes they receive.

A practical framework for accessible justice includes six dimensions: availability, simplicity, affordability, fairness, trust and support. These factors together determine whether justice services are genuinely usable for their users.



### Availability

The extent to which justice services can be accessed when and where they are needed through reliable, accessible digital channels.



### Simplicity

The degree to which justice services are clear, intuitive and easy for users to understand and navigate.



### Affordability

The extent to which digital justice services reduce the financial, time and administrative costs of accessing justice.



### Fairness

The degree to which digital processes uphold due process, transparency and equal participation for all parties.



### Trust

The level of public confidence that digital justice systems are secure, impartial, reliable and transparent.



### Support

The availability of assistance, guidance and alternative access routes to ensure all users can effectively engage with digital justice services.

# Digital justice in practice

There are many practical examples of digital reform which illustrate how technology combined with human-centred design can improve service users experience with the justice system. These include:

- Reducing the cost of Lasting Power of Attorney: Redesigning the service journey reduced costs by 31%, increasing productivity 5-fold, while simplifying the application process for families navigating complex life events.
- Moving appeals online: Redesigning the appeals process using human-centred design resulted in around 80% of appeals being submitted digitally, significantly improving accessibility and completion rates

## What the evidence tells us

Evidence from our work in the UK Justice sector indicates that well-designed digital services can improve the efficiency and accessibility of justice processes. Independent evaluation of reformed civil, family and [Immigration and Tribunal Services](#) found that digitalisation contributed to **more timely access to hearings and decisions**, reduced administrative effort for court staff and legal professionals, and improved user experience for many.

Public users frequently reported that digital services were easier to use than paper processes and enabled cases to be initiated and managed online, reducing time and cost associated with traditional court administration.

However, international experience suggests that digital justice reform isn't purely a technology challenge; it requires **whole-system transformation across processes, infrastructure and organisational capability**.

Again, evidence from our work in the [Office of the Public Guardian](#) highlights that digital services are most effective when integrated across the full case journey rather than layered onto existing legacy processes. Removing fragmented and parallel paper and offline channels unlocks both financial and quality benefits.

Implementation challenges are common across jurisdictions pursuing digital justice reform. In the UK, courts have historically relied on **paper-based case files in the court setting, legacy monolithic IT systems and dispersed infrastructure**, making it difficult to integrate new, well-designed digital services or emerging technologies across the justice system.

These structural constraints mean digital services must operate alongside legacy systems or provide spot solutions to remove a perceived bottleneck, creating complexity for court staff, legal professionals and often moving a bottleneck downstream.

# Defining and assessing effective digital justice services

Evidence from our work suggests that the success of digital court services can't be measured solely through technological deployment or system efficiency. Instead, effective digital justice services are those that improve the **practical accessibility of justice for citizens**, while maintaining procedural fairness and public confidence.

Our experience and insight from international reform in Canada, Australia and Singapore indicate that digital services can reduce administrative burden, accelerate case progression and simplify user interaction with the justice system when designed around the needs of users rather than institutional processes.

Applying a six-dimensional measure allows us to move beyond a narrow definition of success and assess impact in a more balanced and meaningful way. While many programmes can demonstrate strong performance against traditional metrics such as time and cost, this broader lens often reveals a more nuanced picture.

*Digital services can reduce administrative burden, accelerate case progression and simplify user interaction with the justice system*

It highlights where outcomes for users may be limited due to accessibility constraints, where solutions introduced unintended operational pressures, or worse, introduce potential bias and hallucinations. In doing so, it challenges the assumption that successful delivery equates to successful outcomes and instead reframes success as something multi-dimensional and enduring, that enables accessibility, fairness and trust as technology advances.



# AI and the next phase of justice reform

As digital reform in justice systems matures, attention is increasingly turning to the role that artificial intelligence (AI) could play in supporting courts and legal services. Used responsibly, AI has the potential to improve efficiency and accessibility across justice processes, particularly in areas such as document analysis, case triage and legal research support.

Internationally, interest is growing: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reports that over 50 governments are exploring or piloting AI tools in judicial systems, while the World Justice Project highlights the growing use of digital and AI-enabled platforms to expand access to legal services, particularly through online dispute resolution. These developments suggest that AI could play a valuable role in improving how justice services are delivered across the end-to-end user journey.

However, justice differs fundamentally from many other areas of public service. Encounters with the justice system often occur during deeply personal and emotionally significant moments, particularly for victims, witnesses and defendants. In this context, trust—and the perception of fairness—are central to the legitimacy of justice institutions.

While AI can assist with administrative tasks and information processing, decisions affecting individuals' rights, responsibilities or liberty shouldn't be delegated entirely to automated systems. Research on algorithmic decision-making consistently highlights the importance of transparency, governance and human oversight to maintain confidence in digital justice systems. **AI therefore has greatest value when it augments professional judgement rather than replace it** by supporting legal professionals while preserving human accountability.

Looking ahead, responsible deployment of AI in justice systems will depend on several key priorities.

- 1. Systems must be designed for trust**, with transparent and explainable models and clear accountability for outcomes.
- 2. AI should support decision-making rather than automate it**, ensuring human judgment remains central to justice processes.
- Digital reforms must maintain **assisted and hybrid access channels** so that vulnerable users aren't excluded from justice services. Finally, AI should support **end-to-end service integration**, helping connect fragmented justice journeys across institutions.

Together, these principles reinforce the next phase of digital justice reform isn't simply about introducing new technologies, but using them in ways that strengthen accessibility, legitimacy and public confidence in the justice system.

## Conclusion

The past decade of digital reform demonstrates that technology can reduce friction, improve efficiency and expand access to justice. Yet it also shows that trust, fairness and usability must remain at the centre of reform. As justice systems explore the potential of AI, the challenge will be ensuring that innovation strengthens rather than undermines public confidence.

If this resonates with your work, and you'd be interested in tackling challenges in your organisation, reach out to talk to Rob Pearson, Director of Justice and Security, today.