



Companies House

# Our strategy 2017 to 2020



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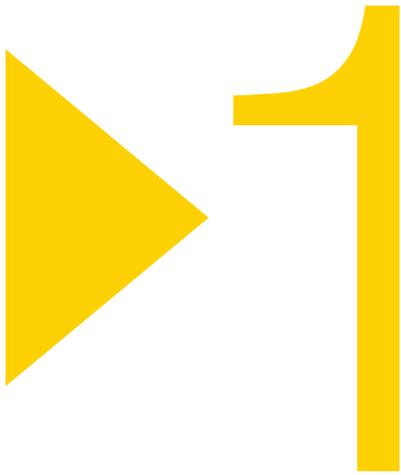
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Companies House is an Executive Agency of the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

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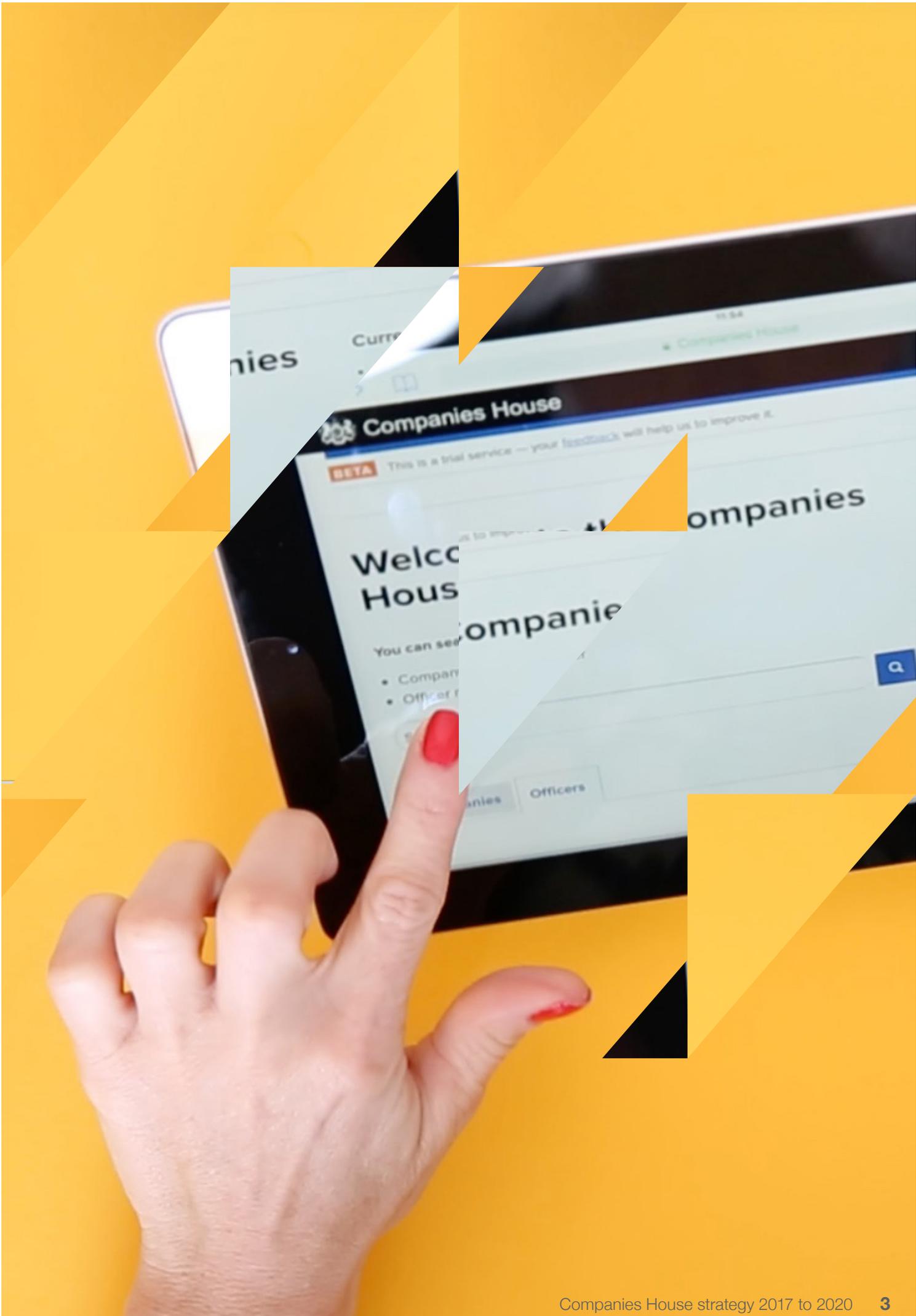


# introduction

The UK is a great place to start and grow a business. At Companies House we support that environment. We are the ‘home of company information’.

We make it quick and easy to set up a company, so businesses can choose a legal form that works for them and then focus on making a success of their business. We make it easy for companies to comply with their obligations, so this takes up the minimum amount of time. We create transparency in business, allowing people to know who they are choosing to do business with and to make the right investment decisions. In this way we support the vision of our parent department, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in building an economy that works for everyone.

In doing this, we are also embodying the ethos of the civil service vision; by delivering high quality services for the public and providing “efficient, trusted services designed around user need to deliver improved outcomes for the country”.





# our purpose

**Company registration and  
corporate transparency;  
making the UK a great place  
to do business.**

In the future, we will be doing this entirely digitally, for major transactions there will be no paper service.

Our staff will be outward looking, seeking to develop the skills they need to deliver both current and future business needs.

Search customers will have easy access to our data, using it as part of their due diligence, developing new products that consume our data and providing business confidence to support the UK economy.

This will lead us to deliver our vision.



# our vision

To be the best  
registry in the  
world

We will do this through:

- Excellence in company registration and search
- Making the register as complete and accurate as possible
- Building a high performance culture



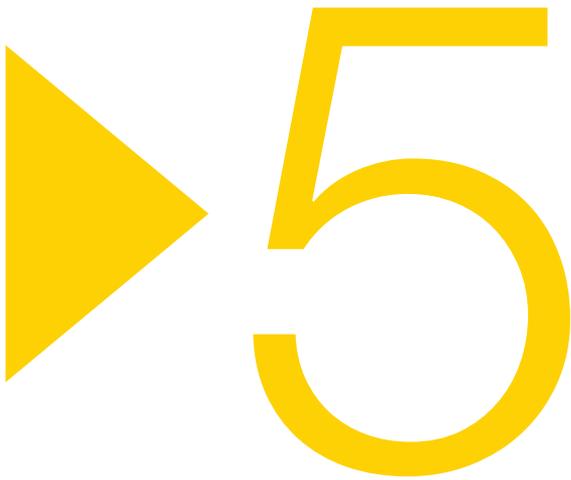
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# background

In 2013 Companies House set out its strategy for the future. This was an ambitious programme of work to make a step change in the way the UK's registry is delivered.

We considered every aspect of our work, from our very reason for existence to the way in which we charge for our service to how we would support our people. This strategy was to take us towards being a modern, fully digital registry, offering fast, efficient services to companies and, crucially, free access to searchers. Our strategy was based around five themes:

- Free, open data
- Digital transformation
- Improved register integrity
- Reduced burdens on business
- Efficiencies and simplification of fees



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# our achievements so far

During the course of the strategy Companies House has been enormously successful. We are seen as a world leading registry in terms of our innovation, our customer service and our transparency. In June 2015 we launched Companies House service (CHS).

This was a groundbreaking move. Through CHS we have opened up the company register to be searched for free online. The service has been a great success, and is now receiving an average of 15 million requests a day. It has opened up new uses for company data, improved company transparency and saved time and money for businesses who previously had to make requests from our paid for services.

Alongside the development of CHS we have also developed additional digital filing options for customers. We currently see 99% of all incorporations, and 85% of all other documents filed digitally. In 2016 we extended the range of transactions that could be undertaken digitally, by launching a new service allowing customers to dissolve a company digitally.



Over the course of the strategy, we have made a step change in the integrity of the UK's register, both in terms of fixing data issues, such as erroneous dates of birth, and working with others to identify illegal behaviours. Key to this was establishing the Integrity and Enforcement Unit, responsible for assisting customers in getting information right, and linking up with other parts of government to assist in uncovering criminal activity. We are now receiving a thirteen-fold increase in requests per month from law enforcement agencies.

One of the key priorities for the UK government throughout this time, has been the reduction of burdens on business. Companies House has worked hard to deliver innovative solutions for businesses. To reduce duplication for customers, we have worked closely with HMRC to develop joint filing systems. In 2015 we launched the Company Accounts and Tax Online service and in 2017 we will launch a Streamlined Company Registration System allowing customers to register for incorporation and certain business taxes in a single transaction.

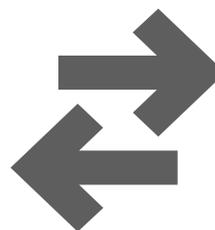
At Companies House we take pride in our ability to be efficient in all we do. We have a dedicated continuous improvement team, who work with all areas of the business to seek out efficiencies and improvements. In the last three years, the register has grown by an impressive 18.6%, with a total of over 3.8 million companies now registered. Throughout this time we have focused efforts on ensuring we are constantly identifying ways to be more efficient, we are proud of our track record in this area, delivering savings totalling 22%.

In the last three years, we have reduced in size as an organisation. This reflected changes in the nature of our work, with transactions becoming increasingly digital. Recent changes have seen Companies House take on additional work, often requiring different skills and different roles to those we have had in the past. Over the next three years, we will need to make sure that we are the right size, and have the right skills, to deliver the high quality services our customers deserve.

## REGISTER SIZE



## TRANSACTIONS



10m

Transactions handled last year



37,880

Average number of transactions processed in a day

## SEARCH AND DATA REQUESTS



1.3 billion

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## Legislative change

Delivering the government's strategic aims in a way that works for business is our core role. Since developing our strategy there has been a real increase in focus on the issue of transparency, with the UK leading the way globally in increased openness about who controls UK businesses. Whilst we were aware that this would be a major issue, which is why we focused on the development of free data, we could not have foreseen the extent to which it would change the way we operate. The Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act (SBEE) introduced many changes to company registration. The old, familiar annual return was replaced with a new confirmation statement, allowing companies to simply confirm their record is correct and offering them greater flexibility about when they do so. It also introduced the public identification of beneficial ownership of companies, through the requirement to provide details of People with Significant Control (PSC). The introduction of a public register of PSC was a world first, and part of the UK government's drive to become the most transparent place in the world to do business. The implementation of SBEE was one of the most complex projects ever undertaken by Companies House, and we therefore focused much of our resources into getting this right for customers. Consequently, the introduction was almost seamless. However, it meant that we have had less opportunity to focus resources on transforming paper based forms to digital services. We know we have to get the systems and process right before we can move everyone away from paper.

## Refreshing our strategy

With three years having passed we think the time is right to review what we have achieved and what has changed in the wider world and to refresh our approach to make sure we remain at the forefront of company registration. Much of the work of our original strategy is still ongoing, as we continue to focus on becoming a more digital organisation. In other areas the focus of our work needs to shift slightly to meet the needs of today's economy and today's priorities.

The coming years are likely to see more legislative changes, and we need to be on the front foot, working with colleagues across government to develop change in a way that works for business. In 2017 we will see the introduction of the fourth Anti-Money Laundering Directive, which will build upon the PSC information already held. Further down the line, we expect to be playing a critical role in the delivery of the register of beneficial ownership of overseas entities, a priority for the government. In the coming years we will also see the UK exiting the European Union. It is essential that we provide the systems to support business growth and confidence during this time.



# excellence in company registration and search

Our three outcomes are:

- customers can do everything online
- our services are simple and easy to use
- we support government's policy objectives

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# Companies House prides itself in offering efficient digital services to our customers. We are customer focused in all we do, making sure users can complete their transactions as quickly and easily as possible.

This applies to all our customers, whether they are filing companies, who need to comply with legal obligations, or search customers, who want to find out information about a company. During the course of the strategy we have created many more digital services, allowing customers to move away from the slow, inefficient and error prone paper filings of the past. We will be continuing along this path.

## Digital services

We are committed to delivering all our services in an entirely digital manner, closing the options of filing on paper. Digital services are quicker, more efficient and more accurate. When a customer files digitally, we are able to steer them through the customer journey, reducing the chance of them making mistakes. This means that digital filings are less likely to be rejected, making the experience more efficient for customers. Further, data entered digitally by a customer can be added to the record immediately, rather than re-entered within Companies House. This means the record is updated more quickly, and the risk of an error occurring within Companies House is also reduced.

To achieve this goal, it is essential that we are able to offer customers services that are easy and quick to use. At present the highest volume transactions, such as accounts filings, are partially enabled. However, there are many gaps that we need to fill. Most transactions are not enabled for all company types, and the majority of lower volume transactions are not enabled at all. We recognise that this causes difficulty for some customers moving

to digital filing. Intermediaries such as accountants who file documents on behalf of companies need to create systems for filing that work for all transactions. Creating systems to allow for digital filing of some documents whilst also retaining the arrangements for paper filing where we do not provide a digital solution is not practical. We intend to make substantial progress towards full digitisation over the course of this strategy. We will initially focus our efforts on achieving complete digital enablement for all types of accounts, then move on to complete enablement of other transactions. For high volume, critical services, we will develop sophisticated, user friendly services that are easy to use, reducing the time taken to complete the filing and designing out scope for error. For some transactions, which are very low volume, this may be a simpler digital service.

## Requiring digital filing

Customer take-up of digital services will be a key priority for Companies House through the life of this strategy. We will work with all customers to understand what stops them from filing digitally, and to refine existing services to improve the customer experience and encourage those who currently file on paper to interact with us digitally. We will make sure the solutions are better and quicker for them. Digitally filed information is better for users of the information as well, providing consistent, machine readable information, which can be more easily used to improve corporate transparency. Bearing in mind all these benefits to customers, and potential efficiencies to Companies House, we will consider whether we should compel companies to file information with us digitally, and

whether that would be for major, established transactions or whether it should extend to all information filed to Companies House.

## Transparency

Corporate transparency is a top priority for the UK government, with a commitment to being the most transparent place in the world to do business. Companies House plays a key role in this ambition. We have led the way in openness, with free data making the register available at any time and any place. In 2016 we delivered a step change in transparency through the introduction of the public register of PSC. In 2017 we will be building on this with the implementation of the fourth Anti-Money Laundering Directive. This will see Companies House collecting information about beneficial owners of a wider range of corporate entities, including Scottish Partnerships, Scottish Limited Partnerships and unregistered companies. We recognise that some companies, especially smaller companies, find this law complicated. We will be working to make sure our systems are what customers need: that they are as simple as possible to use and guide customers through their obligations to make compliance easy. We will develop improved guidance to help customers understand their obligations better.

Later, the government has indicated that it sees requiring similar information from overseas legal entities that own land in the UK or enter into public procurement contracts, as a vital element in ensuring that the UK remains a safe and transparent place to do business. Companies House, with its expertise in running similar registers, will be well placed to support the development of this new register and create an efficient and trusted digital register.

## Digital communication

Increasingly, people expect to receive communications via digital means. We have made huge steps forward in this area for our search customers who can access all the information they need online via our CHS services. We have also introduced a 'follow' function, allowing customers to register their interest in a company and to receive digital email alerts whenever changes are made to that company's record.

Over the course of the strategy we will be aiming to move registration customers away from paper reminders for their transactions and onto email reminders, as well as reviewing what other communications we will carry out digitally. Our goal is to move all communications with customers to digital options. This is in line with modern expectations of customer services and will lead to efficiency savings for Companies House.

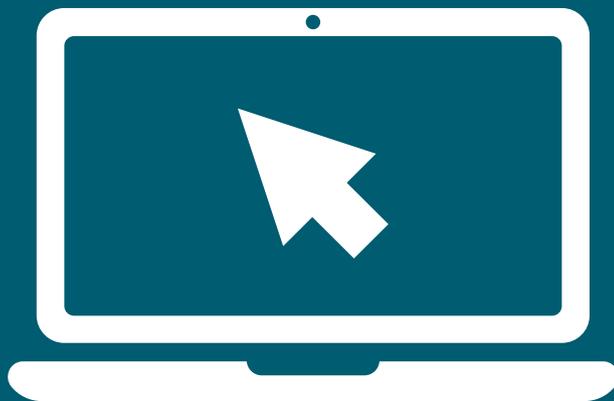
## Supporting our digital services

It is vital that Companies House has the appropriate technology infrastructure to support the provision of services to our customers and internal users. We will continue to invest in modernising this capability in line with the overall strategy set out by government. This will include simplifying our technology estate so that it is easier to maintain and develop our services to meet the changing needs of government policy and customers. More generally to support new change initiatives we will be working more closely with our sponsor department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) so that government policy objectives can be met through the design and testing of functionality for users at early stages of policy formulation.

Our excellence in digital services must also apply to internal systems. Our focus on providing the best possible services to our customers has inevitably meant that our internal systems have lagged behind. This means that internal systems can be inefficient and require manual intervention. We will begin to address this over the course of this strategy to ensure our staff are provided with equally user-friendly and simple systems, to help them support the digital register.



**Superfast and  
documents  
right there ...  
100% fantastic!**



Customer feedback on the Companies  
House service

# MORE DIGITAL, MORE RELIABLE

Year  
**1**

## ACCOUNTS



Complete digital enablement of accounts filings

## BENEFICIAL OWNERSHIP

Beneficial ownership information available for wider range of company types

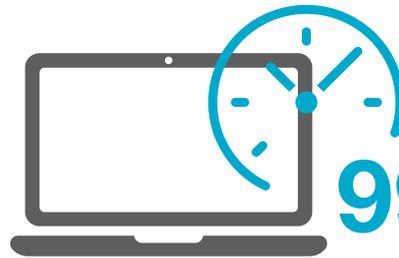


## INSIGHT

Complete insight work to understand barriers to digital filing



## SERVICE AVAILABILITY



**99.9%**

Year  
**2**

## REMINDERS SENT DIGITALLY



Increased proportion of reminders issued digitally

## SERVICE AVAILABILITY



**99.95%**

Year  
**3**

## SERVICE AVAILABILITY



**99.99%**

## ACCOUNTS

**95%**

Digital filing of accounts at 95%



## DIGITAL ENABLEMENT

Digital enablement of all transactions complete





# making the register as complete and accurate as possible

Our three outcomes are:

- we work with others to identify data issues that need to be corrected
- companies provide current, complete and correct information
- we design out scope for error in services

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# Companies House is a registry, rather than a regulator. Our role is to receive information and present that out in a form that is helpful to searchers.

The government considers it essential that the process of incorporating a company, and complying with disclosure requirements throughout the life of a company should be simple and low cost, with the minimum of burdens. In line with this principle, we have designed easy to use systems, and have no powers to take an active role in investigation of information presented to us to confirm that it is truthful. Starting a company is not a suspicious activity. The vast majority of companies are law abiding and simply want to comply with the law, therefore it would be unreasonable to require excessive checks for all companies. That said, we recognise the importance of making sure that the data on the register is of high quality. For the register to be a valuable source of information for searchers they need to be able to have confidence that the data is current, complete and correct. We also work with companies to help them ensure the information is correct, once it has been registered.

The main and new focus of data quality work over the lifetime of this strategy will be on information on People with Significant Control (PSC). The PSC register was implemented on 30 June 2016, and the amount of information Companies House holds on PSC is likely to increase through further legislative proposals, such as the fourth Anti Money Laundering Directive. The importance of this information to corporate transparency and the interest in this data set means the integrity of the information should be a key priority for Companies House.

## **The right data in**

The best way to ensure the data on the register is current, complete and correct is to help our customers understand what they need to do and help them to provide the right information in the first place. By minimising the amount of incorrect data that ever reaches the register we can maximise its integrity. Very few companies are involved in any form of illegal activity. Most customers simply want to comply with legal requirements, as quickly and simply as possible. We will focus on getting the best possible data on the public register. This will be achieved by ensuring our digital services help companies file the right information, and that we regularly review and develop our digital services to continually improve companies' filing experiences and the quality of the data, designing out the scope for error. In addition, we will help educate companies about what they must file, through user-friendly journeys and regularly reviewed guidance. This education will continue through the use of innovative, far-reaching and accessible communications.



# This is the model for registers of the future.

Mike Bracken

Chief Digital Officer for the Co-operative Group. Former Executive Director of Digital and the Chief Data Officer for the UK Government.



## Working with other government sources

We will work with other government organisations to ensure the data on the register can be effectively analysed by users. This will include exploring the use of other government registers and data sets, such as addresses, nationalities and Standard Industrial Classifications (codes that describe a company's business activities) so that the data on the public register is compatible with other data sets. This will lead to data that is more consistent with other sources, leading to improved comparison and analysis opportunities, maximising the value of the information on the register to the wider economy.

Recognising that a small minority abuse the benefits of a low burden registration system and act fraudulently, we will work with others in the law enforcement sector to deal with these incidents robustly. We already work with a wide range of enforcement and government bodies, sharing data and supporting investigations into illegal activity. In the coming years, we will build upon this, and extend these activities to PSC information and other new data sets. This will again improve the integrity of the information on the register, for the benefit of consumers of company information.

## Tackling problems on the register

We recognise that, despite our best efforts, occasionally incorrect or incomplete data will be placed on the register. We will review information regarding PSC on the register to identify incomplete and inaccurate data, contacting companies for follow up action to ensure the information on the register is complete and correct. This includes responding to complaints about inaccurate data, for example those received through the "report it now" button on our digital services.

Similarly, we will apply these principles to new or changed data requirements. In designing out scope for error, we will focus on high volume transactions that will result in the biggest overall benefit. This will apply as much to any measures introduced through the data review, that might result in suppression of information, as to any new sets of data filed with Companies House. We will extend and tailor current compliance processes to new filing requirements, to ensure Companies House continues to have world leading compliance levels across all data sets.

## Working in partnership

The Law Enforcement Liaison team at Companies House have added so much to our capacity to do our job—investigating companies that present a risk to the reputation and commercial success of UK plc. Their willingness to work with us, share common goals, go the extra mile and cooperate in new ways is highly impressive. I regard them as superstars for this work. They have helped us obtain winding up orders against delinquent companies, disqualification orders against deserving directors and down the line, prosecutions. We are moving forward together as we introduce the new disclosure regime to enable early dissolution following our enquiries and I am confident this will also be a success. We regard Companies House as a vital partner in our work.

**David Usher.** Senior Investigator, Company Investigation. The Insolvency Service.

# IMPROVED INTEGRITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Year

1

Reduction in incorrect PSC information on the register



## GUIDANCE



Refresh of all customer guidance to assist in correct filing



## ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING

New compliance and integrity processes developed following the implementation of the Anti-Money Laundering Directive



REPORT IT NOW FUNCTION AVAILABLE

Year

2

## IMPROVE REGISTER INTEGRITY

Work with trust and company service providers to scope opportunities to improve register integrity



Reduction in incomplete PSC information on the register

Improvements on inconsistent directors' data



Year

3

## SCOTTISH ENTITIES

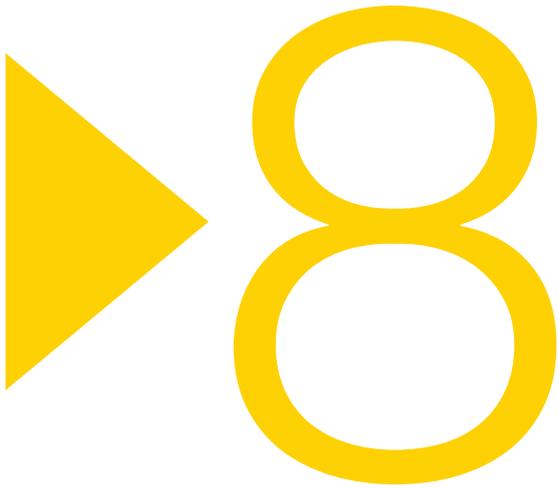
Resolving compliance issues for Scottish entities



## IDENTITY ASSURANCE

Introduce new measure for identity assurance





# building a high performance culture

Our three outcomes are our staff:

- strive for excellence
- are adaptable and embrace change with confidence
- are outward looking, developing skills to meet current and future needs

Our people provide first class service to our customers, as evidenced by our customer satisfaction score of 88%. As such, they are front and centre of everything we do. We have a highly committed workforce, with vast expertise in company registration. This gives us a great foundation on which to build to ensure we have the right skills to deliver excellence in the future. Having made progress in relation to our culture change journey over the past three years, this will continue to be a significant driver going forward.



### Culture shift



The world is changing. We are seeing a major shift in the work undertaken at Companies House. We need to make sure we can meet the changing needs of our customers. In the future, we will need a higher proportion of staff to have strong digital, analytical or specialist skills, with a reduction in many administrative roles. Our staff of the future will be developing better digital services, and using new skills to improve integrity rather than focusing on receiving and logging forms. The civil service leadership statement requires our leaders to be inspiring, confident and empowering. We will make sure our leaders live up to this statement, preparing our people for change and promoting a culture of flexibility and continual learning.

### **Enabling our managers to lead and motivate**

Our managers need support so they can in turn coach and support others. Building our management capability to move from a directed management culture to one of coaching and empowerment will be critical to our success. As is common in many organisations, many of our managers are expert in their technical areas; they understand work processes and the detail of the work and manage processes very well. However, they are then often asked to add on people management to their already busy technical role. We will begin by reviewing our organisational structure to define the different types of leadership roles we require. We will identify our best people managers to coach and develop individuals and teams to deliver higher performance and adaptability, with a focus on enabling all staff to reach the maximum of their potential. Using a range of initiatives including shadowing exceptional people managers, training interventions, learning from other organisations and coaching, these people managers will be assessed against their ability to help us become a high performing culture.

### **Engagement**

As the focus of our work changes we will make sure staff understand evolving customer needs, the skills that are required to meet these and the contribution they make within the organisation. By helping our people to engage with the wider picture and how Companies House will contribute to the UK business framework, we can build a sense of confidence in embracing that future. Our people have already shown that they can deliver complex change well. We need to carry on along this path and reward and promote adaptability and a positive approach to learning and continuous improvement.

We will develop a programme which facilitates sharing of knowledge between Companies House and other parts of government, public and private sector organisations, as well as between Companies House and external customers. There will be a particular focus on learning from excellent digital companies. We will provide opportunities for organisational raids, where small groups of staff visit another organisation to learn best practice, share ideas or find new ways of tackling problems. We will also deliver a programme of external speakers, people coming into Companies House to talk to teams about their work and the impact Companies House has in the wider world. Linked to this we will encourage staff to make reciprocal offers to other organisations. Companies House is a centre of excellence in many areas and we should be proud to share our expertise with others.



**our people  
need the  
right tools  
for the job**

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## People management systems and policies

We need to provide our people with the right tools for the job. We need to make sure that our systems and policies do not place unnecessary burdens on our managers and are as simple and streamlined as possible. Our HR and Payroll system is due to be replaced in 2018 and our focus will be on ensuring it is easy to navigate and provides us with the relevant people metrics to aid decision making.

Alongside this we intend to develop a new approach to performance management with an emphasis on quality conversations and continual feedback. Recent research supports the view that continual constructive feedback is the key to success in high performing organisations. There is a view that once or twice a year formal performance reviews are outdated. We will embrace this new thinking and other ideas on people management to ensure we are incorporating and testing where appropriate and sharing widely with our leaders.

We will also continue to utilise new digital tools that help us to manage and connect effectively with our staff. The digital online engagement system has been rolled out to the entire organisation so we can continue to obtain real time feedback from staff on issues, ideas, and levels of engagement. Alongside this a new reward and recognition tool will be introduced to help us embed our value of ensuring 'every achievement counts'. The metrics from these systems will enable us to measure our success in terms of redefining the roles of managers in the organisation as well as levels of engagement of our people.

## Talent management and succession planning

Continuing to refresh the staff profile within Companies House will remain a key aim of our strategy and we will actively engage with other organisations to facilitate loans, swops and secondments. Our emphasis will be on encouraging all staff to look for different ways to develop new skills and to ensure that those interested in progressing have identifiable career paths linked to professions. Our commitment to recruiting apprentices and offering young people access to our organisation through various work experience and placements will remain a priority. We will nurture internal talent and offer opportunities for new people to join the organisation ensuring we have a healthy mix of ideas, experience and knowledge. Our on boarding arrangements will be creative, flexible and evaluated to ensure we continue to improve the experience and reinforce our values and key priorities for new people joining us.

# HIGHLY SKILLED, HIGHLY ENGAGED

Year  
**1**

PROGRAMME  
OF EXTERNAL  
SPEAKERS



LEADERSHIP  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAMME



PERFORMANCE  
MANAGEMENT



New approach  
to performance  
management



WORKING  
DAYS LOST

Reduction in average working  
days lost to sickness

PILOT STRUCTURE



Pilot new structure with  
people and technical  
manager roles

PEOPLE SURVEY

Increase  
people survey  
engagement  
score



Year  
**2**



NEW HR  
SYSTEM



WORKING  
DAYS LOST

Reduction in average working  
days lost to sickness

PEOPLE SURVEY

Achieve top  
quartile for  
people survey



All staff aligned to  
a profession and  
completing 5 days  
learning a year

Year  
**3**

TALENT MANAGEMENT



Talent  
management  
programme for  
high potential  
individuals

Formal coaching  
qualifications  
held by over 25%  
of staff



**6.5**  
days



WORKING  
DAYS LOST

Average working days lost  
due to absence below 6.5

PEOPLE SURVEY

**70%**



People survey  
engagement  
over 70%

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