

Home Office Open Document Format adoption plan

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Contents

1. [Introduction to the Open Document Format](#)
2. [Open Document Format adoption principles](#)
3. [Adoption phases: user benefits as milestones](#)
4. [Where are we now?](#)
5. [Transformation within the Home Office](#)
6. [Known barriers](#)
7. [Engagement and support](#)
8. [Leadership](#)

1. Introduction to the Open Document Format

In July 2014 the government adopted the Open Document Format (ODF) as its single standard for ‘sharing and collaborating’. This was the result of a thorough and careful public engagement and standards consideration process.

You can find more information about:

- [the standard selection process](#)
- [ODF as part of a wider open standards strategy](#)
- [the ODF website](#)

The following sets out the Home Office strategy and high-level plan for adopting the ODF open standard.

1.1 Open Document Format in context: digital by default

This ODF adoption plan should be considered in the wider context of other open standards for information, and the ambition to make services digital by default, accessible entirely through a web browser.

This means that our first preference is to avoid documents wherever possible, moving information for reading, collaboration and transactions online using HTML5 as the open standard. This should be possible for a large majority of user needs.

Where there is a residual need for standalone documents, the right format should be selected. For documents that are not expected to be editable, the open standard is PDF/A. For structured data, open machine-readable formats such as CSV might be suitable.

This plan focuses on ODF adoption because of the unique challenges in fixing historic issues, like documents locking or not working on different systems. The Home Office has already established the routine selection of the right open standards for information to meet other user needs. For example, the [digital strategy](#) for services provided to external and internal users requires information is online by default. While the transparency strategy requires publishing data sets in an open machine-readable format, such as a CSV text file.

The Home Office's plan to adopt the Open Document Format reflects the strategy for increasingly moving information online, reducing stand-alone documents and using open standards for both.

1.2 Benefits of the Open Document Format

The benefits of ODF for sharing and collaborating on editable documents to the Home Office and its users are that its adoption:

- avoids imposing unnecessary costs of specific software on users including citizens, businesses, and public bodies
- enables a wider choice of software and technology for working with documents
- lowers barriers to entry for suppliers and developers
- establishes an open standard for greater cooperation between different systems, technologies and their suppliers
- avoids over-reliance on a single product or supplier, and encourages competition over the technology and services we buy
- ensures access to information into the long-term future, including for the public record

2. Open Document Format adoption principles

To give ourselves the best opportunity for lasting change, we want to learn from other people's work to adopt ODF. That wisdom is distilled into principles which will govern and guide our own adoption. The principles we've defined are:

2.1 Digital by default

We must constantly challenge ourselves to meet user needs more digitally. This means moving information online and avoiding documents entirely wherever possible. Our broader aim is digital transformation, not a like for like migration to ODF.

2.2 Business leadership

Sponsorship for adopting ODF must come from the top of the organisation, from a visible business leader. This leader understands the benefits of change for the organisation and its users, and is able to explain them in plain English. Change must not be led by technology.

2.3 Phased change

We will phase the adoption of ODF. A big bang approach is effectively an unwise bet that many factors will turn out perfectly at the first attempt. A phased plan stands a better chance of succeeding because it allows time for unexpected obstacles to be addressed, and for people to become accustomed to change in manageable chunks. A measured pace also allows for feedback to inform any changes needed.

2.4 Support people

We will support those who are uneasy or unfamiliar with the change. Ultimately change doesn't work if it doesn't work for people. Support doesn't have to mean impersonal or expensive training, and in fact peer support through a network of local champions often works better.

2.5 Engage early

We will communicate and prepare for changes with enough time for people and technology to adjust. This is particularly true for different departments to coordinate their adoption of ODF. There will be no surprises for users, civil servants or other partners.

2.6 Never reject the Open Document Format

We will never reject an incoming editable document in ODF format. Asking someone to resend a document in a closed proprietary format is akin to bad manners. Establishing this etiquette is a good start for changing culture.

3. Adoption phases: user benefits as milestones

Citizens, businesses, and civil servants, all users of our digital services, can understand and support milestones which are clear, simple and talk about the benefits for them.

By going at a considered pace, we allow people to become familiar and capable with ODF. We also make sure we don't lose the opportunity to consider better digital approaches to meeting user needs, avoiding the need for documents altogether.

The following summarises each phase, making clear the objectives, user benefit, and organisation's benefit.

3.1 Phase 0: any incoming documents

The objectives during phase 0 are to:

- not reject ODF documents from any citizens, businesses, or other public bodies, sent into the

Home Office

- cease creating new systems that require editable documents but do not support ODF documents

The adoption of ODF during phase 0 benefits the user because it:

- imposes no unnecessary software costs on anyone who needs to send documents to the Home Office
- enables a wider choice of software and technology tools for creating and editing documents

The adoption of ODF during phase 0 benefits the organisation because it:

- gently increase familiarity with ODF, starting with those receiving documents and working with our external users and partners

3.2 Phase 1: citizens and business

The objectives during phase 1 are to ensure that:

- all editable documents published or sent to citizens and businesses will be in at least ODF 1.2 format
- incoming ODF documents will be accepted from citizens and businesses into new automated technology systems

The adoption of ODF during phase 1 benefits the user because it:

- further extends benefits
- enables broader technology choice
- avoids unnecessary costs to users and businesses who need to use Home Office services supported by automated systems

The adoption of ODF during phase 1 benefits the organisation because it:

- starts technology or process changes needed to support ODF
- further increases familiarity with ODF
- starts understanding technology aspects of ODF support
- starts to embed culture of open standards and their benefits
- establishes Home Office leadership on open standards

3.3 Phase 2: other government departments

The objectives during phase 2 are to:

- ensure that all editable documents outgoing to other government departments will be available in ODF format where editable documents are unavoidable
- continue to support other formats if other government departments are at different stages in their implementation or if there is a preferred alternative agreed bi-laterally
- accept ODF from other government departments, including into new automated technology systems

The adoption of ODF during phase 2 benefits the user because it:

- extends benefits of broadening technology choice
- avoids unnecessary costs to users in other government departments who need to use Home Office services supported by automated systems

The adoption of ODF during phase 2 benefits the organisation because:

- the transformation supports ODF further towards our core systems
- interactions with other government departments can carry more valuable information in larger volumes, and often into automated technology systems
- cultural acceptance of working with ODF as an open standard is now routine

3.4 Phase 3: wider public sector

The objectives during phase 3 are to:

- extend requirements for all editable documents flowing between the Home Office and the wider public sector to be ODF, including automated technology systems

The adoption of ODF during phase 3 benefits the user because it:

- makes the benefits of wider technology choice available to them
- avoids unnecessary costs to users across the wider public sector

The adoption of ODF during phase 3 benefits the organisation because:

- the internal transformation will be complete
- central government will lead on encouraging the wider public sector to adopt ODF
- Home Office leadership on open standards will be established

4. Where are we now?

The Home Office manages a large and diverse technology landscape, which includes technology developed many years ago, before open standards for documents were viable considerations.

The Home Office itself consists of a range of bodies, such as Her Majesty's Passport Office, and is associated with non-departmental public bodies, such as the Disclosure and Barring Service. The scope of this plan applies to all the bodies that normally conform to Home Office standards for technology and digital service design.

Today, almost all Home Office civil servants use Microsoft Office 2007 as their primary office productivity solution. There is some use of alternatives, such as Google Drive for collaborative working, but these are minimal. Open source applications such as LibreOffice or OpenOffice are not installed and available as an option for use on current official technology.

Microsoft Office 2007 supports ODF 1.1 but does not implement some features, such as tracked changes, that you can use with other software implementing ODF 1.1. Currently Google Apps only

supports ODF 1.1. Microsoft Office 2007 supports export to PDF/A but Google Drive only supports export to standard PDF 1.4, which would require a further step in the workflow. By contrast, both LibreOffice and OpenOffice currently support ODF 1.2 and export to PDF/A.

5. Transformation within the Home Office

A significant opportunity for ODF adoption is presented by the upcoming modernisation of the technology that supports departmental needs after major IT outsourcing contracts come to an end around 2016. The Technology Reset Programme (TRP), will research departmental users and their needs, explore different kinds of solutions from a range of suppliers, and provide modern strategically aligned technology to meet the needs of the Home Office's approximately 30,000 internal users. Any replacement of Office 2007 is within the scope of this programme.

Below are the Home Office's transformation commitments.

New solutions will be digital by default, putting information online and avoiding the need for stand-alone documents altogether. Open web technologies, such as HTML5, are suitable for viewing or editing information online for most user needs.

Where final non-editable standalone documents are necessary, they will be PDF/A, the profile of PDF suitable for long term preservation.

Where editable standalone documents are necessary, all new technology solutions will support ODF 1.2. The Home Office will ensure this requirement is communicated to suppliers where solution development is outsourced.

Where there is a dependency on other systems, over which we have no control or do not wish to change because they are legacy, current document formats will be supported in the interim but support for ODF will be committed to. This means subsequent costs to support ODF will not be a barrier to transformation.

User research will be undertaken to establish user needs to inform the design of new services. The Home Office will actively trial alternative solutions to understand their viability to meet these user needs.

It is possible that multiple solutions are developed to better meet particularly different or specific user needs, such as those of finance and statistics users, or users who require additional assistance. This may mean a small minority of users do not use ODF as an editable document format if it does not meet their needs at that time. Where this is the case, the Home Office will explain its reasoning.

Technology procurement will be subject to the fair and open processes expected of all public bodies. This means being disciplined about user needs, and open to a range of solution types from a range of suppliers.

Users will be able to benefit from lower cost options as the breadth of compatible software, including open source, increases. To ensure that there is a more direct incentive to minimise costs

The Home Office will report publicly on progress against the adoption plan, discussing both successes and sharing experience of obstacles and challenges. Working openly allows others to learn from the Home Office's experience, and enables others to offer advice to support the Home Office.

5.1 Technology and document legacy

The Home Office has both a technology and document legacy. Legacy technology systems will be contained, and typically no work will be undertaken to modernise them. This means the ability to work with open formats such as ODF and PDF/A will not be applied to those legacy applications. It also means their use of proprietary document formats will not be allowed to extend further than their current reach.

The historic body of documents, most of which are in current and previous Microsoft formats, will not be transcoded to ODF.

6. Known barriers

Obstacles will emerge as the adoption plan is implemented. The adoption principles ensure the pacing of adoption allows sufficient time to understand and work through the inevitable challenges.

The following lists the barriers that have already been identified, together with remedies.

Barrier	Solution
Lack of familiarity with ODF and its benefits.	Chief Digital Officer champions benefits of ODF and the Technical Design Authority raises awareness and need for compliance in technology and digital professions.
Lack of familiarity with modern digital working and the wide variety of office productivity software available.	The Technical Design Authority raises awareness in technology and digital professions. User trials will cover a range of alternative solutions.
Reticence accepting software which feels like it is less desirable than the more expensive options	Digital by default solutions developed to meet user needs at unprecedented levels of user experience, making them preferable to current solutions.
Natural aversion to change, particularly in a domain that has appeared settled for many years	Digital by default solutions developed to meet user needs at unprecedented levels of user experience, making them preferable to current solutions. Phased introduction of new solutions to minimise disruption of change.
Dependence on other government departments to adopt ODF within a suitable timeframe to support interdepartmental working with ODF	Start working with other departments with sufficient time to ensure successful joint working with ODF is achieved.
Low enthusiasm for ODF from some suppliers where technology development or support is outsourced	Broaden the market engagement to more suppliers and encourage suppliers who develop services aligned to the government's open standards strategy. Feedback from public engagement around standards indicated a vibrant market of suppliers preferring to work with open standards

7. Engagement and support

The adoption principles require that no stakeholder group is surprised by the adoption of ODF, and that users are supported through change.

The Home Office will establish a working group whose role is to engage with users to gain support for the adoption plan. This will include, for example, working with citizen-facing teams where publications need to be in an editable format, and liaising with other departments to ensure that adopting ODF for interdepartmental processes succeeds.

The team will also establish surgeries to support colleagues through obstacles and issues, providing access to expertise and experience.

8. Leadership

The senior business leader championing the benefits of the ODF open standard for editable documents is Norman Driskell, the Chief Digital Officer of the Home Office.

The senior Technology Design Authority will ensure that Home Office technology is developed to support this ODF adoption plan, and is responsible for ensuring any requests to deviate from this plan are considered and necessary, applying conditions for subsequent transformation where possible.

Exemptions will be considered by the Cabinet Office and published unless there is a national security implication.