



BUSINESS

HOW THE JUSTICE SECTOR IS MAKING THE MOST OF COVID-DRIVEN DIGITAL CHANGE



Digital adoption is set to have a significant impact on the entire public sector, potentially adding £13.4 billion to UK GDP by 2025.

Introduction: Keeping officers safe, clearing court backlogs, ensuring nobody's left behind

The justice sector is complex, broad and faces significant challenges on a daily basis.

Policing, courts and tribunals, prisons and probation services – each one has its own unique obstacles to overcome.

Police forces are struggling with legacy computer systems and concerns around [data security and migration](#). Covid-driven backlogs are crippling courts and tribunals, leading to fewer convictions and [record wait times](#) for victims. And prisoners are facing [digital exclusion](#), leaving them unprepared to navigate the digital world.

A heavy reliance on paper combined with siloed data is limiting the sector's ability to respond to these challenges.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has made [digitisation](#) a priority to help alleviate some of these pressures. With the right investment, digital technology has the potential to streamline processes, cut operating costs and lead to faster, fairer outcomes for individuals across the UK.

Technology is vital for supporting future ways of working and ensuring old ways don't creep back in. From online crime reporting to video-enabled court hearings, digital investment is [already helping](#) to relieve some of the tensions the justice sector faces.

We recently partnered with the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) to understand the scale of all these changes and their impact across the UK, surveying decision-makers and employees at justice sector organisations to find our answers.

Keeping officers safe, clearing court backlogs, ensuring nobody's left behind

Taken from a small set of justice respondents, our research suggests the pandemic accelerated digital progress in the sector by 5.3 years.

This rate of progress is the fastest of any sector and higher than the public sector average of four years.

This could be down to the justice sector being further behind in its digital journey compared to other areas of the public sector when the pandemic struck. But the potential of continued investment cannot be ignored.

Digital adoption is set to have a significant impact on the entire public sector, potentially adding £13.4 billion to UK GDP by 2025.

That figure could be £100 billion by 2040.

Covid acted as a catalyst for decision-makers in the justice sector to realise and embrace digital transformation and its potential benefits. And as with any adoption, some organisations were leading the way long before the pandemic began.

By choosing to invest in digital, these organisations are now thriving in a sector that is struggling.

This report explores how these organisations have adopted technology and what we can all learn from them as we embark on our own digital transformation journeys.

Read on to find out more.

“In sharp contrast to so much else in this strangest of years, the criminal justice system (CJS) did not pause or stop because of COVID-19. Indeed, it could not.”

Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2021



Irwin Mitchell: Bringing courts into the digital era

The UK courts and judiciary system is rooted in tradition. Change hasn't always come easily.

Yet the pandemic forced courts to look at their technology to stay functioning as the backlog of cases grew. The giant paper bundles of evidence many were used to were of little use to parties dialling in from home.

Legal firm Irwin Mitchell recognised this disconnect. It saw the need to make cloud technology a central part of the courtroom to ensure the course of justice could continue unobstructed. The old ways of working simply weren't equipped to handle these challenges.

Jonathan Scarsbrook, Technical Director at Irwin Mitchell, told us,

“As an organisation, we are routinely handling documents that are of the most sensitive nature possible – private medical records, settlement discussions and so on – and historically much of this information was stored on paper or discs, which brings with it a range of security challenges and risks. We sought to adopt cloud technology and increased digital security around sensitive information long before the pandemic.”

It wasn't long before Irwin Mitchell had proven its new way of thinking worked.

The company secured a staging post early in the pandemic, with a settlement of over £10 million approved in Manchester. The court in question used Irwin Mitchell's IMShare solution to file all the necessary documents as e-bundles, saving a lot of time and paper in the process.

“Consistency of approach around virtual hearings has been lacking,” said Jonathan. “But Cloud Video Platform has gradually emerged as the court service's platform of choice for remote hearings.

We expect the rollout of this solution to continue at pace.”

Now, courts are no longer seeing digital technology as a temporary inconvenience. Instead they're starting to view it as a long-term solution.

Services such as remote court hearings (which allow more trials to be held) and interoperability (which improves efficiency and the rate at which evidence is processed) will be vital to clearing the significant backlog of cases created by Covid-19.

“Clients have felt far more at ease being at home, being able to make a cup of tea in their own house, or take the dog for a walk, than travelling to a more formal office, where they are cooped up with us for what can be a 12-hour day sometimes.”

Jonathan Scarsbrook, Technical Director at Irwin Mitchell

HMP Five Wells: Building the future of prisons with the Ministry of Justice

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has placed huge emphasis on the importance of digital technology. So much so that it's making digital a part of its tender process – as integral to any project as pricing and design.

And this was the case for Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Five Wells.

The £253 million build, developed by Kier Strategic Projects, has led the way in using digital to place users at the heart of the built environment.

It was part of a MoJ programme to reform and modernise prisons – such as prisoners having windows with no bars – to make them more efficient, safer and more focused on rehabilitation.

Lynda Rawsthorne, Director of Prison Infrastructure at MoJ, says that digital sat at the heart of the project.

“The MoJ is committed to embracing a digital-first approach, which has helped us drive time efficiency throughout the programme.”

Technology was the backbone of this project. The prison's 13 buildings were conceived and constructed as digital from the beginning. This meant that any component parts designed for the project could be reused on subsequent MoJ prison projects, creating a more sustainable model for any future constructions.

Even when the pandemic struck, the project scarcely missed a beat thanks to the adoption of hybrid working and a digital-first approach.

James Franklin, Head of BIM at Kier Strategic Projects, the company that built the prison, says hybrid working not only allowed the process to carry on but improved communication and efficiency.

“As an organisation we really benefited from the rollout of Teams and Office 365. In some cases the communication is better. A lot of previously wasted time isn't there. We can be a lot more effective.

“Now we're continuously in collaboration... We're getting help from incredibly rapid programmes. If you want to develop an off-site approach then digital has to be your backbeat. Otherwise we simply couldn't get to that level of coordination quickly enough, with the assurance those items are streamlined across all the programmes.”

The prison includes 16 classrooms and 24 workshops for 'high-quality academic and vocational learning' – with the aim of every prisoner having a meaningful qualification by the time they leave, to help prepare them for the outside world and stand them in the best stead to avoid reoffending.



Image credit:
kier.co.uk

The £253 million build, developed by Kier Strategic Projects, has led the way in using digital to place users at the heart of the built environment.



“The Ministry of Justice was setting a precedent right from the tender stage. Now there’s an investment in technology. We’re looking at how we can improve each of our workflows by employing different technologies, everything from supply chain to drone surveys. That’s at the heart of our digital action plan. Everything is digital.”

James Franklin, Head of BIM at Kier Strategic Projects

The Supreme Court: Taking existing infrastructure to the next level

The Supreme Court is the final level of appeal in the UK. Expectations are high and resources can be limited. Which means innovation is vital to stay on top of the numerous workstreams the court deals with every day.

Chinonso Orekie, Chief Technology Officer at The Supreme Court, is a firm believer in the potential of digital technology to support his team.

Before the pandemic even began, Chinonso and his team had already embarked on a four-year technology journey. Together they transformed the court from a heavily paper-reliant organisation to a collaborative team unrestricted by geographic location and archaic administration.

Despite the limitations of a private branch exchange (PBX) system, The Supreme Court set out to make long-term changes to how it handled information and delivered services.

“Technology is a crucial part of every organisation,” Chinonso told us. “But today for the Supreme Court it’s a thread that runs through everything we do. It’s crucial. We’re a small body, but an incredibly important and high profile one.”

One of the key challenges the team faced was the need for a system that could support more flexible working practices within the court. Several key staff were working in locations other than the court building. This and the growing need for remote hearings created a need for a secure, easy to use video link solution.

Fortunately the infrastructure to support this was already in place.

The Supreme Court had Office 365 licenses and a desire to move to a new telephony solution. Working closely with a partner, Chinonso and his team deployed a Skype for Business cloud solution that meant his team could take advantage of this existing investment and elevate it to the next level to support new ways of working.

The Supreme Court deployed this new digital solution in just nine weeks. Today the system is enhancing business processes and providing savings to the organisation. And Chinonso and his team couldn’t be happier.

“Our partner advised us on what we could achieve with our existing investment in Microsoft licences to realise the tech vision we wanted.

“As a department we believe in responsiveness. While cost plays a role, first and foremost it’s about the service we receive. Our partner focused on the delivery and tailored the service around our needs, showing us how we could maximise our current Office 365 investment. We even visited video conferencing experts to see the handsets in use – they really did put us at the centre.”

Chinonso Orekie, Chief Technology Officer at The Supreme Court

How can we help you?

Despite the justice sector being behind on their digital transformation journey, these organisations are setting clear examples for others to follow.

We partner with police services, courts, prisons and probation services to help them digitally transform and create more positive outcomes for citizens.

The sector still faces issues. Inefficient systems and labour-intensive methods from aging legacy infrastructure are using up precious funds and time.

But digital investment provides a roadmap to deal with some of the strain, leaving employees more time to focus on face-to-face services and allowing more citizens to have their needs met wherever they might be.

There can be no going back to the old ways of working.

Now there is an opportunity to:



Improve contact between public and private organisations in the sector through the use of collaboration tools and a stronger network



Leverage technologies, particularly improved networks, to create new initiatives and platforms and support hybrid working tools to better serve and protect communities



Create a more efficient system where police officers are able to do their jobs more effectively, courts can hold more trials to help clear the backlog and offenders are supported throughout their sentence and rehabilitation to prevent reoffending

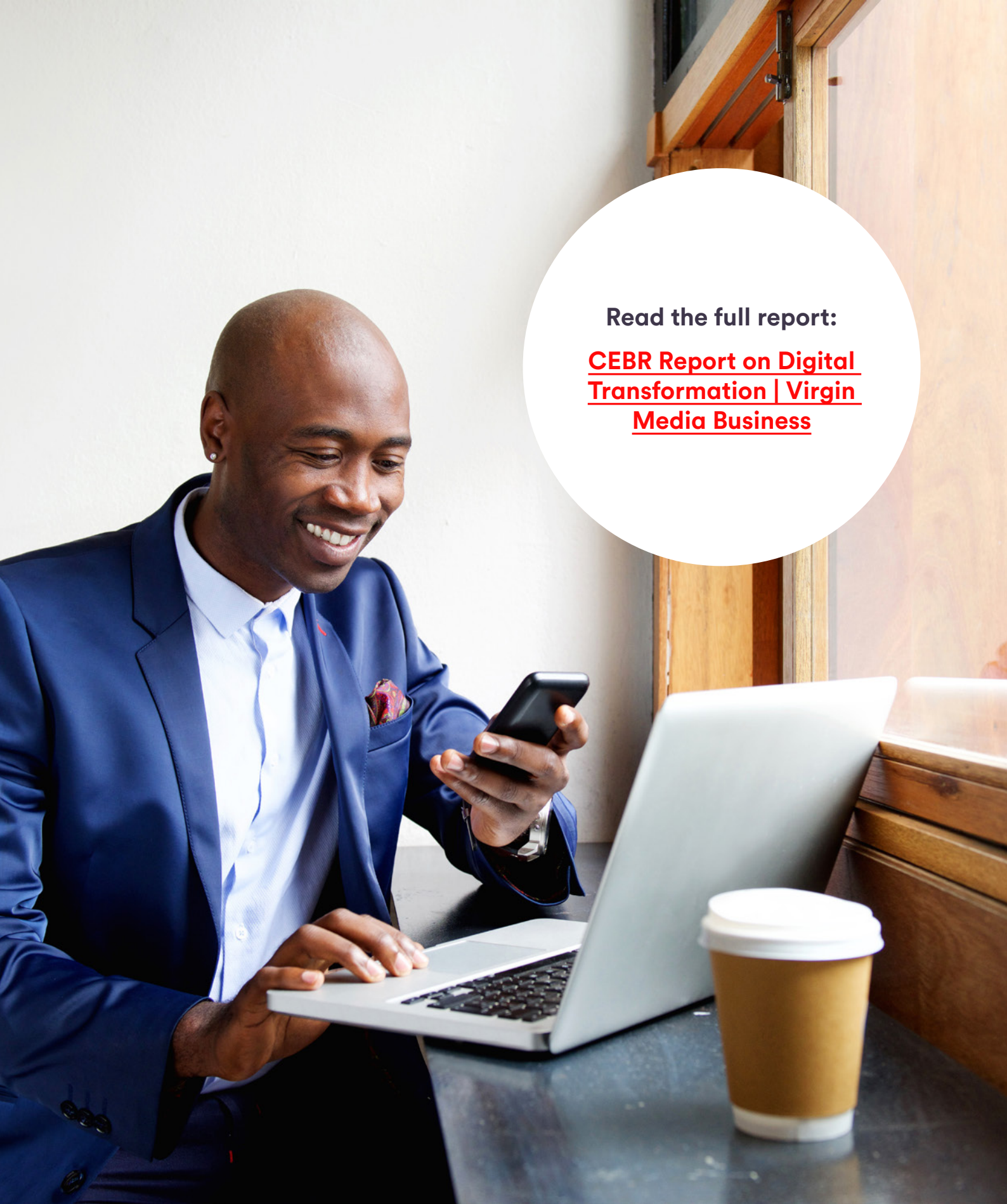
Want to know how we can help you make the most of these opportunities?

[Head to our justice sector advice page now](#)



“This was a process that was already underway before the pandemic, but COVID-19 has been a catalyst for change. It’s worth remembering that one of the great strengths of our justice system has always been its ability to adapt to meet the needs of the people in our country.”

Rt. Hon Robert Buckland QC MP,
former Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain – [4th June 2021](#)



Read the full report:
[CEBR Report on Digital Transformation | Virgin Media Business](#)

Get in touch
0808 159 7725

