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The Strategic Imperative of Identity Security and Governance in Strengthening UK Cyber Resilience

Executive Brief

Why This Matters Now

Cyber resilience has moved decisively into the boardroom. Recent UK Government guidance, alongside emerging regulatory frameworks such as the **UK Cyber Governance Code of Practice, NIS2, and DORA,** makes clear that executive and non-executive directors are now directly accountable for cyber risk oversight, resilience, and recovery.

At the centre of this responsibility lies identity. Across most material cyber incidents, compromised identities, human, privileged, service, or third-party, are the primary attack vector. As organisations digitise operations, extend supply chains, and adopt cloud and AI-driven platforms, identity has become the effective control plane for enterprise security.

This Executive Brief summarises why identity security and governance must now be treated as a strategic, board-owned capability, not simply an IT control.

Identity as a Strategic Risk and Regulatory Issue

Regulatory frame worksare converging on a common expectation: organisations must demonstrate clear accountability, measurable controls, and operational resilience.

UK Cyber Governance Code of Practice
emphasises board ownership of cyber risk, clear roles and responsibilities, and assurance mechanisms.

NIS2
extends accountability to senior management, requiring demonstrable risk management practices, supply chain security, and incident response readiness.

DORA
places specific focus on operational resilience, including the ability to withstand, respond to, and recover from ICT-related disruptions.

Identity governance underpins all three. Without clear visibility and control over who and what has access to systems and data, boards cannot credibly demonstrate compliance or resilience.

What Boards Should Be Asking

Boards and executive committee sshould be confident they can answer the following questions at any point in time:

- Do we have a complete and accurate view of all identities: employees, contractors, systems, and third parties?
- Are access rights aligned to roles, risk, and business need, and are they reviewed regularly?
- How quickly can we revoke or isolate access if credentials are compromised?
- Do our suppliers and partners meet our identity and access standards?
- Are we receiving regular, meaningful metrics on identity risk and control effectiveness?

If these questions cannot be answered with evidence, identity governance remains a material exposure.

Identity and Resilience: Beyond Prevention

Neither NIS2 nor DORA assume that all incidents can be prevented. Both stress preparedness, response, and recovery.

Organisations with mature identity governance are materially better positioned to:

- Contain incidents involving credential compromise
- Prevent lateral movement through excessive privileges
- Restore operations quickly through controlled re-issuance of access

In this context, identity is not simply a preventative control; it is a core resilience mechanism.

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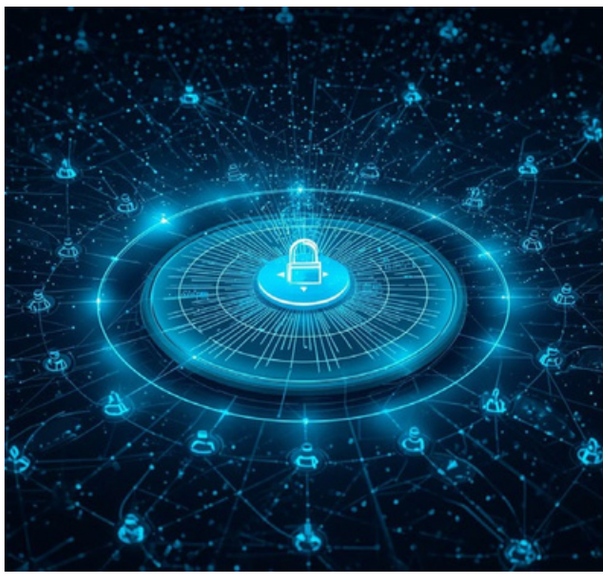
Executive Takeaways

- Identity is now the primary attack surface and must be governed accordingly
- Regulatory expectations place accountability squarely on boards and senior leadership
- Effective identity governance enables prevention, compliance, and rapid recovery
- Treating identity as a strategic capability strengthens trust, resilience, and business confidence

Executive Summary

TheUK Government's recent Ministerial Letteron Cyber Security to leading UK companies delivers an unambiguous message: cyber threats are intensifying, and accountability for managing them now rests firmly at the highest levels of leadership. Cyber resilience is no longer an operational or technical concern alone; it is a strategic priority that boards and executive teams must actively own.



At the centre of this challenge lies identity. In an increasingly interconnected digital environment, every employee, contractor, supplier, system, and device represents a potential access point. Identity security and governance determine whether an organisation can prevent unauthorised access, detect malicious activity, and recover effectively from cyber incidents.

This white paper explores why identity must now sit at the core of corporate cyber strategy in the UK. It examines how strong identity governance directly supports the Government's call for enhanced cyber oversight, and it outlines practical, actionable steps organisations can take to embed identity controls as a foundation of long-term cyber resilience.

1. The Changing Landscape of Cyber Risk

The Ministerial Letter calls on boards to take visible ownership of cyber governance, align with the Cyber Governance Code of Practice, and ensure their organisations are prepared to prevent, respond to, and recover from cyber incidents.

The scale, sophistication, and speed of modern cyber threats mean that traditional perimeter-based defences are no longer sufficient. Attackers are no longer focused solely on breaching firewalls or exploiting network vulnerabilities. Instead, they increasingly target the weakest and most pervasive link in the security chain: identities.

Phishing attacks, credential theft, privilege escalation, insider misuse, and exploitation of third-party access have become the dominant attack vectors. As a result, identity has effectively become the new perimeter. Without clear governance over who has access to what, when, and why, no cyber defence strategy can be considered complete.

2. Identity at the Core of Modern Cyber Resilience

Identity as the New Perimeter

As organisations adopt cloud services, enable remote and hybrid working, automate business processes, and extend their digital ecosystems, identity has emerged as the defining security boundary. Every human and non-human identity, employees, service accounts, applications, bots, and partners, represents a potential entry point for attackers.

Modern adversaries exploit this complexity. Stolen credentials and excessive privileges allow attackers to move laterally, remain undetected, and cause widespread damage. Globally, compromised identities are now recognised as the root cause of many major cyber breaches.

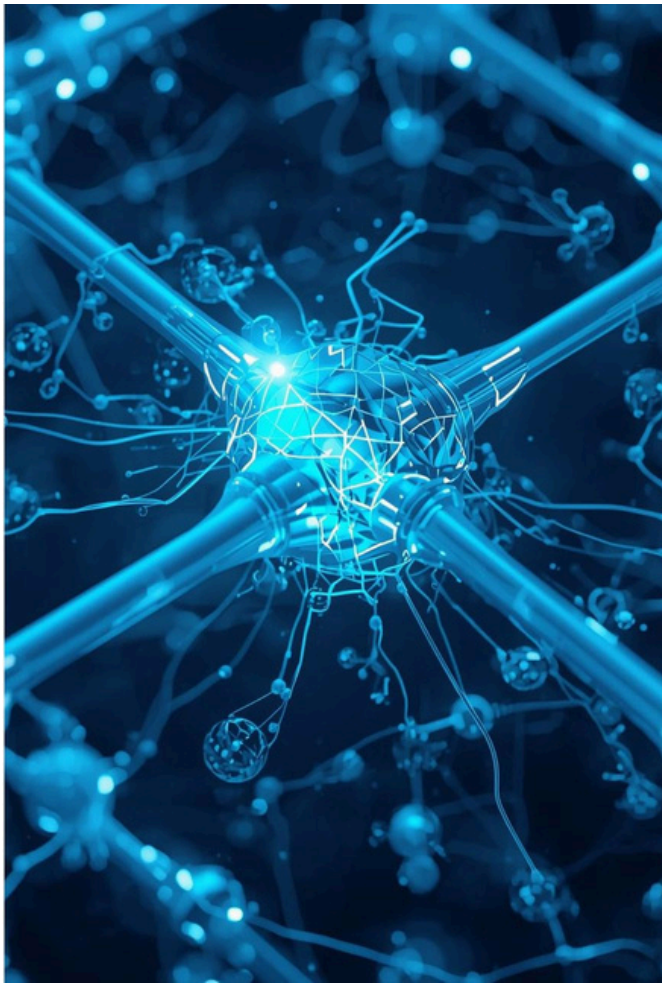
Governance as the Foundation of Control

Identity governance provides the structure and oversight required to manage access effectively. It ensures that access is granted appropriately, reviewed regularly, and revoked promptly when no longer required.

Strong identity governance enables organisations to confidently answer fundamental questions such as:

- Who has access to which systems and data?
- Are those permissions appropriate for each individual's role and responsibilities?
- Can access be isolated or revoked quickly during an incident?

By answering these questions, identity governance underpins not only cyber resilience but also regulatory compliance, operational stability, and business continuity.



3. Extending Responsibility to the Supply Chain

The Ministerial Letter highlights a significant and concerning statistic: only 14% of UK businesses currently assess the cyber risks posed by their suppliers. In today's interconnected economy, supply chain partners often have privileged or persistent access to critical systems and data.

If a supplier's identity controls are weak, the organisation's own security posture may be compromised regardless of internal safeguards. As such, identity governance must extend beyond organisational boundaries to include contractors, vendors, and managed service providers.

To strengthen supply chain resilience, organisations should:

- Map all third-party identities and understand their access levels.
- Require suppliers to meet baseline cyber standards, such as Cyber Essentials.
- Automate access reviews and enforce least privilege principles across internal and external users.

Trust in the supply chain begins with visibility and control over identity.

4. Governance and Oversight: A Board Responsibility

The Government's guidance urges executive and non-executive directors to treat cyber risk as a strategic issue rather than a technical one. Identity governance sits at the heart of this responsibility.

Boards should expect regular, structured reporting on key identity risk indicators, including:

The number and management of privileged accounts.

The volume of dormant, orphaned, or shared identities.

The frequency and outcomes of access reviews and entitlement certifications.

The status of supplier and third-party identity risk assessments.

Embedding identity metrics into board-level reporting transforms cyber oversight from a reactive exercise into a proactive, measurable governance function

5. Building Resilience Through Identity-Led Recovery

While prevention remains critical, the Government's letter makes clear that organisations must also plan, test, and rehearse their ability to recover from cyber incidents.

When an attack involves compromised credentials, the ability to rapidly identify affected identities, revoke access, and restore legitimate access determines the scale and duration of impact. Organisations with mature identity governance frameworks can respond faster, contain incidents more effectively, and resume normal operations with minimal disruption.

In this context, resilience is no longer defined solely by how strong defences are, but by how quickly and effectively an organisation can recover. Identity clarity is fundamental to that recovery.

6. From Compliance Obligation to Com petitive Advantage

Cyber resilience is not only a defensive necessity; it is increasingly a driver of business confidence and growth. The Government explicitly links strong cyber governance to investment, innovation, and economic resilience.

Customers, investors, regulators, and partners now expect organisations to demonstrate robust identity governance and clear accountability. Those that can provide evidence of effective controls gain a competitive advantage through enhanced trust, reduced risk, and improved operational efficiency.

7. A Framework for Action

To align with government expectations and strengthen cyber resilience, organisations should adopt a structured identity governance approach built around six key actions:

1. Create a Single Source of Truth for Identities

Consolidate identity data across HR, IT, cloud platforms, and third-party systems to maintain an accurate and complete inventory of all human and non-human identities.

2. Apply Least Privilege and Role-Based Access Controls

Define access based on job roles, automate entitlement reviews, and ensure permissions remain aligned with business requirements.

3. Extend Identity Governance to the Supply Chain

Embed identity and access requirements into supplier contracts, perform regular supplier security assessments, and monitor all external access paths.

4. Integrate Identity Metrics into Board Governance

Include identity-related risk indicators in regular cyber and enterprise risk reporting to ensure executive visibility and accountability.

5. Conduct Identity-Focused Incident Exercises

Test response plans using scenarios involving credential theft, privilege misuse, or insider threats, with a focus on detection, containment, and recovery.

6. Foster an Identity-Aware Culture

Make identity governance part of organisational culture by educating employees and partners on secure access practices, accountability, and shared responsibility.

Conclusion

The UK Government's Ministerial Letter on Cyber Security represents a clear call to action. Cyber risk is now a strategic leadership issue, reinforced by regulatory expectations set out in the UK Cyber Governance Code of Practice, NIS2, and DORA. Identity security and governance sit at the heart of the response.

By elevating identity from an operational IT process to a board-level capability, organisations can better defend against evolving threats while demonstrating accountability, resilience, and regulatory alignment.

The question every leadership team should now ask is simple:

> **Do we truly know who has access to what, and can we control it when it matters most?**

About Trevonix

Trevonix is a specialist identity and access management services firm, headquartered in London, focused on helping organisations translate identity strategy into measurable outcomes.

Founded by practitioners with deep experience delivering complex identity programmes in highly regulated environments, Trevonix was established to address a common gap in the market: the disconnect between identity technology deployment and real-world adoption, integration, and operational value.

Trevonix operates as a vendor-independent, outcome-driven partner, working alongside internal teams, resellers, and incumbent systems integrators. The firm provides support across the full identity lifecycle, from assessment and strategy through implementation, optimisation, and ongoing assurance.

With highly credentialed delivery teams, proven accelerators, and flexible resourcing models, Trevonix helps organisations strengthen identity governance, accelerate time-to-value, and improve cyber resilience without unnecessary disruption.

This perspective is shared to support informed executive decision-making and open dialogue on how identity can better serve organisational resilience and trust.