

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

TUESDAY 21 MAY 2002 AT 10.30 AM.

E-GOVERNMENT UPDATE

Report of the Director of Community Information

Five members have requested an item on E-Government. This report has been prepared to assist with the consideration thereof.

1. History

The first phase of “Herts Connect” resulted in the setting up of our Gateway services with their emphasis on customer focus. This phase is now substantially complete with all planned services moved into the Customer Service Centre which is meeting its operational and financial targets. Other areas of achievement include:-

- A fully transactional website – judged by the Society of IT Managers (‘SOCITM’) in their recent survey as being one of only four fully ready for e-government.
- A digital television service offered through NTL with transactional capability – in advance of the Government’s chosen pathfinders on the subject.
- The second stage of implementation of the Oracle 11i system for CSF and ACS is now underway with completion due for December 2002.
- An Information Management Strategy and principles (attached as Appendix 1) have been agreed with an associated work programme.

2. Next Steps

Further productivity and service benefits are being sought. A number of steps are underway as part of the “Managing the Authority” Best Value Review where we are seeking to broaden and deepen service delivery through information and communications technology. Some of the areas are dealt with below.

3. Areas for Development

3.1 E-Commerce and E-Procurement

A request for information has been sent out to potential suppliers for the new financial system to replace the mainframe Walker system. The new system

should help us to deliver e-procurement with consequent efficiencies. Final selection of the financial system will be by the end of calendar year 2002. It is likely to be supplied by a service provider (i.e. we will not own and operate the system ourselves). HCC has implemented one of the first local authority supplies catalogues which permits the electronic purchase of supplies items by schools and other service areas. In addition we have already begun to order and communicate electronically with a number of suppliers such as Dell Computer.

3.2 Information and Knowledge Management

Although our information management principles and the related action plan are in place a key part of our Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) strategy as reported to the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) in September 2001 (and due to be re-submitted in September of every year) is to adopt an authority-wide system of knowledge management. Knowledge Management has been described as 'making the right information available in the right place at the right time'. It includes both the efficient use and storage of data and therefore takes us into the area of electronic records management. There will be a significant inter-relationship with any portal technology (see 3.3 below) adopted for sharing service platforms (such as a website) with partner organisations. It will also be essential to obtain a solution in this area to meet the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act when this becomes effective from 2005. Significant efficiencies ought to be available from the adoption of electronic records storage.

3.3 Partnering and Portal Technologies – 'A One Stop Shop With Many Doors'

Representatives of public bodies (including the districts, Health, NHS Direct and the Police) in Hertfordshire have met and agreed to support the concept of a 'one stop shop with many doors' - i.e. a citizen can obtain the information or outcome they are seeking if they contact any one of the partner organisations and no matter which means of access they use. Portal technology is key to delivering these citizen focused services.

Work has been taken forward with the HLGA (Hertfordshire Local Government Association) with the help of the IDeA (Improvement and Development Agency) to obtain agreement with Districts about shared objectives for collaborative e-government working. Consultation with the public has shown a desire for seamless service delivery. The work with the IDeA is intended to identify the business case for particular projects aimed at delivering benefits to users. In addition this is a strong priority set by central government and HCC has, on behalf of the 11 local authorities in Hertfordshire, submitted a local government online (LGOL) funding bid for some £4m to deliver these services. The outcome is awaited shortly.

Portal technology will allow the integration of different public sector information streams into a single web presence and allow the effective sharing

of data between partnering organisations. The degree of integration sought will define the requirement for a technical solution.

If the LGOL bid is successful and agreement is obtained from partners then a tendering process is likely to select a supplier during the summer and autumn. This also affects our own knowledge management (KM) strategy as noted at 3.2 above.

3.4 Systems Architecture

Adoption of any portal/KM technologies (as described above) must fit into the overall systems architecture and information strategy for HCC – i.e. does the new technology parallel, duplicate or replace systems in which we have already invested (such as Lotus Notes) and what are the costs and consequences to HCC of this? This will be addressed as part of the Best Value Review referred to at 2 above.

3.5 External Recognition and Funding

An extensive series of public relations initiatives is underway to enhance HCC's reputation in this area. We are already recognised as a leading public sector body (see recent reports from SOCITM, the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission etc.) with a clear focus on business benefit and customer outcomes.

Cementing and building upon this reputation will, we hope, yield some return in funding terms.

3.6 Customer Service Centre (CSC)

The e-government Panel continues to urge further use of the CSC which is being examined by an officer group as part of the Managing the Authority Best Value Review (a.k.a. 'Herts Connect – simply done'). Evidence will be sought from services as to their plans to make further use of e-delivery and to identify the potential service efficiencies.

Volume continues to grow on our website and an invitation to tender for external hosting and support of the site will, when completed, allow support and access 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Good progress has been made with the implementation of electronic transactions as listed at Appendix 1 of the IEG Statement. This list will be added to as part of the exercise referred to above.

Discussions continue with district partners about the shared use of the CSC and a limited number of calls are handled at present for other public services in the Eastern Region most notably for Trading Standards.

Consideration is being given to bringing forward some of our targets for delivery of e-government under Best Value Performance Indicator Target 157.

The new targets might form part of any Public Service Agreement concluded by HCC with central government.

3.7 Adequacy of Infrastructure/Investment

The County Council authorised a significant ICT capital expenditure programme for the year 2002/03. Increasing reliance upon technology to deliver our services and to make them accessible to the public means that this requirement will continue.

Further work is needed to identify, as noted above, customer and business benefit arising from the introduction of technology. In addition a review of infrastructure such as our voice and data networks will be required both to test its adequacy for present and foreseen demand and to consider whether there are alternative means of providing technical services to the organisation. This refers in particular to the possibility of buying in services from outside providers in contrast to the “mixed economy” which we have today which sees us owning and operating a number of ICT assets and systems. This area will also be addressed as part of the Best Value Review.

3.8 Securing Business Benefit

The first phase of Herts Connect delivered efficiencies which were used to fund the business model for the Customer Service Centre and website. An example of this can be seen in libraries where:-

- A sum in excess of £232,000 (17.1 FTEs at 1999 values) was transferred to the Gateway budget as a result of the transfer of telephone renewals from library counters to the CSC. This has been followed by a further £114,000 for the current financial year.
- The above changes resulted in a better service to the public over greatly extended opening hours.
- Renewals over the Automated Telephone Renewal (ATR) line (some 15,000 per month) or over the web are costed at less than 2p.
- Staff have also had the time to take on new roles notably around PC user support in libraries.

Adopting a similar approach can give the possibility of further efficiencies and service enhancements where both ‘front-line’ and ‘back office’ staff will be using the same systems. One example would be on-line applications or registrations where data would be entered and confirmed by the applicants themselves. This would remove the requirement for data preparation and keying presently undertaken by HCC thus releasing resource, particularly in the case where self-service became the primary or sole medium through which such applications were made.

4. Issues

Technology is not an end in itself. It is only useful if it delivers a better and/or more efficient outcome for the user of our services. Successful 'e-government' like any other service mechanism also depends upon many behavioural and cultural factors. Some of the considerations include:

- Are we obtaining the productivity benefits from new business processes enabled by technology (including procurement) whether they be cashable or non-cashable?
- Do we have a customer-facing approach where staff 'own the problem' and manage through to the best outcome for the user?
- Are we providing better customer access and service?
- Are we using the CSC/web as widely as possible?
- Is our systems architecture and our knowledge management policy complete, fully communicated and accepted by the organisation?
- Is our technical infrastructure adequate and cost effective?
- Which portal/knowledge management technology will we adopt in order to deliver seamless services with our partners?
- Are we responding to users' expressed preferences and needs?

APPENDIX 1

The Strategy

The focus of the Information Management Strategy is a set of 9 high level principles from which a series of actions will flow.

PRINCIPLE 1: Information is a shared corporate resource.

A fundamental goal of any Information Management Strategy is the sharing of data. To achieve this requires acceptance of the basic principle that all information is the property of the organisation as a whole and does not belong to individuals, discrete departments or business units. Unless this is accepted any attempt to improve organisation-wide effectiveness through better Information Management will be wasted effort.

PRINCIPLE 2: Creator/custodian maintains the information.

Whilst information “ownership” must be accepted as being at an organisational level, the responsibility and authority over the use of the data should be delegated as far down the organisation as is necessary to ensure the maximum efficiency and quality of the updating and publishing processes, i.e., information should be managed by those closest to it. For each ‘information set’ it will be necessary therefore to determine who is authorised or best placed to:

- ❑ agree/authorise access privileges (confidentiality issues etc);
- ❑ define the data (i.e., the metadata¹);
- ❑ decide why, how and by whom the data can be changed or deleted ;
- ❑ act as the “custodian”, i.e., the person/unit responsible for its business continuity, including safe storage and recovery of the data, and for ensuring it is available for publishing when required.

PRINCIPLE 3: Ensure all information is fit for purpose.

The quality of information should be fit for purpose. Information should be sufficiently accurate, current, relevant and complete for the intended purpose. Those producing information should understand the requirements of those who need it and the wider benefits to HCC arising from its use.

PRINCIPLE 4: An overall framework of standards.

The creation, storage and use of information must comply with all legal and regulatory requirements, HCC guidelines and policies and, where appropriate, conform to national data format standards.

¹ Metadata is information about information. It can comprise as much detail as required but usually describes the source of the information and its custodian, how it was generated, how often it is updated, any security/confidentiality issues, and the currency, accuracy and completeness of the information. The potential users of the information can then decide whether it is ‘fit for purpose’.

Mechanisms should be established to ensure and monitor compliance with these standards. Success will be measured by our ability to provide access and reliable information to the public, our partners, and our staff to meet constantly evolving information needs.

PRINCIPLE 5: Information to be organised, stored and retained in a consistent way.

A data register (or metadata database) should be established as the definitive register that describes all the information assets of the organisation. The overall responsibility for the administration of this register should lie with the Community Information Management Unit based in the Corporate Information Directorate.

Operational systems hold huge volumes of data, which is not always easily accessible to answer ad-hoc management enquiries for supporting decision-making. Organisation-wide Information Management systems need to be developed to enable staff and partners (Principle 8) to have quick and easy access to information and to be able to find documents and files through full text and keyword searching techniques using a web based front-end on Connex.

PRINCIPLE 6: File once for the whole organisation.

The same data should be held in as few computer systems and locations as possible and ideally in a single system/location. Where this is inappropriate then one source should be agreed as the definitive copy where all changes are made. This should then be used to produce copies for the other systems. The corporate approval process for the development of new applications should endeavour to identify opportunities for data sharing between systems.

The strategy will seek to reduce duplication of computerised information systems. It will also seek to reduce the costs for developing new and maintaining and enhancing current systems.

The implementation of technologies such as Electronic Document Management utilising an effective indexing/filing regime is an important first step in achieving this high level principle for paper/email/fax based information.

The Strategy will therefore play a major role in moving the organisation to a 'paper less' office based upon electronic record keeping by seeking to share all information electronically. (*in line with DPA, confidentiality and copyright security constraints*)

PRINCIPLE 7: Location independence.

This principle seeks to ensure that suitable systems are in place to enable staff and partner organisations to create, manage, store, access and transmit information from every location in which they are required or expected to work.

PRINCIPLE 8: Enable sharing of information with partner organisations.

An effective and complete Information Management Strategy cannot be contemplated without the involvement of the authority's key information providers and users. The strategy will seek opportunities for joint working to define and agree information standards and to promote an information sharing culture .

PRINCIPLE 9: Monitor and Review.

A mechanism is required for ensuring the implementation and review of an Information Management Strategy.

For the first year (April 01 to March 02) this function will be carried out by the current Information Management Steering Group that will have the following duties and responsibilities:

- monitor implementation of the Information Strategy at departmental and corporate levels;
- provide advice, guidance and support to departments in implementing the Information Strategy;
- approve supporting documentation required by the Information Strategy;
- recommend revisions to the Information Strategy at agreed intervals;
- monitor that the Information Strategy is linked to the corporate business planning process.

