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September/October 2011

Open Era

- Core open standards to be mandated across public sector ICT

Sharing Success

- Exclusive new research into the true state of play for shared services: savings and barriers

By the Power of Skunk

- HM Government Skunkworks raises a stink around innovation

Transparency, Privacy & the NHS

- Fears that transparency and citizen privacy may collide in NHS reform

PLUS: News Update, Government Digital Service, View over Westminster, Product Notes & Contracts Won.





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On the Cover

Sharing Success - shared services will benefit the public sector.

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'Can do' to Digital

The current blossoming of the Government Digital Service (a rather prosaic and old-Whitehall style name for such a modernising unit, but old habits die hard) is encouraging for those of us who have been following this agenda for longer than we care to contemplate.

Finally, the Cabinet Office - the engine of all genuine reform to the workings of the UK government - has drawn together several of the main threads of what is needed to embrace the use of the internet and other new digital technologies to speed up the workings of government and focus them on the citizen rather than the bureaucrat.

Although it is a shame that the unit cannot be led by a senior civil servant with a long-standing innate understanding of the workings of government (will it always be necessary to bring in someone from the 'new media' sector to do these jobs?) supporters of the new 'executive director of digital', Mike Bracken, will say that this is the whole point, and that an understanding of online publishing and social media is more important than a knowledge of the tunnels running underneath Downing Street.

Bracken will certainly bring a more 'can-do' attitude to the task than most career civil servants would be able to muster, and this will be needed to develop a 'Betagov' project - which is extremely unusual in its experimental, fast-paced approach to innovation. Likewise to the innovation unit formerly known (until a few weeks ago) as HM Government Skunkworks, which will attempt to embed this kind of agile, flexible approach across everything the government does with IT.

Will the new Government Digital Services unit succeed?

Critics might say that the government is still running behind the game when it comes to working online, and that this unit might perhaps have been better set up at least five years ago. Why do we always have to get it wrong by throwing money at an old-style centralised service like Directgov, before someone sees the true capacity of new technologies to be more customisable and user-focused? Why do we still need a central unit like this at all, when it could be argued that digital services should by now have already been embedded in the DNA of government?

Above all, it could be argued that most of the projects handled by this new unit are 'front end', whereas the true potential for cost savings, innovation and citizen focus still need to take place at the back end, down in those hidden corridors and basements which for the most part remain housed within distinct Victorian silos. Will the open standards, flexible modular systems and pooled budgets needed to make progress in these underlying areas be moved on far enough or quickly enough by the new unit, alongside the more eye-catching work on 'Betagov'?

But this time, the optimists are hopeful. Something does feel different - the younger generations who have grown up with IT are beginning to exert their influence, perhaps, and even the government is starting to talk the right language. Things are moving faster, and that is the first pre-condition for technological success.

NHS IT a political football

The Department of Health has "announced an acceleration" of the dismantling of the £12bn National Programme for IT in the NHS in England at the same time as a review by the Cabinet Office's Major Projects Authority "concluded that [the programme] is not fit to provide the modern IT services that the NHS needs." Coming in the week before the Labour Party conference, and in the midst of a row over the FiReControl fiasco, the announcement notes that "the programme was created in 2002 under the last government". It remains to be seen whether the current government will have any more success in the tricky arena of NHS IT.

Dan Jellinek, Editor
Helen Olsen, Publisher

UKA.tv

The past two months have seen another series of un-missable interviews from top level figures in the world of public sector IT on UKauthorITy.tv, brought to you by IT in Use magazine with UKauthorITy.com:



BILL MCCLUGGAGE, DEPUTY GOVERNMENT CIO, is targeting commonality across government IT with the imminent launch of a core set of open standards. He tells Helen Olsen it is an "interesting time" to do so, given the economic background...



QAMAR YUNUS, GOVERNMENT LEAD ON OPEN SOURCE POLICY, reveals his passion for driving a profound shift in the government's approach to procurement of technology and cutting overall cost - helping it become a more intelligent customer.



PUBLIC SERVICES NETWORK DELIVERY DIRECTOR, KENNY ROBERTSON, who is also director of ICT at the DWP, explains why and how the PSN forms the core of the government's new ICT strategy.



MARK O'NEILL, HEAD OF HM GOVERNMENT SKUNKWORKS, says his new and experimental innovation agency is here to facilitate conversations, raise ICT project success levels and drive down costs. If it gets it right, it could be a game-changer.

Catch now on www.UKauthorITy.tv



Shared services: the time to start was yesterday

Council shared services can generate big savings but it is unclear whether they will be enough, or will be realised fast enough, to offset all budget cuts required by government policy, according to the latest ITU Live.

The debate was held as findings emerged of comprehensive new research into shared services published this month by ITU magazine and UKauthorITy in partnership with Capita and Socitm. According to the survey, almost all public sector managers (94%) agree that shared services present an opportunity to cut costs. However the research predicts a typical three to six year time-frame for return on investment. Geoff Connell, chair of Socitm's London branch and joint CIO of Newham and Havering councils, said: "If you look at reducing head counts, particularly with large amounts of redundancy costs, it takes time to manage people out of your organisation. Also contracts take time to move away from and join up with your partners, because they may be for a number of years. These are some of the reasons it takes a while to get set up. Even just aligning technology platforms. If you've got five thousand users, it doesn't happen overnight."

Paul Taylor, director of change and communities and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, said that councils sharing services should work up from back office functions such as human resources to more strategic functions like ICT. At each a business case must be made and managers tasked to deliver it. However it is unclear whether shared services could deliver all the savings needed for councils to survive the deep and sustained budget cuts they currently face, Taylor said. "Will it be enough at the end of the day? I don't think any of us can tell."

Full details of shared services survey: page 12.
View ITU Live: www.ukauthority.com/ITULive/

Crowd wisdom could reduce planning confrontation

Creative online collaboration could reduce conflict in our adversarial planning process, the left-leaning think tank, Demos, has proposed. The Civic Long Tail suggests that new developments be considered online with a "collaborative approach" involving developers, residents and experts.



The pamphlet, written by social technology analyst, Charles Leadbeater (pictured above), analyses the potential of combining open data from government with social media and online civic activism. Leadbeater admits that a web 2.0 planning process "may remain largely adversarial" but suggests "it may benefit from having a more open, collaborative and creative front-end."

While "opening up the data to allow private companies, civic entrepreneurs and campaigners to draw on it will help... openness per se is not the answer," Leadbeater says. "The key will be in crafting the right relationship between government as the holder and collector of data and the civic long tail of people who want to put it to public use, creatively and effectively." www.demos.co.uk/publications/thecivictail

Fire control project shot down in flames

A project to set up nine regional control centres for fire and rescue services in England was a "complete failure" and wasted £469m, MPs have found. The verdict was widely expected but will cast a shadow over future shared services schemes.

Labour launched FiReControl (sic) in 2004. Following a series of major delays and cost overruns, it was scrapped by the current government in December 2010. In a new report the Commons Public Accounts Committee says that the project did not achieve any of its objectives and that eight of the centres were empty "white elephants". Margaret Hodge, committee chair, said that the taxpayer has lost nearly half a billion pounds, and that Communities and Local Government's failure to recognise that the project's success hinged on the cooperation of locally accountable and independent fire and rescue services and its inability to ensure such local buy-in, fatally undermined the project.

According to MPs the project was rushed, without proper understanding of costs or risks. Leadership relied far too much on external consultants and frequent departures of senior staff contributed to weak management and oversight. A contract to implement a national IT system linking the control centres was not awarded until three years in to the project. The contract itself was poorly designed and awarded to a company without relevant experience. The system was never delivered. "No one has been held to account for this project failure, one of the worst we have seen for many years, and the careers of most of the senior staff responsible have carried on as if nothing had gone wrong at all and the consultants and contractor continue to work on many other government projects," states the report.

Communities and Local Government now plans to spend a further £84.8m to secure the original objectives of FiReControl, so that there is a co-ordinated response to national incidents. However Hodge warns it is not clear how this extra spending will deliver value for money or achieve its objectives.

NHS INFORMATION USE 'STILL IN ITS INFANCY': As NHS reforms in England loom, the chair of the health select committee has said that the service still lacks the skills needed to commission care intelligently. "We're still very much closer to the beginning of that process than we are to the end," said Stephen Dorrell, a Conservative former health minister. Dorrell was speaking at the launch of 'The Intelligent Board', a guide to intelligent commissioning, published by Dr Foster Intelligence. The guide stresses the need to consider data on outcomes rather than merely the cost of episodes of care. <http://drfosterintelligence.co.uk>

Smart transport in a jam

Asking grants to local authorities for high-tech transport schemes will add to the misery of traffic congestion, a committee of MPs has warned. The Department for Transport (DfT) comes under fire for its decision to end funding of the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Toolkit.

The toolkit enabled town halls to install electronic equipment and communication networks to obtain reliable data and attempt to change traffic flows. Examples of measures introduced include traffic light phasing, variable message signs, better car parking information signs and bus passenger information.



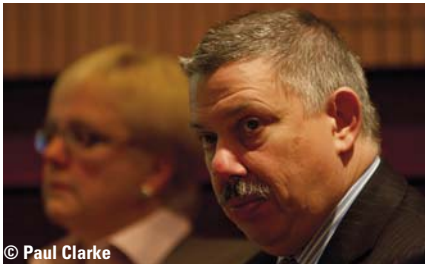
The SCOOT system - which controls the timing of traffic lights by responding to traffic, accidents and bus priority - has been used successfully in Edinburgh and Southampton. But the ITS Toolkit fell victim to the government's spending cuts, the commons transport select committee was told. The decision was sharply criticised in its report, which urges the DfT to reinstate the programme - or find a successor. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmtran/872/87202.htm

Commissioning-only vision 'lacks evidence'

A report suggesting that some UK local authorities could be moving towards becoming "residual councils" by 2020, responsible for little more than commissioning services, has been dismissed by one leading local government expert as a vision lacking evidence of value.

'Future councils - life after the spending cuts', from localism think tank, the New Local Government Network, says that a handful of local authorities that commission most of their services might become 'residual councils' - commissioning hubs that deliver almost no public services directly. Possible valuable uses of technology cited by the report could include cloud computing to save money and increase flexibility; analysis of large datasets to tackle inefficiency and spot fraud; and "collaborative consumption" in which citizens use social media platforms to work together.

However Glyn Evans, Socitm president, said: "Future Councils quite correctly notes that social media, internet use and IT will be key factors in determining how councils will operate in the future. However, it fails to consider their implications in full". If it had, the possibility may have emerged of "a transforming council, one which is agile, responsive, entrepreneurial and in continuous flux as it reflects a rapidly changing society. People talk about being a commissioning council, but where is the evidence that it delivers better outcomes for the public?"



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BENEFITS REFORM HINGES ON 'OPTIMISTIC ASSUMPTIONS': The government's benefits reforms are critically dependent on optimistic assumptions about digital take-up and IT project management, MPs have warned. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee sets out a bleak forecast for the plan to cut £2.7bn from running costs at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) by 2015. It is particularly concerned that the savings plan depends on an "optimistic expectation" that 80% of benefit claimants will communicate online. Currently only 17% of Jobcentre Plus users deal with their claims online. The report is also scathing about the department's hopes that "agile" project management will enable it to introduce the new universal credit without mishap. <http://bit.ly/pcrM5t>

SCOTLAND BACKS PATIENT ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC RECORDS: The Scottish Government has unveiled a new electronic strategy for its health service. Under the proposals, patients will become more involved in their own healthcare and services and have direct access to their electronic records. Launching the initiative, health minister Nicola Sturgeon cited the example of a pioneering electronic record for renal patients. "The electronic renal patient record has allowed consultants to share health information freely with patients and improve the care that patients receive." <http://bit.ly/nguLBW>

COME CLEAN ON POLICE IT PLANS: MPs have set the home secretary a strict timetable for clearing up uncertainties about her planned overhaul of police IT systems. Greater "clarity" is badly needed over plans to end the chaos of 2,000 different computer systems, conclude MPs in a report by the Home Affairs Select Committee. It warns that the axing of the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) is being rushed, pointing out that it is not clear which of its functions will transfer to a proposed new company.

Core open standards to be mandated

The UK government is set to publish a list of 10-12 key open technology standards, including web and document formats, that it will require all public sector bodies to use, says Bill McCluggage, director of ICT strategy and policy at the Cabinet Office. He added that standards would help government work in a more interoperable way that reduced costs and would underpin the open data agenda.



"We are going to publish a draft list of open standards we think are at the top of the hit list, for formal consultation," McCluggage said. "We are going to start with a handful, a suite of about ten to a dozen, as being the most important, most impactful... it does need policing, it needs compliance, but it needs all of our stakeholders to come with us."

This core is likely to include key web standards such as the HTTPS standard for secure web pages, and document standards such as the UTF-8 standard for encoding Unicode characters, he said. The initial set will not be set in concrete, but form part of an evolutionary process, McCluggage added.

Full story: Page 7.

PARLIAMENT NOT 'APPY: Parliament has pulled back from plans to introduce a mobile phone app for visitors to the Palace of Westminster because it will cost too much. Further work is to be undertaken to explore a more cost-effective method of providing visitor information via smartphones.

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Kent takes IT sharing to the next level

A council IT shared services partnership is set to create one of the UK's largest public sector collaboration platforms through the launch of a procurement marketplace potentially covering council, health, education, emergency services and other bodies within the county of Kent and beyond.

The news was revealed ahead of a shared services conference staged earlier this month (September) by Kent Connects, a strategic IT partnership comprising all 14 Kent and Medway local authorities plus Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

Carol Patrick, head of Kent Connects, said that a pilot marketplace is likely to go live for testing by the new year, with work planned in three phases. "The first phase will be probably looking at a software audit - an opportunity for people to exchange, share or sell existing kit, and have the opportunity to say 'I need, has anybody got'. The second phase will be more structured, hosting contracts, procurement and horizon scanning. And by the third stage, we hope suppliers and others outside of the partnership will also be putting in goods and services, to bring down costs." This model, or something similar, is likely to be the answer for public sector IT service development across the UK as budget cuts continue, Patrick says.

<http://bit.ly/kentconnectsvideowall>

MINISTER CALLS FOR ROOT AND BRANCH REFORM OF CRIMINAL IT SYSTEMS:

The criminal justice system is inefficient and still reliant on paper, while the rest of the world embraces technology, says police minister, Nick Herbert. He is calling for fundamental reform of the criminal justice system, a streamlining of case administration and greater integration of systems between organisations and agencies. "We must bring justice into the 21st century... By next April, we are requiring the entire criminal justice system to go digital, with secure electronic transfer of case files between the police, prosecutors and courts."

Health chief warns of data risk from reform

A joint letter from the information commissioner and NHS chief executive has warned NHS organisations to keep a close eye on data governance during the reforms in England. The concern arises partly because of the planned abolition of organisations currently responsible for protecting data, strategic health authorities and primary care trusts (SHAs and PCTs).

The letter (<http://bit.ly/qKQhIX>), from Christopher Graham, information com-



missioner (pictured above), and David Nicholson, NHS chief executive, to NHS strategic health authorities and trusts, reminds managers of the new penalties now in force for breaches of data security.

Despite these, "Incidents of data loss continue to occur and in some cases these are both significant and clearly in breach of national guidelines, eg encryption of mobile devices. While we have to accept that some incidents will always occur, it is not acceptable where adherence to national policies would have prevented the breach."

The letter says that the NHS and the Information Commissioner's Office "are particularly concerned to ensure that there are no gaps in the information governance assurance provided by SHAs and PCTs during NHS reorganisation". It asks the new PCT clusters, which will be responsible for commissioning care, to conduct and publish an assessment by March 31 2012.

Government 'struggling' with ICT strategy

Central government's IT team is struggling to raise the tempo of its ICT strategy, a leading market analyst has warned.

The report by TechMarketView says that progress on the strategy has been "slow and steady" since its publication in March. Achievements it acknowledges so far include simplification of the procurement process and a presumption against large unwieldy projects. However it claims that the government is struggling to move to the next phase of agreement on technology and data standards, "disintermediation" of large IT deals and rationalising the number of data centres. "CIOs continue to work against the backdrop of a relatively unchanging political landscape where political, cultural, legal and economic barriers to change remain", says Georgina O'Toole, director, TechMarketView. "Bureaucracy remains a feature, the nature of politics means that short-termism often dictates... and 'horizontal government' (as opposed to the existing vertical silos) requires a significant step-change in culture."

Despite these reservations, the report welcomes the government's "distinct change in emphasis" in relation to the G-Cloud programme. "A sense of pragmatism seems to be finally entering the Cabinet Office Team's thinking," says O'Toole. "It is possible to deliver a Cloud commercial model from 'legacy' IT."

www.techmarketview.com

DigiNotar breach raises UK certificate fears

Digital security breaches that caused the Dutch government to suspend online transactions with citizens could have serious implications for the UK, which has a less regulated structure than the Netherlands for issuing online authentication certificates, warns a leading security expert. An intrusion into systems run by digital certificate issuer, DigiNotar - since declared bankrupt - apparently originated in Iran with unknown hackers launching an attack with stolen or forged certificates impersonating trusted sites. The Dutch government was particularly hard hit as it uses DigiNotar to secure most of its online transactions with citizens, including tax returns. It has recommended that no-one use its secure online services for the time being. Calum MacLeod, director of security company, Venafi, said that the UK government is exposed to at least as much risk as the Dutch, and possibly more. "In the Netherlands there is a quasi government body that regulates trusted third parties, with an audit process."

The UK, by contrast, relies on a voluntary standards scheme for digital certificate suppliers, tScheme, with several firms operating under these looser controls, MacLeod said.

Think tank feels the collar of police inefficiency

More outsourcing of back office functions by police will protect frontline jobs, according to a report by right of centre think-tank, Policy Exchange. 'Cost of the Cops: manpower and deployment in policing' calls on the Home Office to encourage police forces to strip out cost and free up officers for the frontline through a programme of shared services and outsourcing of back office functions. The report calls for forces to seize the initiative "to reengineer their services - particularly the non-visible, back office functions that are not part of core policing".



According to Policy Exchange only "incentivisation or a degree of mandation" from the Home Office will encourage police authorities to strip out cost and free up officers for the front line through "a bold programme of shared services and outsourcing of back office functions". www.policyexchange.org.uk

Open Era

Dan Jellinek reports from ITU Live's debate on Open Standards in the public sector.

"Adherence to open standards is important if the government is to make data more readily accessible. It will also help the government avoid lock-in to any one provider." Thus spake the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) in a report published this summer on government and IT – 'A recipe for rip-offs: time for a new approach'.

The committee went on to recommend that the government prioritise the adoption of a set of core open standards for technology. It was in this context that the ITU Live panel on open standards debated the best way to move this critical agenda forward.

Bill McCluggage, deputy government CIO and director of ICT strategy and policy at the Cabinet Office, acknowledged that research undertaken by his department had indeed revealed low awareness in government of open standards issues, as noted by PASC.

Some 52% of respondents did not even know about the existence of the current out of date set of standards, the 'e-GIF' (eGovernment Interoperability Framework), McCluggage said. "Another 35% don't use them, and only 13% in the survey said they actually used them for any useful purpose."

This had to change, to break down barriers between departments and enable more collaborative working, he said. "With the modern internet age, and electronic transactions engines in the background, which are interconnected in some circumstances [like] the Department of Work and Pensions and HMRC and benefits activities... you do need a set of well understood and agreed and mandated standards to break that very siloed and very expensive situation we've got ourselves into."

Accordingly, the government is now set to publish a draft list of around 10 or 12 open standards, McCluggage said. "To shotgun out a whole series of standards and say you have to have all of those in your catalogue will result in the same place as we are now. Getting to a set of core set of standards that are really impactful is important; then develop it. This is an evolutionary process."

The initial set was likely to include web standards such as HTTPS, the Unicode character format UTF8, and word processing formats, McCluggage said.



Marc Straat, European head of standards at Adobe, said that one of the reasons the old e-GIF had failed was an inability to engage with non-technical staff such as procurement managers, "the people that had to do the work". For the new project to succeed it would be important to educate these people on the benefits of open standards, Straat said.

McCluggage agreed that "One of the real issues is that this doesn't feature above the horizon of a businessperson. They look at this and they say 'I don't understand how this has any relevance to my business'. And yet everything they do is based on it."

The discussion is not just about standards in software but about how those then work through the business process, he said. "It's about the workflow – unless you have a proper set of standards in place, that workflow will cost you reworking as you come to an interface between one part of a process and another."

McCluggage's response to another recommendation of the PASC report – that government "should omit references to proprietary products and formats in procurement notices" – was equally clear. "I think it (reference to such items) shouldn't be happening. We should be more interested in the outputs and the outcomes of what we need to deliver." On the other hand, "to ban or to stop proprietary is quite a dangerous view – we need to look at it from a balanced perspective as to what's best for the business, what's value for money".

Mark Brett, policy and programme manager at the Society of IT Management (Socitm), said that information security was another area that would gain by wider use of open standards. "You need one type of identity mechanism, you need one type of authentication, and all of these standards need to be open [to] be adopted by the vendor community and developers," Brett said.

"Also by being open, it means that everyone is aware of all the threats, risks and vulnerabilities, and that actually stops the criminals, because the community has developed the locks. Everybody understands a five lever mortice lock; you can go on the internet and

find out how it all works, but it doesn't mean you are going to be able to pick that lock. So by having open security standards, it actually makes things more secure."

Counter-intuitively, he said, open standards would also boost innovation because interoperability is needed to make a new solution work in the marketplace. "Open standards stimulate the market for new products, new services, things that don't exist today that will exist within the next 12-24 months, [but they] need to be able plug in and talk to what's already there.

"The real innovation will come with services they put on top. We've got to do really far-reaching horizon-scanning to make sure we get the fundamental pipe-work and the standards strongly mandated now, so that you're building for the future," added Brett.

Straat agreed that open standards can fit within a competitive marketplace, but warned the right balance has to be struck. "It's a very interesting balance; you have to be very careful," he said. "Lots of software vendors are doing a lot of interesting innovation. They don't want it all put into a box of open standards but they want to use open standards in a progressive way.

"It's nice to have standards, but if you don't have multiple offerings, there is no choice."

Ultimately, the success of the new open standards initiative – as compared with the petering out of the old one – will boil down to the strength of the mandate: the policing, McCluggage said.

This time will be different, he said, "because now we are at the cusp of a new maturity environment for internet-based activities, and we've got a policing regime. We also have leadership which insists upon it. We are in a new era."

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Transparency, Privacy & the NHS

Michael Cross warns that transparency and citizen privacy may collide in NHS reform.

In a few weeks' time, by the end of December, NHS patients throughout England will be able to look up for themselves how good their GP is at dealing with specific medical conditions. The "comparative clinical outcomes" of GP practices is one of the key datasets set for release under the prime minister's transparency agenda, launched across the public sector in May this year.

Such datasets play in to another political agenda - that of NHS reform in England. The Department of Health's vision of local commissioning from a wide spectrum of health and social care providers depends crucially on the availability of comprehensive data about performance and outcomes. The idea is still very much a novelty to the NHS, as a veteran of past Conservative reforms said last month. "We're still very much closer to the beginning of that process than we are to the end," Stephen Dorrell, former health secretary and chair of the Commons health select committee, said.

Dorrell was speaking at the launch of a guide to intelligent commissioning, published by Dr Foster Intelligence, a joint venture between the Dr Foster healthcare information company and the Department of Health. The guide, aimed at clinicians and other members of groups commissioning NHS care, stresses the need to consider data on outcomes rather than merely the cost of episodes of care. The best commissioning, it says, focuses on patients and populations, pays for outcomes rather than discrete services, and is "collaborative and engaging".

Another stress is on transparency, especially to local populations. "Commissioners should be open about their decision-making processes. They should publish information, in jargon-free language, about the policies, principles and information that guide their decisions. They should explain who takes the decisions and how, be open about how conflicts of interest are dealt with, and let local people know how they can contribute to the debate."

The report lists 10 key data sources for commissioners, topped by the NHS secondary uses service, which extracts anonymised data from NHS core systems. It's described as "a rich source for benchmarking and trend analysis".

The trouble is, not everyone is happy for this rich source to be mined - especially in the politically charged cause of NHS reform. Since 2009, when the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust 'Database State' report claimed that it breached European data protection and human rights principles, the Secondary Uses Service has been at the centre of controversy.

Probably unwittingly, the Cabinet Office has added fuel to this campaign. Last month (September) it published an independent review of the impact of transparency on privacy, commissioned by Francis Maude as part of a consultation into the government's open data plans.

The review, by Kieron O'Hara of the University of Southampton, reaches the no doubt welcome conclusion that "privacy and transparency are compatible" - indeed he stresses that "privacy is a necessary condition for a successful transparency programme". However he raises several concerns that could provide ammunition to privacy campaigners.

One concern is the ability to identify individuals from anonymised data by so-called "jigsaw identification". O'Hara warns of a potential clash between the transparency agenda and a growing technical consensus for access controls on anonymised data: "There are no complete legal or technical fixes to the deanonymisation problem," adding that "It is essential that policymakers, data managers, data controllers, privacy officers and lawyers do not automatically assume that anonymised data cannot be used to re-identify people."

This would be a serious concern for systems such as the Secondary Uses Service, which relies on anonymity to avoid the need for governance measures such as patient consent. O'Hara's report suggests that such measures may need to be built in. He makes 14 recommendations for institutionalising privacy, including for privacy interests to be represented on the government's Transparency Board.

The Cabinet Office's response to the O'Hara report seems to be to play it down. A high-placed source said that it does not represent government policy and will be treated as one response to the ongoing consultation



into open data. The outcomes of the consultation will be reflected in a white paper due for publication in February 2012.

Meanwhile, quite separate concerns are surfacing about information governance and NHS reform. Also last month, Christopher Graham, the information commissioner, and David Nicholson, NHS chief executive to NHS strategic health authorities and trusts, wrote to NHS managers of the new penalties now in force for breaches of data security. The letter says that the NHS and the Information Commissioner's Office "are particularly concerned to ensure that there are no gaps in the information governance assurance provided by SHAs and PCTs during NHS reorganisation". It asks the new PCT clusters, which will be responsible for commissioning care, to conduct and publish an assessment by March 31 2012.

It also notes, sternly, that "Incidents of data loss continue to occur and in some cases these are both significant and clearly in breach of national guidelines, eg encryption of mobile devices. While we have to accept that some incidents will always occur, it is not acceptable where adherence to national policies would have prevented the breach."

The timing was apt. In one particularly embarrassing incident, Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust last month received a ticking off from the Information Commissioner's Office for mislaying an unencrypted CD containing 1.6 million patient records. The good news is that the trust knows where the disc is: the bad news that it is in a landfill site, in a locked filing cabinet which was sent to landfill during an office move. The fear is that many such incidents could be waiting to happen during a rushed NHS reform.

The O'Hara review - which should be essential reading for anyone concerned with either the transparency agenda or NHS reforms - notes that "the political legitimacy of a transparency programme will depend crucially on its ability to retain public confidence." That may be a long shot.

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/independent-transparency-and-privacy-review>

Clyde valley plans 'UK's most ambitious' council shared services



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James Martin Greenshields

Seven councils across the Clyde valley have set out detailed plans to share support services valued at £155m, which could see thousands of staff moving to a new organisation. The proposal involves the sharing of IT, finance, payroll, revenues & benefits and human resources and is aimed at saving up to £30m a year.

Supporters of the scheme say that between 2,000 and 3,400 staff could transfer to a new shared services public body owned by the participating councils. A management team will be appointed to oversee the transfer of services. The new body would operate under a "distributed model", with sites in each participating council area: West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire, Inverclyde, East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire, Glasgow and North Lanarkshire. Councils had until the end of last month (September) to decide whether or not to take up the plan.

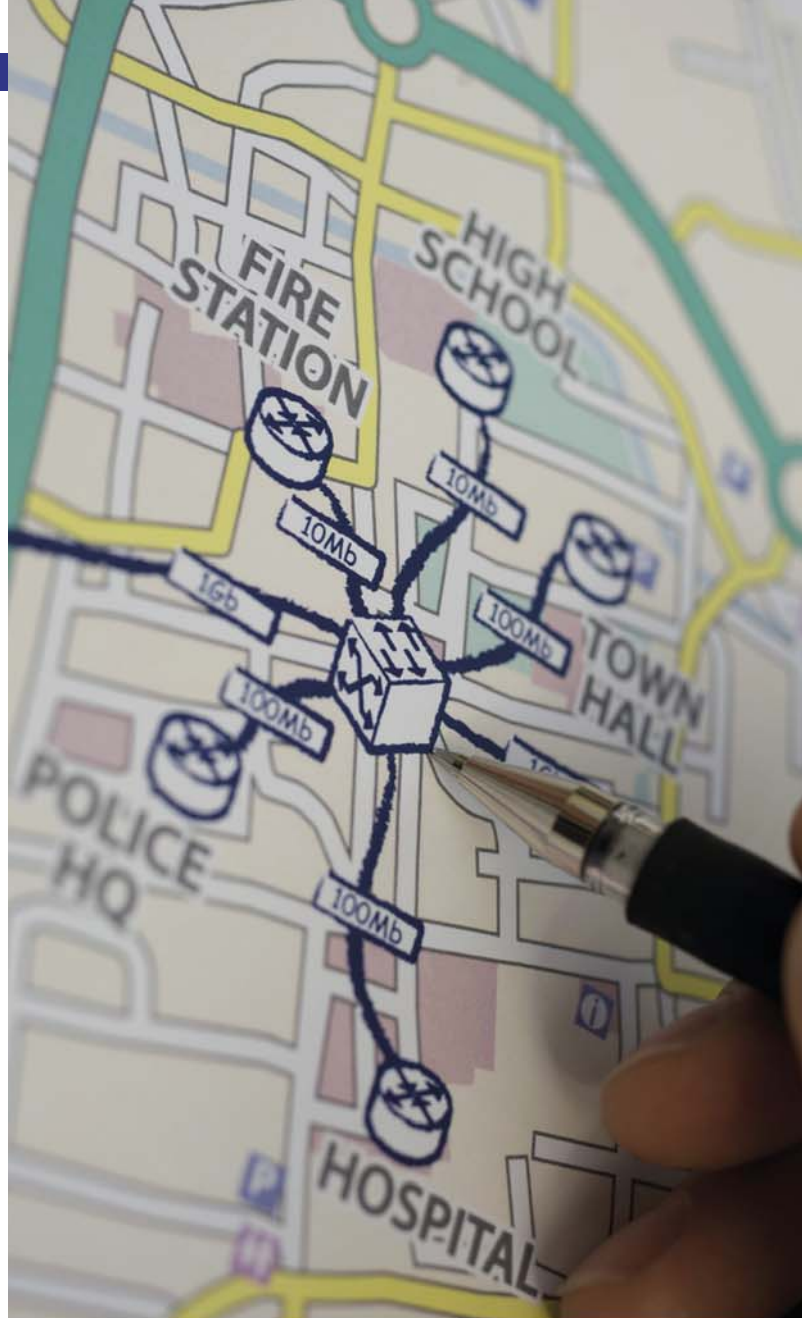
AUTHORITIES SHARE HOUSING BENEFIT CUTS EXPERTISE: Nearly 170 local councils are to share IT expertise to cope with cuts to housing benefit that threaten many families with eviction. A scheme led by Cambridge City Council is among 10 that will share £4m of government cash, to offer advice and practical help to worried tenants. It boasts no fewer than 167 other authorities across the UK as partners in developing special software, under the umbrella of the Northgate Benefits Product Group. The £463,500 grant will help the councils to identify benefit claimants most at risk from the cuts and advise them on how the shake-up will affect them and their future options. The announcement follows growing unease about the impact of dramatic cuts to the maximum payments of local housing allowance (LHA), delayed until January next year.

BROADBAND MILLIONS MAY MISS NOT-SPOTS: The majority of people will enjoy super-fast broadband within four years through a £363m cash injection to town halls, the government has pledged. The largest sums were handed to local authorities in Devon and Somerset (£31.3m), Cumbria (£17m), North Yorkshire (£17.8m), Norfolk (£15.4m) and Lincolnshire (£14.3m), to help pay for speeds of 24 megabits per second (24Mbps), although doubts have been raised about whether the money will be enough to connect up homes in low-speed areas, or so-called 'not-spots'. Official figures show there are around 560,000 properties (2/3 of homes) across Devon and Somerset, for example, that will not even receive 2Mbps, if expansion is left to private companies alone.

PICKLES PUTS ASSETS ON THE MAP: Online maps of public sector assets are the latest tool to be offered to armchair auditors. However a demo map published by Communities and Local Government (CLG) gives only a partial picture, of mainly central government assets. The demo Google-style map shows more than 180,000 assets owned by 600 public sector bodies, including central government and 87 councils. However critics said that it is London-centric and does not comply with the government's proposed open data policy, with terms and conditions restricting use to viewing for non-commercial purposes.

<http://publicassets.communities.gov.uk>

GOVERNMENT KILLS OFF CORE: Plans to improve the accuracy of electoral registers by creating a nationwide database have been abandoned. The Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (Core) was also intended to make it easier for political parties to verify the legitimacy of their donors. However, the provisions of the 2006 Electoral Administration Act - passed by Tony Blair's government - were never started and the legislation will now be repealed. The database, which would have been administered by a new independent public body, would have cost an estimated £11.4m to build and £2.7m a year to run.



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Government unites front and back

Separate initiatives to merge the public-facing side of digital government services and back-end infrastructures have both gained ground over the summer.

The ambition to merge central government's public websites into a single domain has received the official blessing of ministers. According to a press statement issued by Cabinet Office minister, Francis Maude, the single domain programme prototyped as 'Alphagov' has now moved to the "beta" stage of testing.

On the Government Digital Service blog, Tom Loosemore, head of the project, said the beta stage would be complete by 2012. "The citizen-facing gov.uk beta... will be an operational test, in that it will be constantly updated in order to trial the essential behind-the-scenes administrator tools and processes. While this aspect of the beta project will be a public website, direct.gov.uk will remain the definitive url for citizens' online interactions with central government."

Meanwhile the idea of creating a single back-end digital network spanning the entire public sector - a key element of the government's ICT strategy - has come a step closer with the completion of a key pilot project. The Project Pathway team, comprising two local authorities and two private sector suppliers, has launched the UK's first compliant public services network (PSN). Project Pathway involved Hampshire and Kent county councils, Global Crossing, Virgin Media Business and the Cabinet Office's pan-government PSN team.

PSN aims to improve telecommunications efficiency public sector-wide by sharing infrastructure, establishing and improving methods for procuring networks and services that use them, and realising savings through a common approach. Kent and Hampshire have already saved some £4.7m in a year by aggregating council and education networks.

'Freemium' potential model for public data charges

A 'freemium' service is emerging as a likely business model for opening up the national resources of public sector information for re-use, UKauthorITy understands. Basic data would be offered for free, but more sophisticated services would be charged for. It is one of three business models proposed for the new Public Data Corporation (PDC) in a consultation published last month by the Cabinet Office. The other two are: maintaining the status quo, but with a commitment to make more data available for free; and harmonisation, putting a single price on all chargeable information falling within a government organisation's 'public task'. All three options suggest that the government intends to continue earning revenue from information - especially to compensate for the extra cost of making more raw datasets free.

Consultation: <http://bit.ly/o0Rio0>

NHS tries again with electronic clinical language

The Department of Health now expects clinicians in England to use the SNOMED CT system of encoding medical language, finally replacing Read Codes - which are widely used in UK general practice but little elsewhere. The Information Standards Board for Health and Social Care has approved SNOMED as "a fundamental standard" and notified all NHS organisations, independent providers and information system suppliers of the need to use SNOMED CT when providing care. The coding system is already used in centrally run services such as Choose and Book and Summary Care Records (SCRs). Its adoption across the NHS should help the exchange of information and enable the creation of more accurate measures of outcomes - a critical part of the government's reforms for the NHS in England. The intention to replace the Read system is not new: seven years ago, the former NHS Information Authority announced plans to replace Read by 2006. However, like many predictions made in the early phase of the NHS National Programme for IT, that proved wildly optimistic.

Human rights commission champions data protection

The government urgently needs to overhaul its data protection regime as it is "deeply flawed", according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

In its report 'Protecting Information Privacy', the watchdog says that current privacy law is failing to stop breaches of personal data privacy and is not keeping pace with the rapid growth in personal data collection. Organisations may be unaware that they are breaking the law as the complexity of the legal framework means their obligations are unclear, the report claims. It also finds that it is difficult for people to know what information is held on them, by which government agency or private sector body, or how it is used. For example, it would be very difficult for someone to find which organisations hold CCTV footage of them. The report says that the government should:

- Streamline current legislation on information privacy so that it is easier for organisations to understand their responsibilities and for citizens to know their rights;
- Ensure public bodies comply with the current data protection and RIPA regimes, in addition to the Human Rights Act;
- Ensure all requests for personal data are justified and proportionate.

www.equalityhumanrights.com

EMPLOYEE-LED MUTUALS 'OPEN TO EU CHALLENGE': Government proposals to let employee-led mutuals take on the running of public services prior to opening them up to full competition could fall foul of EU procurement law, warns Sureyya Cansoy, director of public sector at technology industry association, Intellect. In the UK government's recent response to the European Commission green paper on the modernisation of EU public procurement policy (<http://bit.ly/pqKJ2h>), it urged that "the revised Directives should make clear that, in circumstances such as the development of employee-led organisations/mutuals, employees should be able to gain experience of running public services for a period of, for instance, three years, prior to full and open competition". However, said Cansoy, "I assume it would take a good couple of years for all members states to agree on an amended directive. So if the UK government is making a proposal around mutuals now, what will they do in the meantime? Will they use the fact they are making this proposal to the EU as a justification for pressing ahead now, and if they do that, will they be breaking the EU procurement laws and will they be challenged?" Intellect supports many of the elements in the government's response to the EU consultation, Cansoy said, including a call to "substantially" raise the threshold over which goods and services have to go through the full EU procurement process.

Audit concerns over Welsh government IT costs



The budget for the Welsh government's 10-year £220m Merlin IT contract overspent by £50m in the first seven years, according to an investigation by the auditor general. While the auditor's report finds the contract to provide ICT to the Welsh government and the National Assembly for Wales is delivering core ICT services effectively, "overall value for money of services is uncertain", it states. The report raps the Welsh government which it says has "not monitored effectively the costs and value for money of services delivered under the contract". The Merlin contract, with a consortium led by Siemens, began in April 2004.

www.wao.gov.uk

GDS: Digital Party Like it's 1999

Comment: Michael Cross talks to Mike Bracken about the seismic changes heading towards government's digital estate.



In the Government Digital Service (GDS), it's like 1999 all over again. There's a definite sense of new-term excitement as a fresh and optimistic team takes on the challenges of the e-government agenda. There's also a sense that things are going to happen. While the coalition's programme to make public services "digital by default" lacks the eye-catching immediacy of the targets Labour set for the old Office of the e-Envoy, it has stronger political backing - and a considerably stronger business case.

The head of the programme, Mike Bracken, took over as "executive director of digital" on July 5. He explains that he has five sets of responsibilities:

- Directgov, now back in the Cabinet Office after its perambulations through the Central Office of Information and Department for Work and Pensions.
- Beta-gov, the working name for the new transactional website due to emerge from work on the single government domain.
- Digital engagement.
- The innovation team, previously known as the government skunkworks.
- ID assurance; creating a market in systems for secure electronic sign-ins.

Although formally created in April, the Government Digital Service begins work in earnest as a team this month, when its disparate elements move into new accommodation under one roof. Bracken says that the new HQ will be in a government building "close to Whitehall but not in it".

The new establishment can expect a certain amount of attention from organisations such as the Taxpayers' Alliance, and their friends in the daily press. Bracken enthuses about being able to lure in some "top flight developers" from the private sector (he himself joined from The Guardian) but stresses that the total headcount of "easily less than 2,000" will be less than that of the teams merged into the new service. The team will not have static numbers, but will change as it transforms government services. "It will scale depending on what we're working on at any one time," Bracken says.

He explains "digital by default" as "a culture change, to think digitally first". It will involve redesigning government transactions from scratch, rather than merely reproducing paper processes in digital media. A particular focus is user-centricity, a field in which public sector web services still lag dismally behind the commercial world, he says. "When you apply online for a driving licence, the final frame of the process asks 'Do you want to apply for a driving licence?' - and you've just done that!" The new catch-phrase will be e-government services created "with you, for you and by you", he says.

The main focus of transformation will be with the beta-gov team, which will pick processes from across (central) government and bring them in for transformation. Bracken says he will be starting with transactions where there is a very seasonal demand, such as applications for student loans, and on those with high non completion rates. The first fruits will be visible next year, he says.

That may not be soon enough for some critics of the government's overall ICT strategy, which appears to be in danger of losing momentum. An assessment of the first six months' progress, from analysts TechMarketView, describes progress as "slow and steady". But research director, Georgina O'Toole, points out that almost all progress so far has been on the easy parts - centrally directed policy statements such as centralising oversight, simplification of the procurement process and introducing a presumption against large unwieldy projects.

After these "easy wins" the government is struggling to move to the next phase, of agreement on technology and data standards, "disintermediation" of large IT deals and rationalising the number of data centres.

A big uncertainty is the speed in which government ICT moves to the 'cloud', under the G-Cloud project being run from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). However Martin Bellamy, director of change and ICT at the MoJ, assured a conference last month that the project is still "alive and kicking."

O'Toole says she detects a welcome change of emphasis in the programme. "A sense of pragmatism seems to be finally entering the Cabinet Office Team's thinking. The efficiency and reform group has taken time to reflect on the end game and is now focusing on changes to commercials and methods of procurement rather than on the next sassy technology.

"Basically, this means adopting a Cloud commercial model with legacy IT; indeed suppliers have been doing this for years through financial engineering," O'Toole says.

"This realisation takes some of the emphasis away from moving UK Government ICT onto the latest technology platforms. Instead, the emphasis is being placed far more on methods of procurement and the legalities involved. The Cabinet Office procurement teams are now very much at the fore."

As usual, local government is taking a lead. Warwickshire County Council announced last month that it is to adopt Google' Gmail as its primary email service in a first step on a route to the G-Cloud. The 100 staff selected to test the product will also have access to other Google apps such as Google Docs and Google Chat. The council claims the move will save £250,000 a year.

However history has shown that one council's innovation does not necessarily permeate the entire public sector. The TechMarketView analysis concludes: "We question whether UK government has the capacity to accelerate the implementation of the ICT strategy into the all-important transformational phase. CIOs continue to work against the backdrop of a relatively unchanging political landscape where political, cultural, legal and economic barriers to change remain. Bureaucracy remains a feature, the nature of politics means that short-termism often dictates (but that means projects with longer timescales are left on the back-burner), and 'horizontal government' (as opposed to the existing vertical silos) requires a significant step-change in culture."

The new-term optimism of the Government Digital Service is in for a severe test.

Joint Effort Will Reap Rewards

It might be a difficult path to start, but following the shared services road will reap rewards, finds Dan Jellinek.



UK public bodies are encountering many barriers on the road to sharing more services with each other and with partners in other sectors, from problems integrating technology systems to staff fear of job losses, according to new research due to be published later this month by Informed Publications in partnership with Capita and the Society of IT Management (Socitm).

But the potential rewards are worth the effort, with some shared services projects already achieving savings into the millions, the research finds.

The study explores three key areas: the range of models that exist for shared services and how organisations decide which to choose; the use of technology as an enabler, for example with sharing of a common ICT infrastructure; and the human factor – how to build a culture of trust that is the most important bedrock for joint service delivery.

As one might expect in the current climate, cutting costs was cited as by far the most significant reason why organisations are sharing or looking to share their services, with three out of every five respondents (60.4%) strongly agreeing and a further third (33.8%) agreeing that sharing services is an opportunity to cut costs. The main other perceived opportunities were to improve service quality (43.4% agree; 31.4% strongly agree); to boost innovation (44.6% agree; 30.2% strongly agree) and to radically redesign service delivery (42.6% agree; 30.6% strongly agree).

Comments from respondents elaborating on the reasons for sharing services included “provides us as a small authority with better procurement opportunity”. One gung-ho respondent even suggested completely merging local authorities to leave around 100 UK-wide compared with the current 433. However a small minority of 5.1% agreed or strongly agreed that shared services “has no benefit for our authority”.

As for which services are shared or planned to be shared, the largest area of established sharing is in waste/recycling/street cleansing services, with almost half (47.5%)

already sharing services. This was followed by procurement (26.3%); and ICT – technical support (26.1%); with other aspects of ICT services and human resources/payroll also featuring highly. These services also ranked highly among those where shared services are planned. Bringing up the rear were plans for sharing library services (47.3% - no plans to share, 8.4% already share) and housing (44.4% - no plans, 9.2% already share).

Almost one in five (18.1%) say that their organisation already shares a chief information officer (CIO) or head of IT, with a further 6.7% in the process of implementing sharing and 9.6% planning to do so - although 38.7% have no plans in this direction.

As for shared service models, less formal arrangements such as joint working with shared costs (30.0%); information joint working or support arrangements (29.6%) and joint venture between public sector partners (27.0%) scored highest among those with projects already established. Outsourcing (18.9%), shared commissioning (18.7%) and joint venture with a private sector partner (16.1%) were all of significant interest. Currently least popular options included: charity (6.9%); social enterprise (4.3%); community interest company (1.3%) and mutual co-operative (1.0%). However many did not know if such models would be used in future, suggesting plenty of scope for expansion.

Almost nine out of 10 respondents (87.8%) either agreed or strongly agreed that “technology enables shared services”. On the other hand some 25% agreed with the statement that “technology is a barrier to progress”, suggesting that many respondents feel technology can be both an enabler and a barrier, perhaps depending on the service or model under consideration.

In terms of quantifying savings from sharing services, the larger proportions of respondents estimated or predicted savings at the lower end of the scale (though still not to be sniffed at), with 34.2% estimating that savings of less than £100,000 had already been made; 31.0% estimated realised savings of £100,001-£500,000; and 19.3% of savings



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between £500,001-£2m. Others reported even higher estimates, including 5.9% who had already saved an estimated £10m-plus (these organisations were, without exception, the larger local authorities or central government departments). On the whole, slightly higher estimates were made in each case for savings expected in the three to six year timescale. Indeed, 57.2% of respondents do not predict a return on investment (ROI) for shared services inside five years, with just 12.3% predicting ROI inside 12 months.

The biggest single barrier to implementing shared services, and achieving all those savings, was the fear of job losses within organisations, the survey found (average score 2.2 on a scale of 1-3). Suggested ways of overcoming this included implementation of voluntary redundancy instead of compulsory, and all the usual essential ingredients of culture change – strong leadership, good communication and building trust – were prominent among organisational elements considered essential for success.

In the end, it is hard to beat success itself to convince everyone in the organisation that a change is worthwhile. “Many of the barriers disappear as a result of delivering a better service,” as one respondent put it. “Actions speak louder than words.”

Culture club

Some 479 senior directors and officers from 310 organisations spanning the whole UK public sector – nearly one in five of all major UK public bodies – participated in the research. The largest response came from local government, followed by central government, health and emergency services.

More than a fifth of survey respondents (22%) were categorised as ‘level 1’ in seniority, including chief executives and heads of department; 58% were level 2 – senior officers and managers – with the remaining 20% categorised as level 3. Just over a quarter of respondents (27.1%) had an IT role, with the rest fairly evenly spread across other functions.

Taken together, these figures show the study is one of the most comprehensive of its kind ever conducted.

‘The first steps: building a culture of trust to deliver shared services’ is published by Informed Publications in October. To request a copy email: shared@ukauthority.com

By the Power of Skunk & Innovation

Up to now, government IT projects have tended to be characterised by the word "big"; Mark O'Neill, 'Head of Skunkworks', told Helen Olsen as he joined July's ITU Live panel.

"Projects are big, timescales are big, costs are big. The suppliers we work with to deliver these are big. Unfortunately, the one area where 'big' doesn't always apply is benefits," said O'Neill.

Now more mundanely known as head of innovation and delivery at the Cabinet Office, O'Neill said that his new team aims to seek out, test and deliver smaller, leaner IT solutions across government more quickly, more cheaply, in a way which is modular, reusable and which works with the widest possible range of suppliers including smaller businesses (SMEs).

Alan Banks, managing director of Adobe UK, agreed that a move towards quicker, lower cost development cycles is a "hugely good idea", and one which commercial organisations had already embraced for some time.

"My question is whether you have responsibility without authority," Banks said. "The reason government struggles to deliver innovation and agility is that it is so hidebound and process-bound, so highly governed... so for instance the security legislation and standards that central government has to adhere to on desktop computer systems pushes costs up by 10%-20%."

However O'Neill said his unit did have a measure of authority. "We do have a stick - the skunk stick. We are tied in with the Cabinet Office ERG (Efficiency and Reform Group) approval process for all major IT projects."

This gives his unit the right to challenge the structure of any major government IT project being proposed by asking two simple questions: "First, 'What is it you want to do?' And second - 'Why do you want to do it that way?'"

"Asking those simple questions allows us to focus on the outcome, rather than getting bogged down in how we're going to deliver it, and allows us to focus on breaking down some of the massive projects into components that are easier to share, and where there is a wider opportunity for market engagement."

"So we're not just forced to speak to a small number of suppliers because a project is so

vast; we can talk to a much wider ecosystem," he added.

The skunk stick has already been wielded to the public good, O'Neill said. Although he could not divulge details, "It's probably saved us about £40 million so far by asking those two questions. They should be simple to answer -if you're doing something and can't set out what you want to achieve, and why you want to do it in this particular way, then you've probably got some more fundamental problems underneath it."

He acknowledged that any move to make denizens of Whitehall more agile would involve a slow, tricky programme of culture change and business change, but said it would be a continuous process, evolving over time: "To make these things happen we need to bring people along, and I don't underestimate the size or scale of that challenge."

It is worthwhile to try to open up the government IT market, Banks said, but the 'elephant in the room' was public procurement law that meant that, however innovative a conversation was between public and private sector, the moment anything is to be purchased it must be thrown open to competition.

"It can cost us hundreds of thousands of pounds to show you how we can help you innovate. But as soon as you get to that point where exchange of value happens, where I start making some money back from my investments, it goes into the open market, it's published in the EU journals, everyone has a chance to offer those services at the lowest price, so therefore I very rarely engage with those processes in government."

SMEs suffer the worst, said Banks, because they cannot afford to engage at all. "Small leading-edge enterprises don't have lots of money."

O'Neill agreed that more ways needed to be found for government to engage with the private sector, such as joint venture or partnership activities, but he said that there was also a need for government to ensure that the technologies it buys are robust and stable. "I want to make sure that we can maximise benefits for all parties while minimising expenses and overheads... but there



is an issue for us about building maturity into the process."

One answer, suggested the panel, could be to run technology challenges where the winners go straight into an 'app shop' for purchase by public bodies, working a bit like the current 'PQQ' (pre-qualification questionnaire) stage of the procurement process.

Two other fundamental building blocks to embed agile processes across the public sector are the use of open standards and the use of appropriate software licensing models that will allow reuse, O'Neill said. "That is not always to say open source is the right licence, but if we are building things for reuse, we need to build them for reuse, not suddenly say 'oh, we need another licence'."

The innovation team itself would be creating technologies for reuse under open source licences, he said. "We are about delivery - we are building code, developing things, putting stuff out there for reuse, because that's what makes the difference. [And] everything the skunkworks itself delivers will be open source. Everything which is delivered through us will at the very least be open standards."

There are major cost savings to be made in the public sector from using open standards and open source technologies, Banks said, but there are also de facto standards in widespread use that should not be overlooked. For example Flash is a de facto standard rather than an open standard, he said, "but it's on 98% of all connected PCs."

Although the innovation team would start off by focusing on central government, its remit is the whole public sector, from central government to health, emergency services, local government and others, O'Neill said. "It's a completely open organisation. If people have got a process that works, a process that delivers value, I want to know about it."

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Summer of Love Draws to an End

What with recalls to tackle rioting and the upper hand in the phone hacking crisis, MPs have had a lively summer. Who knows, writes Tim Hampson, they may soon even rise back above bankers in the popularity stakes.



MPs have had a lively summer. The twin crises of phone hacking at News International and rioting on England's city centre streets have made them felt needed again.

As one Tory MP from the shires quipped in the Strangers Bar at the start of this autumn session: "For most of this year we've been less popular than the bankers, but people are now listening to us."

So MPs have a new spring in their step, and they find they have a new enemy to get to grips with too – social media.

One of the issues surrounding the trouble on the streets was the use of mobile phones and other handheld devices. Facebook, texting and BlackBerry Messenger in particular were widely cited as being used by young people to organise criminal activity.

As a result prime minister, David Cameron, suggested a social media "shut off" during times of national crisis.

Speaking in a recalled House of Commons packed with MPs returned more or less eagerly from their holidays last month, Cameron said: "Everyone watching these horrific actions will be struck by how they were organised via social media.

"Free flow of information can be used for good. But it can also be used for ill. We are working with the police, the intelligence services and industry to look at whether it would be right to stop people communicating via these websites and services when we know they are plotting violence, disorder and criminality."

Hyper-tweeter Louise Mensch, Tory MP for Corby and East Northamptonshire, gave her backing for a temporary block of activity on social media sites in times of national emergency – on Twitter.

Mensch was concerned the Northamptonshire Police had much of their time and resources wasted answering false alarms due to social media rumours.

She said: "I don't have a problem with a brief temporary shutdown of social media just as

I don't have a problem with a brief road or rail closure.

"If short, necessary and only used in an emergency, so what? We'd all survive if Twitter shut down for a short while during major riots."

In a further message, she said: "Twitter regularly down for maintenance, and if in a major national emergency police think Twitter and FB should take an hour off? So be it."

The police also expressed support for the idea of closing down social network sites. Asked about Twitter's role during the violence in London, the then Metropolitan Police acting commissioner, Tim Godwin, told the Home Affairs Select Committee that he had contemplated seeking the authority to switch it off.

However, he conceded it probably wouldn't be legal to do so and that "it is also a very useful intelligence asset".

Accordingly, Cameron appeared to be warming to the idea of a temporary ban on social media in future emergencies and told MPs that the home secretary, Theresa May, would be speaking to the companies who run the social media networks and police to establish how to prevent the net being used as a tool for troublemakers.

Facebook, BlackBerry and Twitter were invited to attend. But by the time the meeting took place, a cold blast of reality had replaced the heat of riot rhetoric. Closing social media sites and shutting down private networks such as used by BlackBerry wasn't that easy or desirable, let alone legal, we began to hear.

Critics warned that by shutting down social media, the UK would be stomping in the boot prints of China, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Ten human rights groups warned that hasty measures to limit access to social networks and communications could lead to abuse. In a letter to the home secretary, they said they were concerned that new measures, made in good faith but in a heated political environment, could overextend powers in ways that would be susceptible to abuse, restrict

legitimate, free communication and expression and undermine people's privacy.

Jim Killock of the Open Rights Group said that powers targeting individuals could easily lead to abuse: "Blocking people's communications could do more harm than good. People may be put in danger and efforts to stop rioting and damage might well be disrupted."

And so the mood shifted, and after the meeting with Facebook et al, a Home Office spokeswoman said that the government "did not seek any additional powers to close down social media networks".

Social networks were even praised for how they had helped following the incidents, with clean-up campaigns in London and Manchester organised using social media.

Facebook pointed out that while some users did attempt to incite violence, more users stood up to them by reporting their comments to authorities. Moreover, two Facebook users who encouraged rioters to destroy their local towns on the social networking site were jailed for four years.

Meanwhile, another website is causing a major outbreak of social disorder in the corridors of Westminster in the form of www.sexymp.co.uk, a free game released as a publicity stunt for a digital media agency. Surfers pick which MP they would rather 'do', out of a random choice of two, with (at time of writing) most desirable female elected as Charlotte Leslie (Conservative, Bristol North West) and most desirable male Dominic Raab (Conservative, Esher and Walton).

The site's creator, 22-year-old reality TV star and entrepreneur Francis Boule, said: "I thought it would be an interesting opportunity to hold the first ever parliamentary beauty contest and find out once and for all which MPs and parties have the most sex-appeal. Although I fully expect this to offend some people, this was never my intention."

As to explaining the difference between fully expecting and never intending, Boule may have to take a few lessons in double-speak from our newly invigorated politicians.

SMART PARKING REMINDERS: PayByPhone has announced a new smartphone app for iPhone, BlackBerry and Android phones. After completing a once-only simple registration, motorists enter the location number, choose how much time they need, and PayByPhone handles the rest. The app shows on a Google map where the car is parked and users can receive text reminders before their parking expires. The app can be used anywhere. PayByPhone is the official parking provider for areas including the City of Westminster, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, York, and the London Boroughs of Barnet, Islington and Tower Hamlets.
<https://paybyphone.co.uk>

GAZETTEER ACOLADE FOR ACOLAID: Idox Group says it is the first supplier whose digital mapping systems have been accepted by GeoPlace as conforming to the new DTF 7.3 v3.1 format for national gazetteer data. GeoPlace is a joint venture between the Local Government Group and Ordnance Survey, and has required all councils in England and Wales to submit local land and property gazetteer (LLPG) data to it by 30 September. Acceptance by GeoPlace will now allow all 180 Idox English and Welsh gazetteer customers of its Acolaid and Uniform products to upgrade their systems and submit files before the deadline.
<http://www.idoxgroup.com>

BROWSE BARNSELY BROADBAND: A free, wireless broadband network has gone live in Barnsley town centre, enabling local businesses and residents to browse the internet on enabled devices. This follows a six-month collaboration between Barnsley Council and AWTG. The partners have also been working with ask4, an internet service provider (ISP) involved in the Digital Region project that has been tasked with monitoring and running the infrastructure. www.awtg.co.uk

Online platform waits for train problems

A website combining reporting of public transport problems with tracking of responses from operators and online campaigns for change has been launched by online democracy group, mySociety, in one of its most ambitious projects to date. FixMyTransport, launched in a beta or trial version, is in its own words "targeted specifically at smaller problems such as persistently broken ticket machines, buses that always leave early, or silly rules that appear to do nothing but create inconvenience for travellers."

Some 18 months in construction, the scale of the project was swollen by the need to build in several public transport datasets of transport stops, stations, routes and journeys including the National Public Transport Gazetteer (NPTG) and the National Public Transport Data Repository (NPTDR). Duplication is avoided by a feature whereby anyone entering a problem is alerted if a comment has already been made about the same service.



The site is inviting people to develop versions for their own area or region, with its open source code released for free adaptation. However developers say they would like anyone planning on developing a local version to contact them and develop the service in liaison with the original.
www.fixmytransport.com

Police urged to use 'Amazon style' procurement hub

All 43 police authorities in England and Wales will soon have access to an 'Amazon-Style' online procurement portal.

Lincolnshire Police is the first force to use the new National Police Procurement Hub, developed by National Police Improvement Agency to give the police service the ability to select, purchase and pay for a range of approved goods and services online from 500 suppliers. It will enable Lincolnshire to buy items such as IT, body armour, vehicles and a whole range of other goods and services.



IT procurement supplier, ProcServe, is providing the technology, and all forces are expected to be subscribed to the hub by June 2012. A phased implementation over six years will target savings totalling up to £30m. The Association of Chief Police Officers is backing the initiative saying that it harnesses the buying power of the police service in order to lower costs, improve supplier relationships whilst realising greater efficiency in billing and processing transactions. David Horne, the project's senior responsible officer, and former chair of ACPO's procurement portfolio, said the move was a big step forward to deliver yet more savings, as well as better support for the service's operational requirements.

PARTNERS TARGET £5BN HOUSING FRAUD: Civica and Experian are combining some of their data systems in an attempt to fight social housing fraud in the UK. The Tenancy Verification Service uses data matching and risk profiling to identify high certainties of social housing fraud, which can then be followed up and investigated. The companies say Experian's data assets and analytics combined with Civica's systems and processes will help tackle the estimated 50,000 council homes illegally sub-let or occupied in the UK at a cost to the taxpayer of £5bn a year.
www.civica.co.uk

MOBILE FINGERPRINTS ROLL OUT: New mobile fingerprinting devices have been deployed across 25 police forces. The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) has rolled out the technology – developed by biometric identification

solutions provider Cogent Systems – to divisions including City of London Police, Kent Police, Lancashire Constabulary, Hampshire Constabulary and the British Transport Police. The service, MobileID, enables officers to check an individual's fingerprints against the national database while on patrol. Benefits of this new system include the identification of dead or unconscious victims at the scene of a crime or accident, saving on average around 30 minutes per case. www.cogentsystems.com

CLASSIFIED CLOUD DATA: Huddle has joined forces with FCO Services – the trading arm of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office – to launch Huddle IL3, which will enable public sector organisations to collaborate securely on data in the cloud classified as impact level 3 (restricted). The first SaaS application to be launched on FCO Services' Government Secure Application Environment (GSAE) cloud infrastructure, Huddle IL3 will enable office-based, remote workers and teams across government to access and distribute content up to IL3 with the appropriate security measures and accreditation.
www.huddle.com

LONG-TERM PREDICTIONS FOR CITIES: IBM has introduced new analytics software and services to help cities predict the results of policy decisions and their positive and negative consequences up to 25 years into the future. System Dynamics for Smarter Cities is designed to help politicians and managers reduce the unintended negative consequences of municipal actions on citizens, as well as uncover hidden beneficial relationships of the policies. "A more thorough understanding of how policies affect each other over time will enable officials to reduce or avoid negative results before they happen," said Michael Littlejohn, vice president of Strategy for Smarter Cities at IBM.
www.ibm.com/uk/SmarterCities

HEALTH

EAST LONDON NHS FOUNDATION TRUST has invested in a new fibre optic network from Virgin Media Business to connect 50 of its sites. In doing so it has increased speeds for its desktop users fivefold to an average of 10 Mbps. It replaces a system that had proved expensive to run and where outages lasting days were not uncommon.

GATESHEAD HEALTH NHS FOUNDATION TRUST is using SMART for its staff e-rostering and time and attendance solutions. To date, the trust has rolled out the Time and Attendance (T&A) solution to around 2,000 clinical and non-clinical staff. The e-rostering solution, integrated with T&A, has gone live across 20 wards and is expected to be fully deployed by August 2012. Upon completion of the project, SMART solutions will support the trust's 3,500-strong workforce.

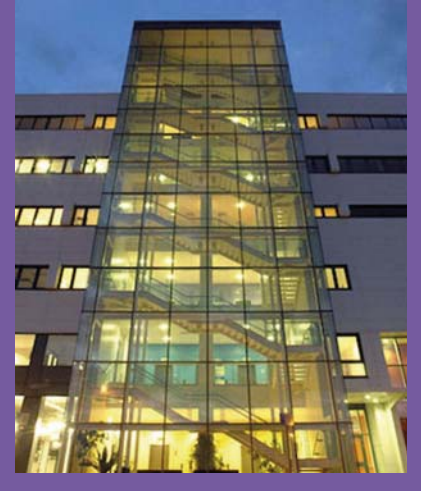
HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE has contracted English Newborn Hearing Screening Programme Centre and Northgate to provide a newborn hearing screening service in Ireland. The two year deal, which comes with the possibility of a further extension for a year, builds on Northgate's and the NHSP's long track record in both infant and adult screening in the UK. Once completed, Northgate will be screening over 17,000 babies per year at hospitals in Cork, Wexford, Waterford, Tíre, Kilkenny and Tipperary.

LANCASHIRE AND CUMBRIA NHS PRIMARY CARE TRUSTS are using a telehealth project to allow doctors to remotely assess people who have suffered a loss of brain function in their home. The PCTs have signed Virgin Media Business to provide a high-speed fibre optic network for this purpose at an estimated set-up cost of £250,000. This will include the delivery of an internet protocol virtual private network, which will support the high definition video and audio.

NHS SCOTLAND has confirmed purchase of a single sign-on and password reset solution to improve access to health systems, increase productivity and enhance data security for health workers across Scotland. The solution from Imprivata will provide No Click Access to the many patient systems that run in hospitals and health communities across Scotland. The agreement was procured through value added reseller, Trustmarque Solutions, and will be facilitated via a partnership between Imprivata and Northgate Managed Services.

SOUTH WEST STRATEGIC HEALTH AUTHORITY AND NHS SOUTH WEST PCT Clusters have extended their contract for a further two years with MedeAnalytics. The performance network programme provides 13 PCTs with access to web-based analytics and reporting and provides an educational stream of thought leadership articles, web-based discussion forums and seminars to disseminate best practice.

OXFORD RADCLIFFE HOSPITALS NHS TRUST has completed a deal for Veeam's Backup & Replication software. The trust currently maintains three data centres, containing 168 physical servers and 217 virtual servers. It has a core IT team of 100, who are responsible for all management tasks even as the virtual infrastructure expands beyond these machines. The trust has virtualised a variety of Microsoft and other applications, including many critical clinical applications and SQL Server databases.



TEES, ESK AND WEAR VALLEYS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST has invested in a business intelligence and data warehousing solution from Advanced Business Solutions. The five-year, £4.3m agreement comprises IBM's Cognos and Infosphere software and ABS' own software systems. The integrated information centre will be delivered as a fully managed service by ABS' sister company, Advanced 365. This will include provision of overnight loading of new data from Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys' data repositories and 24/7 service desk support.

TRAFFORD HEALTHCARE NHS TRUST has deployed InterSystems' Ensemble to connect 14 clinical departmental systems. Ensemble is a seamless platform for integration and the development of connectable applications and is being used by Trafford to enable information to flow between departments and systems.

UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS OF LEICESTER NHS TRUST is tendering for a £14m managed telecommunications services contract. The trust hopes that the five year deal will enable it to put in place a cost effective telecommunications infrastructure, states a notice in the Official Journal of the European Union. In addition to telecommunications services and equipment, the contract will deliver mobile phones, networks and a wide area network. Telephone, internet and television services for patients will also be provided as part of the deal.

SHARED SERVICES



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CORNWALL COUNCIL AND FOUR LOCAL NHS TRUSTS have published a pre-tender for various shared services, covering areas including IT infrastructure and devices, document management, helpdesk and consultancy services. According to a notice, the council is looking for a 10-year contract in partnership with local health organisations including Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust and community health organisations. The council says it is looking for a private sector company or a consortium to deliver the services and "to make substantial investment within public sector services of Cornwall".

HEREFORDSHIRE NHS AND HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL have embarked on a shared services agreement for Microsoft products. Working with Trustmarque Solutions, the organisations will realise a combined cost avoidance of its Microsoft licensing model in the region of £1m over six years. As a result, the partnership has avoided large reinvestment and upgrade costs across the board, and it now has a licence model that will support flexible working for its partners. The new licence model will also support the future of desktop delivery to the partner organisations.

MID KENT IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP, the shared service comprising Maidstone Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Swale Borough Council, has selected Capita's software services business to support its operation. The five-year contract gives the councils a platform on which to base their shared revenues and benefits operation. It also allows Swale to share the IT without working operationally with the other two councils.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BARKING AND DAGENHAM COUNCIL has signed a joint venture agreement with Agilisys to reform the delivery of its back office and support services. The IT services and outsourcing provider will work with the council for seven years in a jointly owned business known as Elevate East London. About 350 staff from Agilisys and the council have transferred to Elevate East London.

BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL has adopted the Getmapping Integrated Solution (GMIS). The solution helps authorities to save money, extend and improve the use of GIS and mapping across the organisation whilst enhancing data sharing and collaboration. The package also includes an aerial photography update programme.

BURY COUNCIL'S Children's Services has chosen Liquidlogic's PROTOCOL Integrated Children's System. It will provide better management oversight of casework and improve initial response time to referrals by increasing the amount of time social workers can spend with children and families.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILS are the latest authorities to use software from Mayrise to manage their 130,000 street lights, following the award of two new PFI contracts. The contracts, awarded to Balfour Beatty, are valued at £203m and £230m respectively and include the installation of new lighting stock and maintenance for the next 25 years. The MAYRISE street lighting management system will be integrated with remote monitoring technology to allow automatic dimming of street lights and signs and improved asset management.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL has now transferred its IT and facilities management services into LGSS, the shared service operated by Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire County Councils. The move will save Cambridgeshire County Council almost £3.6m over the next four years on the cost of providing these services. The two councils launched LGSS in October last year to share business services such as HR, legal services, internal audit and finance. To date the shared service has banked £11m of savings for the two authorities.

CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL has claimed a further £20,000 worth of efficiency savings just one year after signing a five-year contract with Capita. The contract, for the administration of housing and council tax benefits claims, has seen the time taken to process new claims more than halve from 44 to 17 days. Overall processing time for all claims has reduced from 14 to nine days.

CORNWALL COUNCIL is improving customer service to revenues and benefits claimants across the county with a £170,000 EDM and Workflow platform from Civica. The product

TRANSPORT

READING BUSES is using Freeway fleet management software to keep its low-emission fleet at full strength. The software manages stock automatically and allows Reading Buses to save money on parts as it only pays for what it uses, with the system recording accurate usage. Freeway also integrates with Reading Buses' Triscan fuel management software so that a complete picture of the total running costs per mile for each make and model is available for the entire fleet.

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON AND GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY have signed a five-year enterprise agreement with Asite for the use of its collaborative software as a service platform (cSaaS). The technology will provide TfL and the GLA with a single integrated data management solution for all aspects of the contract administration process across their significant ongoing portfolio of construction and facilities management works. TfL staff as well as their entire construction supply chain will use Asite's Contract Administration applications to manage contract change and to provide real-time visibility of their actual schedule and cost position against budget.



will speed up revenues and benefits processing with one single platform for scanning and administration of the 3,000 documents and communications received every day.

MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL has started the roll out of personal digital assistants (PDAs) to builders, electricians, plumbers, joiners and other tradespeople in a bid to create a better system for repairing and improving tenants' homes. A software system which sends details of each job directly to a worker's PDA has been installed at the local authority. It also allows jobs to be monitored in real-time as workers send and receive updates through their devices. Midlothian hopes that the project will help it to save more than £1.4m over the next five years.

PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL has decided to use a combined solution using Liquidlogic's PROTOCOL Integrated Children's System (ICS) alongside its education system as part of a concerted move towards a more collaborative approach to children's social care. The new systems will get data feeds from schools and other agencies to provide an updated view of a child's care requirements.

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL is to implement Microsoft Lync, the next-generation Unified Communications system, which represents the largest non-Microsoft delivered deployment of the system in the UK to date. The NEC-installed implementation will reduce the council's current ICT maintenance and operating costs to enable flexible working and support improved communications across the entire estate.

POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL is the first Welsh authority to implement a Welsh language recruitment system that is integrated with its HR and payroll system. Applicants can search the council's website for job

openings, read supporting recruitment information, and apply for roles – all online and in their first language.

SOUTH LAKELAND DISTRICT COUNCIL is employing Meantime software to streamline procurement procedures and cut the time spent on administration. The bespoke software, which will cost £4,000 to create and install, replaces the council's paper-based procurement toolkit with a more efficient and user-friendly interactive online system. Officers will be encouraged to use the new system for all council purchases over £2,500.

STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL has chosen Capita's SIMS and One management information systems for its children's services. The 10-year contract was awarded to Capita following a rigorous two year tender process which included visits to existing Capita customers to see firsthand how SIMS and One were being used to drive improvement in schools and across local authorities.

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL has bought ADP's Aspire CRM. The latest version of the system will be deployed as part of the alliance's initiative to make savings through shared services with High Peak Council. Savings from the deployment will help protect vital council services that were under financial pressure because of major reductions in government funding.

SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL has contracted BT for a network that will enable the council to offer higher levels of service to its customers, while generating savings across all city council services. Over the next 10 years BT will deliver a corporate net-buildings. The company is also investing in Sunderland via a strategic contact centre and its work with University of Sunderland Business Faculty.

EDUCATION

CORNWALL COLLEGE is implementing a financial management system with integrated budgeting, forecasting and planning functionality from Advanced Business Solutions. The package, which also comprises integrated cash flow forecasting, workflow and document imaging software, will cut the time taken to budget and forecast and enable the electronic circulation of 100,000 documents. The planned go live of the new ABS system is Q1 2012.

FREE SCHOOL NORWICH, which opened its doors this term, is using Cloud-based ICT support from Civica. The school is directly funded by the Department for Education rather than the local LEA and will open six days a week, 51 weeks a year. By setting up its 'Our Cloud' cloud-based ICT – which is based on Civica's CloudBase computing platform – the school can stage lessons that can be delivered at local sites like theatres, museums and even outdoors. Timetables and homework tasks set are all accessible by parents at any time from any computer or device.

GRACE ACADEMY, a charitable education trust running three specialist business and enterprise academies across the West Midlands, has appointed Civica for the delivery of managed service ICT provision. The academy is sponsored by the Grace Foundation, a registered charity established by Lord Edmiston, chairman of the IM Group. The agreement, which begins in September, will cover its three

SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY has selected Spendvision to automate its expense management. The university has a wide range of suppliers, and uses around 350 purchasing cards for low-value, high-volume transactions across the organisation. However the manual process that was previously in place for recording and managing these transactions was time-consuming and prone to inaccuracy. In response, the university decided to automate the process to help improve efficiency and optimise spending.



academies and an administration site, providing a top class ICT support platform to underpin best practice teaching and personal development in a modern environment.

LONDON SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY has selected Spendvision's expense management platform to automate the process of reconciling purchasing card and lodge card transactions. The solution will offer a user-friendly system to engage cardholders and reduce the time it currently takes for staff to code and approve card transactions.

MALCOLM ARNOLD ACADEMY in Northampton is to benefit from a new ICT service and change management programme from Northgate Managed Services. The £1.5m contract will enable teachers and students to access the academy's educational resources from any device connected to the internet, at any time, with the implementation of a mix of

technologies such as thin client, virtual desktop, wireless and Northgate's "cloud-based" learning environment, MY-SCHOOL.

POLICE

POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND has contracted Fujitsu for an extension of its contract for the provision and management of its ICT managed services. The three-year extension, worth £19m, takes the contract through to 2016. The new contract offers an additional saving of 15% on current operational ICT costs and extended scope to cover additional applications.

POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND is also centralising information from eight police districts and using advanced analytics software from IBM to help officers more quickly identify and respond to crime trends, reduce incidents and improve data sharing across its 29 policing areas and 80 stations. This improved insight is already helping PSNI identify and manage crime hot spots and reducing the overall recorded crime rates in the region, which are now at their lowest level in more than a decade.

BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE and Blackboard Connect joined forces to deliver a public information campaign during the largest policing operation in the force's history; demonstrations by the English Defence League and Unite Against Fascism in Luton. The initiative enabled the police to reassure the public and maintain control of a potentially inflammatory situation by opening up a live communication channel to residents, shoppers and local businesses. The service enabled police to send text messages to the public, helping them respond to situations in real-time and quell reports of rumoured incidents.

GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE has selected Sabio to implement Workforce Management solution for its Operational Communications Branch. The solution will also support the force with the integration of previously separate resource management teams. The introduction of real-time adherence will also enable the production of more granular contact centre staffing schedules, allowing the force to deliver on its comprehensive customer service level targets. The new Sabio WFM solution replaces Greater Manchester Police's previous Excel-based scheduling system.

FIRE

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE has selected Talend Data Quality to integrate and manage over 100 applications within its IT infrastructure. The implementation of the open source solution will enable the service to dramatically reduce the time taken to compile reports, whilst ensuring the consistency and accuracy of information contained within them.

SOUTH WEST FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES has contracted the Amor Group to improve data management and IT security ahead of a connection to the Public Sector Network. The aim of the programme is to improve community and fire fighter safety through the timely and secure sharing of information between fire and rescue services and their external partners over the PSN. The programme is being supported by funding of £1.1m from SW Councils' Improvement and Efficiency Programme.

TAYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE is using IBM asset management software to assist in automating maintenance and provide real-time information on the equipment critical to the safety of firefighters and the citizens they protect.



The fire and rescue team now has the means to manage, measure and track the entire life cycle of vital equipment, including operational equipment and specialist clothing.

CHESHIRE and DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE services are the latest organisations to select Aligned Assets as the supplier for their gazetteer management systems. Both have chosen Symphony Bluelight, the UK's only gazetteer system built specifically for the emergency services, and compatible with the National Address Gazetteer.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT & AGENCIES

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT has signed a new contract with Kainos Causeway to support its migration to a more flexible and cost-efficient cloud-based open source platform. The contractor provides advisory and maintenance/support services for the OS platform, run in a cloud-based environment. Migrating to the new OS platform has freed the DfT from the annual cost of an enterprise software licence, while the cloud-based hosting environment offers the flexibility and cost efficiency of being able to scale resources up or down in response to peaks and troughs of website usage.

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK & PENSIONS prime contractor, Avanta, has chosen Civica in an IT outsourcing agreement worth over £1m per year. The outsourcer is providing a hosted communications infrastructure and technical support for up to 80 Jobcentre Plus and other DWP offices across the country. This outsourced service is supporting Avanta's operations nationwide, helping people on state benefits to select, train for, obtain and retain employment that is appropriate to their ages and capacities.

DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS (BIS) has appointed Careline Services, in partnership with the Business and Enterprise Group, to provide its new Business Link helpline. The telephone helpline is an important part of the government's new framework of support for businesses. In conjunction with the Businesslink.gov.uk website, the helpline will support small businesses and those starting up to find the information and guidance they need. It will also provide support to businesses that are not currently online.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE has extended its CORMORANT service contract with global security systems specialist, Cassidian, to December 2012. This deployable, modular LAN/WAN voice and data solution was originally delivered to two Royal Signals Units for use at the strategic command level, since when deployment has been expanded to tactical command use by both the Army in Iraq and the Royal Air Force to support operations in Libya and Afghanistan. The contract includes resident Cassidian field engineers, 24/7 technical helpdesk and a dedicated repairs centre.

ENERGY SAVING TRUST is using SFW for a new web-based system to help it manage the delivery side of its Endorsed Advice Service. The Endorsed Advice Service is a tailored programme of training, assessment, monitoring and continuing professional assessment for any organisation delivering energy saving advice to customers. The new system uses Microsoft's SharePoint 2010 technology and is based on its enterprise document management capabilities.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT has signed a four-year, £12m deal with Accenture for the development and management of information technology applications across the institution's operations. The company will provide application development, maintenance and support and will work across the parliament's human resources, finance, logistics and administrative departments. Accenture will analyse, design, build, test and implement new functions and applications as a managed service over the life of the contract.

MELIN HOMES, a provider of affordable homes in south east Wales has awarded a five-year contract to Capita's software services division. Aligning its housing management, direct works and finance divisions will help Melin to create increasingly efficient working processes and streamlined services to the benefit of its residents. The contract will provide direct, secure access to the most recent tenancy information over the internet and a point of contact with access to all customer data in one place.

ANTONINE HOUSING ASSOCIATION has selected Asset4000 from Real Asset Management (RAM) to manage its £12m asset base. Under new rules, from April 2012, housing associations will be obliged to break their assets down into individual components. Anything that is currently deemed replaceable, for example a roof or bathroom, will be considered an individual asset under the new rulings.

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