

Transformational Government

Enabled by technology

Local Government

Delivery experts working in local government have worked up, in their own words, some hypothetical examples that give a glimpse of what may be possible in the future. These scenarios are not policy statements of what will happen: they are illustrations of what might be possible in a simple pragmatic way when the principles of the strategy are delivered. These illustrations simply apply existing technologies to public sector delivery models, rather than trying to stretch the technology too far.

Representatives mandated by customers to deal with a local authority on their behalf will have increasing access to service delivery systems. This will allow immediate resolution of issues.

Amy, an unemployed single parent of two children goes to the local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) office to ask if they can look in to her Rent Allowance entitlement. She has just had her payments stopped and received a repayment demand because they say she is in employment, which she doesn't agree with. Amy is quite distressed and does not have any paperwork with her. The CAB has "official partner status" with Thanwick Council, ensuring it meets security and propriety standards and as a result can access the Council's benefit systems.

The CAB worker, Joyce, finds that the Amy's work details were inputted by the employment service but that subsequent unemployment has only just been registered on the system via the employment service. Discussion confirms that Amy had recently been taken on as a packager at the local telesales warehouse but the job lasted only a short while before she was laid off. Joyce confirms that the Rent Allowance system is set to resume Amy's payments on Friday and accepts

incremental payment of the necessary refund under the CAB's discretion agreed with the Council's finance department. Amy, who had been terribly worried about missing her rent, is much happier.

(b) Specific issues of concern to local communities.

Local authorities as a whole have agreed with the Government a number of 'Shared Priorities'* for action in order to improve the quality of life for large sections of the community. Information & communication technology (ICT) can help by improving communication across neighbourhoods, engaging citizens in selecting and developing ways of resolving issues of concern and offering citizens the possibility of planning collaborative approaches to areas of concern. Included amongst the shared priorities is the need to create safer and stronger communities and improve the environment.

A local resident, Ken Jones, is concerned about the number of local break-ins and consults his Safer Neighbourhood Service via the Thanwick Council website. He saw that the Service could be accessed from his Council's web site when he was

looking up details of local nature walks. He is particularly worried about forced entry through the window by his back door. He has heard this is becoming a common means of access by local burglars. He completes an enquiry form available on the site and sends it off to the Crime Reduction Officer. He then notices that the site contains a map of incidents that have occurred over the past year – he enters his postcode and goes to his neighbourhood. He finds to his surprise that there have been no recorded break-ins through windows or doors at the backs of houses in his area. Only one isolated house which Ken noticed was having a new security system fitted.

Having real information, rather than hearsay, makes Ken much less worried and he begins to wonder if it would be useful to join Neighbourhood Watch, just to keep up to date and help keep an eye on things. It might even help him get support for better lighting on some of the local streets. He clicks on to the registration form.

Barbara has been increasingly concerned about the way our lives seems to be squandering natural resources and generating non-recyclable packaging in alarming quantities. She has decided to make a personal contribution to this problem and has joined a domestic waste composting scheme sponsored by Thanwick Council. She has obtained a recycling container at a reduced price as a result of bulk buying by the Council and has joined the Council's environmental chat room that operates online on Mondays and Thursday from 7.30pm to 9.30pm.

Last week she also joined her neighbourhood focus group and has just received a text requesting views on a proposed tidy neighbourhood scheme. She could wait until she gets home to respond to a similar message that will have reached her PC but she's on the bus with her friend and neighbour, Maureen, so that'll give them something to talk about and she'll text her response after Maureen gets off.

*Notes: The "Shared priorities" consist of seven key social challenges agreed jointly by the Local Government Association (LGA) (on behalf of all local authorities) and Government. These are: raising school standards; improving quality of life for older people, children, young people and families at risk; promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities; creating stronger and safer communities; transforming the environment; meeting local transport needs; promoting the economic vitality of localities.

Providing a significant improvement in quality of life through citizen-focused service delivery forms the basis of the transformation agenda. This is supported by trust founded on greater accountability, encouraging vital citizen engagement in the development and delivery processes. Much of the necessary ICT functionality is already available. It is the wholesale use of this capability to facilitate engagement with the public and create a flexible network of policy-making and service delivery that makes the ICT contribution potentially so powerful.