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Dear Sirs

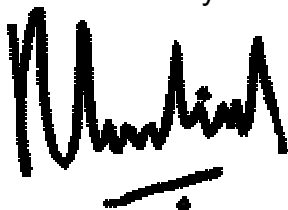
Response to *Transformational Government*

1. I am writing, as Chair and on behalf of the Advisory Panel on Public Sector Information (APPSI), in response to your recent strategy document, *Transformational Government: Enabled by Technology*. My purpose is to offer our initial reaction to the strategy, to introduce you to the work of APPSI, and to invite ongoing dialogue between your Unit and our Panel.
2. APPSI is a Non-Departmental Public Body, established by the Cabinet Office in April 2003. Full details about our Panel can be found at www.appsi.gov.uk. Our terms of reference are as follows:
 - to advise Ministers on how to encourage and create opportunities in the information industry for greater re-use of public sector information;
 - to advise the Director of the Office of Public Sector Information and Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office about changes and opportunities in the information industry, so that the licensing of Crown copyright and public sector information is aligned with current and emerging developments;
 - to review and consider complaints under the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005 and advise on the impact of the complaints procedures under those Regulations.
3. APPSI welcomes *Transformational Government*. We regard technology as fundamental to, and increasingly important for, the management and delivery of government service and consider there are innumerable opportunities for better and new systems. Given the significance of technology, it follows for us that it should be managed strategically and systematically and that the underpinning vision and plans should be clearly and publicly articulated. We hope your strategy is widely read and understood.

4. However, we consider that one vital aspect of technology management is absent from your strategy document. The missing ingredient is what we call *public sector information management*. There are three strands to this notion. The first is the secure retention, preservation and archiving of public sector information. The second concerns freedom of information – public sector information systems should be designed in a way that requests for access to official information can be met efficiently and effectively. The third is the re-use of public sector information which (we believe) can and should be shared and *re-used* where benefits can accrue. For example, geographical, meteorological, statutory and census data, although captured by government departments for use in the course of their regular activities, can also be used to good effect by others, such as publishers, traders, educators and citizens.
5. While the focus of APPSI is very largely on this third strand of public sector information management, in practice APPSI often finds it difficult, and undesirable, to disentangle the three. More, CIOs of all public sector bodies should, in our view, develop a set of strategies, policies and practices that embrace all three and manage them together and coherently. Crudely, the same set of systems should support all three strands; the same bodies of data are simply used in different ways.
6. We are in no doubt that your Strategy Team is alive to the challenges of public sector information management. But we are surprised that your strategy document does not address these matters explicitly and in some detail. We accept that the document does make passing reference to some related issues (for example, the re-use of geographical information is touched upon) but we submit to you that public sector information management is so fundamental to the exploitation of technology in government and to the delivery of services to the public that it deserves more detailed treatment by technology strategists.
7. To adopt an analogy: if technology is considered as the “plumbing”, your strategy addresses the purpose, the benefits and the beneficiaries of having the plumbing in place, it advocates a more efficient use and allocation of the plumbing infrastructure, and it recommends a more professional approach to the maintenance and development of the plumbing. However, it does not say much at all about what liquid can and should be flowing through the pipes, how leakages might be avoided, how the liquid should remain sanitised, who should be allowed to tap into it, and how the liquid might feed into other system and facilities.
8. In practice, these omissions are worrying. CIOs need guidance on how to manage their content. (Content is, after all, the information asset that government produces and that drives service delivery). For example, CIOs want (or should) to know how the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005 impacts on their systems and how these regulations relate to legislation and regulation regarding freedom of information and electronic records management. Public sector information systems should not only enhance government service and be efficiently and professionally run. They should also support compliance with the above and other legal and regulatory requirements. Awareness of the full range of requirements is low, however, and we believe that your Unit can and should play a role in encouraging better understanding and, in turn, best practice in public sector information management.

9. We also urge that your Unit considers two further issues which, at least arguably, fall within its scope – document management systems and knowledge management systems. In our view, the value of public sector information will only be realised and exploited when fairly advanced systems of each kind are in place. However, our research suggests, first, that document management technology within the public sector (systems that help name, store, retrieve, and control all computer-based files, but most significantly, word processed documents and ever more pervasive e-mail) is several years behind good practice in the private sector. The concern here is that full exploitation of public sector information will depend on the presence of advanced systems – document management systems - for identifying and making available information in electronic form. Without such systems, exploitation of public sector information will always be disappointingly incomplete. Second, our investigations suggest that many, but not all, knowledge management initiatives within the public sector are almost exclusively inward-facing, that is, devoted to improved performance and efficiency internally. Yet, these same efforts could valuably also have an external dimension – for example, a knowledge management project devoted to identifying and maintaining a database of useful reports for re-use internally could and should be extended to embrace materials that could also be exploited externally. APPSI would encourage greater involvement by your Unit in both these technology-related topics, along with consideration by you of the likely increase in funding that might be needed to introduce appropriate document management and knowledge management across government.
10. Finally, we would welcome regular, ongoing dialogue on the issues raised in this letter. Your Unit and our Panel share a strong desire to exploit technology in the public sector. We stand ready to work closely with you in ensuring that public sector information is managed optimally on the technology platforms that you are encouraging to be put in place.

Yours faithfully



Professor Richard Susskind OBE
Chair