

BOROUGH OF TELFORD & WREKIN

Response to the National Strategy

Transformational Government Enabled by Technology

1. Introduction

Borough of Telford & Wrekin welcomes the opportunity to comment on the document 'Transformational Government; Enabled by Technology'. We fully support the concept that technology is a tool that can help us to truly enable government at all levels by transforming the way in which services are delivered to the customers by enabling effective processing and partnership working.

2. The vision

The strategy document paints vision of fully e-enabled joined up services which meet the needs of citizens and businesses which is clearly what we should all be aiming to achieve. Local, national & regional services across all disciplines working together to provide the services people and businesses need, where they need it, when they need it with minimal effort on the part of the supplier or the user. Before we embark on this ambitious challenge the needs of the citizens and businesses must be firmly at the heart of this process.

We welcome stance that ICT is an enabler and not an end in itself; customer centric services are at the heart of all our businesses. However the issues of access, in terms of skill, ability and economics need to be addressed to avoid excluding the most vulnerable members of society.

However the focus seems to be on central government departments and single service sectors such as health or police. The complexities of local government provision must not be ignored as they present unique challenges. Local government can be seen as the glue that, through existing partnership working arrangements, connects many agencies such as health providers, police, schools and the voluntary sector.

Additionally the Corporate Performance Assessment framework places demands on local government which may often be in direct conflict with the requirement to provide choice of access channels which do not always realise the efficiency gains expected by central government. Indeed in some instances this merely transfers the cost from the citizen to the authority.

3. The Strategy

The document suggests some ways to achieve the vision. Moving to a shared services provision is a key pillar of the strategy. In principle this is good,

however, until legislative obstacles to effective data sharing are addressed this is unlikely to be achieved with any degree of success. Similarly, investment in ICT within local government has been high over recent years as we strive to achieve the government's targets. Although interoperability is a key component in procurement, supplier desire to protect their intellectual property and market position presents obstacles. Supplier management is key to this and the proposals are welcome.

The strategy document pre-supposes that recent investment in ICT has been at the front end, if indeed investment has been made at all. However a number of other authorities made a conscious decision to get their house in order first. This strategy will potentially disadvantage such councils if newly installed systems do not meet the national standard and are scrapped. Whilst recognising that significant savings and service improvements can be achieved by using centres of best practice to deliver services to groups or consortia we hope that it will be recognised that a 'one-size fits all' approach is not usually successful. Authorities must be allowed to make decisions which are in the best interests of their citizens and local businesses without the requirement to conform to a national directive.

Leadership is key to any successful strategy and we are pleased to see that this is recognised.

Overall this is a positive vision with many strong ideas, however to deliver this local government must be fully engaged reflecting the key role we play in citizen's lives. There needs to be a greater recognition of the strengths and complexities of service provision in local government flexibility built in to the strategy to cater for this. We would urge inclusion of local government representatives on the Boards and in the professional development programme.