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Date: 31 January 2006  
Your ref:  
My ref: PJJ/JR

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Transformational Government – Enabled by Technology**

Thank you for an opportunity to comment on the above document. Dorset County Council broadly welcomes the strategy and the sentiments expressed in the foreword. Technology should never be taken as an end itself, but only as a means to improving our services to the public, either directly or indirectly.

The strategy is helpful in that it both sets out ambitions and, in most areas, tactical actions that are aimed at delivering those ambitions. However, one of the key issues that is not addressed in any depth is that of funding. It is quite true to say that modern technology, implemented effectively, can produce efficiency gains. However, a potential block is the limited amount of capital funding to invest in significant systems, when key services are under severe pressure to even manage their day-to-day activities. An acknowledgement of this in the document, and perhaps consideration of grant support (per the IEG funding), will assist.

On the subject of funding, it would also be helpful if any grant could be used as an inducement to partnership working. Such working does require more thought and effort, but it is the right ambition. Funding available to partnerships would assist in achieving more meaningful outcomes.

Efficiencies will be created by encouraging citizens towards “cheaper channels”, but care is needed that we do not just add channels. In due course, the bold step of ceasing “old channels” will be needed as usage declines. Although this is mentioned once, there are other opportunities in the strategy to highlight this point (e.g. para 55).

Information sharing will be a key issue for resolution if some of the ambitions set out in the strategy are to be realised. If parts of other legislation frustrate consistent data sharing then duplicate databases cannot be eradicated. A holistic view of this matter is essential.

The development of an action plan (para 32) is helpful. Part of that plan should include a review of benefits realisation. This was a late addition to the IEG process, which made data collection very difficult. If there is a simple statement of benefits expected and realised set out at the beginning of a project, then past project reviews will be made easier.



Director of Resources Peter Lewis



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The document sets out the importance of designing services around the needs of citizens and businesses (para 10), and recognises the importance of segmenting customers into defined groups with specific characteristics. This highlights a general point about the role of central government in setting the context for local authority transformation. Lessons learned from the National e-Government Programme highlight the importance of the central government's role in taking responsibility for developing generic tools to assist local authorities move forward in a consistent and coherent manner, and to avoid the duplication of work across every local authority; in this specific example, local authority customer segmentation would for the most part be completed centrally, and allow for some flexibility to tailor this to a local context. Even where Government is committed to this approach, the experience of the National Projects highlights the importance that such products are developed in a timely fashion and that their delivery timescales are reflected in any future performance targets. Appropriate central direction is helpful, without imposing unreasonable constraints that may stifle local innovation.

We look forward to receiving the final review of the document and the action plan in due course.

Yours faithfully

Peter Lewis  
Director of Resources

(Please request a signed hard copy if you require one.)