

**“Transformational Government”**

**Response to the Cabinet Office consultation November 2005**

**Intelligent Addressing Ltd**

**26/11/05**

## **Intelligent Addressing Ltd (IA)**

IA is an independent information management specialist, focusing on land and property data and, specifically, addressing and spatial referencing. It considers itself a UK leader in this field.

The company was originally formed when it brought a number of information management experts together, primarily to support local government in its development of the National Land & Property Gazetteer, the national initiative led by local government which has created an address dataset of reference for use throughout the public sector.

IA works primarily in the e-Government environment across both local and central government. In the last 12 months alone it has been involved at different levels in some 8 national projects ranging from ValueBill, where it played a vital enabling role, to advice in connection with the implementation of Command & Control systems for emergency services.

IA has three key skill areas:

### Management of address Data Hubs

Currently IA manages the National Land & Property Gazetteer and National Street Gazetteer Hubs on behalf of Local Government. This involves collating about 20,000,000 records each month and the secure distribution of different cuts of datasets totalling about 40,000,000 records to some 551 organisations on different media under the terms of the Mapping Services Agreement.

### Data cleaning and matching

Over the course of the last two years alone IA has cleaned over 1 billion address records from public sector sources and matched them to the National Land & Property Gazetteer (NLPG). Data has included addresses in many different formats and derived from the Postcode Address File, Ordnance Survey Address-Point, Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rating Lists, Electoral Rolls, Planning, Police Command & Control data, Utilities, Land Charges, HM Land Registry, Housing Associations etc.

In some instances IA has been retained to help keep address data contained in other databases synchronised with the NLPG.

### Consultancy

IA advises central and local government on information management matters relating to land and property addressing. They provided advice for the original development of BS7666, the UK's addressing standard, and have been actively involved in its review.

## Summary Response

We welcome this report but do not consider it fully recognises the level of commitment to change that will be required across government in order to effect transformation.

- We welcome the formation of a Service Transformation Board but are unclear what power it would have to enforce its conclusions without which its effect may be very limited. Every Department can claim dispensation arguing that their responsibilities for service delivery require them to act as an exception to any rule.
- The Common Infrastructure Board that will be established is a very interesting development and may well, in practice, prove the most vital component of transformation. Successful delivery will again be dependent upon its level of empowerment.
- We do not sense that the authors of this report fully recognise the pivotal importance of common data standards and the absolute necessity to enforce their adoption across government, if technology is to be properly enabled and the process “transformed” so that services can genuinely be shared. Common technology does not enable joined-up solutions but common data standards, conventions and quality parameters do.
- The report correctly identifies that the majority of savings will be provided through streamlining back-office functions to enable more effective front-office service delivery. These back-office functions are neither glamorous, nor superficially vote-winners. The report does not explain how it is intended to attract and empower the necessary quality of leadership within the back-office environment to produce the results that achieving real transformation in government will necessitate.
- Transformation will not so much depend upon the technology as the people leading the delivery.
- We agree with the overarching strategy but believe that the only practical approach to implementation is to identify specific areas where services can be shared and concentrate on those first. There are examples where government has tried to kick-start too many projects at once and achieved very little as a result. It is vital to make a difference relatively quickly and with minimum risk and build on success.
- The problem of the age of systems is not as important as their relative value. The Gateway Review process examining new procurement is excellent but Government can take steps to improve its evaluation of the real value of its existing systems.

## Commentary

1. In the introduction by Tony Blair “how we can use technology to transform government services” ...he states.... “Within the public services we have to use technology to join up and share services rather than to duplicate them.”

Undoubtedly the majority of people across government would agree with the principle, however we would question whether there is anything in this report which truly reflects the enormous and all-encompassing resolve that will be required to achieve these ends.

2. We agree with the overarching strategy described in the introduction, especially that a key area for technology leadership should be to focus on “the efficiency of the corporate services and infrastructure of government organisations, thus freeing resources for the front line”. (2.(2))
3. We believe that the only practical approach to implementation is to identify specific areas where services can be shared and concentrate on those first. There are examples where government has tried to kick-start too many projects at once and achieved very little as a result. It is vital to make a difference relatively quickly and with minimum risk and build on that success. For example, the 22 National Projects, which were led by ODPM, saw few of the potential fruits from many good ideas. Had the expenditure and drive been more focused then we consider more lasting benefit would have been achieved.
4. “Unlocking around £1.4 billion (10% of the current spend on technology) from the current annual spend on legacy systems which can be released to new technology enabled reforms in public services” (6). These are very challenging targets. Their achievement will not so much depend upon the technology as the people leading the delivery.
5. “The specific opportunities lie in..... reforming the corporate services and infrastructure which government uses behind the scenes” (7) “The corporate services and infrastructure which government uses behind the scenes have been very much Cinderella areas – despite costing £7 billion a year.” (16) .... and other statements. These are correct. The majority of the savings will be provided through streamlining back-office functions to enable more effective front-office service delivery. Typically, government gives very little real recognition to the importance of back-office functions. They are neither glamorous, nor superficially vote-winners. How does it intend to attract and empower the necessary quality of leadership within the back-office environment to produce the value it requires? In our view, nothing in the report fully addresses this issue although the direction proposed in the section on Shared Services gives us some encouragement.
6. “Many systems are also old and custom-built” (13) This problem can be over-stated. The question is not the age of systems or their origins but at

what point they cease to deliver an acceptable level of value. The Gateway Review process examining new procurement is excellent but Government can improve its evaluation of the real value of its existing systems

7. "Many systems are designed as islands." (14) "Often the customer experience is not joined-up, especially where it crosses boundaries" (14) "The availability of effective information technology to support those at the front line has been poor.... Where too often the systems have failed to provide the right information at the right time to the right person." (15) "Sophisticated, holistic policy solutions ... rely upon effective and pervasive technology systems across government and beyond...." (19) We agree with all these statements however, the resolution of these problems is not so much "technology" as ensuring the rigorous adoption of similar data standards right across government. We do not sense that the authors of this report fully recognise the pivotal importance of common data standards and the absolute necessity to enforce their adoption across government if technology is to be properly enabled and the process "transformed" so that services can genuinely be shared.

These issues are not straightforward. For example, attempts to adopt a common address-base shared across government and supported by local government, have foundered with ODPM and other departments reluctant to intervene and resolve contentious issues which are essentially commercial and relate to public sector IPR and management control.

If agreement on the choice of a standardised base of addresses, a common component of most public sector databases and where better management can offer considerable savings, cannot be reached swiftly and sensibly right across government, what hope can government have that the choice of more complex data standards can be resolved?

8. "Challenge ahead is not just to do IT better .... It is also about doing it differently..... building services which are more joined-up, more personalised, more efficient, and more effective in terms of policy outcome." (20) Strategy (point 2 of 3) "Government must move to a shared services culture – in the front office, in the back-office, in information and in infrastructure – and release efficiencies by standardisation, simplification and sharing." (21) We welcome the formation of a Service Transformation Board whose "Role to set overarching service design principles, promote best practice ..... and challenge inconsistency with agreed standards." (28 (c)) What power does it have to enforce its conclusions without which its effect will be limited? Every Department can claim dispensation and plead operational necessity for its own form of implementation.
9. "Over 2,500 government websites." (33 (3)) We welcome the convergence on Directgov as one of the two primary on-line entry points. (33(d)).
10. "Common technology will enable joined-up solutions, leveraged investment and shorten the implementation timeframe....." (39(3)).....This statement is not strictly true. Common technology does not enable joined-up solutions but common data standards, conventions and quality

parameters do. The introduction of BS7666 (the addressing standard used by local government) encouraged a number of software suppliers to develop solutions for local government applications which offered genuine price competition and choice. Common data standards facilitate connectivity, across these applications, at least at a base level.

11. "A Common Infrastructure Board will be established; it will be supported from the Cabinet Office and financed through user investment; and it will set out a roadmap and timetable for the delivery of a common infrastructure." (39 (3)) This is a very interesting development and may well, in practice, prove the most vital component of transformation. Successful delivery will be dependent upon the empowerment of the CIB.
12. "Data sharing is integral to transforming services and reducing administrative burdens on citizens and businesses." (39(4)) Does the word "integral" fully reflect its importance? The most basic tenet of effective information management is to collect information once and correctly (and, if possible, at its source) and then share and use it many times. The ability to "share" is not simply integral but the essential measure of success.
13. "Common standards and practices for information management will be developed, with an effective range of tools to allow the most efficient use and sharing of information to all those across government that have a legitimate need to see and use it." (39 (5)) As stated above, we agree. Common data standards are pivotal to data sharing which cannot be properly achieved without them.

In the 1980s, government recognised that three databases of reference (people, places/addresses and organisations) were vital to efficient service delivery. About a quarter of a century later, only the "addresses" element (in the National Land & Property Gazetteer, the "NLPG") has been created.

Even this has only been recognised as the base of address reference by local government which, for a period of five years, has been obstructed in its aim to provide wider access to the NLPG by licensing and royalty impediments imposed by other parts of government arguing that government policy on reselling public data necessitates a robust commercial approach and defence of their IPR.

It is difficult to see how the "Transformation Government" paper proposes to ensure prompt resolution of this type of logjam and yet there will be many others requiring prompt resolution before transformation will be achieved.

14. "**The Shared Services** agenda is a major cultural shift for the wider public sector. To implement it:
  - o Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Councillors and Chief Executives must give strong leadership.

- Bodies awarding funding should presume that public service organisations only deliver good value for money when they standardise and share services with others.
- A Shared Services Director has been appointed in the Cabinet Office to promote and drive sharing across the public sector and to establish overarching standard frameworks for shared services with a joint HM Treasury and Cabinet Office team and governance; and Regional Centres of Excellence have been established for local government.
- HM Treasury will work with the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission, the Cabinet Office and public service delivery on guidelines for the governance and funding for service sharing. They will ensure that relevant accountability frameworks expect and encourage full use of shared service provision where applicable, including the measuring performance against published benchmarks.

(5) Each government organisation should set out clear policies for sharing of services and assets that it needs or can provide to others.” (40)

We welcome this attempt to achieve “Coherent, joined-up leadership” (42) but we do not sense that this report properly recognises the scale of what is actually required to effect the necessary change either in the strength of its words of the proposals that it makes.