

Andrew Stott
E Government Unit
Cabinet Office
Stockley House
130 Wilton Road
London
SW1V 1LQ

3rd February 2006

The Strategy for Transformational Government

Dear Andrew,

I am responding on behalf of Land Registry to the publication in November 2005 of “Transformational Government, enabled by Technology”.

Land Registry welcomes the publication of this important strategy paper, which introduces some fresh thinking on how Government and public sector bodies can harness technology for the benefit of the citizen. We are particularly pleased that the document sets out the need for change, identifying as it does significant benefits in both financial and quality of service terms.

The three central themes of the strategy: design of services around the citizen or business, moving to a shared service culture and strengthening Government’s professionalism in IT practices, are compelling and present a strong vision not only for the IT community but also the whole of Government. Land Registry certainly endorses this vision, and looks forward to working with the e-Government unit in helping to take it forward. Moreover, we believe that many aspects of the strategy can only be achieved through closer ties between Government departments and would welcome involvement in the appropriate coordination bodies being proposed.

We have attached a précis of our views but should you feel it appropriate to discuss any point in more detail please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

John Wright
CIO and Director of Information Services
Land Registry

Response from Land Registry to the e Government Strategy **Transformational Government, enabled by Technology.**

1. General

- 1.1. It will be important for us to have a sound understanding of the detail of the changes in prospect such that we can evaluate their impact on our own key transformational initiatives. In particular our e-Conveyancing programme is progressing after a great deal of consultation with all stakeholders and underpins much of our business strategy for the immediate future. It is therefore crucial to us that we have full confidence that the changes being proposed will assist us to move forward more quickly, more coherently and more cost-effectively than we have managed heretofore.
- 1.2. Moving from processes driven by routine to an approach centred around risk-managed exception will be hugely challenging, implying as it does a considerable cultural shift in thinking and attitudes towards issues such as liability.
- 1.3. The key to success for any centrally driven programme of transformation of this kind will be its implementation. In this context, we would highlight the need for striking a balance between maintaining a firm hold on the general direction plus ensuring a consistent approach and the nurturing of innovation and responsiveness.
- 1.4. In some ways the strategy is setting out to deal with a problem analogous to a large conglomerate in the private sector that has decided to integrate the IS functions of its subsidiary businesses after a period of merger & acquisition. Experience and current best practice thinking in this area suggest that the keys to success are clarity of purpose, strong central leadership and a resolute application to its execution.
- 1.5. There are a number of areas where we would look for the strategy to be expanded. In particular, identity management, appropriate security levels and the specific needs of self-funded government departments.

2. Citizen and Business Centred Services

- 2.1. The case for engaging with citizens, business and front-line public servants to better understand their wants and needs is unarguable. However, the introduction of any new approach should be cognisant of existing channels of communication that exist across the public sector. Like many other Government departments we have well established interfaces and mechanisms for interacting with our customers and would like to explore the proposals further before they are taken forward. For instance, we would like to ensure our main customer base, conveyancing practitioners, are not placed into an inappropriate grouping, which could make communication more tortuous or dilute their representation.
- 2.2. Whilst the financial case for rationalising 130 major call centres is certain to be compelling, care must be taken to ensure we avoid a loss of customer/citizen intimacy as these important services are consolidated. It is notable that a number of high profile private sector organisations are now reversing their centralised approach to call centres for just this reason.
- 2.3. Governance processes will be crucial to the success of the customer group transformation initiative, particularly given the proposal for Customer Group Directors to report to a single Minister where more than one government department services the customer concerned. Moreover, in constructing the governance processes it will be essential to avoid any unnecessary layers of bureaucracy such that the various new bodies are able to work quickly and coherently together, so as to be seen to be effectively streamlining services.
- 2.4. We believe that one of the next steps must be to determine how the existing programme SROs will interface to the proposed Customer Group Teams and Directors. In a similar vein, we also feel it important to clarify the role of the Service Transformation Board in relation to the Gateway review process and other established mechanisms for ensuring best practice.
- 2.5. Whilst Land Registry agrees with the proposal to reduce the number of government websites, we would not be in favour of losing our URL, as this would undoubtedly weaken the branding and visibility of what is one of the most popular and frequently accessed UK government websites.

3. Shared Services

- 3.1. Land Registry fully endorses the new drive for shared services as it recognises the substantial efficiencies that would be realised from such an approach and would be happy to explore these ideas further with the e Government unit and other interested departments/agencies.
- 3.2. We suggest that in order for this aspect of the transformation agenda to gain traction, priority is given to cross department product offerings and less contentious services such as the sharing of DR facilities. Other areas where this may also be true are with standard business support utilities such as AR, AP, asset management and payroll.
- 3.3. Any initiative to share services must be mindful of existing contractual commitments and issues such as differing personnel terms and conditions that can exist between departments.
- 3.4. The suggestion of each department publishing its service and asset portfolio is welcomed but should perhaps be extended to include active/planned projects and resource capabilities. However this inventory should not be seen as a substitute for a strong people network amongst the IT community.
- 3.5. The cost model for shared services and how costs will be allocated with predictability to individual departments will be fundamental to its uptake and success. This is especially relevant when considering the need to separate costs applicable for statutory services from commercial services, which are a constant challenge amongst the trading funds.
- 3.6. As the paper sets out the value of geographic data, we would like to recommend prioritisation of the creation of a common address standard.
- 3.7. In regard to technology standards and architecture, we fully agree that it is important for individual departments to not re-invent wheels. However, our experience with e-conveyancing, was that unfortunately we were unable to find any standards in relation to security and identity management. As a consequence we have done a lot of analysis in this area and would be pleased to share our experience with colleagues if that would be helpful.

4. IT Professionalism in Government

- 4.1. We warmly welcome and support the drive to create an IT profession in government, and recognise there are some solid proposals on how this can be moved forward.
- 4.2. We would urge care however to avoid any separation between IT staff and the non-IT staff within individual departments as these close working relationships are often a cornerstone of success.
- 4.3. Land Registry feel that progressing many of the aims in this area would best be achieved by working closely with both the IS and HR communities within the individual departments.
- 4.4. The suggestion of actively engaging individuals in networking and mentoring schemes is well received and we would be pleased for Land Registry to be a full participant in these activities.
- 4.5. The need for a shift in how Government deals with IT suppliers and the points made are sound, but we would like to see a focus on increasing flexibility and speed of engagement.
- 4.6. In the past OGC have produced an interesting and useful analysis of suppliers in the IT sector and we would urge that this be updated and issued on a regular basis.