

Response from London Connects to  
The new National Strategy  
'TRANSFORMATIONAL GOVERNMENT  
- Enabled by Technology'  
January 2006

## 1. Introduction

London Connects is extremely pleased to be able to provide its response to the new national strategy. This has been prepared as a result of wide discussion within our organisation and particularly a well attended workshop of London-wide public sector representatives held in January with representatives of the e-Government Unit.

We welcome and support the strategy. We wish to participate and contribute actively to its development and implementation. We believe we have a significant role given our particular perspective of London, Londoners and their public services (with emphasis on the boroughs and the GLA family)

## 2. Key propositions that we support

We particularly support:

- The strategic vision (paragraphs 4,5 and 56)
- The statements that agenda is about much more than e-government & IT enabled change – it is about transforming the purpose, culture & design of public sector organisations.
- The three key transformations which form the main themes of the Strategy
- The focus on transforming public services at the front line - both for customers and front-line staff
- The critical role of leadership
- The diagnosis of the current position (paragraphs 13 - 17)
- The strong emphasis on
  - joint channel development
  - information sharing, management and assurance
  - common infrastructure

- The need for action at the highest level in government
- The fundamental link to the efficiency agenda
- The need to 'do IT differently' and manage it as a strategic asset right across government
- The aim of ongoing continuous transformation through improved capacity to innovate successfully
- The strong emphasis on developing, implementing and raising standards regarding professionalism, projects, information and processes
- The priority for better supplier engagement and management on a portfolio basis

### **3. Overcoming the obstacles**

We believe the following issues will constitute significant obstacles to successful implementation of the strategy:

- Departmental and Local Authority 'empires'
- Separate cultures
- Organisational & legal boundaries
- Inability to realise many potential business benefits of technology
- Inertia and resistance

Overcoming of them will be critical and very difficult, given their ingrained nature and history. We support plans to tackle these and the need for fundamental change in the way government as a whole works. We would particularly stress the need to gain support for the strategy at a political level across the structures of central and local government.

### **4. The Strategy and the outcomes of the 2005 e-government Programme**

The strategy takes us beyond e-government and the 100% target. We all need to understand what has been achieved and its limitations (referred to in paragraph 18).

Clear decisions and resourced plans are needed regarding the major national initiatives that have been established. London Connects has the capacity to and is prepared to act as joint client agent for them on behalf of London public service organisations. We wish to offer ourselves in this role.

From our own perspective, we aim to address and answer the question 'What next in London after 2005?' This is the subject of London Connects' own recently agreed Strategy (see section 8.1 of this document)

## **5. Key omissions from the document**

In reviewing the document we believe there are two major omissions:

- The strategy focuses on the business of government – it does not cover the role of technology policy, infrastructure & skills regarding society & the economy
- How do we make the link between the Strategy & social inclusion through innovation?

We understand that the strategy is part of the overall 'Digital Strategy Programme' which covers these areas, but we believe the strategy would benefit from more explicit references and clearer links, which could be addressed at a suitable point in the future.

## **6. The need for further detail and clarity on the role of Local Government**

Local authorities account for approximately 75% of all contact between citizens and the machinery of government. In many ways they are the public face of 'government'. Given their semi-independence and remoteness from central government they can often be viewed as 'poor relations' (despite their best efforts). They have a critical role particularly regarding customer groups, client information & channel development. Within the proposed strategic approach there is the risk of local government being marginalised by the influence of the big government departments (despite the efforts of the ODPM).

- **Will this be tackled?**
- **Will we have a presence and major influence on the Service Transformation Board and the Common Infrastructure Board?**
- **Will we be systematically and consistently engaged with central government around standards and information management?**
- **Why not include us fully in the government's professionalism programme?**

To maximise and support positive input to the strategy from local government ,immediate priority should be given to providing clarification and detailed guidance on the role that local government will play. This should not fall into the trap of treating local government as a separate issue from the rest of government - a planned approach covering both is needed. Local government itself should be involved in developing this.

In addition we wish to highlight particular obstacles to this agenda which we have encountered, which central government can play a key role in resolving and which should be built into the plans.

### **6.1. Information sharing (especially regarding clients)**

Lack of clarity regarding the legal basis for information sharing and the impact of the Data Protection Act continue to hamper progress in this area. Local authorities attempt to address issues individually in the absence of a central lead and a determined attempt to resolve fundamental obstacles.

### **6.2. Shared services**

Despite an increasing will to work together, groups of local authorities encounter major difficulties in developing shared services. These relate to governance, shared and equitable risk and reward, legal liabilities and accountabilities and stem in part from the separate legal constitution of the authorities. Central government could provide crucial support to find common, successful solutions.

### **6.3. New simplified targets**

The national e-government programme for Local Authorities has been partly focused through comprehensive targets monitored via external audits and the CPA process. The expiry of the programme brings the risk of loss of momentum and prioritisation, given the range of other pressing issues for local government. This should be addressed by rapidly developing a revised set of simplified, focused targets for modern service delivery, which can be readily used by local politicians and senior managers to measure their progress.

## **7. The challenges facing London**

The challenges facing London mirror those which the national strategy addresses, but London's role within the UK is of fundamental importance in its own right.

London's future success depends on its viability as a major world city which is attractive to live & work in, and for businesses and tourists. Indeed its position amongst the 'first rank' of world cities is critical. There are an increasing number of competitors for the business on which London's success depends, and technology is providing an ever more flexible means to move business and jobs around the world. As a city London needs to respond to this

challenge. Uniquely for a city of its size, the delivery of public services is spread across a huge multiplicity of organisations.

Planning for a successful modern city is a critical issue for all those with a stake in London's future, which includes the UK as a whole. The key challenge is to develop a London-wide platform to support economic growth and to enhance the quality of life. Such a platform would build social capital, the capacity and skills of Londoners, the life chances of the population and support improved democratic engagement. The 2012 Olympics will provide a huge opportunity in this regard but realising this will be a major challenge.

London must have a reputation for excellent and efficient public services based partly on using IT to meet the needs of its population. The different structures of the public sector must be largely invisible to the public, and services must be integrated and responsive to individual needs. The public sector needs to have a robust common technology infrastructure for its services, and use it to support joint and secure information management. There must be an increased sharing of key information and infrastructure resources between public sector organisations.

For these reasons, and also because it is the seat of national government, London should play a lead role in the development and implementation of the Transformational Government Strategy

## **8. How London can support the agenda**

### **8.1. London Connects and its Strategy**

London Connects is the unique public sector partnership that promotes the effective use of technology to meet the future needs of Londoners, the city's businesses and visitors. We are supported and funded by many of London's public sector organisations, but depend on annual lobbying for our existence. Nevertheless London Connects has successfully developed its credibility, track record of delivery and support across public sector partners. Our recently agreed strategic priorities which are designed to support the National Strategy are:

- Services for Londoners : Providing improved services and access for Londoners through technology
- Shared effectiveness : Increasing the effectiveness of our stakeholders through joint working and information management
- London's future: Facilitating beneficial use of technology to ensure the future viability and success of London

Our programme provides a range of major deliverables which will yield efficiency savings and improve effectiveness for its partners, through work in the following main areas:

- Developing and supporting better and more efficient customer service and customer contact by the use of technology
- Helping partner organisations to capitalise on their recent investment in e-government and achieve improved public feedback
- Work on joint procurement around technology and business solutions including common London-wide infrastructure
- Joint data sharing and data management across London's public sector
- Work on public sector security related to use of technology
- Providing learning and information sharing activities and networks to promote best practice

We are a ready-made and effective vehicle in London to support and facilitate implementation of the National Strategy, and given this and our track record, we request your ongoing formal support and endorsement for our work.

## **8.2 Encouragement for regional approaches**

The practical approach in the strategy involves some key organisational steps in central government and immediate areas of joint focus. It sets out a timetable of:

- 2006 deliver existing programmes, establish initial structures
- 2007 – 11 implement key transformations

In many areas of implementation the active involvement of local government is vital to progress and success. If this involvement is to be achieved the nature of local government dictates local geographical approaches are utilised, similar to the requirements of the national efficiency agenda.

- **As well as the national approach outlined will you support a London based approach to implementation?**
- **If so, will you encourage active participation of government departments in a London approach?**

We believe this participation to be fundamental to progress; currently there are major problems with developing modern services in London as a result of weaknesses in liaison.

## **8.3. Practical steps in London – overcoming barriers to progress**

Based on our practical experience and consultation with our partners, we have given detailed consideration to plans for progress in London.

Leadership is key. The Mayor and GLA together with the Association of London Government are central to this and are the key sponsors of London Connects. Joint structures such as the Regional Centre for Excellence and 'Capital Ambition' have been established to drive improvement, modernisation and efficiencies in London and should be looked on to provide the overall lead regarding the Strategy. They are key to addressing the complexity of the structure of London government.

We recommend priority is given to implementing key 'building blocks' within London which will underpin the approach. Work is needed to design and create a common technology and information infrastructure for London's public services, including using initiatives we have already commenced. This requires collective work on an IT and Information strategy and framework for London.

The private sector has a key role to play. The 2012 Olympics should be used as a catalyst for this. The active involvement of the major government departments who directly serve Londoners is vital to this work, if we are to achieve customer focus and efficiencies across the board.

1<sup>st</sup> February 2006