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Emailed: itstrategyprojectteam@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Comments on 'Transformational Government Enabled by Technology' (Cm 6683)

We were pleased to see the publication of this strategy last November and thank you for the opportunity to respond. Our comments are attached for your information and we trust that you will find them useful.

We have been encouraged by some, though not all, of the media's reactions that immediately followed the publication and have taken them into account in our response. However, we have confined our comments to key observations and suggestions that we believe to be constructive. Our comments are based on the experience of Mott MacDonald as consultants on technology enabled projects across Government of the type envisaged.

We look forward to reading the final strategy following completion of this current consultation process. If in the meantime you have any questions about our suggestions or we can be of any assistance then please do contact us. Our contact details are below.

Yours faithfully,

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Mott MacDonald Response

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Introduction

We welcome the IT strategy ‘Transformational Government Enabled by Technology’ and agree with the three key transformations in the vision: ‘business and citizen centred services’, using ‘shared services’, and delivered with ‘professionalism’.

In common with some of the commentators in the media we see this as being the first formal IT strategy co-ordinated across all parts of the public sector, which can only be a good thing. The ambition to establish a continuing process of improvement enabled by technology as new technologies emerge, rather than a one-off reform driven by current technology, is we believe also eminently sensible and to be applauded.

Mott MacDonald therefore endorses the vision and the principles behind it. We support what is intended and why it is being planned.

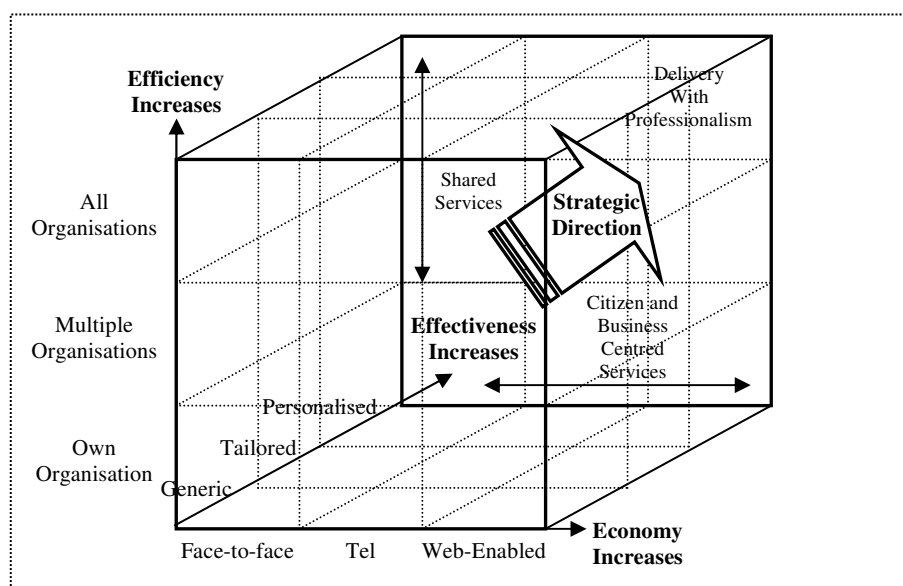
Our Approach

Although we support the overall aims and rationale of the strategy, the detail of how the strategy is to be realised has raised many questions. Many of these questions are not fundamental and will be asked by others as we have already seen them in the media. We do not think that we would add value simply by repeating them; however we do believe that we can add value with the two following suggestions:

Suggestion 1 – A visual framework to enhance clarity

We believe that the immediacy and clarity of the strategy could be enhanced by use of:

- Typical business terms: economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Doing so would give a real sense of these three separate but inter-related dimensions: reducing the cost of a transaction (economy), improving the handling of transactions (efficiency), and increasing the value of the transactions (effectiveness).
- A framework that explains these typical business terms and the three key transformations in the vision. Ideally this could be simply represented in a diagram, since they are useful in communicating and it is notable that the document currently uses no diagrams. The figure below is offered as an example and further description.



This figure supports the views in the strategy in one simple, albeit three-dimensional, diagram.

The figure shows the considerations in a clear manner, in so far as it shows that:

- There is a need to become more economical with ‘handovers across channels’ so that less complex matters are dealt with by less costly methods (such as web-enabled channels) allowing staff the time to concentrate on more complex matters via the more costly methods (face-to-face) and therefore savings to be made;
- At the same time there is a need to be more effective with the ‘personalisation’ of services so that citizens and business centred services are addressing their needs and the customer experience is joined up. In part ‘personalisation’ is made possible by technology such as web-enablement; and
- Likewise the need for efficiency is also ever present with the opportunity to share services between Government departments. Shared services should not only increase efficiency but also allow the personalisation and the joined up customer experience that supports effectiveness, and is again, technology enabled.

The final key transformation ‘professionalism’ applies to all of the above: to ensure the economies, efficiencies and effectiveness are planned and realised well.

Please note that in with that professionalism, and in an environment that is arguably more complex than the private sector it must be recognised that the extent and rate of changes must be tempered by matters such as social inclusion and democratic accountability. That is, although the above framework applies to both public and private sectors, the public sector must perhaps retain more ‘balance’ and ‘consultation’ in changing front-line services than might be possible in a wholly commercial organisation. Taking social inclusion as an example, whilst many government enquiries can be, and are being, automated and web-enabled (and rightly so) not all of the public have access to the Internet and for some groups of society this approach is inappropriate. Therefore, the ability to use other channels (face-to-face and telephony) for these enquiries must be retained, albeit at a reduced level. This is not to reduce the usefulness of the framework but it is important to be recognised.

Suggestion 2 – Co-ordination of shared services to maximise success

We believe that ‘shared services’ will probably be the most difficult of the key transformations to realise effectively. If shared services simply emerge from various starting points across the country without careful co-ordination and scrutiny then they are likely to be sub-optimal because:

- There are likely to be many groups formed, or forming, of varying size and nature. The current situation with many purchasing organisations serving different groups, geographical areas and providing different services at varying prices would suggest that this is likely; and
- Some of these groups may not be of suitable size or critical mass to become shared services. From observation, some shared services have in the past been justified based on assumptions that more groups will join when in fact they do not, or not sufficiently quickly.

There are examples of such problems recognised in the strategy and we would not wish to see them reoccur. Conversely, there are examples of good solutions, good solutions around which others could cohere or adopt, and we would wish to see this encouraged.

Our suggestion is, therefore, that the priorities and establishment methods of shared services should be co-ordinated across the country to ensure that there is a net benefit. There may be some resistance, especially amongst those who approach ‘shared services’ and ‘frameworks’ as useful benchmarks rather than expecting them to be in their best interest to join. In some cases this is valid, but where it is, it should be demonstrable prior to (not after) any decision in order to allow the reasoning to be understood by all and the shared service to improve over time.

End.