

Sent: 03 February 2006 14:19

To: IT Strategy Project Team

Subject: Netmums response to Transformational Government strategy

Netmums is encouraged by the Government's development of an integrated and strategic approach to technology. The Transformational Government strategy is to be welcomed and we believe it will help the development of better Government services.

Netmums is an online network of parents based around local communities, providing information and advice to mums and dads, and helping them to access the government and voluntary sector services that are there to support them. As such, Netmums has been termed an 'intermediary' – directing people to health, education, leisure and employment services – but it is also about working with communities, and so Netmums is able to also give a voice on particular issues of concern to parents.

It clearly makes sense to modernise and simplify systems and ensure information sharing. Netmums' concerns relate primarily to how the needs parents are to be met, and so our comments are focused on the way in which customer centred delivery will be achieved. The strategy includes a number of statements which, if carried through, will ensure that individual groups of customers are better catered for, and that services will be more appropriate and accessible. The most important is in the final paragraph (56) which states that the vision includes '*...policy makers regarding technology as crucial to designing policy and achieving policy outcomes*'. It needs to be clear that this is at the very heart of the strategy and not just part of the vision for the future.

A couple of specific comments...

Customer group directors

The definition of the role of the Directors is practical and detailed. However, to achieve the vision of policy making in the future making use of technology where appropriate, there will need to be more than 'signposting of the potential of technology'. It is not clear whether there will be engagement with those responsible for policy development, and the importance that will be placed upon it.

It would be easy to concentrate on the sizable job of improving the services that are currently delivered through technology (having first assessed the needs of customers). If the aim is to embed the technology potential in policy design, it will be important for a Director to engage directly with those responsible for ALL policies relating to the particular customer group. The Director would need to be aware of services that are currently delivered without technological support, as well as those services that are already online. Without this, the potential for use of technology within evolving policies will not be realised. To find the best ways to work with citizens, it is important that the role is defined as being forward-looking and strategic to some extent.

To take an example, Children's Centres are an important element of parental support provided by Government, so to determine whether there is a way in which technology can help to directly achieve some of the *policy objectives* which Children's Centres are intended to fulfil, should be important. Currently, technology is more often seen as a way to join up people / information, and not as a technique for achieving outcomes in its own right.

Defining the needs of customer groups

The Government devotes significant resource to consultations about the wishes of citizens. In our view it should not be necessary to carry out time-consuming and costly exercises, but instead make use of existing research, for example, DfES recently looked at the needs of parents in their Helplines project and to supplement this by working closely with those existing customer groups who are already working with technology and can give more specific insights (as already included in the strategy). We also agree that ways of identifying customer satisfaction will need to be incorporated.

While transforming government is an enormous task, the appointment of customer group directors does give the opportunity to be bold and to look cross-departmentally at issues in a new way, and we hope this can be done successfully. As our members are recipients of government services, we are willing to be part of the process and look forward to seeing the strategy being taken forwards.

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